

Prophetic Praxis and Local Social Change: Muhammadiyah's Community Movement in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article analyzes how Muhammadiyah's prophetic orientation is translated into social change within Indonesian local communities. It employs qualitative sociological document analysis of organizational texts, historical studies, community case research, and relevant scholarship published no later than 2022. Kuntowijoyo's triad of humanization, liberation, and transcendence is combined with institutionalization, resource mobilization, embeddedness, and community agency as analytical dimensions. The findings show that prophetic values become socially consequential when converted into durable schools, clinics, philanthropic bodies, cadre networks, disaster-response units, and participatory empowerment programs. These institutions alter access to knowledge, health care, welfare, leadership, and collective organization. However, service expansion does not automatically constitute liberation. Programs remain transformative only when beneficiaries gain voice, organizational capacity, bargaining power, and control over resources. Local outcomes vary according to institutional density, leadership quality, class, gender, geography, and collaboration with state and market actors. The study concludes that Muhammadiyah's prophetic movement is best understood as institutionalized moral action whose credibility depends on measurable empowerment, reflexive accountability, and sustained participation beyond charitable delivery.

Keywords: *Muhammadiyah; prophetic movement; social change; community empowerment; sociology.*

INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah is commonly described through the institutional scale of its schools, universities, hospitals, orphanages, mosques, philanthropic agencies, and disaster-response organizations. That scale is sociologically important, but institutional inventories alone do not explain how a religious movement changes local society. The central issue is the conversion of religious conviction into patterned social action: how Qur'anic interpretation becomes an organization, how organizations redistribute resources, how cadres gain authority, and how communities acquire or fail to acquire greater capacity over their own lives. Muhammadiyah's significance therefore lies not merely in possessing charitable enterprises but in constructing a durable infrastructure through which moral claims enter everyday social relations (Alfian, 1989; Nakamura, 2012; Nashir, 2010).

The language of a prophetic movement provides one way to interpret this process. Within Indonesian Muslim thought, Kuntowijoyo formulated prophetic social science as a value-conscious project organized around humanization, liberation, and transcendence. Humanization opposes dehumanizing social relations; liberation challenges material, political, and cultural domination; and transcendence grounds both projects in accountability to God rather than in instrumental progress alone (Kuntowijoyo, 1998;

ZTF, 2011). Although this formulation was developed after Muhammadiyah's founding, it resonates with the movement's long-standing doctrine of commanding good, preventing harm, and making faith socially effective.

The connection is especially visible in the interpretation of Surat al-Ma'un associated with Ahmad Dahlan. In the well-known movement narrative, Dahlan refused to treat repeated recitation as sufficient and required students to assist orphans and poor people. This pedagogical act redirected piety from verbal mastery toward organized service. The establishment of schools, health services, orphan care, and *Penolong Kesengsaraan Oemoem* subsequently gave institutional form to the proposition that neglect of vulnerable people contradicts religious integrity (Peacock, 1978; Baidhawry, 2009; Nashir, 2021). The prophetic claim was thus practical before it became an explicit sociological vocabulary.

Yet the concept can easily become celebratory. Calling a movement prophetic may imply that its programs are morally correct by definition, thereby replacing analysis with institutional self-description. Sociologically, prophetic legitimacy must be examined through effects, power relations, and organizational practice. A hospital can humanize access to care but can also become financially inaccessible. A school can expand mobility while reproducing class segregation. Philanthropy can reduce suffering while maintaining donor control over recipients. Cadre formation can develop public leadership but can also produce organizational closure. The empirical question is not whether Muhammadiyah declares a prophetic mission, but under what conditions that mission generates emancipatory change.

Local communities are the decisive arena for this inquiry. National policies and central-board documents acquire practical meaning only through branches, sub-branches, mosques, schools, women's groups, youth organizations, local philanthropists, professional staff, and community partners. These actors interpret instructions, mobilize resources, negotiate with governments, and adapt programs to specific livelihoods and cultures. Consequently, one Muhammadiyah network may sustain a complex ecology of services while another depends on a few volunteers. Local variation is not a minor implementation problem; it is constitutive of the movement's social form (Nakamura, 2012; Ritonga & Hanifawati, 2021).

The movement's relationship with beneficiaries has also changed. Classical charity tended to position the poor as recipients of assistance, whereas contemporary empowerment discourse emphasizes participation, productive capacity, rights, and bargaining power. Muhammadiyah's *Majelis Pemberdayaan Masyarakat* explicitly presented its approach by 2021 as bottom-up, based on assessment, equality, local actors, and collaboration rather than programs imposed from above (Muhammadiyah, 2021a). This shift parallels wider transformations in Islamic philanthropy from episodic almsgiving toward organized welfare, citizenship claims, and social development (Fauzia, 2013; Latief, 2013, 2016).

This article asks three questions. First, how are prophetic values translated into organizational mechanisms of local social change? Second, what forms of change are visible across education, health, welfare, philanthropy, disaster response, cadre

formation, and community empowerment? Third, what tensions limit the movement's transformative claims? The article argues that Muhammadiyah operates as an institutionalized prophetic movement when transcendental commitments are converted into humanizing services and liberating collective capacities. Its strongest contribution is the creation of repeatable civic infrastructures. Its principal weakness arises when institutional expansion, professional management, or charitable delivery becomes detached from participation, redistribution, and accountability.

The contribution is both conceptual and empirical. Conceptually, the analysis integrates prophetic social science with sociological theories of institutionalization, social movements, and community empowerment. Empirically, it synthesizes evidence from Muhammadiyah's history and selected local studies without claiming the exhaustive procedure of a systematic literature review. This design allows attention to mechanisms and contradictions rather than merely cataloguing publications. All sources are limited to 2022 or earlier, so the article analyzes the movement as documented before subsequent organizational developments.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative sociological document analysis with a historical-institutional orientation. It is not a systematic literature review and does not claim exhaustive retrieval, database saturation, or meta-analytic coverage. Documents were selected purposively because they illuminate the relation between normative ideas, organizational structures, local programs, and community outcomes. The corpus includes Muhammadiyah's official ideological documents, historical accounts of the movement, sociological and political studies, scholarship on Islamic philanthropy and civil society, studies of Kuntowijoyo's prophetic social science, and local case research published no later than 2022.

The principal normative sources include Pedoman Hidup Islami Warga Muhammadiyah, Pernyataan Pikiran Muhammadiyah Abad Kedua, Negara Pancasila sebagai Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah, and Risalah Islam Berkemajuan (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2000, 2010, 2015, 2022). These were read as official constructions of moral purpose rather than direct evidence of implementation. Official reports and public statements concerning al-Ma'un, community empowerment, health, and social welfare were used to clarify institutional intentions and organizational vocabulary. Claims from official sources were compared with academic studies wherever possible.

Historical and sociological works were selected to cover several levels of analysis. Classic studies explain Muhammadiyah's emergence as an associational reform movement and its creation of modern schools and welfare institutions (Noer, 1973; Peacock, 1978; Alfian, 1989; Nakamura, 2012). Research on civil Islam and organizational politics locates these institutions within state-society relations (Hefner, 2000; Jung, 2014). Studies of philanthropy examine how religious giving becomes professional welfare provision and Muslim citizenship (Latief, 2010, 2013, 2016). Local cases were included when they described participation, cadre activity, institutional strengthening, or community programs rather than merely announcing an event.

The analysis used four sequential coding operations. First, normative statements were coded according to humanization, liberation, and transcendence. Second, organizational practices were coded by mechanism: institutionalization, resource mobilization, cadre socialization, network coordination, professionalization, participation, and advocacy. Third, reported outcomes were classified as changes in services, knowledge, behavior, organization, economic capacity, public voice, or power relations. Fourth, contradictions were coded when evidence suggested exclusion, dependency, unequal access, elite capture, weak participation, or divergence between official ideals and local implementation.

A distinction was maintained between outputs and social change. The number of schools, clinics, grants, trainings, or relief packages constitutes organizational output. Social change requires evidence of altered capacities, opportunities, norms, relationships, or institutional arrangements. Similarly, charitable relief was not automatically coded as liberation. Liberation required some indication that people increased their agency, reduced dependence, strengthened collective organization, gained access to rights, or improved bargaining power. This distinction prevents institutional scale from being treated as self-evident transformation.

The unit of interpretation is the mechanism linking religious meaning to local consequence. For example, al-Ma'un is not analyzed only as theology, and a clinic is not analyzed only as a facility. The relevant sequence is theological interpretation, organizational rule, resource mobilization, professional practice, beneficiary encounter, and social effect. This mechanism-centered approach permits comparison across sectors while retaining the specificity of local contexts.

The study has three limitations. First, documentary evidence disproportionately represents successful or formally organized initiatives; failed projects and informal dissent are less visible. Second, many publications describe activities but do not provide longitudinal outcome data, beneficiary testimony, or comparison groups. Third, the movement's vast geographical diversity makes national generalization hazardous. Conclusions therefore concern recurrent patterns and conditions, not uniform effects across all Muhammadiyah communities.

Table 1. Sociological Framework for Analyzing Muhammadiyah's Prophetic Movement

Dimension	Normative question	Organizational mechanism	Observable local implication
Humanization	Does action protect dignity and expand human capability?	Education, health care, social protection, inclusive service standards	Improved access, reduced stigma, stronger knowledge and well-being

Dimension	Normative question	Organizational mechanism	Observable local implication
Liberation	Does action reduce domination or dependency?	Empowerment, collective organization, advocacy, productive assets, rights education	Greater agency, bargaining power, income security, and public voice
Transcendence	How is social action anchored in moral accountability to God?	Cadre formation, worship, ethical rules, organizational identity, public trust	Service understood as obligation rather than patronage or publicity
Institutionalization	How are values made durable and repeatable?	Branches, councils, charitable enterprises, procedures, professional staff	Continuity beyond individual charisma and episodic volunteering
Embeddedness	How does the movement interact with local relations and culture?	Kinship, neighbourhood networks, women's groups, local leadership, partnerships	Adaptation, legitimacy, participation, or conflict according to context
Reflexive accountability	How are consequences assessed and corrected?	Evaluation, transparency, beneficiary feedback, deliberation, public reporting	Reduced mission drift and stronger correspondence between ideals and outcomes

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. From Prophetic Norms to a Movement Grammar

The documentary evidence shows that Muhammadiyah's prophetic orientation is not concentrated in a single doctrine. It is assembled from several mutually reinforcing ideas: tawhid, amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, tajdid, al-Ma'un, Islam Berkemajuan, and the aspiration to create a truly Islamic society. Together they form a movement grammar that links worship, knowledge, organization, and public usefulness. Religion is judged not only by personal observance but also by whether it produces education, care, justice, and orderly collective life (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2000, 2010, 2022).

Kuntowijoyo's framework clarifies this grammar by identifying distinct but interdependent directions. Humanization protects people from reduction to objects, numbers, labor units, or passive recipients. Liberation seeks release from poverty, ignorance, exploitation, political powerlessness, and cultural fatalism. Transcendence prevents emancipation from becoming morally unbounded by locating action within divine accountability (Kuntowijoyo, 1998; ZTF, 2011). In Muhammadiyah practice, these dimensions frequently overlap: a school humanizes through knowledge, can liberate through social mobility, and is normatively sustained as religious service.

Al-Ma'un supplies a particularly condensed moral sociology. The surah connects denial of religion with neglect of orphans and the poor, thereby making social relations an indicator

of piety. Muhammadiyah's historical interpretation translated this connection into organizational duties. Education, healing, feeding, orphan care, and later empowerment became forms of da'wa rather than secular supplements to it. Nashir (2021) consequently described the al-Ma'un tradition as a movement of liberation whose modern organizational expressions include health, social welfare, empowerment, philanthropy, and disaster management.

The movement grammar also changes the status of beneficiaries. In paternalistic charity, the giver is active and the recipient is morally grateful. Prophetic liberation requires a different relation: vulnerable people are subjects capable of interpreting needs, organizing interests, and influencing decisions. Muhammadiyah's official community-empowerment discourse by 2021 explicitly rejected a top-down model and emphasized prior assessment, local actors, equality, and collaboration (Muhammadiyah, 2021a). This vocabulary marks a significant sociological transition from relief to agency, even though implementation remains uneven.

Transcendence functions as a source of motivation and organizational discipline. Volunteers and professionals are expected to work beyond immediate material reward, while institutions are expected to treat resources as an amanah. This moral framing helps mobilize donations, labor, buildings, professional networks, and public trust. At the same time, transcendental language can shield institutions from criticism if leaders interpret accountability to God as a substitute for transparent accountability to people. The prophetic framework therefore requires both spiritual intention and verifiable institutional responsibility.

2. Institutionalization and the Production of Local Capacity

Muhammadiyah's most distinctive sociological achievement is the institutionalization of moral action. Many religious movements generate sermons and short-term mobilization; Muhammadiyah repeatedly converts ideas into schools, clinics, hospitals, orphanages, universities, philanthropic agencies, women's organizations, youth groups, and branch structures. Institutionalization allows programs to survive leadership succession, accumulate expertise, obtain legal recognition, and coordinate resources across locations (Alfian, 1989; Nakamura, 2012; Nashir, 2010).

This process transforms local capacity in several ways. A school creates teachers, literate families, alumni networks, and expectations about children's futures. A clinic creates regular contact with biomedical knowledge and professional health workers. A branch office provides meeting space, records, leadership routines, and links to higher organizational levels. A women's group can connect religious study with early childhood education, maternal health, savings, and social support. Each institution reorganizes time, authority, knowledge, and cooperation in the community.

The institutions also lower the transaction costs of collective action. A disaster or economic crisis does not require a community to invent an organization from nothing. Existing cadres, donor lists, buildings, vehicles, health professionals, communication channels, and leadership hierarchies can be redirected. This network capacity was visible during COVID-19, when Muhammadiyah mobilized health facilities, universities,

philanthropic resources, religious guidance, and public communication across sectors (Latief, 2020; Rahmawati & Wulan, 2022).

Institutional density matters. Communities with interconnected schools, mosques, clinics, Lazismu offices, youth organizations, and active branches possess a thicker movement ecology than communities with only nominal membership. Dense ecologies create pathways from childhood education to youth activism, professional work, philanthropy, and leadership. They also make Muhammadiyah identity socially sustainable because members can obtain services and relationships inside the network. Conversely, weak branches may depend on individual donors or charismatic figures and decline when those actors withdraw.

Institutionalization can nevertheless produce bureaucratic distance. As schools and hospitals become large employers, managerial efficiency, accreditation, revenue, and professional autonomy acquire their own logic. Staff may relate to the institution primarily as a workplace rather than as a movement. Service users may be treated as customers rather than citizens or moral subjects. Institutional continuity is therefore necessary but insufficient: prophetic purpose must be reproduced through recruitment, training, governance, affordability, and evaluation (Nugroho et al., 2021).

3. Humanization through Education, Health, and Social Care

Education has been Muhammadiyah's most pervasive humanizing mechanism. Its schools historically joined Islamic learning with modern subjects, graded classrooms, teacher organization, and broader access. In local society, this arrangement challenged the separation between religious instruction and modern knowledge. It produced Muslim professionals and organizational cadres while widening educational aspirations among families that might otherwise lack formal schooling (Noer, 1973; Peacock, 1978; Nakamura, 2012).

The humanizing effect is not limited to curriculum. Schools create disciplined public spaces in which girls and boys, teachers, parents, and administrators negotiate authority and citizenship. 'Aisyiyah's educational activities widened women's organizational participation and created routes from domestic religious roles into teaching, welfare, health, and public leadership. Indonesian Muslim women were not merely beneficiaries of modernization; through organizations such as 'Aisyiyah they became agents who shaped its institutions (Blackburn, 2004; van Doorn-Harder, 2006).

Health services similarly turn religious concern into bodily protection. Latief's (2010) study of Islamic charitable clinics demonstrates how low-cost and accessible medical assistance translated welfare discourse into concrete support for poorer households. Muhammadiyah's later hospital network expanded professional treatment and health education. In local communities, the hospital is more than a curative site: it connects religious philanthropy, medical labor, training, insurance arrangements, public-health campaigns, and crisis response.

Social care institutions address populations frequently stigmatized or neglected, including orphans, poor families, older people, persons with disabilities, and disaster survivors. Their humanizing potential lies in making vulnerability publicly visible and

institutionally actionable. Care becomes a collective obligation rather than a private family failure. At their best, Muhammadiyah services provide continuity and dignity beyond episodic donations.

However, access is stratified. Private educational and health institutions must finance staff, facilities, and regulation, which can increase fees and selectivity. Prestigious schools may serve middle-class families more effectively than marginalized households. Hospitals may participate in national insurance but still face financial and administrative pressures. Humanization must therefore be evaluated through affordability, geographic reach, treatment quality, and the experience of vulnerable users, not through institutional ownership alone.

A second limitation is the dominance of service-delivery indicators. Enrollment, patient numbers, beds, buildings, and scholarship totals are easier to count than dignity, confidence, mobility, or reduced exclusion. Institutions can meet administrative targets while leaving unequal relations unchanged. A prophetic assessment requires attention to who enters, who is excluded, who makes decisions, and whether users can voice complaints without losing access.

4. Liberation through Community Empowerment and Collective Agency

Community empowerment represents the clearest attempt to move from humanizing provision toward liberating agency. The relevant programs include farmer organization, livelihood development, support for informal workers, women's economic groups, disability inclusion, environmental initiatives, and assistance in frontier or marginalized regions. The sociological objective is not simply higher income. It is the creation of knowledge, organization, productive capacity, networks, and bargaining power that communities can retain after external facilitators leave.

The study of farmers participating in Muhammadiyah empowerment programs in Paseh District provides a concrete example. Ritonga and Hanifawati (2021) found that participation was associated with socialization, training, coaching, partnerships, farming experience, land status, and the organization's attitude toward farmers. Their findings indicate that empowerment is relational: participation rises when facilitators respect local backgrounds, maintain coaching, and build institutional partnerships. A technically sound program can fail if social trust and participant conditions are ignored.

Local branch studies also show that Muhammadiyah's potential is greatest where religious meetings are connected to practical problem solving. In Sidokare and Wonokoyo, researchers identified branches as possible organizers of education, religious life, and community programs, while also noting the need for stronger innovation and local engagement (Maharani et al., 2020; Octavia et al., 2020). These cases are modest, but they show that the branch can function as an intermediary between national ideals and neighborhood needs.

Empowerment changes the movement's theory of the poor. Poverty is no longer treated only as lack of consumption but as restricted access to assets, knowledge, organizations, markets, political influence, and public recognition. This interpretation is closer to liberation because it asks why vulnerability persists. It also permits advocacy against

harmful policies or exploitative economic relations, not merely assistance to individuals who suffer their consequences.

Nevertheless, empowerment language can disguise project dependence. Short funding cycles encourage visible trainings, equipment distribution, and beneficiary counts. Communities may participate in meetings without controlling budgets or program design. Productive assets can be abandoned when markets, maintenance, or collective governance are weak. A program is not bottom-up merely because participants are consulted. Meaningful participation requires decision rights, access to information, shared risk, and the ability to refuse or revise an intervention.

Liberation also requires confronting internal hierarchy. Local elites, male leaders, educated cadres, or asset-owning farmers may dominate committees and benefits. Women may provide unpaid labor while men represent the group publicly. Persons with disabilities may be included symbolically without accessible decision processes. Prophetic empowerment must therefore analyze power inside communities rather than romanticizing local participation as automatically egalitarian.

The most durable programs combine technical capability with collective organization. Training improves knowledge, but associations, cooperatives, savings groups, or producer networks protect that knowledge from dispersing. Partnerships can expand markets and state access, but excessive dependence on a corporate or governmental sponsor can narrow autonomy. The central sociological test is whether Muhammadiyah leaves behind stronger community institutions, not merely improved individual skills.

Table 2. Main Channels of Prophetic Social Change in Local Communities

Channel	Primary social mechanism	Potential transformation	Principal risk
Education	Knowledge formation, social mobility, cadre reproduction	Expanded aspirations, professional capacity, women's participation, civic identity	Class selectivity, credentialism, weak integration of prophetic values
Health and social care	Professional service, pooling, institutional protection, risk	Greater security, reduced stigma, continuity of care, bodily	Commercial pressure, curative bias, unequal access
Philanthropy	Resource redistribution, volunteering, moral solidarity	Immediate protection and possible citizenship claims	Paternalism, donor control, episodic assistance
Community empowerment	Participation, collective organization, assets, market and policy links	Agency, livelihood resilience, bargaining power	Project dependency, elite capture, token participation

Channel	Primary social mechanism	Potential transformation	Principal risk
Cadre and branch networks	Socialization, leadership recruitment, organizational memory	Local leadership and sustained collective action	Organizational closure, factionalism, volunteer fatigue
Disaster and public-health response	Rapid network mobilization, professional coordination, trust	Crisis protection and strengthened community preparedness	Emergency orientation without long-term recovery or accountability

5. Philanthropy, Crisis Response, and Civic Solidarity

Islamic philanthropy is a major bridge between prophetic morality and material redistribution. Zakat, infaq, sadaqah, and waqf mobilize resources through religious obligation and solidarity. Modern organizations such as Lazismu professionalize collection, reporting, program design, and partnerships. This process extends assistance beyond face-to-face giving and can direct middle-class resources toward education, health, livelihoods, and emergency relief (Fauzia, 2013; Latief, 2013, 2016).

Latief's concept of Muslim citizenship is especially relevant. Philanthropy can do more than express compassion; it can articulate claims about welfare, rights, and the responsibility of public institutions. When religious organizations provide services neglected by the state, they demonstrate civic capacity and expose welfare gaps. Yet they may also normalize state withdrawal if charitable substitution is not accompanied by advocacy. The prophetic task is therefore dual: relieve suffering and question the arrangements that reproduce it.

The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated Muhammadiyah's capacity for rapid cross-sectoral mobilization. Health institutions, universities, philanthropic agencies, mosques, media, and organizational leaders contributed medical care, protective equipment, food support, public guidance, and adjustments to worship. Studies of the movement's pandemic response emphasize networking and philanthropy as resources that enabled civil society to address governmental limitations (Latief, 2020; Rahmawati & Wulan, 2022).

Crisis response embodies humanization by protecting life and transcendence by framing care as a religious duty. Its liberating dimension is less automatic. Relief can leave survivors dependent unless recovery strengthens livelihoods, preparedness, and local organization. Emergency programs also tend to centralize decisions because speed is necessary. Accountability mechanisms must therefore be restored as the immediate crisis passes, including transparent targeting, community feedback, and attention to groups whose needs are less visible.

Muhammadiyah's networked structure provides both resilience and inequality. Strong regions can mobilize hospitals, universities, donors, and trained personnel; weak regions may receive external teams without equivalent local capacity. National solidarity can compensate for local scarcity, but repeated external substitution may inhibit branch

development. Crisis programs should therefore include transfer of skills, equipment governance, and local preparedness rather than treating communities solely as sites of deployment.

6. Cadres, Local Leadership, and the Reproduction of Prophetic Action

Institutions do not reproduce prophetic action automatically; cadres interpret and animate them. Muhammadiyah's schools, study circles, Baitul Arqam programs, youth organizations, and leadership structures socialize members into a shared vocabulary of Islam, organization, and service. Cadres connect formal rules with local relationships, recruit volunteers, negotiate with officials, and identify community needs. They are therefore carriers of both ideology and practical organizational knowledge.

Research on social cadre formation in Ambarawa, Pringsewu, found that cooperation among organizational councils contributed to social consensus and produced cadres with differing levels of commitment (Nihayati, 2018). The finding is important because commitment is not an individual moral trait alone. It is shaped by opportunities to act, recognition, mentoring, inter-council coordination, and meaningful responsibility. Cadres become durable when the organization provides a social career rather than only ideological instruction.

Local leadership can function as a form of cultural brokerage. Leaders translate official programs into local language, identify legitimate partners, and decide whether an intervention fits community norms. Their embeddedness produces trust that external professionals may lack. However, the same embeddedness can reproduce patronage, family dominance, and reluctance to criticize respected figures. Collective-collegial governance must therefore be accompanied by rotation, documentation, and channels for dissent.

Volunteerism remains a core resource, but it is vulnerable to exhaustion and inequality. People with secure income, education, and flexible work can participate more consistently than precarious workers. Women often sustain care and educational activities without equivalent formal authority. Professional staff can reduce dependence on unpaid labor, yet professionalization may weaken movement identity if employment is disconnected from cadre formation. A sustainable prophetic movement needs fair labor practices as well as voluntary sacrifice.

Generational succession presents another challenge. Younger activists may prefer issue-based networks, digital communication, environmental advocacy, or flexible volunteering over long meetings and hierarchical routines. This is not necessarily declining commitment; it may indicate a different repertoire of collective action. Muhammadiyah's capacity to integrate new repertoires while retaining institutional memory will influence whether prophetic values remain socially credible.

7. Uneven Outcomes and the Limits of Organizational Scale

Across the documents, the strongest evidence concerns organizational outputs and intermediate outcomes. Muhammadiyah clearly creates facilities, programs, cadres, and networks. Evidence is thinner regarding long-term changes in poverty, inequality, health

outcomes, political voice, or intergenerational mobility attributable to specific programs. This imbalance encourages an institutional fallacy: assuming that a large organization necessarily creates proportionately large social transformation.

Local outcomes vary with geography. Urban branches often possess professionals, universities, donors, and access to government agencies. Rural and peripheral communities may have stronger interpersonal solidarity but fewer institutions and specialized staff. Programs designed in metropolitan settings can misread agricultural cycles, customary authority, transport barriers, or informal economies. The prophetic claim must therefore be contextual rather than standardized solely through administrative uniformity.

Class position affects both service and participation. Middle-class members often supply leadership, donations, and expertise, but their preferences can shape institutions toward formal education, curative medicine, and professional services. Poorer communities may need land rights, labor protection, debt relief, disability access, or affordable transport—issues that require advocacy and redistribution rather than service delivery alone. Without mechanisms for marginalized groups to influence priorities, the movement risks benevolent middle-class governance.

Gender is another axis of unevenness. 'Aisiyiah has generated extensive female leadership and social service, but organizational authority and public representation can still be gendered. Women's unpaid care work may subsidize institutions while strategic decisions remain male-dominated. A prophetic sociology cannot count women's participation without analyzing their control over resources, time, and leadership.

Relations with the state and market are similarly ambivalent. Cooperation provides funding, regulation, insurance, infrastructure, and policy access. It can expand benefits rapidly. It can also impose bureaucratic priorities, create dependence, or discourage criticism. Market partnerships may strengthen livelihoods but can expose communities to price volatility or corporate agendas. Muhammadiyah's autonomy is therefore not isolation; it is the capacity to collaborate without surrendering mission or community accountability.

Finally, prophetic vocabulary itself can be unevenly institutionalized. Central documents articulate humanization, liberation, and progressive Islam, while local actors may know the movement primarily through routine worship or facility management. Conversely, local volunteers may embody solidarity without using theoretical language. The relevant question is not terminological conformity but whether practices consistently protect dignity, reduce domination, sustain moral accountability, and learn from affected communities.

Table 3. Criteria for Distinguishing Charitable Output from Prophetic Transformation

Analytical criterion	Charitable or administrative output	Evidence of prophetic transformation
Position of community	Recipient, patient, student, or beneficiary	Co-designer, rights-holder, organizer, and evaluator
Resource relation	Temporary transfer controlled by provider	Sustained access, productive control, or community-managed assets

Analytical criterion	Charitable or administrative output	Evidence of prophetic transformation
Knowledge relation	Instruction delivered by expert	Mutual learning and locally retained capability
Power relation	Need is relieved without challenging its source	Bargaining power, representation, or institutional rules are changed
Accountability	Reporting upward to donors and organizational leaders	Transparent reporting plus feedback and redress for affected people
Time horizon	Event, project, or emergency cycle	Institutional continuity, leadership succession, and long-term outcome tracking

Discussion

1. Institutionalized Prophecy as a Sociological Form

The findings support the concept of institutionalized prophecy. Prophetic values become socially effective not through moral charisma alone but through routinized structures that repeatedly allocate attention, labor, money, expertise, and authority. Muhammadiyah's branches and charitable enterprises function as moral infrastructures: they make certain responses to illness, ignorance, poverty, and disaster expected and organizationally possible. This helps explain the movement's continuity across political regimes and leadership generations.

Institutionalization changes the nature of religious action. Ahmad Dahlan's exemplary teaching becomes a curriculum, council, budget, professional role, and reporting system. The gain is durability and scale; the danger is displacement of purpose by procedure. Weberian rationalization is therefore present but incomplete as an explanation. Muhammadiyah does not simply replace charisma with bureaucracy. It repeatedly seeks to recharge bureaucracy through prophetic narratives, cadre formation, worship, and organizational memory.

This cyclical relation between value and organization differentiates a movement from a conventional service corporation. A corporation can provide efficient education or health care. A prophetic movement claims that service should express justice, compassion, and accountability beyond contract. The claim must affect pricing, inclusion, labor relations, environmental practice, and community voice. Otherwise, prophetic language becomes branding attached to ordinary organizational behavior.

2. Service Provision Is Not Identical to Liberation

The distinction between humanization and liberation is analytically necessary. Humanizing services reduce suffering and expand capability, often immediately. Liberation concerns the structure that distributes vulnerability and voice. A scholarship may enable one student to study while leaving an exclusionary fee system intact. A clinic may treat occupational illness without addressing unsafe labor. Food aid may prevent hunger without altering access to land or employment. These are valuable interventions, but they should not be described as equally transformative.

Muhammadiyah's movement from almsgiving toward empowerment indicates recognition of this distinction. Bottom-up assessment, farmer participation, productive programs, and advocacy seek to develop agency. Yet liberation requires organizational willingness to encounter conflict. Increasing bargaining power may challenge employers, landholders, officials, or market intermediaries. A movement that prioritizes harmonious partnerships can hesitate when empowerment produces confrontation. Prophetic liberation therefore tests the limits of institutional respectability.

The tension does not imply that service should be abandoned for activism. Vulnerable people need immediate schools, medicine, food, and shelter. The sociological requirement is a layered strategy: relief protects life, services expand capability, empowerment strengthens organization, and advocacy addresses structural causes. Muhammadiyah's network is unusually suited to such layering because it contains professionals, universities, grassroots branches, philanthropic resources, and public legitimacy. The problem is coordination across institutional silos.

3. Embeddedness, Participation, and Local Ownership

Local embeddedness explains why identical organizational programs produce different outcomes. Branch leaders work through kinship, religious reputation, neighborhood reciprocity, occupational groups, and local politics. These relations can generate trust and rapid mobilization. They also define who is heard. A branch dominated by established families may interpret community needs through elite experience. Participatory procedures must therefore widen representation rather than simply consult existing leaders.

The evidence from farmer programs reinforces the importance of social fit. Participation was related not only to program content but also to farmers' backgrounds, previous experience, land status, and the organization's approach (Ritonga & Hanifawati, 2021). Community agency is produced through repeated interaction, respect, and credible commitments. Training alone cannot create it. Long-term facilitators, local organizations, and feedback mechanisms are more important than a single intervention event.

Ownership is also material. Communities have limited control when equipment, data, funds, and partnerships remain legally or administratively controlled by the external institution. Genuine local ownership requires agreed rules for assets, transparent budgets, leadership renewal, and access to information. Muhammadiyah can contribute organizational knowledge while allowing community institutions to remain autonomous. This is more consistent with liberation than absorbing every initiative into the movement's formal structure.

4. Prophetic Accountability and the Measurement of Social Change

A major implication is the need to reform how success is measured. Institutional statistics are necessary for governance, but they privilege what organizations control: buildings, staff, participants, funds, and activities. Prophetic accountability must include outcomes experienced by communities. Relevant indicators include affordability, learning gains, health improvement, livelihood resilience, women's decision power, disability access, organizational survival, policy influence, and beneficiary satisfaction.

Measurement should not be reduced to technocratic auditing. Some outcomes—dignity, trust, solidarity, moral courage—require qualitative evidence and deliberation. Beneficiary narratives, community scorecards, participatory evaluation, and public forums can complement administrative data. The purpose is not to prove that every program succeeds but to expose unintended consequences and permit correction.

Transcendence strengthens this argument rather than weakening it. If resources are an amanah and vulnerable people possess moral dignity, then opaque management and unexamined harm are religious failures as well as technical failures. Accountability to God cannot be empirically measured, but it can generate institutional obligations to honesty, fairness, and openness. Prophetic accountability therefore joins vertical moral commitment with horizontal responsibility to people.

The movement must also allow negative findings. Organizations commonly publicize success stories because they sustain donations and legitimacy. This creates selection bias and inhibits learning. A credible prophetic movement should document program failure, unequal outcomes, and community criticism. Reflexivity is not disloyalty; it is a method of *tajdid* applied to institutional practice.

5. A Conditional Model of Muhammadiyah's Local Social Transformation

The evidence permits a conditional model. Prophetic norms produce local transformation when five links remain connected. First, values must be interpreted in relation to concrete injustice rather than repeated as abstract slogans. Second, organizations must mobilize durable resources and competent people. Third, programs must be embedded in local knowledge and include affected groups in decision making. Fourth, services must connect to empowerment and, where necessary, advocacy. Fifth, outcomes must be evaluated through public and beneficiary accountability.

Breakdown at any link changes the character of the movement. Values without institutions generate rhetoric. Institutions without participation generate paternalism. Participation without resources generates frustration. Resources without ethical direction generate mission drift. Service without structural analysis generates dependency. Advocacy without local legitimacy becomes elite representation. Evaluation without openness becomes administrative performance.

This model also explains variation without denying the movement's overall contribution. Muhammadiyah has created exceptional associational capacity in Indonesia, but capacity is a potential rather than a guaranteed outcome. Local social change depends on how that capacity is governed. The prophetic designation is therefore best treated as a demanding evaluative standard, not an honorific description

CONCLUSION

Muhammadiyah's prophetic movement is most convincingly understood as the institutional conversion of Islamic moral commitments into organized local action. The movement's schools, health services, social-care institutions, philanthropic agencies, cadre networks, disaster units, and empowerment programs alter community access to knowledge, care, resources, leadership, and collective organization. Kuntowijoyo's triad

clarifies the direction of this action: humanization protects dignity and capability, liberation reduces domination and dependency, and transcendence anchors both in moral accountability.

The analysis also establishes a necessary limit. Organizational scale and charitable output do not by themselves demonstrate prophetic social transformation. Services can humanize without liberating; professional institutions can expand while becoming socially selective; participatory language can conceal donor control; and local embeddedness can reproduce elite domination. Transformation is stronger when communities acquire decision rights, durable organizations, productive control, bargaining power, and mechanisms for evaluating the institutions that claim to serve them.

Muhammadiyah's principal sociological asset is its capacity to connect normative discourse with repeatable civic infrastructure. Its principal challenge is to keep that infrastructure responsive to marginalized people rather than to organizational growth alone. Future research should move beyond institutional inventories through comparative local fieldwork, longitudinal outcome studies, gender- and class-sensitive analysis, and direct participation of service users and community partners. The continued credibility of a prophetic movement depends not on proclaiming moral purpose, but on demonstrating that its institutions learn, redistribute power, and produce socially just change.

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