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STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS HARMONY THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL WISDOM IN TARAkan CITY

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Abstract

In the past five years, the Religious Harmony Index in North Kalimantan Province has shown a consistently high level of achievement, remaining above the national average. In 2021, the index recorded a score of 75.63, surpassing the national average of 72.39. This study seeks to explore the key factors behind this sustained harmony, focusing on how social, cultural, and institutional dynamics contribute to the province's strong interreligious relations. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study was conducted in Tarakan City—a heterogeneous urban setting considered representative for examining the drivers of religious harmony in the region. The data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method. The findings reveal that one of the primary factors contributing to the high Religious Harmony Index in Tarakan is the active role of the Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB) or the Interfaith Harmony Forum. Through consistent dialogue and coordination among religious leaders, FKUB plays a strategic role in maintaining social cohesion and resolving emerging issues at the grassroots level before they escalate publicly. The forum also identifies potential sources of intolerance and applies cultural approaches



in mediating community conflicts, such as disputes related to the establishment of houses of worship. Another significant factor is the preservation of local wisdom among the Tidung ethnic community, particularly the values embodied in *tenguyun*—a tradition that emphasizes cooperation, mutual assistance, and communal solidarity. These cultural principles extend to environmental stewardship, reflected in the Tidung people's moral responsibility to protect natural ecosystems such as mangrove forests. Overall, this study underscores that cultural communication and local wisdom function as vital socio-cultural capital that reinforce institutional efforts to sustain religious harmony. These findings highlight the importance of integrating local cultural values into broader peacebuilding frameworks to strengthen interfaith relations in plural societies.

Keywords: Religious Harmony, Local Wisdom, Community Participation, Tolerance.

Abstrak

Dalam kurun lima tahun terakhir, nilai Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Provinsi Kalimantan Utara terhitung tinggi berada di atas rata-rata Nasional. Pada tahun 2021, Nilai indeks tersebut berada angka 75,63 atau berada di atas rata-rata Indeks Nasional yaitu 72,39. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji faktor yang berperan dalam menaikkan nilai Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Provinsi Kalimantan Utara dengan memanfaatkan metode penelitian kualitatif. Lokus penelitian ini yaitu Kota Tarakan sebagai salah kota yang heterogen yang layak dilakukan kajian faktor yang mendukung tingginya nilai indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Provinsi Kalimantan Utara. Data yang terkumpul kemudian dianalisis dengan teknik kualitatif deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, diantara faktor yang mendukung tingginya nilai Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Tarakan adalah peran Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB) Kota Tarakan. Dalam melaksanakan fungsinya, FKUB Kota Tarakan rutin melakukan komunikasi antar tokoh agama berkenaan dengan isu-isu aktual terkait kerukunan umat beragama. Disamping itu, FKUB Kota Tarakan juga mendeteksi potensi intoleransi beragama serta melakukan pendekatan kultural *dalam* menyelesaikan persoalan di masyarakat seperti penolakan dalam pendirian rumah ibadah. Faktor lain yang mendukung tingginya nilai Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama di Kota Tarakan yaitu adanya kearifan lokal dari Suku Tidung seperti *tenguyun* yakni suka bekerja sama serta nilai lokal yang mengharuskan Orang Tidung agar selalu menjaga dan melestarikan ekosistem alam seperti hutan bakau. Implikasi hasil penelitian ini mengindikasikan bahwa komunikasi kultural serta kearifan lokal sebagai modal sosial-kultural sangat signifikan dijadikan sebagai basis penguatan kerukunan umat beragama.

Kata Kunci: kerukunan umat beragama, kearifan lokal, peran masyarakat, toleransi.

A. Introduction



Interreligious harmony is a crucial element in fostering a cohesive society and nation within the framework of the Republic of Indonesia. Various actions that could undermine this harmony, including intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism, must be prevented so that people can continue to live peacefully within the national framework. Therefore, dialogue among all elements of society is essential. Cases of religious intolerance may lead to violence, discrimination, and conflict, all of which can threaten the quality of interreligious harmony (Benu et al., 2025). In the long run, such circumstances may endanger the very existence of the state.

To minimize the aforementioned threats, the active involvement of various community groups is essential in strengthening the ideology of tolerance. In this regard, the roles of religious leaders and traditional figures are of great importance. In addition, the role of civil society is equally crucial and must be encouraged (Jubaidi et al., 2019, p. 127). With a strong ideology of tolerance, interreligious harmony within society can be realized. Ultimately, various conflicts, whether driven by ethnic or religious motives, can be prevented.

Therefore, the role of this research is highly urgent in identifying the factors that can support and enhance interreligious harmony. Considering Indonesia's condition as a pluralistic nation composed of various ethnicities, nationalities, races, and religions, one of the greatest challenges that arises is how to manage such diversity so that it becomes a significant potential rather than a threat that could lead to inter-ethnic, racial, or religious conflicts (Lubis, 2020, p. 9). Throughout history, several conflicts in Indonesia have been recorded, often motivated by ethnic or religious issues. Hence, it is crucial to learn from these incidents to prevent similar conflicts with ethnic or religious nuances from recurring elsewhere.

One such conflict was the Tarakan Conflict that occurred on September 27, 2010. The conflict began with a dispute between Bugis youth and local residents. It was fueled by ethnic sentiments, resulting in thousands of people being displaced and the closure of various public facilities such as schools, markets, and government offices. Fortunately, this conflict was resolved swiftly thanks to the concerted efforts of multiple parties to reconcile the two opposing groups (Ardiyanti, 2014, p. 34). Learning from this case, it is evident that religion-based conflicts could also potentially arise in the future.



Tarakan City, located in North Kalimantan, is often regarded as a miniature of Indonesia due to its diverse population consisting of various ethnic groups such as the indigenous Tidung people, as well as Bugis, Javanese, Banjar, and others. The city is also home to followers of multiple religions, including Islam, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. This demographic structure represents a great potential for implementing development initiatives based on cultural diversity. However, at the same time, it poses a significant risk of triggering conflicts if not properly managed, particularly in maintaining interreligious harmony in Tarakan City.

To achieve such harmony, active participation from all groups is required, ranging from local government officials to grassroots community members. In this regard, the active involvement of religious leaders and government representatives in the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs is essential. Each year, the Center for Research and Development of Religious Affairs and Religious Services under the Research and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religious Affairs releases the Religious Harmony Index (RHI) for every province. Specifically in North Kalimantan Province, Tarakan City is consistently selected as one of the survey samples. This means that Tarakan City directly contributes to the overall high or low Religious Harmony Index score in the northern region of Kalimantan Island.

In 2022, the Religious Harmony Index score for North Kalimantan reached 80.59, which is above the national average and ranked fourth nationally (Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama, 2022). This score marks a significant increase compared to previous years. In 2021, the Religious Harmony Index in North Kalimantan stood at 75.63, categorized as high. This value also represented an improvement compared to 2017, when the index was 74.1, also in the high category but ranked tenth nationally. In fact, the 2021 index position had fallen outside the national top ten. In 2018, the index value in North Kalimantan declined to 74, but it rose again the following year, in 2019, to 77.97 (Tim Peneliti, 2018). The high Religious Harmony Index score has had a direct positive impact on the social life conditions of North Kalimantan.

In 2021, the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) designated North Kalimantan Province as the second happiest province in Indonesia based on the Regional Happiness Index (Suchaini et al., 2021, p. 31). Among the indicators used to measure this index were positive relationships with others, satisfaction with the surrounding



environment, and satisfaction with security conditions. It is assumed that these indicators are closely related to the high Religious Harmony Index in the region. Consistent with the Ministry of Religious Affairs' index, the Setara Institute also conducted a survey on the Tolerance City Index, scoring 94 cities across Indonesia in 2020. The results showed that Tarakan City ranked 29th among 94 cities nationwide (Halili & Subhi Azhari, 2020, p. 12). The city's position rose sharply to 13th place in the 2021 release. Moreover, Tarakan was ranked among the top ten cities in the social regulation variable (Setara Institute, 2022). This indicates a strong role played by both the government and the community in fostering a culture of tolerance in Tarakan City.

Although the Tolerance City Index score is relatively high, this does not mean that social tensions among communities have never occurred. As mentioned earlier, Tarakan was once shaken by an ethnic conflict between the Tidung and Bugis communities. Reportedly, this conflict stemmed from social jealousy among the Tidung people, who perceived the Bugis community in Tarakan as being more successful and dominant in various economic sectors. The conflict began with the death of Abdullah bin Haji Salim on September 26, 2010, following a fight involving a Bugis individual. During his funeral, many mourners carried sharp weapons, which triggered ethnic sentiments. As a result, public facilities such as offices, schools, and markets were closed. In addition, many residents sought refuge at police stations, which were considered safer, or even fled Tarakan Island altogether (Ardiyanti, 2014, p. 34). Thanks to the swift intervention of the government, security forces, religious leaders, and traditional figures, both conflicting groups agreed to reconcile on Thursday, September 30, 2010—meaning the conflict lasted less than a week. One of the key factors in achieving this peace agreement was the presence of cultural communication involving both parties.

Today, the people of Tarakan continue to live peacefully. However, the trauma of the 2010 conflict still lingers. Based on the reality described above, the greatest concern in Tarakan today lies not in religious conflicts, but rather in potential ethnic tensions. The religious communities in Tarakan are, in fact, aware of the importance of tolerance to ensure they can practice their faith safely and peacefully. Nevertheless, given the social, economic, and political challenges facing Tarakan, failure to manage



them properly could once again trigger conflicts similar to the 2010 incident (Subagyo & Rusfiana, 2018, p. 121). Therefore, this study seeks to explore the role of the community in promoting interreligious harmony in Tarakan City, as well as to identify early signs of intolerance that may threaten religious harmony within the city.

Based on the realities described above, the research problems in this study are as follows: What is the role of the community in creating interreligious harmony in Tarakan City? and How does local wisdom function in supporting the realization of interreligious harmony in Tarakan City? The objective of this study is to describe the role of the community in fostering interreligious harmony in Tarakan City and to explain the function of local wisdom in supporting the establishment of such harmony.

The concept of interreligious harmony referred to in this research follows the Joint Regulation (PBM) of the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Home Affairs No. 9 of 2008 / No. 8 of 2006, which defines it as: “A condition of relations among religious communities based on tolerance, mutual understanding, mutual respect, recognition of equality in the practice of their religious teachings, and cooperation in social, national, and state life within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, founded upon Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia.”

In 2012, research on the Religious Harmony Index in East Kalimantan showed that public responses concerning interreligious relations were very positive, with an average score of 0.79. One of the factors contributing to this high score was the community's attitude of not problematizing religious differences in social interactions. Nevertheless, potential social conflicts that could escalate into religious conflicts cannot be entirely ruled out, as evidenced by previous incidents such as those in West Kutai (1985), Paser (2008), Tarakan (2010), and Bulungan (2012) (Rais, 2012a).

The study also found that the sub-variable with the lowest score was willingness to participate in the construction of places of worship for other religions (Tim Penulis Puslitbang Kehidupan Keagamaan, 2015). In its report titled The Effectiveness of the Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB) in Maintaining Religious Harmony, the role of FKUB has been fairly effective in fostering harmony within society. However, this role still needs improvement, particularly in institutional aspects, including the development of adequate secretariats. The most important finding emphasized in the



study is the need to enhance grassroots engagement, ensuring that harmony initiatives reach non-elite or community-level groups (the grassroots), where social interaction and religious coexistence are most directly experienced.

Afandi(Afandi, 2018) in his study identifies several key ideas that can serve as a foundation for instilling character values derived from interreligious harmony in East Kalimantan. These include religious, cultural, and ethnic pluralism, religious maturity, and emotional intelligence. Among these fundamental aspects, the most important to emphasize is maturity in religious thinking. This attitude directly fosters awareness within individuals and serves as the main instrument for realizing harmony among religious communities.

A study on Multicultural Education Based on Local Wisdom for Elementary School Students was conducted at several elementary schools in Tarakan City. This model of multicultural education includes the introduction of cultural and local wisdom elements such as proverbs, songs, daily behaviors, mottos, and traditional ceremonies. Specifically, in the subject of Religious Education, students are introduced to tolerance, respect for differing opinions, and similar values(Riyanti, 2021, p. 33). The multicultural education model in these elementary schools represents the government's role, through the Department of Education, in providing a foundational understanding for students in Tarakan City to foster interreligious harmony.

To describe the social realities discussed above, this study employs several theoretical frameworks as analytical tools. First, the functional theory, which emphasizes how societies motivate and position individuals appropriately within the system of social stratification. According to Merton, structural-functional analysis focuses on groups, organizations, societies, and cultures. He argues that the object of structural-functional analysis should be depicted as a patterned and standardized system(Ritzer, 2014, p. 428). Meanwhile, Parsons identifies four essential functions in every system: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and pattern maintenance(Ritzer, 2014, p. 408); Second, the theory of tolerance. Milad Hanna connects the concept of *tasamuh*, often translated as "tolerance," with the term *qabul al-akhar* (accepting the other). This acceptance involves empathy and consideration for others—an approach that, according to scholars, goes beyond Walzer's concept of active tolerance(Saprillah, 2014, p. 272).



Therefore, this research plays a crucial role in identifying the factors that can support and enhance interreligious harmony. Considering Indonesia's condition as a pluralistic nation composed of various ethnicities, nationalities, races, and religions, one of the greatest challenges that arises is how to manage such diversity so that it becomes a valuable potential rather than a source of danger that could lead to ethnic, racial, and religious conflict (Lubis, 2020, p. 36). Theoretically, Michael Walzer (Walzer, 1997) popularized the concept of active tolerance, emphasizing five key parameters: accepting differences to live peacefully with others; viewing diversity as a positive distinction; acknowledging that others also possess rights; showing openness through curiosity, respect, and willingness to learn from others; and offering support for diversity.

In the White Book on Religious Moderation published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, tolerance is defined as "an attitude of providing space and not interfering with others in their beliefs, expressions of faith, and opinions related to their beliefs." Thus, tolerance refers to an open-minded and respectful attitude toward differences (Tim Penyusun Kementerian Agama, 2019, pp. 43–44).

B. Methods

This study is a qualitative-descriptive that examines the role of society, including local wisdom, in realizing and maintaining interreligious harmony in Tarakan City. As in most qualitative studies, data collection techniques used include interviews with various informants relevant to the research theme, such as religious leaders from different faiths, members of the Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB) of Tarakan City, researchers, traditional leaders, community figures, and others. The interview data were complemented by document studies and literature reviews related to the research theme, such as religious data and the interreligious harmony index in Tarakan City, as published by institutions such as the Research and Development and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and the Setara Institute (Cresswell, 2014, p. 189). The collected data were then processed and analyzed using a descriptive narrative method, with the researcher serving as the main instrument, as is characteristic of qualitative research (Sugiyono, 2010, p. 305).



Therefore, in this study, data analysis was conducted throughout the research process, continuing until the completion of data collection.

C. Results and Discussion

Results

The Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB) of Tarakan City in Realizing Harmony Among Religious Communities

The existence of the Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB) at the national level cannot be separated from the Joint Regulation (PBM) of the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Home Affairs No. 9 of 2008 / No. 8 of 2006 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of the Duties of Regional Heads/Deputy Regional Heads in the Maintenance of Interreligious Harmony, Empowerment of the Interreligious Harmony Forum, and the Establishment of Houses of Worship. This regulation serves as the legal foundation for the establishment of FKUB. The forum was established with the expectation of becoming a medium for fostering harmony among religious communities. According to Article 10(2) of the PBM, the membership of FKUB at the district/city level consists of 17 representatives from various religions.

In this context, FKUB of Tarakan City differs from what is stipulated in the PBM. Based on the Decree of the Mayor of Tarakan No. 460/HK-XI/305/2019, the management board of the FKUB of Tarakan City for the 2019–2024 period consists of 50 members representing religious organizations from each faith. Quantitatively, this number is significantly higher than the PBM's standard and is often perceived as excessive. However, this larger membership was intentionally chosen to uphold the principles of justice and equality, ensuring that the communication and dissemination of harmony values could involve more groups and religious organizations.

Historically, even before the issuance of the PBM No. 9 of 2008 / No. 8 of 2006, interfaith leaders in Tarakan City had already formed an interreligious forum called the *Forum Komunikasi Antar Umat Beragama* (FKAUB) of Tarakan City. The membership of that earlier forum was not much different from the current FKUB, and eventually, the members of FKAUB were converted into FKUB members. Both forums share the same vision — to promote interreligious harmony within society.



In addition to its 50-member main body, FKUB Tarakan City has also established two sub-organizations: FKUB Muda (Youth FKUB) and Perempuan FKUB (Women's FKUB). The FKUB Muda has the task of promoting interreligious harmony among youth, including university students and school pupils. This strategy was chosen based on the consideration that communication and education on the importance of interreligious harmony must be delivered in a language and style appropriate to young people's reasoning and communication patterns. Therefore, the members of FKUB Muda are selected from youth representatives of each religion. Currently, FKUB Muda of Tarakan City is chaired by Dr. Ilham Agang (aged 36), a civil servant lecturer at Borneo University Tarakan, elected through the Regional Assembly of FKUB Muda members.

Meanwhile, the Perempuan FKUB of Tarakan City is currently chaired by Mrs. Kasbariah. Its main task and function are to disseminate interreligious harmony values among women's communities within each religious group. For example, the Women's FKUB representatives from Islam conduct outreach among *Majlis Taklim* groups. Similar to the main and youth FKUB bodies, the members of the Women's FKUB also come from female representatives of each religion.

In carrying out its duties and functions, FKUB Tarakan City — including its main board, youth division, and women's division — receives grant funding directly from the Tarakan City Government. However, given its relatively large organizational structure and limited funding, the forum's role in promoting interreligious harmony remains somewhat constrained. The high expectations placed upon FKUB by various parties have led to the perception that it serves merely as a gathering place for religious elites, without sufficient grassroots engagement. On the other hand, serving as an FKUB member is often regarded as a secondary occupation, leading to the common notion that those involved must be prepared to work sincerely, as the position does not offer significant material benefits.

The Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB) of Tarakan City regularly holds daily meetings in its two-story office building, which was granted by the Mayor of Tarakan. The meeting schedule is organized by religious representation: Monday for Islam, Tuesday for Christianity, Wednesday for Catholicism, Thursday for Buddhism, and Friday for Confucianism and Hinduism. On Saturdays, a joint meeting involving



representatives of all religions is held. During these joint meetings, participants discuss current issues related to interreligious harmony. The role of FKUB Tarakan City in maintaining interreligious harmony is considered highly significant. One notable example was during the 2010 ethnic conflict in Tarakan, which involved the Tidung and Bugis ethnic groups. At that time, rumors spread suggesting that the conflict was religiously motivated, portraying it as a clash between Muslim Tidung and Christian migrants from South Sulawesi. However, field investigations revealed that the migrants involved in the conflict were Bugis—who are also Muslims like the majority of the Tidung—rather than the Christian Toraja people.

Despite this clarification, Islamic religious leaders, who represented one of the conflicting groups, did not remain passive. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of Tarakan City, which also represents FKUB, worked closely with local security forces to mediate between the two groups and facilitate a peace meeting. As a result, within less than a week after the conflict erupted, both parties reached a peace agreement. The 2010 conflict became a crucial lesson for all stakeholders in Tarakan City, emphasizing the importance of preventing similar ethnic unrest in the future. This sentiment was affirmed by Zainuddin Dilaly, the Chairman of FKUB Tarakan City and concurrently the Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of North Kalimantan, who stated as follows:

What needs to be watched out for in Tarakan is ethnic identity conflict. The local people here tend to live simple lives. They feel content as long as they have a sack of rice and about six kilograms of fish. This is quite different from our brothers and sisters from Sulawesi, who work extremely hard and suddenly manage to build three-story houses. As a result, local residents are gradually pushed into the interior areas, which creates social jealousy within the community. One manifestation of this was the ethnic riot in 2010 (Interview with Zainuddin Dilaly, Chairman of the Interreligious Harmony Forum [FKUB] of Tarakan City and Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council [MUI] of North Kalimantan, July 16, 2022, at the Tarakan City Islamic Center).

Factually, apart from the 2010 ethnic conflict, interreligious harmony in Tarakan City has remained well-preserved. This fact aligns with survey results from both the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Setara Institute. The awareness of Tarakan's pluralistic society regarding the importance of religious harmony is remarkably high. Even so, the 2010 incident still left psychological trauma among the community,



despite the conflict being relatively short-lived compared to those that occurred elsewhere, such as in Ambon, Sampit, and Poso.

However, a high harmony index—well above the national average—does not guarantee that harmony will always be maintained. Potential conflicts may arise at any time. Therefore, the FKUB of Tarakan City continuously seeks to detect potential sources of conflict and religious intolerance at an early stage. One of the recurring issues that can trigger conflict is the construction of new houses of worship. In fact, the growth of houses of worship in Tarakan has been quite rapid.

According to data from the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tarakan City, each religious community has its own houses of worship. The data show that Islam has 166 houses of worship serving 239,304 adherents, Christianity 94 houses of worship serving 27,293 adherents, Catholicism 3 houses of worship serving 9,583 adherents, Buddhism 4 houses of worship serving 1,765 adherents, Hinduism 1 house of worship serving 112 adherents, and Confucianism 1 house of worship serving 84 adherents. These figures indicate that the religious communities in Tarakan live harmoniously side by side. They can freely practice their faith without fear of disturbance from followers of other religions.

The FKUB of Tarakan City is the institution authorized to provide recommendations for the establishment of houses of worship in the city. In carrying out this duty, the FKUB consistently upholds the principle of justice to ensure that all religious communities in Tarakan have their own places of worship. A religious and harmonious society, after all, emerges from communities that are diligent in performing worship within their respective houses of worship. Nevertheless, conflicts occasionally arise when certain religious groups feel that their existence is threatened by the presence or expansion of another.

The FKUB of Tarakan City addresses such objections not merely by relying on written regulations, such as the Joint Regulation (PBM) No. 9 of 2008 / No. 8 of 2006, Article 14, which stipulates that the establishment of a house of worship must be supported by at least 60 local residents. In certain cases, even when a religious group has fulfilled these formal requirements, opposition may still arise from members of other religious communities. To anticipate such situations, the FKUB of Tarakan City employs cultural communication strategies, engaging religious leaders from the



opposing community to convince their followers that the construction of houses of worship is essential for all faiths. In many instances, cultural communication serves as an effective means of resolving conflicts related to the construction of houses of worship (Wahab, 2021, p. 207). In the specific context of Tarakan City, if the opposing group is from the Muslim community, then the responsibility to resolve the issue lies with the FKUB representatives from Islam—and similarly for other religions.

Cultural communication among religious leaders at the interfaith level is a top priority for the FKUB of Tarakan City in resolving any emerging issues. This process is then followed up at the grassroots level within each religious community. Cultural communication can also be understood as cultural *da'wah*, which acknowledges the reality of religious diversity while maintaining theological truth claims without disregarding the universal moral values upheld by each faith (Riyadi, 2024, p. 18). This approach is deemed crucial, drawing lessons from the intensive culturally grounded communication patterns employed during the resolution of the 2010 conflict. Syamsi Sarman explained this further in the following interview:

One of our top priorities is communication among religious leaders to quickly resolve issues at the grassroots level. Whenever possible, we try to address problems promptly before they reach the media. Demographically, communication problems in Tarakan are not too difficult to manage since the population is relatively small and the area is not vast. However, we remain vigilant, having learned from the experience of the interethnic conflict in 2010. (Interview with Syamsi Syarman, General Secretary of the Interreligious Harmony Forum [FKUB] of Tarakan City, July 18, 2022, at the Baznas Office of Tarakan City).

One of the positive aspects contributing to interreligious harmony in Tarakan is the full support provided by the Tarakan City Government. This support is exemplified by the granting of funds for the construction of a two-story building that now serves as the office of the Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB) of Tarakan City. The government's commitment to fostering interreligious harmony is also consistently emphasized in various public forums. During the inauguration of a church, Mayor Khairul expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the congregation of the United Pentecostal Church in Indonesia (GPSDI) Philadelphia Congregation, who had worked together since 2005 to finally establish the church. The mayor, who is a Muslim, remarked that the increasing number of houses of worship—including churches—in



Tarakan demonstrates the strong religious spirit and interreligious harmony in the city. He even encouraged the construction of a Christian Center in the church area(Wibawa, 2021).

More recently, on Thursday, July 7, 2022, Mayor Khairul also inaugurated the building of the United Pentecostal Church in Indonesia (GPSDI) The Harvest Ministry Juata Laut. The ceremony, attended by representatives from the GPSDI Central Board, the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Tarakan City, FKUB officials, religious leaders, and congregants, was marked by the mayor's congratulatory remarks to the congregation, who had been worshipping in temporary locations for approximately 15 years. The inauguration of this church stands as tangible evidence of the government's support for all religions. In his address, the mayor reaffirmed his commitment to guaranteeing religious freedom in Tarakan City. He also expressed gratitude for the harmonious interreligious relations that have prevailed in Tarakan, noting that all religious communities share social space in practicing their respective faiths. He concluded by urging all parties, including religious leaders, to continue safeguarding interreligious harmony in the city (Rizal, 2022).

Despite the government's strong support for religious freedom in Tarakan, certain incidents still require collective solutions—one of which was the rejection of the construction of a house of worship by the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation. In this case, the FKUB of Tarakan City postponed issuing a recommendation for the construction of the Jehovah's Witnesses church due to objections from representatives of the Catholic community, who did not recognize Jehovah's Witnesses as part of the Catholic faith. Consequently, the FKUB of Tarakan City decided to consult with relevant authorities in Jakarta regarding the issuance of such legal recognition, as explained by Syamsi Syarman, General Secretary of the FKUB of Tarakan City:

Until now, we have not issued a recommendation for the house of worship. We first brought the case for consultation to Jakarta. They already have a permit from the Directorate General at the central level, but the Christian and Catholic groups in Tarakan rejected it due to theological differences. (Interview with Syamsi Syarman, General Secretary of the Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB) of Tarakan City, July 18, 2022, at the Baznas Office of Tarakan City).

In line with Syamsi Syarman's statement, the Tarakan City Government has also not yet been able to decide whether to accept or reject the case until there is a legal



ruling regarding their religious status. In another case, rejection of the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation also occurred at one of the elementary schools in Tarakan. Three students at the school were not promoted to the next grade because they adhered to the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses (Tim Redaktur, 2021).

The phenomenon of rejection toward Jehovah's Witnesses has also occurred in other regions. Saprillah (Saprillah, 2021, p. 241) mentions that Jehovah's Witnesses have difficulty obtaining a recommendation from the Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB) of Balikpapan City because of opposition from mainstream churches, citing theological reasons similar to those in Tarakan. The incident concerning Jehovah's Witnesses in Tarakan City requires a cultural solution that can serve as a bridge for several minority religious groups to obtain their rights to freely practice their faith, as guaranteed by the 1945 Constitution. One proposed solution is citizenship recognition, which refers to acknowledging individuals as members of the state regardless of their faith or religious ideology, as long as it does not contradict *Pancasila* (Saprillah, 2021, p. 242). This is essential because neither individuals nor the state can impose recognition of a particular belief. On the one hand, the state guarantees freedom for every group to practice their religion and beliefs, as mandated by the 1945 Constitution. In this case, the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation must be treated fairly.

Discussion

The Role of Local Wisdom in Fostering Interreligious Harmony

The role of local wisdom has proven in several regions to be an effective means of strengthening interreligious harmony. One example is the *Kitorang Samua Basudara* wisdom in the city of Manado (Muslim, 2016). This expression is simply understood to mean that all human beings are brothers and sisters; therefore, they must live harmoniously despite differences in ethnicity and religion. Another expression of local wisdom often echoed by the people of Manado as an instrument of social harmony is *sitou timou tumou tou*, which means "humans live by humanizing others." These local wisdom values have made Manado known as a city of peace (Rais, 2012b, p. 16), where people of all religions coexist peacefully. In Papua, the philosophy of local wisdom known as *satu tungku tiga batu* ("one stove with three stones")



symbolizes that religion, customary law, and government serve as the three main pillars in realizing harmony within the region (Sabara & Kodina, 2020, p. 307). Due to the significant role of local wisdom, the Center for Research and Development on Religious Guidance and Religious Services has included it as one of the indicators that support harmony in the national Religious Harmony Index Survey.

Local wisdom is one of the unique cultural assets of Tarakan City in fostering interreligious harmony in the region. Although Tarakan is inhabited by multiple ethnic groups from various migrant communities, the Tidung ethnic group remains the indigenous population residing on Tarakan Island, as well as in several other areas of northern Kalimantan such as Malinau, Sesayap, Bunyu, and Nunukan, and even across the border in Malaysia, including Tawau and Sandakan (Musfeptial & Rahmawati, 2017, p. 45). The influence of the Tidung people as a local ethnic group remains strong within society. In various ceremonial events, the Tarakan City Government consistently involves Tidung traditional leaders, acknowledging their enduring influence among the community—even though, *de jure*, they no longer hold formal authority like municipal officials. Therefore, these traditional leaders continue to play an important role in maintaining interreligious harmony, particularly through local wisdom values that remain deeply rooted in the community.

The Tidung people, as the indigenous ethnic group of Tarakan, possess several forms of local wisdom that serve as foundations for harmonious living in the city. One of these is the *Tenguyun* life philosophy, which means “to enjoy working together.” In daily life, this philosophy is practiced through cooperative activities, particularly in livelihood pursuits such as fishing. The Tidung people help one another in building boats, crafting paddles, and performing other related tasks. During life-cycle events such as weddings or funerals, the Tidung community customarily provides mutual assistance in preparing all the necessities related to these ceremonial rituals (Arbain, 2016, pp. 106–107). In a broader social context, the *Tenguyun* philosophy has become a foundation for the Tidung people to collaborate with migrant communities in developing Tarakan across various sectors, including social, economic, and political spheres. This reflects the character of Tarakan society, which is notably open and welcoming toward newcomers.



In the context of contemporary Tarakan, however, the value of the *Tenguyun* philosophy is perceived to be fading along with modernization. Some members of society have begun to adopt a more individualistic attitude, focusing on personal interests. This reality poses a challenge for the Tidung people and the Tarakan government to continue preserving this traditional value. Consequently, the Tarakan City Government has initiated a large communal ceremony known as *Iraw Tengkeyu*, which functions as a form of application and revitalization of the *Tenguyun* value within society. Historically, this celebration was held to commemorate the birthday of the Tidung king. In the present day, it has been transformed into the official anniversary celebration of Tarakan City. People of diverse ethnicities, tribes, and religions in Tarakan actively participate in the event. The highlight of the *Iraw Tengkeyu* festival is the parade of the *Padaw Tuju Dulong*—a traditional boat symbolizing the Tidung community, characterized by its seven towering masts (Arbain, 2016, p. 118). The collective awareness of the importance of unity reflected in *Iraw Tengkeyu* serves as a vital source of social cohesion for the people of Tarakan.

Another form of local wisdom that remains deeply rooted among the Tidung community is their commitment to preserving and protecting the natural ecosystem. As a coastal society, the Tidung people place great importance on conserving mangrove forests. This practice helps protect the coastline from erosion while also serving to absorb and diffuse ocean waves. Moreover, mangrove forests function as vital habitats for various marine species, including fish. One unique characteristic of Tarakan City is that its mangrove forests are home to a species of monkey known as the *Bekantan* (proboscis monkey) (Arbain, 2016, p. 105). This wisdom of mangrove conservation is beautifully reflected in a local folk song as follows:

“Bebilin yadu yaki, sama muyu ngusik ngacaw de upun baka, geno baya buyag binatang tanga maupun tad de dumud, upun bakau penyyangga timuk bunsuk, bua upun baksu kalap tenugos de uwot, upun bakau no baya buyag kuyad bekare baya no gium buyag dan mangow.”

Grandmother and grandfather once advised, “To all my descendants, protect and preserve the mangrove forests. Do not disturb them, for the mangroves are the habitat of both marine and terrestrial creatures. The mangrove forest serves as a barrier against floods; its fruit provides medicine, and it is the place where the proboscis monkeys live, breed, and adapt.”



According to traditional leader Datuk Norbeck, the song is widely loved and often sung by many people—both Tidung and non-Tidung. He further explained that, in the context of social harmony, the song carries a profound moral message: the importance of protecting and preserving one's living environment. Moreover, it promotes maintaining harmonious relationships among human beings, regardless of ethnic or religious differences. Guided by these values, the Tidung people—who are predominantly Muslim—have been able to live peacefully alongside various migrant groups, both Muslim and non-Muslim, such as the Bugis, Javanese, Balinese, Minahasan, Torajan, and Chinese communities.

One of the contemporary challenges faced by the people of Tarakan is the low level of literacy regarding local wisdom, particularly in relation to multicultural education. This is evident in the fading understanding of the *tenguyun* philosophy (the spirit of cooperation), which has been forgotten by parts of the community. In fact, this philosophy is crucial, considering the multicultural demographic structure of Tarakan, composed of numerous ethnic and religious groups. Therefore, it is essential to revitalize local wisdom education based on multicultural values from an early age, particularly in schools and madrasahs. One practical approach is to integrate local wisdom into the curriculum at various educational levels, especially through local content subjects.

Exploring the Potential of Intolerance in Preventing Interreligious Conflict

One of the potential sources of intolerance in Tarakan City is the growing spread of radical or intolerant preaching in the name of Islam. This movement has not only taken root in society but has also infiltrated university environments. In fact, this phenomenon is not unique to Tarakan—it is part of a broader pattern occurring across various regions. Research conducted at several Islamic universities in East and North Kalimantan indicates that these campuses are highly vulnerable to the infiltration of radical ideologies (Arbain & Saleh, 2019, p. 118).

In essence, the term “radicalism” is not inherently negative; it simply denotes a firm or deep commitment to a cause. However, it has come to bear a negative connotation due to its association with coercion, intolerance toward differing views,



and even violence in the name of religion. Among the radical groups identified are the *Salafi Takfiri*, a faction known for declaring other Muslim groups as heretical or unbelievers simply for holding differing opinions. Although their numbers remain relatively small, their influence extends to various layers of society—including university students and faculty.

Another group with notable activity on campuses is former activists of *Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI). As is well known, HTI advocates for the establishment of a caliphate system as the only legitimate form of governance compatible with Islam, while branding Indonesia's state system based on Pancasila as *thaghut* (idolatrous). Reports have suggested that radical groups use universities as platforms for recruitment and dissemination of their ideology, targeting both students and lecturers (Risfil, 2022). This is unsurprising given that pro-caliphate discourses promoted by HTI were once widespread in university settings, including at the University of Borneo Tarakan.

Following the revocation of its legal status, which rendered HTI an illegal organization in Indonesia, a new challenge has emerged—its former activists are now more difficult to monitor. Nonetheless, in practice, they continue to conduct activities. Whereas their proselytizing efforts once relied on *halaqah* (study circles) or *tarbiyah* (religious training), today they have shifted toward extensive use of social media platforms such as websites, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram. If this form of intolerant preaching goes unchecked, it could have serious consequences, as it targets all segments of society. The absence of strong multicultural literacy among citizens could further weaken the foundations of interreligious harmony.

To address this issue, it is crucial for all stakeholders to actively promote discourses of tolerance and multiculturalism, particularly among students and young people. In the context of Tarakan City, the local government should integrate models of tolerance and multicultural education across all levels of the educational system. Equally important, universities must strengthen inclusive religious education that emphasizes coexistence rather than exclusivism. Unfortunately, current models of religious education in many general universities tend to be exclusivist, focusing narrowly on doctrinal truth claims and ritual practices rather than cultivating mutual understanding and respect across faiths.



D. Conclusion

This study concludes that the level of interreligious harmony in Tarakan City is relatively high, as reflected in the 2021 North Kalimantan Province Religious Harmony Index score of 75.63, which exceeds the national average of 72.39. This condition is the result of active participation from various community elements, particularly the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) of Tarakan City, which regularly holds meetings to discuss current issues related to harmony, employs cultural approaches, and conducts early detection of potential conflicts and intolerance. In addition, the local wisdom of the Tidung community—such as the *tenguyun* (cooperation) philosophy and the spirit of environmental preservation—has also strengthened social harmony amidst the city's ethnic and religious diversity.

The study further concludes that efforts to enhance interreligious harmony in Tarakan City can be pursued through two main strategies. First, by expanding the role of the community through interfaith communication and collaboration—not only among religious elites but also at the grassroots level—with both moral and material support from the government. Second, by internalizing local wisdom values that promote harmony into educational curricula at all levels and encouraging religious counselors to deliver sermons and teachings that emphasize the importance of interreligious harmony grounded in local wisdom.

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