

Synergy on Paper, Fragmentation in Practice: Islamic Social Capital in Collaborative Poverty Governance

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Abstract

Rural poverty governance can remain fragmented even where formal mandates, coordination forums, and community institutions coexist. This study explains how collaborative governance operates in rural poverty alleviation in North Aceh, Indonesia, and how religion-based social capital interacts with formal authority. A qualitative single-case design with six embedded gampong combined 20 semi-structured interviews, three focus group discussions, participant observation, and document analysis involving 32 participants. The findings identify four mutually reinforcing barriers: institutional fragmentation, competing data authorities, vertical capacity deficits, and ritualistic collaboration. Government institutions control mandates, administrative data, and public resources, whereas Baitul Mal, meunasah-based deliberation, and community networks provide locally validated knowledge, relational trust, and moral legitimacy but remain weakly connected to planning and decision-making. Integrating collaborative governance with bonding, bridging, and linking social capital shows that the principal constraint is missing linking capital rather than insufficient community trust. The study develops an Integrated Sharia-Responsive Collaborative Governance Model centered on data-validation protocols, recognized deliberative inputs, and consequential decision rights. Effective poverty collaboration therefore depends on creating accountable institutional pathways that connect socially embedded knowledge to public authority without displacing state responsibility.

A. Introduction

Poverty in North Aceh is becoming more severe precisely when its headline statistics suggest progress (BPS-Statistics Aceh Utara Regency, 2024). Between 2023 and 2024, the district's poverty depth index surged from 2.16 to 2.78 and its severity index from 0.42 to 0.70, although the poverty headcount declined, leaving those still below the poverty line further behind. In a district supported by special autonomy, formalized Sharia institutions, and extensive poverty programs, this worsening condition makes institutional coordination an urgent governance problem: institutions mandated to reduce poverty coexist without consistently converting their authority, data, and resources into collective action (Nugroho et al., 2021; World Bank, 2022; Maulana & Hendri, 2025).

This troubling pattern reflects a wider governance problem across developing countries. Rural communities have experienced slower poverty reduction amid recent global shocks (Bundervoet et al., 2022), while deprivation is reinforced by fragmented governance, disconnected implementation, and limited non-governmental participation (Sulila et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2020). Under decentralization, these problems intensify when authority is transferred without sufficient coordination and informational capacity (Bardhan, 2002; Smoke, 2015). Poverty alleviation therefore depends not only on available programs, but on whether actors controlling statistical data, social assistance, religious resources, village economies, and community legitimacy can make and implement decisions collectively (Cairney & Toomey, 2024; Yang, 2023).

Collaborative governance provides a framework for examining this challenge. Ansell and Gash (2008) identified initial conditions, institutional design, facilitative leadership, and collaborative processes as determinants of cross-sectoral cooperation. Emerson et al., (2012) placed collaborative regimes within a broader system of leadership, incentives, interdependence, and uncertainty, connected through principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. Yet coordination forums do not necessarily produce policy impact. Agreements may be formally reached while implementation remains fragmented, creating a "downstream problem" in which collaborative procedures fail to generate effective action (Ansell et al., 2017; Sørensen & Torfing, 2021).

The distance between formal coordination and operational cooperation is evident across Indonesian cases. Collaboration can broaden inclusion when communication is sustained (Lawelai & Nurmandi, 2023), but weak legal frameworks in Malang and dependence on facilitative leadership in Yogyakarta restrict continuity (Azizi & Agustin,

2024; Yulianto, 2025). Government dominance has reduced forums to administrative rituals in East Nusa Tenggara and Southwest Papua (Niki et al., 2020; Suroso et al., 2025), while sectoral egos and limited community involvement persist in Java (Taqiyah & Kumalasari, 2024). Similar fragmentation weakens institutional synergy in decentralized social programs (Supranoto et al., 2025). These studies illuminate formal failure but rarely examine capacities already embedded in community institutions.

This omission leaves the relationship between formal authority and informal institutional capacity insufficiently explained. Existing research provides limited insight into structural rural poverty in post-conflict settings and privileges bureaucratic forums over religious institutions, moral authority, and local deliberative traditions. Scholarship shows that faith-based organizations can mobilize trust and collective obligation (Candland, 2000; Clarke, 2006; Greeley, 1997) but often treats them principally as providers of redistribution (Atia, 2012; Fauzia, 2013; Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). At the same time, discrepancies among BPS, DTKS, and community records remain framed as technical inconsistencies rather than contests over whose knowledge becomes authoritative in policy decisions (Casson et al., 2010).

These unresolved relationships become visible in North Aceh, where a poverty rate of 16.11 percent, representing 104,490 residents, exceeds the Aceh and national averages (BPS-Statistics Aceh Utara Regency, 2024). The district possesses formalized Sharia, a legally recognized *Baitul Mal* extending to the *gampong* (village) level and living *meunasah*-based deliberation (M. Kasim & Nurdin, 2020; Nurdin et al., 2021; Qodir et al., 2022). *Zakat* institutions can support poverty reduction and sustainable-development objectives (Hasan, 2020), yet their resources, community knowledge, and moral legitimacy remain weakly connected to official planning and data systems (Mustari et al., 2024; Siregar et al., 2025). In this post-conflict setting, formal reconstruction may therefore advance without equivalent institutional cooperation (Aspinall, 2009; Faguet, 2014).

Because official datasets capture different dimensions of deprivation, their categories cannot be treated as interchangeable. BPS measures poverty against a monetary line – Rp473,719 per capita per month in North Aceh in 2024 – whereas extreme poverty uses the international threshold of USD 2.15 per capita per day in purchasing-power-parity terms, producing a district estimate of 0.52 percent (BPS-Statistics Aceh Utara Regency, 2024; World Bank, 2022). DTKS, by contrast, is an administrative social-welfare registry rather than an official poverty count. Accordingly, this study focuses on the governance of chronic rural poverty without equating DTKS registration with either general or extreme-

poverty status. This distinction establishes the conceptual boundary within which the findings are interpreted.

Against this background, this study aims to explain how collaborative governance operates in rural poverty alleviation in North Aceh and why formal coordination has not produced substantive joint action. It examines how Islamic values, *Baitul Mal*, *meunasah*-based deliberation, and community knowledge function as informal governance infrastructure, and how BUMDes and public institutions can connect these resources to formal data, planning, and decision-making. On this basis, it develops a contextually grounded model linking public authority and religion-based social capital in post-conflict, religiously embedded societies.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative single-case design with embedded units of analysis (Yazan, 2015) to examine interactions between formal collaboration and religion-based social capital. North Aceh was purposively selected because structural poverty persists despite special autonomy funding and because formalized Sharia, a state-integrated *zakat* institution, *meunasah*-based deliberation, and a post-conflict legacy shape inter-agency relation. Six *gampong* were selected through maximum variation in economic base (three coastal irrigated-agriculture and three interior plantation villages), DTKS deciles 1–2 density, BUMDes status, and distance from the regency center. All maintained an active *meunasah* and *Baitul Mal* unit and were anonymized as G-1–G-6.

Thirty-two participants were recruited purposively (Palinkas et al., 2015), all directly involved in poverty alleviation or social resource management: eight government officials; four DPRK members; six *Baitul Mal* administrators; five BUMDes managers; five community and religious leaders; and four chronically poor beneficiaries. Beneficiaries met four corroborated criteria: expenditure below the district poverty line; substandard dwelling; irregular or absent wage income; and formal recognition as *mustahik* (*zakat* recipient) in the *Baitul Mal* register or as a *zakat fitrah* recipient at the *meunasah* (a small mosque/community prayer house). Two were female heads of household. This sampling boundary directs the analysis toward chronic poverty in a high-poverty district rather than a statistically defined extreme-poverty population.

Data were collected from January to December 2025 through 20 semi-structured interviews, three focus group discussions (FGDs), observation, and document analysis.

Interviews lasted 45–75 minutes (mean 58) and used a role-adapted guide derived from collaborative governance scholarship (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012). Each four-participant FGD addressed data harmonization (110 minutes), village economic and religious cooperation (95 minutes), or access among chronically poor beneficiaries and a *keuchik* (village head) (90 minutes). Eleven visits across six *gampong* provided approximately 96 observation hours in village offices, *meunasah* deliberations, BUMDes premises, coordination meetings, and zakat distributions.

Documents included regional and annual work plans, DTKS aggregates, *Baitul Mal* reports, the One Data Forum regulation, and coordination minutes. Interviews and FGDs were recorded with consent and pseudonymized. Participants were identified by codes—GOV, LEG, BM, BDE, VIL, REL, and BEN—followed by the interview month.

Analysis combined a deductive thematic template with inductive coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Two researchers independently read all transcripts. Categories from Emerson et al., (2012) and Putnam's (2000) bonding, bridging, and linking dimensions were integrated with open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), producing 214 initial codes. Themes were tested against rival explanations, including resource scarcity, and systematically compared across participant groups using a source-by-theme matrix. Twenty percent of the material was double-coded; disagreements were resolved with a third researcher. Trustworthiness followed Nowell et al. (2017) through source-method triangulation, member checking with eight participants, thick description, an audit trail, and negative-case analysis. New codes ceased after the seventeenth interview, and the FGDs cross-validated all seven themes (Guest et al., 2006).

The University Research Ethics Committee approved this study before fieldwork (031/KEP-RE/UMS/2025), and North Aceh's Regional Political and National Unity Agency issued research permit 070/315/2025. All participants provided written informed consent; participation was unrelated to service access, and identities remained confidential.

C. Results and Discussion

This section first presents empirical findings and subsequently examines their theoretical and comparative significance. The results are organized around two interrelated governance domains: the formal collaborative regime, examined through

four barriers to joint action, and the Islamic socio-religious infrastructure, examined through its operational role, exclusion from formal planning, and deliberative capacity. The discussion then brings these domains into dialogue with Emerson et al., (2012) and Putnam (2000), considers their wider relevance, and develops the Integrated Sharia-Responsive Collaborative Governance Model.

1. Results

The findings reveal a persistent separation between formal authority and operational capacity in North Aceh's poverty governance. Government institutions possess regulatory mandates, coordination forums, and administrative data, yet these resources rarely converge into joint implementation. Islamic socio-religious institutions, meanwhile, provide locally grounded knowledge, community trust, and deliberative capacity but remain weakly connected to formal planning and decision-making. This separation is reflected in seven themes across the formal collaborative regime and the Islamic socio-religious infrastructure.

a. The Formal Collaborative Regime: Formal Mandates Without Joint Action

North Aceh possesses the formal components of collaborative governance, including regulatory mandates, coordination forums, and a data-integration mechanism. However, these components have not produced integrated implementation. Evidence across participant groups revealed four interconnected barriers summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Structural Barriers to Collaborative Governance in North Aceh Regency

Barrier type	Core issue	Key actors	Manifestation	Impact
Institutional fragmentation	Absence of binding coordination once implementation begins	Bappeda, TKPK, implementing agencies	Coordination confined to planning meetings; sectoral implementation follows	Program duplication, weak reGENCY-gampong alignment
Competing data authorities	Datasets serve different purposes without agreed reconciliation rules	BPS, Social Service, Baitul Mal	One Data Forum addresses technicalities without reconciliation rules; village records unrecognized	Conflicting targeting decisions and inclusion-exclusion errors
Vertical	Vertical deficits	Village	One-off training	Weak

Barrier type	Core issue	Key actors	Manifestation	Impact
capacity deficits	from regency to households	Empowerment Service, <i>gampong</i> apparatus, BUMDes, beneficiaries	without mentoring; procedures exceed the resources of the poorest applicants	delivery, dropout of eligible households
Ritualistic collaboration	Forums produce procedural records without binding decisions	TKPK, One Data Forum, DPRK oversight	Decisions formulated before meetings; non-government actors invited as observers	Symbolic coordination, no collective action

Source: Field data, 2025

Institutional fragmentation appeared in 27 of 32 accounts, across all six participant groups. Officials acknowledged that although Bappeda (Regional Development Planning Agency) holds a cross-sectoral coordination mandate and the coordination team operates under Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 53 of 2020, coordination ends with planning, after which each agency works within its sectoral mandate. One official described this boundary directly: *“Our role is to coordinate planning, but in practice coordination often stops at meetings, as each agency feels its contribution is sufficient.”* (Interview with GOV-01, Bappeda official, March 2025)

Coordination is thus understood as a meeting obligation rather than an integration mechanism. Legislative members identified the absence of binding accountability as what permits fragmentation to persist:

“We have repeatedly pushed for an integrated performance report, rather than standalone reports from each agency. To this day, there is no shared format showing whether programs support one another or merely overlap.” (Interview with LEG-01, DPRK member, May 2025)

Together, these accounts show that coordination occurs at the planning stage but lacks a shared performance mechanism to trace complementarity, duplication, and responsibility during implementation.

Competing data authorities appeared in 25 of 32 accounts. The pattern did not represent a numerical inconsistency between equivalent datasets. Instead, participants described uncertainty arising from using sources designed for different purposes—BPS statistical estimates, DTKS administrative registration, and *Baitul Mal* community records—without agreed rules for reconciliation or policy use. A Social Service official explained:

“BPS records extreme poverty at 0.52 percent, but the number registered in the DTKS is far larger. [...] Without a reconciliation mechanism, our programs might reach the wrong targets.” (Interview with GOV-03, Social Service official, April 2025)

This account illustrates how administrators encounter non-comparable figures without an institutional procedure for interpreting their different functions. *Baitul Mal* administrators described a third data source: *zakat fitrah* records compiled annually at the *meunasah*, which residents regard as accurate but which never enter government systems.

“This data is very close to residents’ actual conditions because it is collected by people who know exactly who their neighbors are. But it is never recognized by Bappeda or the Social Service.” (Interview with BM-01, Baitul Mal administrator, June 2025)

The central problem is therefore not simply data accuracy but the absence of rules determining how statistical, administrative, and community-validated knowledge should inform targeting decisions.

Vertical capacity deficits appeared in 23 of 32 accounts. BUMDes managers described one-off training without follow-up, while beneficiaries reported that administrative requirements exceeded their available time, mobility, and financial resources. A female head of household explained:

“I have to get a letter from the gampong office, then go to the sub-district, then to the Social Service. [...] I cannot always go because I care for my children and lack transport money, so many neighbors give up.” (Interview with BEN-02, chronically poor female head of household, September 2025)

The evidence locates the capacity deficit across the implementation chain: village institutions lack sustained assistance, while eligible households face procedures they cannot consistently complete.

Ritualistic collaboration appeared in 27 of 32 accounts. The One Data Forum, established under Regent Regulation Number 6 of 2022, has not moved beyond administrative coordination, and non-government participation in the coordination team is symbolic. A *Baitul Mal* administrator stated:

“We are invited to TKPK meetings, and our institution is on the membership list. In practice, decisions are already formulated before the meeting begins. [...] This is not collaboration; it is one-way consultation.” (Interview with BM-02, Baitul Mal administrator, July 2025)

Formal membership therefore does not ensure participation when decisions are formulated. Religious figures added that the format of government forums

discouraged substantive engagement: *"In the meunasah, everyone can speak, and a decision is reached only when everyone agrees. In government forums, the decision is already made before we arrive."* (Interview with REL-01, religious figure, August 2025)

Field observations conducted in 2025 documented these contrasting deliberative formats. The findings indicate that coordination platforms are present, but their procedures do not provide non-government actors with meaningful decision-making authority.

b. The Informal Islamic Socio-Religious Infrastructure

The operational role of Islamic institutions appeared across all six participant groups and in 25 of 32 accounts. Participants associated *zakat*, *musyawarah* (deliberation), and *gotong royong* (communal work) with established community trust, reciprocal obligation, and inter-institutional relationships. Under the coding framework derived from Putnam (2000), these empirical patterns were categorized as bonding and bridging resources. Religious leaders particularly emphasized the mobilizing force of religious obligation.

"When we talk about helping our poor brothers and sisters in the name of zakat and Islamic values, the community's response is much stronger than when the government explains social assistance using the language of regulations and targets." (Interview with REL-02, religious figure, August 2025)

Beneficiaries confirmed that the source and language of an invitation affected their willingness to participate:

"If an ustaz or the keuchik invites us to join a program, we trust them and participate without asking many questions. If an agency official arrives with forms and bureaucratic language, we hesitate." (Interview with BEN-03, chronically poor beneficiary, October 2025)

These accounts identify an existing collaborative resource grounded in relationships that residents already recognize as legitimate. Its operational significance lies in mobilizing participation and communicating with households that formal procedures do not readily reach.

Marginalization emerged in 21 of 32 accounts through three mechanisms: epistemic, because *Baitul Mal* and *meunasah* records are not accepted as planning inputs; regulatory, because informants were classified as religious rather than governmental actors and confined to distribution; and procedural, because participation occurs after decisions are taken. A BUMDes manager described the resulting gap:

"In our village, the government distributed rice assistance to families the meunasah was already supporting, because the two lists were never compared. Meanwhile, a widow and two families in another hamlet were on neither list." (FGD with BDE-03, BUMDes manager, November 2025)

This case shows how unconnected beneficiary lists can duplicate support for some households while leaving others outside both systems.

Deliberative dynamics were reported in 25 of 32 accounts, including all six participant groups. *Meunasah*-based *musyawarah* was characterized by broader participation, decisions reached through convergence, and enforcement through communal recognition. Field observations of *meunasah* deliberations and government coordination meetings matched participants' descriptions of these different procedural patterns. Village and religious leaders proposed connecting local deliberation to formal planning:

"Decisions at the meunasah are respected because all residents are involved. If these deliberations were officially linked to the regency's program planning, even the voices of the poorest residents would be heard." (FGD with REL-03, religious figure, November 2025)

Document analysis across the six *gampong* found no formal channel through which *musyawarah* outputs entered the regency planning cycle. The evidence therefore shows that community-level identification and deliberation exist, but their outputs lack an institutionally recognized pathway into public decision-making.

Table 2. Formal-Regulatory and Islamic Socio-Religious Regimes: Empirically Observed Descriptors

Dimension	Formal-regulatory regime	Islamic socio-religious infrastructure	Interface condition
Source of legitimacy	Legal-rational; statutory mandate and procedure	Moral-religious; obligation and communal recognition	Separated: informants classified as religious, not governmental, actors (BM-01, BM-03)
Knowledge base	BPS statistical estimates and DTKS administrative records	<i>Meunasah</i> records compiled annually, validated face to face	Non-recognized: local records excluded from planning and data forums (25 of 32 accounts)
Trust configuration	Conditional, entitlement-based	Relational, personalized	Asymmetric: informal trust is used for outreach but not

Dimension	Formal-regulatory regime	Islamic socio-religious infrastructure	Interface condition
Decision authority	Legally allocated to agencies, with DPRK oversight	Consultative; morally binding, without planning mandate	reciprocated with planning authority (24 of 32 accounts) Concentrated: substantive proposals reach forums after decisions are taken (BM-02)
Observed operational pattern	Procedurally auditable; weakly matched to changing conditions	Locally responsive; legally unrecognized and financially uneven	Complementary in capacity, disarticulated in practice

Source: Field data, 2025

Table 2 shows that the two governance regimes possess different but complementary institutional resources. The formal-regulatory regime controls legal mandates, administrative data, and decision-making authority, whereas the Islamic socio-religious infrastructure provides locally validated knowledge, relational trust, and moral legitimacy. Their interface nevertheless remains disconnected: community records are excluded from formal planning, religious trust is used for outreach without corresponding decision authority, and substantive proposals enter coordination forums only after decisions have been formulated. To show how consistently these patterns appeared across participant groups, Table 3 presents the distribution of evidence supporting each theme.

Table 3. Source-by-Theme Evidence Matrix (participants reporting each theme, by group; n = 32)

Theme	Governme nt (8)	DPR K (4)	Baitul Mal (6)	BUM Des (5)	Leader s (5)	Benefici aries (4)	Total
Institutional fragmentation	7	4	4	5	4	3	27
Competing data authorities	6	3	6	3	5	2	25
Vertical capacity deficits	5	2	3	5	4	4	23
Ritualistic collaboration	6	4	5	4	5	3	27
Operational role of Islamic	4	2	6	4	5	4	25

Theme	Governme nt (8)	DPR K (4)	Baitul Mal (6)	BUM Des (5)	Leader s (5)	Benefici aries (4)	Total
institutions							
Marginalizatio n mechanisms	3	3	6	4	4	1	21
Deliberative dynamics	5	4	5	2	5	4	25

Note: Participants could support more than one theme. Village and religious leaders are combined under "Leaders" in this matrix (Field data, 2025).

Table 3 shows that institutional fragmentation and ritualistic collaboration received the broadest support, each appearing in 27 accounts. The operational role of Islamic institutions was most consistently reported by Baitul Mal administrators, community and religious leaders, and beneficiaries, but received weaker support from government officials. Twenty-four participants also described religiously mediated programs as more likely to secure community participation. This pattern was not uniform: in one *gampong*, participants regarded the Baitul Mal unit as inactive after zakat collection declined. The negative case indicates that religious legitimacy alone did not ensure consistent institutional operation.

2. Discussion

The results reveal a governance system with institutional density but limited integration. Formal agencies retain statutory mandates, data, budgets, and decision authority, while *Baitul Mal*, *meunasah*, BUMDes, and community leaders hold locally grounded knowledge, relational trust, and deliberative legitimacy. Both regimes are active, yet the interfaces between them remain weak. The widespread institutional fragmentation and ritualistic collaboration across participant groups, along with the marginal position of socio-religious actors in planning, suggest that the difficulty lies not in the absence of institutions but in their inability to produce binding collective action. Persistent weaknesses in poverty governance must therefore be understood through the institutional organization of authority, knowledge, and accountability, rather than through resource scarcity alone.

The coexistence of active institutions and weak joint action is consistent with institutional decoupling: formal structures demonstrate conformity and legitimacy while remaining detached from implementation (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Bromley & Powell, 2012). In North Aceh, coordination meetings, membership arrangements, and reports satisfy

procedural expectations, but programs continue through sectoral mandates. Fragmentation, capacity deficits, competing data authorities, and ritualistic forums consequently reinforce one another. This pattern connects longstanding concerns about administrative silos with the policy-implementation gap (Hood, 1974; Rhodes, 1994; Hudson et al., 2019). Comparable fragmentation in Indonesian poverty programs suggests that formal coordination frequently remains dependent on government dominance, fragile institutional rules, or individual leadership (Azizi & Agustin, 2024; Niki et al., 2020; Suroso et al., 2025; Taqiyah & Kumalasari, 2024; Yulianto, 2025).

Emerson et al., (2012) explain collaborative performance through principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. The North Aceh findings extend this framework by showing that these dynamics cannot mature when agenda control, recognized knowledge, and decision authority remain concentrated within formal agencies (Maulana & Hendri, 2025; Zakaria et al., 2025). Ansell and Gash's (2008) unequal initial conditions are therefore reproduced inside the collaborative process rather than merely preceding it. Non-government actors may be present, trusted, and willing to participate, yet their involvement remains inconsequential when it begins after decisions have been framed. This mechanism helps explain the downstream implementation problems identified by Ansell et al., (2017) and Sørensen and Torfing (2021): collaboration becomes operational only when institutional design connects deliberation to authoritative action (Cairney & Toomey, 2024; Yang, 2023; Salleh et al., 2024).

Because agenda-setting power remains concentrated within formal agencies, those agencies also determine which forms of knowledge enter planning. BPS estimates, DTKS administrative records, and *Baitul Mal* or *meunasah* registers serve different purposes and should not be treated as equivalent poverty measures. Their coexistence becomes problematic because no shared rule specifies how statistical estimates, program registries, and community validation should inform targeting. Government datasets retain formal authority, while locally updated information supports outreach but is excluded from planning. This is more than a technical interoperability problem; it concerns the institutional production of authoritative knowledge. Scholarship on formal and informal institutions shows that development outcomes depend on how their rules interact (Casson et al., 2010; Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). North Aceh identifies non-recognition as the specific mechanism through which potentially complementary knowledge remains disconnected.

This exclusion is especially consequential because the socio-religious infrastructure already supplies resources that formal collaboration has struggled to generate. *Zakat* obligations, *mustahik* identification, *meunasah*-based *musyawarah*, and *gotong royong* organize reciprocity before government forums convene. Whereas Emerson et al. (2012) place trust and shared motivation within collaborative dynamics, the evidence shows that both preceded formal engagement in North Aceh. Religion-based social capital is therefore not only an outcome of collaboration or a philanthropic resource; it is a prior institutional condition that may support collaboration if formal arrangements can use it. This interpretation builds on evidence that religious structures mobilize trust, moral obligation, and community participation (Candland, 2000; Clarke, 2006; Greeley, 1997), while rejecting the assumption that social legitimacy automatically produces political influence.

The interaction among Putnam's (2000) bonding and bridging dimensions and Woolcock and Narayan's (2000) linking capital clarifies this disconnection. Bonding capital operates through neighborhood reciprocity centered on the *meunasah*, and bridging capital connects *gampong* institutions, *Baitul Mal* units, and BUMDes. The absent relationship is vertical: these networks have no recognized route to institutions controlling budgets, official data, and binding decisions (Zakaria et al., 2025). Linking capital is thus not another form of generalized trust but the institutional capacity to move socially validated knowledge into authoritative arenas. This understanding highlights the importance of institutional connections in translating community-based social capital into meaningful participation in governance. Although local values and social networks can sustain collective engagement (Salleh et al., 2024), strong community participation and local legitimacy may still coexist with fragmented programs when representation lacks meaningful influence over institutional decisions.

Such an interpretation does not position religious institutions as substitutes for public authority. *Baitul Mal* and *meunasah*-based networks can improve household identification, communication, and voluntary participation, but they cannot independently guarantee universal coverage, allocate public budgets, or enforce inter-agency accountability. Their value lies in complementing rather than displacing the state. This distinction responds to faith-based welfare research showing that Islamic organizations often possess strong community proximity while remaining subordinate to regulatory authority (Atia, 2012; Fauzia, 2013). Studies of *zakat* similarly report

redistributive and empowerment potential alongside coordination and institutional-integration challenges (Hasan, 2020; Mustari et al., 2024; Siregar et al., 2025). North Aceh adds that legal recognition under Qanun Aceh Number 10 of 2018 does not, by itself, secure epistemic or decision-making authority.

In North Aceh, religious legitimacy supports outreach and participation, yet community knowledge held by religious institutions remains disconnected from formal decisions. Evidence from Sri Lanka, where religious leaders mobilized collective action through socially embedded authority, reinforces the importance of such legitimacy while leaving North Aceh as the analytical focus (Barmania & Reiss, 2021; Wijesinghe et al., 2022). Across developing settings, community and faith-based organizations also reach vulnerable populations whom formal systems struggle to engage (Clarke, 2006; World Bank, 2022). Problems emerge when governments use local trust for delivery without allowing local knowledge to shape targeting and planning, potentially reinforcing duplication and exclusion during economic and public-health shocks (Bundervoet et al., 2022). The Acehnese case therefore demonstrates the need for transparent interfaces between socially legitimate institutions and accountable public authority, rather than replicating particular local institutions elsewhere.

The need for such interfaces is particularly evident in Aceh, where post-conflict reconstruction and decentralization have expanded formal institutions more rapidly than inter-agency cooperation. Special autonomy, Sharia regulation, and a statutory *zakat* institution demonstrate institutional reconstruction, yet cooperative relationships remain uneven (Aspinall, 2009). This pattern accords with research warning that decentralization without coordinating, and informational capacity can reproduce local fragmentation (Bardhan, 2002; Faguet, 2014; Smoke, 2015). China presents a contrasting configuration in which hierarchy and relational leadership support multi-actor coordination through state mobilization (Feng & Xing, 2025; Zhang et al., 2020). North Aceh nevertheless shows that voluntary participation grounded in moral legitimacy still requires formal pathways into program decisions. The shared challenge is to connect administrative authority and socially embedded legitimacy without absorbing community institutions into bureaucracy or shifting public responsibility to voluntary actors.

The Integrated Sharia-Responsive Collaborative Governance Model in Figure 1 translates this explanation into an institutional architecture. Components are marked [E] when supported by the findings, [T] when derived from theory, and [P] when proposed

by participants. *Baitul Mal mustahik* registers and ZIS resources, *meunasah*-based *musyawarah*, BUMDes, religious authority, and *gotong royong* form the foundational layer. They connect to Bappeda, the Social Service, Village Empowerment Service, BPS, and DPRK through three bridging mechanisms: jointly validated data protocols, documented planning positions for *musyawarah* outputs, and consequential decision rights for non-government members. Academics, media, and non-governmental organizations remain outside the model because they were not examined, preserving the boundary between empirical evidence and normative extension.

The model becomes operational through reciprocal flows rather than institutional proximity alone. Community-validated records and deliberative outputs move upward into data and planning forums, while proposed decisions return to *gampong* and *meunasah* institutions for verification before implementation. A shared performance format allows DPRK oversight to identify duplication, exclusion, and weak alignment. Continuous mentoring, durable inter-agency agreements, data-use rules, and dedicated budgeting sustain these flows. Integrated targeting and complementary delivery are proposed governance outputs, whereas reductions in poverty depth and severity remain anticipated effects that this qualitative study cannot demonstrate. By combining Emerson et al. (2012), Putnam (2000), and Woolcock and Narayan (2000), the model locates the conversion of social capital into joint capacity within rules governing knowledge, representation, and authority.

From an institutional perspective, the proposed model addresses the separation between formal governance arrangements and socially embedded mechanisms of collective action. As Helmke and Levitsky (2004) suggest, formal and informal institutions may interact through complementary, accommodating, competing, or substitutive relationships. In North Aceh, religious institutions and community networks possess social legitimacy, local knowledge, and traditions of mutual assistance, yet these resources do not automatically translate into policy influence. Community-based values can sustain economic resilience and collective participation (Salleh et al., 2024), while religious authority depends partly on social trust and moral credibility (Maulana & Hendri, 2025). Similarly, the contribution of zakat institutions to poverty alleviation highlights the importance of connecting Islamic social finance with broader development objectives (Hasan, 2020).

The proposed model therefore emphasizes institutional integration while preserving the autonomy and legitimacy of community-based actors. Its central proposition is that collaborative governance becomes more consequential when informal

social resources are connected to formal planning, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms. Rather than assuming that participation alone produces coordination, the model highlights how shared information, recognized representation, and consequential decision-making authority could transform social capital into collective governance capacity. This approach positions institutional connectivity as a necessary condition for translating community participation into coordinated poverty interventions. Figure 1 illustrates this proposed configuration, showing how Islamic social capital and formal governance structures can be connected through mutually reinforcing mechanisms of data integration, participatory planning, and shared decision-making.

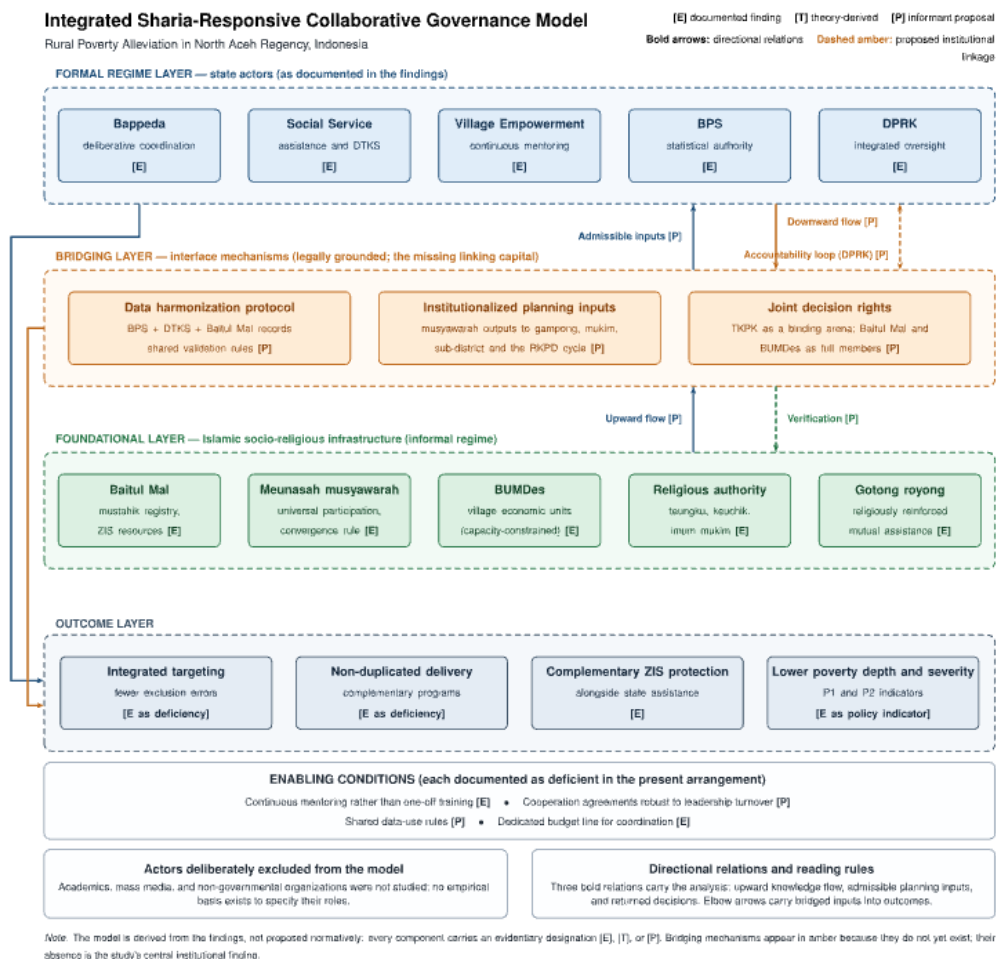


Figure 1. Integrated Sharia-Responsive Collaborative Governance Model for Rural Poverty Alleviation in North Aceh

Indonesian law already provides much of the institutional foundation required for this connection. Presidential Regulation Number 39 of 2019 governs data interoperability, Law Number 23 of 2011 regulates *zakat*, and Law Number 6 of 2014 authorizes village institutions and enterprises (Bafadhal et al., 2024). The remaining gap concerns bridging provisions: joint validation of BPS, DTKS, and *Baitul Mal* records without treating them as interchangeable; recognized planning positions for *musyawarah* outputs; substantive *Baitul Mal* participation in poverty coordination; and sustained mentoring for *gampong* institutions. These measures support Presidential Instruction Number 8 of 2025 and the transition from parallel programs toward institutional partnership (Nugroho et al., 2021; Supranoto et al., 2025). Implementation must nevertheless protect public welfare obligations, prevent elite capture, and avoid treating voluntary religious resources as replacements for state assistance (Taufiq et al., 2025).

Poverty reduction in this setting is inseparable from the institutional distribution of voice, knowledge, and authority. Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 10 therefore intersect with Goals 16 and 17 because inclusion depends on whether socially embedded knowledge can enter accountable public decisions (Hasan, 2020). Rural and decentralized societies differ in religious tradition, legal structure, and political history, yet many face the same distance between administratively extensive states and locally trusted institutions. The transferable contribution of North Aceh is not a Sharia-specific organizational template. It is the demonstration that community legitimacy contributes to public value only when validation rules, early participation, and bounded decision rights connect it to legally authorized action (Roziqi et al., 2025). This mechanism offers a basis for examining collaborative poverty governance wherever formal capacity and social trust are institutionally separated.

North Aceh illuminates a governance problem shared by many decentralized and religiously embedded societies: public institutions hold legal authority and administrative reach, while community organizations hold trust and local knowledge, yet institutional boundaries prevent their effective combination. Similar tensions appear in Islamic welfare in Egypt and Southern Asia, religiously mediated mobilization in Sri Lanka, and multi-actor poverty governance in China (Atia, 2012; Barmania & Reiss, 2021; Candland, 2000; Feng & Xing, 2025; Wijesinghe et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). The Acehnese case does not present Sharia institutions as a transferable template; it identifies a broader mechanism. Socially embedded knowledge contributes to poverty governance when transparent

validation, early participation, and accountable decision rights connect it to public authority without shifting state responsibility to voluntary actors (Clarke, 2006; Hasan, 2020; World Bank, 2022). This mechanism connects poverty reduction with the institutional inclusion and partnerships embodied in SDGs 1, 10, 16, and 17.

Although this study contributes to understanding how religion-based social capital interacts with formal collaborative governance, several limitations must be acknowledged. Its single-case qualitative design supports analytical rather than statistical generalization, while North Aceh's distinctive combination of institutionalized Sharia, post-conflict reconstruction, special autonomy, and living *meunasah* traditions limits transferability to different settings. The analysis concerns governance processes rather than measured welfare outcomes and therefore cannot establish whether the proposed mechanisms reduce poverty depth or severity. Party alignments, budget politics, elite capture, and ulama networks were not examined systematically. Finally, the four beneficiary participants supported the identification of mechanisms but not their prevalence, while the evidence matrix records participant support rather than event frequency and should not be interpreted as population-level incidence.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that rural poverty governance in North Aceh is institutionally dense but operationally disconnected. Government agencies possess mandates, data systems, coordination forums, and public resources, while Islamic socio-religious institutions possess locally validated knowledge, relational trust, and deliberative legitimacy. Collaboration remains procedural because fragmented mandates, competing data authorities, vertical capacity deficits, and forums without consequential decision rights prevent these resources from becoming joint action. The problem is therefore neither an absence of formal institutions nor a shortage of community commitment, but the lack of institutional pathways connecting community knowledge and religion-based social capital to planning, implementation, and accountability.

The study contributes conceptually by positioning religion-based social capital as a pre-existing condition of collaboration rather than merely a philanthropic resource or an outcome of collaborative engagement. Integrating Emerson et al.'s collaborative governance framework with Putnam's bonding and bridging dimensions and Woolcock and Narayan's linking capital identifies the missing vertical connection as the principal constraint. The resulting Integrated Sharia-Responsive Collaborative Governance Model redirects policy

attention from creating additional forums toward data-admissibility rules, documented planning inputs, consequential representation, reciprocal verification, and sustained institutional mentoring.

Based on the limitations acknowledged in the Discussion, future research should compare the relationship between religion-based social capital and formal authority across differently configured religious, post-conflict, and decentralized settings. Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies should examine whether data harmonization, deliberative planning inputs, and shared decision rights improve targeting and reduce poverty depth over time. Studies involving larger and more diverse beneficiary samples are also required to assess the prevalence and distribution of the mechanisms identified in this study. Further research should examine how party alignment, budget politics, elite capture, and *ulama* networks shape the feasibility and implementation of institutional integration.

Finally, where trusted community knowledge already exists, effective collaboration depends not on adding forums but on creating an accountable route from social legitimacy to public decisions.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial or non-financial interests that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of Generative AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used QuillBot to assist with language refinement, including improving grammar, sentence clarity, and readability. The tool was not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, formulate findings, or make scholarly interpretations. All AI-assisted text was reviewed and revised by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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