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Pesantren-Based Free Nutritious Meal Program and Local Economic Empowerment: An Islamic Economic Perspective

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Abstract

Pesantren-based Free Nutritious Meal Programs (MBG) have not been widely examined as mechanisms for local economic empowerment within the framework of Islamic Economics, particularly in terms of governance, management, supply chains, stakeholder involvement, and empowerment mechanisms. This study aims to analyze how pesantren-based MBG programs contribute to strengthening local economic empowerment through Islamic economic principles and institutional management practices. This study employed a qualitative method using a case study approach at pesantren implementing MBG programs involving local communities and micro-enterprises. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving pesantren administrators, local MSMEs, food suppliers, workers, and surrounding communities. The data were analyzed interactively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to identify governance patterns, supply chain systems, stakeholder collaboration, and community empowerment mechanisms within the MBG ecosystem. The findings reveal that pesantren-based MBG programs create local economic circulation through the involvement of local suppliers, MSMEs, and community labor within the food procurement and distribution process. Furthermore, governance practices based on Islamic values such as justice, trustworthiness, cooperation, and public benefit strengthen institutional sustainability and expand the

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socio-economic impact of the program on surrounding communities. This study concludes that pesantren-based MBG programs function not only as nutritional support initiatives but also as strategic instruments for community economic empowerment within the framework of Islamic economics. The study contributes to the development of community-based Islamic economic models by positioning pesantren as strategic institutions in promoting inclusive and sustainable local economic development.

Keywords:Pesantren-Based Free Nutritious Meal Program, Islamic Economics, Local Economic Empowerment, Governance, Community Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren have long served not only as Islamic educational institutions but also as centers of socio-economic development within Muslim communities in Indonesia. Recently, the implementation of Pesantren-Based Free Nutritious Meal Programs (MBG) has gained increasing attention due to its potential contribution to food security, social welfare, and local economic circulation. In Pamekasan Regency, the implementation of the MBG program has expanded significantly. Data from the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) Nasional (2026), indicate that approximately 129 Satuan Pelayanan Pemenuhan Gizi (SPPG) units have been established in the region, reflecting the increasing institutional scale and socio-economic significance of the program within local communities. Within the perspective of Islamic Economics, such programs reflect the principles of justice, welfare (*maslahah*), and equitable economic distribution (Kamal, 2025). In addition, community-based food programs have been recognized as strategic instruments for strengthening local supply chains, empowering micro and small enterprises, and stimulating sustainable local economies (Berti & Mulligan, 2016). The role of pesantren in community empowerment has also become increasingly important, particularly in developing community-based economic systems rooted in Islamic values (Esteves et al., 2021).

The growing attention toward community-based economic development has encouraged Islamic institutions to become more actively involved in addressing social welfare and economic inequality. In Indonesia, pesantren possess strong social legitimacy and extensive community networks that enable them to function as important actors in local economic development (Hudaefi & Heryani, 2019). Beyond their educational role, many pesantren have developed productive economic activities through cooperatives, MSMEs, agricultural businesses, and community empowerment initiatives

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(Zaki et al., 2023). This condition indicates that pesantren-based programs have substantial potential to strengthen inclusive economic systems rooted in Islamic social values and community participation.

Previous studies have examined school feeding and community meal programs from various perspectives. Early studies mainly focused on nutritional improvement, food security, and educational participation among students and children (Forrestal et al., 2021). Subsequent studies expanded the discussion toward the socio-economic impacts of institutional food programs, particularly their role in reducing poverty and supporting local food systems (Palmioli et al., 2020). More recent studies highlighted the importance of institutional procurement systems in empowering local MSMEs, farmers, and food suppliers through sustainable food distribution mechanisms (Berti & Mulligan, 2016). In the pesantren context, several scholars have explored pesantren economic independence, Islamic entrepreneurship, and community empowerment practices based on Islamic values (Ilfi, 2026). Other studies have also emphasized the strategic role of pesantren in strengthening halal economic ecosystems and local economic resilience (Qizam et al., 2025).

From the perspective of Islamic economics, economic empowerment should not merely focus on profit generation but also emphasize social justice, equitable distribution, and collective welfare. The principles of *maqasid al-shariah* highlight the importance of protecting social welfare through sustainable economic activities that benefit broader communities (Abdullah & Kusaeri, 2024). In this context, pesantren-based MBG programs can be understood not only as charitable feeding initiatives but also as mechanisms for developing community-centered economic ecosystems. The involvement of local suppliers, MSMEs, workers, and surrounding communities in food procurement and distribution activities reflects the practical implementation of Islamic economic values within institutional management systems.

Despite the growing literature, several gaps remain in previous studies. Most research on feeding programs primarily emphasizes nutritional and public health outcomes, while limited attention has been given to their role in generating local economic empowerment and sustainable community development (Assefa, 2025). Furthermore, studies related to pesantren economic activities generally focus on entrepreneurship, Islamic education, or institutional independence(Ilfi, 2026) , rather than examining how MBG programs create economic multiplier effects through governance, supply chain management, stakeholder involvement, and community empowerment mechanisms (Shogole, 2025). In addition, limited studies specifically analyze pesantren-based MBG

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programs through the lens of Islamic economics, particularly regarding the implementation of Islamic values such as trustworthiness, justice, cooperation, and public welfare in institutional economic practices(Muiz et al., 2025). Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding is needed to explain how pesantren-based MBG programs contribute to inclusive and sustainable local economic empowerment(Hakim et al., 2025).

Moreover, the sustainability of pesantren-based MBG programs is closely related to the effectiveness of governance systems, stakeholder collaboration, and supply chain management practices. Strong institutional coordination and participatory management mechanisms enable pesantren to distribute economic opportunities more broadly among local communities. Previous studies have shown that collaborative governance and community participation contribute significantly to strengthening local economic resilience and sustaining community-based development programs (Ensor et al., 2018). Therefore, examining pesantren-based MBG programs through governance and Islamic economic perspectives becomes important for understanding how religious institutions contribute to sustainable socio-economic transformation at the local level.

This study aims to analyze the role of Pesantren-Based Free Nutritious Meal Programs (MBG) in strengthening local economic empowerment through governance, management, supply chain systems, stakeholder involvement, and empowerment mechanisms from an Islamic economic perspective. The significance of this study lies in expanding the discourse on Islamic community-based economic development by positioning pesantren not only as educational institutions but also as strategic actors in promoting sustainable local welfare and inclusive socio-economic transformation. Furthermore, this study offers a novel perspective by conceptualizing pesantren-based MBG programs as community-based Islamic economic ecosystems that generate sustainable local economic multiplier effects.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore the role of Pesantren-Based Free Nutritious Meal Programs (MBG) in strengthening local economic empowerment from an Islamic Economics perspective. The case study approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of governance practices, management systems, supply chain mechanisms, stakeholder involvement, and community empowerment processes within the MBG program implemented by pesantren institutions (Yin, 2018). Qualitative research is considered

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appropriate for understanding social phenomena, institutional dynamics, and the meanings constructed by participants within specific contexts (Creswell_Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted at selected pesantren implementing MBG programs involving local communities, micro and small enterprises (MSMEs), food suppliers, and community workers. Informants were determined purposively based on their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and management of the program (Patton, 2015). The participants consisted of pesantren leaders, MBG program managers, local MSME actors, food suppliers, workers, and members of the surrounding community. The study involved 15 informants consisting of pesantren leaders, MBG program managers, local MSME actors, food suppliers, kitchen workers, and members of the surrounding community. Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement, experience, and understanding of the governance, implementation, and economic impacts of the MBG program. The research was conducted over a three-month period from January to April 2026 to allow in-depth observation of operational activities, stakeholder interactions, and community economic dynamics related to the program. Interviews and observations were conducted continuously until data saturation was achieved to ensure the credibility and depth of the findings.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain comprehensive information regarding governance systems, food procurement mechanisms, stakeholder collaboration, and the socio-economic impacts of the program (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Observations were carried out to understand operational activities and interactions among stakeholders involved in the MBG ecosystem, while documentation techniques were used to support the validity of findings through institutional records, reports, and related documents (Sugiyono, 2013).

The data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data credibility was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking to enhance the trustworthiness and consistency of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). Through this approach, the study sought to generate a comprehensive understanding of how pesantren-based MBG programs contribute to sustainable local economic empowerment within the framework of Islamic economics.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

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The findings of this study reveal that the Pesantren-Based Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) plays a significant role not only in fulfilling students' nutritional needs but also in strengthening local economic empowerment within the surrounding community. The implementation of the program demonstrates that pesantren function as strategic socio-economic institutions capable of creating sustainable local economic circulation through community-based food procurement and distribution systems.

One of the major findings shows that the governance and management of the MBG program are strongly based on collaboration between pesantren administrators, local MSMEs, food suppliers, community workers, and surrounding residents. The pesantren prioritized the use of locally sourced food ingredients such as rice, vegetables, fish, poultry, and spices obtained from nearby suppliers and small businesses. This procurement mechanism created direct economic opportunities for local communities and strengthened local supply chain networks surrounding the pesantren environment.

The study also found that stakeholder involvement became a key factor supporting the sustainability of the MBG program. Community participation was not limited to food supply activities but also included cooking, food preparation, logistics, and distribution processes. Such involvement generated additional income opportunities for local residents, especially small traders, kitchen workers, and micro-enterprises operating around the pesantren. As a result, the MBG program contributed to increasing community economic activity and strengthening local economic resilience. Informants explained that the involvement of local MSMEs and surrounding communities in the MBG program was aligned with the policy direction of the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) to strengthen micro-enterprise competitiveness and promote equitable local economic development. Participants emphasized that the program generated significant economic impacts, particularly through increased income, business sustainability, and expanding employment opportunities for community members. Several informants stated that prior to the implementation of the MBG program, many micro-businesses operated only on a small subsistence scale with unstable income and limited business direction. However, after becoming involved in the MBG supply chain, local entrepreneurs experienced increasing product demand, more stable economic conditions, and stronger confidence in sustaining their businesses. Some MSME actors even expanded production capacity and recruited additional workers due to the increasing number of orders generated through the program. In addition, the recruitment of local residents as kitchen workers and operational staff created broader employment opportunities and contributed to reducing local unemployment within surrounding communities.

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Another important finding indicates that the pesantren implemented management practices reflecting Islamic economic values, including trustworthiness (*amanah*), justice (*'adl*), cooperation (*ta'awun*), and public welfare (*maslahah*). Transparency in procurement, equitable distribution of economic opportunities, and collective decision-making processes strengthened trust among stakeholders and supported the continuity of the program. These values also reinforced the social legitimacy of the pesantren as a community-centered economic institution. Informants further emphasized that the implementation of the MBG program was strongly guided by both institutional regulations established by the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) and Islamic economic principles embedded within pesantren management practices. Participants explained that any form of deviation, unfair practice, or action potentially harming the community was strictly prohibited within the program's operational system. Procurement activities, financial management, and stakeholder transactions were expected to uphold the values of *amanah* (trustworthiness), *'adl* (justice), *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation), and *maslahah* (public welfare). Informants highlighted that these values became the ethical foundation for maintaining transparency, accountability, and fairness in the distribution of economic opportunities among local communities. As a result, the implementation of Islamic economic values strengthened stakeholder trust and reinforced the legitimacy of the pesantren-based MBG program as a community-centered socio-economic empowerment initiative.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the MBG program generated multiplier effects on the local economy. The increasing demand for food supplies encouraged local MSMEs and suppliers to expand production capacity and improve business continuity. Several community members reported increased household income and more stable economic activities due to their involvement in the MBG supply chain. This demonstrates that the pesantren-based MBG program operates not merely as a charitable initiative but as a mechanism for sustainable community economic empowerment. Informants reported that the MBG program created tangible multiplier effects on the local economy, particularly for small-scale enterprises and surrounding communities. Several participants explained that the increasing demand generated by the MBG supply chain encouraged local MSMEs to expand their production capacity and improve business continuity. One informant described that a local bakery enterprise even recruited additional workers due to the significant increase in orders after becoming involved in the program. Informants also emphasized that operational regulations encouraged the recruitment of kitchen workers and support staff from surrounding communities, creating broader employment

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opportunities for local residents. As a result, community members who previously experienced unstable employment and limited income gained more sustainable economic opportunities and improved household welfare. These conditions indicate that the pesantren-based MBG program contributed not only to local economic circulation but also to reducing unemployment and strengthening community economic resilience.

The findings also indicate that the effectiveness of the MBG program was closely related to the strength of social relationships and trust between pesantren and surrounding communities. Informants explained that long-standing social ties enabled smoother coordination in food procurement, labor distribution, and operational management. Community members perceived the program not only as an institutional activity but also as a collective social responsibility that strengthened solidarity and mutual cooperation within the local community. This condition contributed to higher community participation and stronger stakeholder commitment to sustaining the program.

Another finding reveals that the MBG program contributed to improving the economic stability of local MSMEs and small-scale suppliers. Several suppliers experienced more consistent demand patterns due to regular procurement activities conducted by the pesantren. Local food vendors and small businesses reported increased income and greater business continuity after becoming part of the MBG supply chain system. The existence of continuous institutional demand from pesantren created more stable local market opportunities and reduced economic uncertainty among community-based enterprises.

The study further found that participatory governance practices became one of the important factors supporting the sustainability of the program. Decision-making processes related to procurement systems, supplier selection, food distribution, and operational activities were often conducted collectively through coordination among pesantren administrators and local stakeholders. This participatory mechanism increased transparency, strengthened stakeholder trust, and minimized potential conflicts within program implementation. The collaborative management approach also enabled pesantren to adapt more effectively to operational challenges and local economic conditions.

In addition, the findings demonstrate that the pesantren-based MBG program created broader socio-economic impacts beyond direct economic benefits. The program strengthened social cohesion, encouraged collective participation, and reinforced the role of pesantren as community-centered institutions capable of integrating religious values with socio-economic development practices. The integration of governance systems,

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stakeholder participation, supply chain management, and Islamic economic principles enabled the MBG program to function as a sustainable model of community-based economic empowerment.

Overall, the study confirms that the Pesantren-Based Free Nutritious Meal Program represents an integrated model of Islamic community economic development in which governance systems, supply chain management, stakeholder participation, and Islamic economic values interact to strengthen local socio-economic sustainability.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the Pesantren-Based Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) plays a significant role not only in fulfilling students' nutritional needs but also in strengthening local economic empowerment within the surrounding community. The implementation of the program demonstrates that pesantren function as strategic socio-economic institutions capable of creating sustainable local economic circulation through community-based food procurement and distribution systems. This finding supports (Hudaefi & Heryani, 2019), who emphasized that pesantren have increasingly developed broader socio-economic functions through community empowerment and local economic development initiatives.

One of the major findings shows that the governance and management of the MBG program are strongly based on collaboration between pesantren administrators, local MSMEs, food suppliers, community workers, and surrounding residents. The pesantren prioritized the use of locally sourced food ingredients such as rice, vegetables, fish, poultry, and spices obtained from nearby suppliers and small businesses. This procurement mechanism created direct economic opportunities for local communities and strengthened local supply chain networks surrounding the pesantren environment. These findings are consistent with Berti and Mulligan (2016), who found that institutional food procurement systems contribute significantly to strengthening local supply chains and supporting community-based enterprises. Similarly, Tay et al. (2024) argued that community-based food systems play an important role in promoting local economic sustainability.

The study also found that stakeholder involvement became a key factor supporting the sustainability of the MBG program. Community participation was not limited to food supply activities but also included cooking, food preparation, logistics, and distribution processes (Dyen & Sirieix, 2016). Such involvement generated additional income

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opportunities for local residents, especially small traders, kitchen workers, and micro-enterprises operating around the pesantren(Latifah, 2017). As a result, the MBG program contributed to increasing community economic activity and strengthening local economic resilience. These findings support Deller et al. (2017), who explained that institutional meal programs can improve local welfare by involving community actors in food production and distribution systems. In addition, Zauro et al. (2020) emphasized that community participation within Islamic social institutions contributes to strengthening inclusive socio-economic development.

Another important finding indicates that the pesantren implemented management practices reflecting Islamic economic values, including trustworthiness (*amanah*), justice (*'adl*), cooperation (*ta'awun*), and public welfare (*maslahah*). Transparency in procurement, equitable distribution of economic opportunities, and collective decision-making processes strengthened trust among stakeholders and supported the continuity of the program. These values also reinforced the social legitimacy of the pesantren as a community-centered economic institution. This finding reinforces the argument proposed by Alam Choudhury and Nurul Alam (2013), who highlighted that Islamic economic governance emphasizes ethical responsibility, social justice, and collective welfare within institutional management systems. Likewise, Kader (2021) argued that Islamic economics prioritizes equitable distribution and social well-being as central objectives of economic activities.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the MBG program generated multiplier effects on the local economy. The increasing demand for food supplies encouraged local MSMEs and suppliers to expand production capacity and improve business continuity. Several community members reported increased household income and more stable economic activities due to their involvement in the MBG supply chain. These findings indicate that the MBG program not only strengthened local economic circulation but also generated broader socio-economic transformation through employment creation and community-based empowerment. This demonstrates that the pesantren-based MBG program operates not merely as a charitable initiative but as a mechanism for sustainable community economic empowerment. These findings align with Raza et al. (2016), who found that community-centered food procurement systems positively influence local economic sustainability and inclusive economic growth.

The findings also indicate that the effectiveness of the MBG program was closely related to the strength of social relationships and trust between pesantren and surrounding communities. Informants explained that long-standing social ties enabled

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smoother coordination in food procurement, labor distribution, and operational management. Community members perceived the program not only as an institutional activity but also as a collective social responsibility that strengthened solidarity and mutual cooperation within the local community. This condition contributed to higher community participation and stronger stakeholder commitment to sustaining the program. These findings support Di Napoli et al. (2019), who emphasized that social trust and participatory engagement are important components in sustaining community-based institutional programs.

Another finding reveals that the MBG program contributed to improving the economic stability of local MSMEs and small-scale suppliers. Several suppliers experienced more consistent demand patterns due to regular procurement activities conducted by the pesantren. Local food vendors and small businesses reported increased income and greater business continuity after becoming part of the MBG supply chain system. The existence of continuous institutional demand from pesantren created more stable local market opportunities and reduced economic uncertainty among community-based enterprises. These findings are in line with White (2017), who argued that institutional procurement systems can create sustainable economic opportunities for local producers and small-scale enterprises.

The study further found that participatory governance practices became one of the important factors supporting the sustainability of the program. Decision-making processes related to procurement systems, supplier selection, food distribution, and operational activities were often conducted collectively through coordination among pesantren administrators and local stakeholders. This participatory mechanism increased transparency, strengthened stakeholder trust, and minimized potential conflicts within program implementation. The collaborative management approach also enabled pesantren to adapt more effectively to operational challenges and local economic conditions. This finding supports Lu and Carter (2023), who explained that collaborative governance strengthens the effectiveness and sustainability of community-based food systems.

In addition, the findings demonstrate that the pesantren-based MBG program created broader socio-economic impacts beyond direct economic benefits. The program strengthened social cohesion, encouraged collective participation, and reinforced the role of pesantren as community-centered institutions capable of integrating religious values with socio-economic development practices(Rohmah et al., 2025). The integration of governance systems, stakeholder participation, supply chain management, and Islamic

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economic principles enabled the MBG program to function as a sustainable model of community-based economic empowerment(Muiz et al., 2025).

Overall, the study confirms that the Pesantren-Based Free Nutritious Meal Program represents an integrated model of Islamic community economic development in which governance systems, supply chain management, stakeholder participation, and Islamic economic values interact to strengthen local socio-economic sustainability. This overall finding supports Zafar and Jafar (2026), who emphasized that Islamic economic development should integrate welfare, justice, ethical governance, and community empowerment within sustainable socio-econom sustainable socio-economic systems systems.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Pesantren-Based Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) is not merely a food assistance initiative, but a community-based Islamic economic ecosystem capable of strengthening local economic empowerment through participatory governance, stakeholder collaboration, and local supply chain integration. The implementation of Islamic economic values such as *amanah*, *'adl*, *ta'awun*, and *maslahah* enabled pesantren to generate sustainable economic multiplier effects, strengthen community welfare, and reinforce their strategic role as socio-economic institutions within local communities.

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