

Sociocultural Interventions in Strengthening the Child Marriage Prevention Ecosystem: The Role of Nahdlatul Ulama through the INKLUSI Programme

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Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana intervensi sosiokultural yang dijalankan oleh Nahdlatul Ulama melalui Program INKLUSI memperkuat ekosistem pencegahan perkawinan anak di enam wilayah intervensi, yaitu Malang, Lombok Utara, Indramayu, Lembata, Tojo Una-Una, dan Sorong. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus berganda eksplanatoris dengan orientasi metode campuran yang didominasi oleh analisis kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui telaah dokumen program, studi baseline, laporan perkembangan lokal, observasi langsung, wawancara mendalam, diskusi kelompok terfokus, dan sesi refleksi yang melibatkan pelaksana program, pemangku kepentingan, dan penerima manfaat. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perkawinan anak di wilayah intervensi tetap berlangsung dalam kerentanan berlapis yang melibatkan faktor struktural, sosiokultural, dan kelembagaan. Untuk merespons kondisi tersebut, Program INKLUSI mengembangkan dua jalur intervensi utama, yaitu penguatan aktor legitimasi lokal dan pelembagaan layanan perlindungan berbasis komunitas. Intervensi ini menghasilkan perubahan awal yang tercermin dalam pergeseran norma sosial, penguatan koordinasi antarkelembagaan, dan meningkatnya akses anak terhadap ruang aman serta layanan perlindungan. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pencegahan perkawinan anak menjadi lebih efektif ketika diposisikan sebagai upaya berbasis ekosistem yang menghubungkan norma, mekanisme komunitas, dan sistem layanan dasar. Kebaruan artikel ini terletak pada penjelasan analitis mengenai bagaimana organisasi keagamaan berbasis komunitas dapat berfungsi sebagai mediator normatif, kelembagaan, dan kultural dalam memperkuat ekosistem pencegahan perkawinan anak di berbagai konteks lokal yang beragam.

Keywords: perkawinan anak; intervensi sosiokultural; Nahdlatul Ulama; Program INKLUSI; ekosistem pencegahan.

Abstract

This article analyses how sociocultural intervention implemented by Nahdlatul Ulama through the INKLUSI Programme strengthens the child marriage prevention ecosystem across six intervention areas: Malang, North Lombok, Indramayu, Lembata, Tojo Una-Una, and Sorong. The study employs an explanatory multiple-case study design with a mixed-methods orientation dominated by qualitative analysis. Data were collected through the review of programme documents, baseline studies, local progress reports, direct observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and reflection sessions involving programme implementers, stakeholders, and beneficiaries. The findings show that child marriage in the intervention areas persists within layered vulnerabilities involving structural, sociocultural, and institutional factors. In response to these conditions, the INKLUSI Programme developed two main intervention pathways: strengthening local legitimacy actors and institutionalising community-based protection services. These interventions generated early changes reflected in shifting social norms, stronger inter-institutional coordination, and improved access of children to safe spaces and protection services. The study implies that child marriage prevention becomes more effective when it is positioned as an ecosystem-based effort linking norms, community mechanisms, and basic service systems. The originality of this article lies in its analytical explanation of how a community-based religious organisation can function as a normative, institutional, and cultural mediator in strengthening a child marriage prevention ecosystem across diverse local contexts.

Keywords: child marriage; sociocultural intervention; Nahdlatul Ulama; INKLUSI Programme; prevention ecosystem.

Introduction

Child marriage remains one of the most pressing issues in the agenda of child protection and social development in Indonesia. Although official data show a declining trend over recent years, this decline cannot be read as evidence that child marriage has substantively diminished in all its forms. Data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs show that the number of underage couples recorded in the marriage administration system fell from 8,804 couples in 2022 to 5,489 in 2023 and 4,150 in 2024. Similarly, data from Statistics Indonesia indicate that the proportion of women aged 20–24 who were married before the age of 18 declined from 6.92 per cent in 2023 to 5.9 per cent in 2024. However, some cases remain unrecorded because they occur outside formal state mechanisms, are settled informally, or are socially normalised within particular communities (Kemenag, 2025; BPS, 2025). At the same time, a substantial body of research has shown that child marriage is closely associated with multidimensional harms affecting health, education, psychosocial wellbeing, and children’s autonomy, as well as

longer-term consequences for human capital, the intergenerational reproduction of poverty, and weak social protection systems (Fan & Koski, 2022; Parsons et al., 2015; Raj, 2010; Cappa, Murray, & Maksud, 2023). Child marriage in Indonesia, therefore, cannot be understood merely as a legal, moral, or domestic matter, but must be situated as a socio-structural problem that persists within community life.

This complexity indicates that child marriage does not arise from a single determinant. A range of studies shows that the practice is shaped by overlapping pressures, including economic hardship, limited access to education, gender inequality, vulnerable parenting patterns, cultural legitimacy, religious interpretation, and the continued availability of marriage dispensation mechanisms (Widiantara & Yuhan, 2019; Sari & Puspitasari, 2022; Mujiburrahman et al., 2021; Tyas & Herawati, 2017; Gusnita, 2023; Musfiroh, 2016; Wahyudi & Prastiwi, 2022). In this context, child marriage is better understood as the outcome of layered vulnerabilities operating through the relationship between families, communities, social norms, and service institutions. Consequently, the prevention of child marriage requires an approach that goes beyond individual behavioural change and addresses the social environment within which the practice is sustained.

Nevertheless, the literature on child marriage in Indonesia has tended to move within three main strands. First, many studies focus on the determinants and consequences of child marriage, particularly those associated with poverty, education, reproductive health, and household continuity (Widiantara & Yuhan, 2019; Sari & Puspitasari, 2022; Parsons et al., 2015). Secondly, a number of studies emphasise the role of culture, religion, and local norms in legitimising or contesting the practice of child marriage (Gusnita, 2023; Musfiroh, 2016; Rofiah, 2017). Thirdly, other studies focus on legal reform, policy implementation, and marriage dispensation as institutional responses to the problem (Wahyudi & Prastiwi, 2022; Insani & Yuningsih, 2024; Yusroni, 2025). Although these strands have significantly expanded understanding of why child marriage persists, research remains limited on how a child marriage prevention ecosystem is actually built through community-based sociocultural interventions that link normative change, local actors, and protection services across diverse social settings.

This gap matters because, in practice, the prevention of child marriage cannot rely solely on awareness campaigns, formal regulations, or fragmented sectoral approaches. It is in this context that the INKLUSI Programme implemented by Nahdlatul Ulama provides an important empirical case. As a religious organisation with a strong social base, Nahdlatul

Ulama functions not only as a programme implementer but also as a civil society actor with the sociocultural reach to connect families, adolescents, religious leaders, customary leaders, village governments, and basic service providers within a shared prevention effort (LAKPESDAM PBNU, 2023). The programme thus offers an analytically relevant setting for understanding how a community-based religious organisation can contribute to building a participatory, connected, and context-sensitive child marriage prevention ecosystem.

Against this background, this article aims to analyse the variation of initial vulnerabilities and actor configurations in child marriage prevention, explain the sociocultural intervention mechanisms developed through the INKLUSI Programme, and identify the forms of social and institutional change that emerged across six intervention areas. The article argues that child marriage prevention becomes more effective when it is positioned as an ecosystem-based intervention, that is, an intervention that does not rely solely on awareness-raising or legal norms, but also reworks local legitimacy, strengthens community-based protection mechanisms, and connects them to referral pathways and basic services. In this respect, the article contributes not merely by documenting a programme, but by offering an analytical explanation of how sociocultural intervention can strengthen a child marriage prevention ecosystem across diverse local contexts.

This section develops a conceptual framework for understanding the prevention of child marriage as a social process shaped by the relationship between vulnerability, norms, local actors, and protection services. It therefore focuses on three main concepts: child marriage as a socio-structural problem, the child marriage prevention ecosystem, and the sociocultural intervention of community-based religious organisations. These concepts are the most relevant to the aims of this article, namely to explain initial vulnerabilities, intervention mechanisms, and the social and institutional changes generated through the INKLUSI Programme.

Conceptually, child marriage cannot be understood simply as marriage below the legal age threshold, but as a social practice that produces multidimensional consequences for children's lives. Research has consistently shown that child marriage is associated with reproductive health risks, interrupted schooling, psychosocial vulnerability, and diminished autonomy in decisions affecting children's futures (Fan & Koski, 2022; Raj, 2010). In the longer term, the practice is also linked to the intergenerational reproduction of poverty, lower human capital, and weaker social protection (Parsons et al., 2015; Cappa, Murray, & Maksud, 2023). Child marriage should therefore be placed within the category of social problems that directly affect the sustainability of development.

In Indonesia, child marriage can be categorised into three principal dimensions of vulnerability. The first is structural-economic, involving poverty and limited access to education that push children, especially girls, into early marriage (Widiantara & Yuhan, 2019; Sari & Puspitasari, 2022; Mujiburrahman et al., 2021). The second is sociocultural, involving cultural values, parenting patterns, and religious interpretations that can normalise the practice (Gusnita, 2023; Musfiroh, 2016; Tyas & Herawati, 2017). The third is institutional, involving weak protection systems, underdeveloped basic services, and the continued availability of marriage dispensation mechanisms (Wahyudi & Prastiwi, 2022). This categorisation suggests that child marriage persists within layered vulnerabilities, which means that prevention cannot depend solely on individual awareness or the formal enforcement of rules.

The second key concept is the child marriage prevention ecosystem. In this article, the prevention ecosystem is understood as the interconnected relationship between actors, norms, community mechanisms, and formal services that work together to prevent, detect, and respond to the risk of child marriage. From a social systems perspective, social problems do not stand alone, but are produced and reproduced through networks of communication, authority, and social practice (Luhmann, 1995). Child marriage prevention should therefore be viewed as the outcome of the interaction of multiple social elements, rather than the product of a single programme or institution.

Analytically, the prevention ecosystem can be understood through three principal components. The first is legitimacy actors, namely those who possess normative and social authority to influence decisions concerning marriage, such as religious leaders, customary leaders, families, and village governments. The second is community mechanisms, namely local forums, groups, or structures that enable prevention, early detection, and accompaniment. The third is basic services and referral systems, namely formal institutions such as Offices of Religious Affairs, schools, community health centres, and women's and children's protection services. These components do not operate separately, but shape one another's effectiveness. The ecosystem concept is therefore important for understanding how prevention is built through the interconnectedness of social norms, local actors, and protection services.

The third concept is sociocultural intervention, particularly as undertaken by community-based religious organisations. Sociocultural intervention is understood here as an effort to change social practice not merely through legal or administrative instruments, but through work on norms, meanings, legitimacy, and the social relations that animate

community life. In societies shaped by plural normative orders, namely state law, religious norms, and customary rules, social change often proves ineffective if it relies only on formal regulation, because everyday decisions remain strongly influenced by local authority and cultural legitimacy (Griffiths, 1986; Von Benda-Beckmann, 2002).

In this framework, religious organisations can be understood as mediating actors with the capacity to reach communities through normative authority and established social infrastructures. This mediating role can be divided into three forms. The first is normative mediation, namely the capacity to shift the social meaning of a practice through sermons, education, and social communication. The second is institutional mediation, namely the capacity to connect communities to basic services and formal protection systems. The third is cultural mediation, namely the capacity to negotiate the relationship between state law, religious norms, and customary rules so that social change can be accepted locally. In this respect, durable social change is more likely when intervention is embedded in local social and cultural structures (Polanyi, 2002).

On the basis of these three concepts, this article positions child marriage as a socio-structural problem sustained through layered vulnerabilities, views prevention as ecosystemic work, and treats community-based religious organisations as important actors in strengthening that ecosystem through sociocultural intervention. This framework is used to read the variation of initial vulnerabilities, intervention mechanisms, and social-institutional change across the six intervention areas of the INKLUSI Programme.

This study employs an explanatory multiple-case study design with a mixed-methods orientation dominated by qualitative analysis in order to explain how Nahdlatul Ulama's sociocultural intervention through the INKLUSI Programme strengthens the child marriage prevention ecosystem in six intervention areas, namely Sorong, Tojo Una-Una, Lembata, North Lombok, Malang, and Indramayu. The unit of analysis is the mechanism through which the child marriage prevention ecosystem is strengthened at community and local service levels, involving religious leaders, customary leaders, village governments, basic service providers, Children's Forums, village-level Women and Children Protection Task Forces, and other supporting institutions. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, direct observation, and reflection sessions with programme implementers, stakeholders, and beneficiaries, while secondary data were drawn from baseline studies, programme documents, local progress reports, and service maps. Informants were selected purposively on the basis of their involvement in, and knowledge of,

the intervention process. The data were analysed through within-case and cross-case reading to identify variations in initial vulnerabilities, intervention mechanisms, and social-institutional changes, with triangulation across sources used to strengthen the validity of the findings (Yin, 2009).

Results

Variation in Initial Vulnerabilities and Actor Configurations within the Child Marriage Prevention Ecosystem

The initial findings show that child marriage in the six intervention areas does not arise from a single cause, but from an accumulation of vulnerabilities operating simultaneously at individual, family, community, and institutional levels. Baseline findings reveal several recurring patterns, namely limited public and adolescent understanding of the risks of child marriage, weak community engagement in child protection issues, the absence of institutionalised prevention mechanisms, and restricted adolescent access to supportive services (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023). At the same time, many child marriage cases are absent from official statistics because they are concealed by families, settled informally, or take place outside formal state mechanisms. Recorded figures therefore do not fully represent the social reality at community level (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023).

The baseline also indicates that these vulnerabilities do not stand alone, but are intertwined with school dropout, gender inequality, risky parenting patterns, extreme poverty, weak protection services, and limited safe reporting channels for children. Children who are most vulnerable to child marriage are therefore typically located within environments marked by layered problems. In this context, the risk of child marriage cannot be understood merely as a consequence of economic pressure or cultural justification, but also as a result of weak protection systems that are not yet capable of early detection and response (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023).

To clarify these initial conditions, Table 1 summarises the principal dimensions of early vulnerability and the actor configurations that shape the child marriage prevention ecosystem in the six intervention areas. The table shows that child marriage develops in settings characterised by low knowledge, weak community participation, socio-religious and socio-customary legitimacy that does not yet consistently support child protection, and prevention services and policies that remain poorly connected at local level. Table 1, therefore functions as a visual presentation of the initial data for reading general patterns and contextual variation in the following analysis (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023).

Dimension of Initial Vulnerability	General Findings	Variation Across Areas	Analytical Significance for Ecosystem Strengthening
Knowledge and awareness of the risks of child marriage	Public and adolescent understanding of the risks of child marriage remains low; myths about marriageable age and readiness remain strong.	This pattern appears across all areas, but tends to be more complex in contexts shaped by strong customary and religious legitimacy.	Prevention cannot rely solely on general socialisation, but must be supported by actors who hold normative authority at local level.
Community participation in child protection issues	Community participation remains limited and collective mechanisms are not yet institutionalised.	In some areas, child marriage has not yet become a shared agenda because local forums, village mechanisms, or child participation spaces remain weak; in contexts with strong traditional authority, participation is also shaped by established legitimacy patterns.	Ecosystem strengthening requires safe, participatory community structures capable of functioning as arenas of early detection.
Support from religious and customary leaders	Some religious and customary leaders do not yet adequately understand the risks of child marriage and in some cases still legitimise the practice.	This is especially prominent in North Lombok, Lembata, and Sorong, where customary authority operates in parallel with formal religious authority.	Legitimacy actors must be treated as key intervention targets because they shape whether prevention norms are accepted at community level.
Policy and institutional strengthening	Strong local policies are absent, and prevention and case-handling services remain underdeveloped.	In some areas, the main constraint is not only the absence of regulation, but also weak inter-institutional coordination and	Prevention requires the institutionalisation of services and coordination, not merely normative campaigns.

		the lack of connection between village services and district-level referrals.	
Adolescent access to services	Adolescents do not yet have systematic access to supportive services or peer networks.	This condition is found across areas, but is more acute where basic services are distant, limited, or not yet child-friendly.	Ecosystem strengthening requires safe spaces, peer networks, and help channels that are accessible to children.
Unrecorded child marriage cases	Many cases go unreported because they are concealed by families or take place outside formal state institutions.	This phenomenon appears across areas, although the form of social legitimacy varies according to local context.	Community-based early detection and non-formal case recording are important for reading realities that official data do not capture.

Table 1. Variation in Initial Vulnerabilities and Actor Configurations within the Child Marriage Prevention Ecosystem across Six Intervention Areas

Source: Baseline Study Report, 2023. Reconstructed by the author.

As shown in Table 1, the principal problem across the six assisted areas is not merely the high incidence of child marriage, but the fragility of the social ecosystem that should function to prevent, recognise, and respond to risk at an early stage. Prior to intervention, communities generally lacked adequate knowledge, strong social mechanisms, and effectively connected service systems through which child marriage prevention could become a collective responsibility (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023).

At the same time, cross-case findings show that early vulnerabilities are not identical across all six areas. In North Lombok, Lembata, and Sorong, customary communities exert a more visible influence, so that marriage legitimacy is derived not only from religious leaders but also from customary leaders who hold normative authority over social life. In such contexts, customary decisions can operate in parallel with, and in some cases separately from, formal religious authority. This finding suggests that child marriage prevention in areas with strong customary bases cannot rely solely on state law or formal religious counselling, because the arena of social legitimacy is plural. In other areas, by contrast, vulnerabilities are more visible in weak service integration, low adolescent participation, and the

absence of robust prevention mechanisms at village level. The variation in early vulnerability across areas therefore suggests that intervention strategies cannot be standardised (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023).

Three principal tendencies emerge from these cross-case findings. First, child marriage operates within a social space shaped by the combination of cultural norms, religious legitimacy, and local institutional capacity. Secondly, the weaker the integration of basic services and protection mechanisms at community level, the greater the likelihood that the risk of child marriage will go undetected. Thirdly, the sources of legitimacy differ across areas, which means that the actors who must be engaged in prevention also differ, ranging from religious leaders and customary leaders to village authorities and service providers (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023). Overall, the baseline functions not only as a portrait of initial conditions, but also as an empirical basis for showing that child marriage persists within a weak and layered social ecosystem. Strengthening prevention therefore requires interventions that can read local legitimacy structures, identify interconnected vulnerabilities, and connect key actors to more responsive and institutionalised protection mechanisms (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023).

Sociocultural Intervention Mechanisms and the Institutionalisation of Community-Based Services

After the initial context of vulnerability and actor configuration had been mapped, the INKLUSI Programme developed a sociocultural intervention mechanism based on multi-stakeholder collaboration. According to programme documents and implementation reports, this mechanism was designed by taking local structures of legitimacy, both religious and customary, into account, while also linking prevention and response efforts from village to district level. In this context, intervention was directed not only towards increasing individual knowledge, but also towards building working relationships among actors so that child marriage would be understood as a shared social issue rather than merely a private family matter (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023).

The data show that this mechanism worked through two interrelated pathways. The first involved strengthening the capacity of actors who held normative authority in legitimising marriage, including religious leaders, marriage registrars, customary leaders, village governments, and basic service providers. The second involved the institutionalisation of community-based services through the creation of safe spaces, early-detection mechanisms, and referral channels closer to children and families. The intervention thus moved beyond awareness-raising activities towards

the creation of social arrangements through which normative change and service change could proceed together (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023).

Within the first pathway, capacity strengthening focused on key actors who played an important part in interpreting, justifying, or processing marriage at local level. The programme facilitated training for religious leaders, Officers of Religious Affairs, community leaders, and service actors across different religious settings. Its reach extended beyond Muslim communities to include Hindu and Buddhist leaders in North Lombok, Catholic leaders in Sorong and Lembata, and local organisations perceived to hold social influence, such as Nahdlatul Wathan in North Lombok and Alkhairat in Tojo Una-Una. Within the Offices of Religious Affairs, strengthening was undertaken through BRUS and inclusive BIMWIN CATIN so that child marriage prevention could be integrated into counselling and pre-marital services. Village and sub-district authorities were also involved through training on village service development, case advocacy, and prevention strategies as part of local institutional strengthening (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023).



Figure 1. Capacity-building training for BRUS facilitators in Lembata

Source: LAKPESDAM Lembata

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Figure 2. Training of Posyandu cadres on child marriage prevention in Tojo Una-Una

Source: Fatayat NU Tojo Una-Una

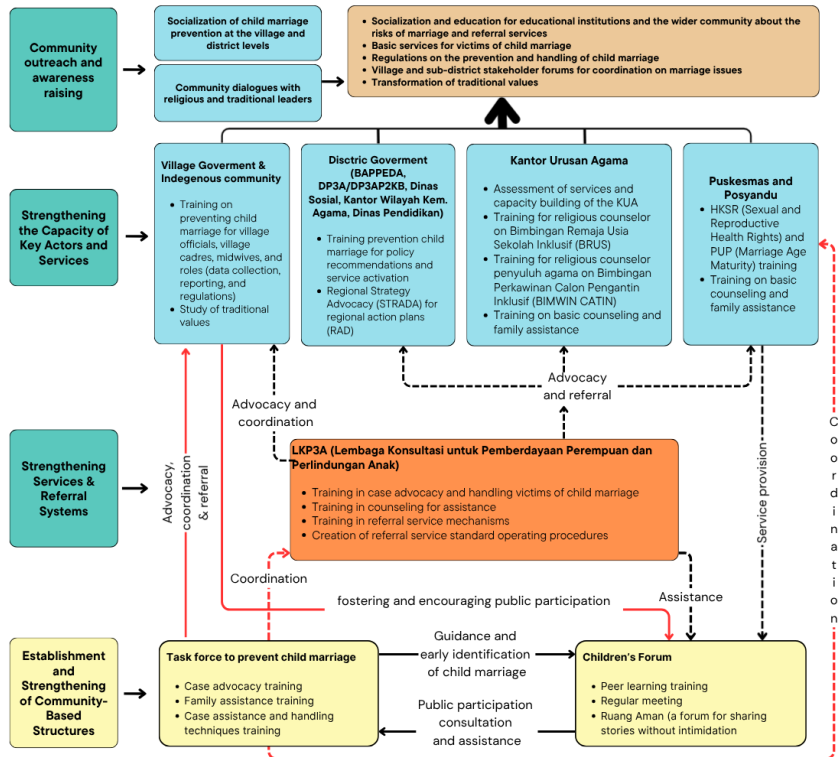


Figure 3. Programme intervention agenda and service mechanism

Source: Prepared by the author based on programme planning documents

The visual materials in the manuscript show that this mechanism was realised through concrete training and accompaniment. The images of BIMWIN CATIN training in North Lombok, BRUS facilitator training in Lembata, and Posyandu cadre training in Tojo Una-Una indicate that intervention was implemented through the strengthening of different actors according to local context. The diagram of the programme service mechanism shows that the intervention was designed to connect public education, community support, case recording, and referral systems to formal service providers. The available visual evidence thus does not function merely as documentation, but demonstrates how the programme combined the strengthening of social authority with the reorganisation of service relations at local level.

The significance of the first pathway also appears in the testimony of one informant involved in embedding the issue within religious spaces. As Ni Luh Eka explained,

“...this programme has become a new source of enthusiasm for our ministry, because we see this issue as crucial for the future, and many people were previously indifferent to it. At present, we are even internalising this within Hindu assemblies in villages across North Lombok...” (Interview with Ni Luh Eka by the author, 10 June 2025).

This quotation suggests that the intervention mechanism did not stop at the transfer of training material, but encouraged the expansion of preventive narratives into religious spaces that had not previously spoken explicitly about child protection. Capacity strengthening thus also functioned as a mechanism for translating norms into diverse social arenas.

The second pathway was visible in the strengthening of safe communities and the development of community-based services. In this regard, the programme established Children’s Forums as safe spaces in which children could share experiences, build knowledge, and detect the risk of child marriage at an earlier stage. At the same time, the programme also formed village-level Women and Children Protection Task Forces involving religious figures, village officials, health workers, and local youth forums. These task forces were equipped with basic counselling skills, family accompaniment skills, risk identification, and case referral capacities. To strengthen this work, LKP3A services were integrated into local mechanisms so that case recording, preliminary accompaniment, and referral to government services could proceed more quickly and responsively (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023).

Programme documents further show that the task forces were not only directed to respond to cases that had already occurred, but also to undertake direct advocacy in the community, monitor potential unrecorded child marriages, and connect families to relevant services. In this configuration, the Children's Forum served as an initial consultation space, while the task force acted as a bridge to village structures and service providers. The programme service mechanism diagram confirms that case recording, accompaniment, and referral were designed as a single sequence of action rather than as isolated services. This shows that the intervention did not merely add new actors, but reorganised inter-institutional relations at local level.

Cross-actor connectivity is also reflected in the experience of field implementers. Ruci Afrida stated,

“...we found partners in the struggle against child marriage, because previously we worked separately rather than collaboratively. We are therefore grateful that INKLUSI has connected us with many parties, from village to district level, including directly with children through the children's forum...” (Interview with Ruci Afrida by the author, 19 March 2025).

This testimony is relevant because it shows that the institutionalisation of community-based services did not simply create new units, but improved working connections that had previously been fragmented. In this sense, the intervention mechanism operated through the formation of more operational institutional relations at local level.

The operational role of the task force as an early-detection node also appears in an interview with the Head of Kaohua Village, Lembata. Saleh Wahid explained,

“...the activation of this task force has become our extension to the smallest level in the village. Usually, the community never reports marriage cases arising from promiscuity or arrangements made by parents. The task force usually hears about them earlier and then reports them to the village midwife...” (Interview with Saleh Wahid by the author, 19 March 2025).

This quotation suggests that the institutionalisation of services at community level created a new function within village structures, namely early listening, reporting, and connection to basic services that had previously not worked effectively.

Another finding is that this mechanism was adaptive to local context. In customary communities such as Bayan in North Lombok, Kedang in Lembata, and IMEKO in Sorong, intervention focused on providing new knowledge so that marriage norms could become more aligned with child protection principles and national law. At the level of children's communities, the forums that were formed did not develop in identical ways, but grew according to local initiative, such as Zona Ceria in Sorong, Dolanan Tradisional in Malang, Minggu Curhat dan Belajar Pengelolaan Lingkungan in Lembata, and Cantigi Bertindak in Indramayu. The institutionalisation of services was therefore not built through a rigid single model, but through contextual adaptation while retaining the same core functions, namely opening safe spaces, expanding child participation, and strengthening connections to the protection system (LAKPESDAM Report, 2023).

In summary, three principal tendencies emerge from this sub-section. First, sociocultural intervention worked by shifting the centre of legitimacy, from actors who had previously been able to justify child marriage to actors encouraged to communicate norms of prevention. Secondly, capacity strengthening did not stand alone, but was tied to the creation of service mechanisms closer to communities, especially through Children's Forums, village task forces, and the integration of LKP3A. Thirdly, the effectiveness of intervention was supported by the programme's ability to adapt its activities to local socio-religious and socio-customary contexts without losing its orientation towards child protection. In this sense, the intervention mechanism that emerged across the six areas did not consist merely of a series of activities, but of a gradual institutionalisation process linking normative change to expanded access to services.

These findings indicate that the strengthening of the child marriage prevention ecosystem in the INKLUSI Programme did not rely primarily on any single instrument, but on the orchestration of social authority, community structure, and basic services. The central significance of this phase of intervention therefore lies not simply in the involvement of more actors, but in the fact that these actors began to be connected within a working mechanism through which prevention, early detection, accompaniment, and referral could operate as part of a more structured sequence. This sub-section thus shows that the institutionalisation of community-based services functioned as a bridge between the initial vulnerabilities mapped in Sub-section 4.1 and the social-institutional changes discussed in Sub-section 4.3.

Cross-Case Evidence of Change: Normative Shifts, Stronger Coordination, and Expanded Child Access to Services

Across the six intervention areas, the findings show that the most visible changes did not simply consist of an increase in programme activities, but in changes in how local actors interpreted child marriage and in the growing connectedness of protection services at community level. Field evidence indicates that village officials, religious leaders, and customary leaders increasingly came to view child marriage not merely as a private family matter or a practice justified by custom, but as a social issue linked to child protection, reproductive health, education, and long-term quality of life. The change observed was therefore not confined to individual knowledge, but extended to a shift in the normative orientation of actors who had previously played an important role in legitimising marriage.

This shift is visible, for example, in the use of new preventive narratives in sermons, religious study circles, BIMWIN CATIN services, BRUS in schools, Sunday services, and non-Muslim religious forums. From a sociocultural perspective, the finding suggests movement from a more normative-legalistic approach towards one that is more responsive to child protection and social well-being. This is reflected in the statement of Ni Luh Eka:

“...this programme has become a new source of enthusiasm for our ministry, because we see this issue as crucial for the future, and many people were previously indifferent to it. At present, we are even internalising this within Hindu assemblies in villages across North Lombok” (Interview with Ni Luh Eka by the author, 10 June 2025).

This quotation is important because it shows that the preventive narrative did not stop within Muslim settings, but also reached other socio-religious spaces that had not previously been explicitly connected to child protection.

In areas where customary influence was strong, normative change also appeared in the form of symbolic and institutional support from customary actors. In Bayan, North Lombok, the Sasak Bayan community declared its rejection of child marriage and drafted awik-awik that would not process child marriage under customary law. In Sorong, the IMEKKO community signed a declaration against child marriage together with government actors. In Lembata, similar support took the form of inter-village commitments to reject the practice. These examples point to a common pattern, namely that customary actors who had previously occupied a potentially legitimising position began to shift towards becoming supports for prevention norms. Analytically, this is important because it shows that prevention does not

operate only through state law, but also through the reconfiguration of local authority in the social spaces where marriage decisions are justified.

Alongside normative change, the study also found stronger coordination and referral mechanisms at village and district levels. The establishment of village task forces and Children's Forums facilitated links with the Office of Religious Affairs, community health centres, district women's and children's protection units, and other referral services. Service mapping and observation show that actors who had previously worked in isolation began to be connected through formal and informal coordination forums, especially in identifying at-risk cases, making referrals, and following up families who might seek marriage dispensation. This is reflected in Ruci Afrida's statement:

"...we found partners in the struggle against child marriage, because previously we worked separately rather than collaboratively. We are therefore grateful that INKLUSI has connected us with many parties, from village to district level, including directly with children through the children's forum..." (Interview with Ruci Afrida by the author, 19 March 2025).

The change observed thus lies not simply in the appearance of new actors, but in improved inter-institutional relations that had previously been fragmented. This coordinating function became more concrete at village level through the role of the task force as an early-detection node. Saleh Wahid, Head of Kaohua Village, Lembata, stated:

"...the activation of this task force has become our extension to the smallest level in the village. Usually, the community never reports marriage cases arising from promiscuity or arrangements made by parents. The task force usually hears about them earlier and then reports them to the village midwife..." (Interview with Saleh Wahid by the author, 19 March 2025).

This quotation suggests that the institutionalisation of services at community level gave new functions to village structures by creating mechanisms of early listening, reporting, and connection to basic services that had previously not operated effectively. In this respect, prevention and response no longer depended entirely on formal institutions that felt socially distant from local residents.

Another important finding is the increasing closeness of children to basic services that had previously seemed distant, unsafe, or difficult to access.

Children involved in the Children's Forums no longer appeared merely as programme targets, but increasingly as subjects who were more willing to seek help, share concerns, and recognise risks faced by peers. This is captured in the focus group discussion with the Children's Forum in Wonorejo Village:

“With this children's forum, we now know where to go when we want to talk, and we know if a friend is in trouble because their parents want to marry them off. I used to be frightened, but because there is a children's forum and many friends here are also willing to have health checks, it no longer feels frightening and is actually enjoyable” (Focus group discussion with the Children's Forum of Wonorejo Village by the author, 2 August 2025).

This quotation indicates that programme change did not occur only at institutional level, but also in the reduction of the social and psychological distance between children as a vulnerable group and the protection system available to them.

The visual materials in the manuscript reinforce this reading. The image of adolescent Posyandu service socialisation in Indramayu indicates the expansion of public educational spaces concerning health and child marriage prevention, while the images of declarations rejecting child marriage by customary communities in North Lombok and Sorong indicate that change did not stop at individual level, but also acquired symbolic form in communal space. Meanwhile, the documentation of regular Children's Forum meetings suggests that safe space for children was not incidental, but was beginning to appear as a recurring practice in assisted communities. Taken together, these visuals support the finding that change in the programme unfolded simultaneously at discursive, institutional, and experiential levels.



Figure 4. Socialisation of adolescent Posyandu services in Indramayu

Source: Fatayat NU Indramayu



Figure 5. Declaration rejecting child marriage by the Sasak customary community in North Lombok

Source: LAKPESDAM PWNUTB



Figure 6. Declaration rejecting child marriage by the IMEKKO customary community in Sorong

Source: Fatayat NU Sorong



Figure 7. Routine meeting of the Children's Forum

Source: LAKPESDAM NU Malang Regency

Across these cases, three principal patterns of change become visible. First, there was a normative shift from the justification of child marriage towards a new understanding of the practice as a social risk that must be prevented collectively. Secondly, inter-institutional coordination and referral became stronger, especially among village structures, health services, Offices of Religious Affairs, and protection agencies. Thirdly, children's access to safe spaces and more responsive basic services expanded. Although the intensity of change was not identical in all areas, the recurring pattern suggests that the effectiveness of intervention did not depend on any single actor, but on the programme's capacity to connect social authority, community structure, and formal services within a more integrated working ecosystem.

Overall, the findings in this sub-section show that the most important outcomes of the intervention were not simply increased knowledge or a greater number of prevention activities, but the emergence of early changes in how communities defined the problem, how institutions worked together, and how children accessed protection. In this sense, the strengthening of the child marriage prevention ecosystem should be understood not as the effect of a single instrument, but as the result of a gradual interconnection between normative change, stronger coordination, and wider access to services. Sub-section 4.3 thus confirms that the intervention built through the INKLUSI Programme has begun to generate observable social-institutional changes at the level of actors, service mechanisms, and children's lived experience in assisted communities.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that child marriage prevention becomes more effective when it is positioned as ecosystemic work rather than as a single intervention directed only at individuals or families. Sub-section 4.1 showed that child marriage across the six intervention areas persisted within layered vulnerabilities involving economic pressure, weak protection, low community participation, and particular forms of social legitimacy. Sub-section 4.2 showed that the INKLUSI Programme responded to these vulnerabilities through two interrelated pathways, namely the strengthening of legitimacy actors and the institutionalisation of community-based services. Sub-section 4.3 then demonstrated that these interventions generated observable change at three levels at once: normative shifts, stronger inter-institutional coordination, and expanded child access to safe spaces and basic services. The effectiveness of child marriage prevention in this study was

therefore determined less by the number of activities or the intensity of campaigns than by the capacity to connect local norms, social actors, and protection systems within a more integrated working mechanism.

These findings extend a body of literature that has largely focused on the causes and consequences of child marriage. Earlier studies have shown that poverty, education, gender, culture, religious interpretation, and marriage dispensation are important explanatory factors in the persistence of child marriage (Widiantara & Yuhan, 2019; Sari & Puspitasari, 2022; Gusnita, 2023; Musfiroh, 2016; Wahyudi & Prastiwi, 2022). Yet the present study demonstrates that explanation at the level of causal factors is insufficient for understanding how prevention actually works in practice. Although early vulnerabilities clearly appeared in layered form, what shaped prevention effectiveness was not merely the presence of these risk factors, but the availability of legitimacy actors, community mechanisms, and basic services that could be connected operationally. In this respect, the article moves beyond studies that locate child marriage simply as a consequence of poverty, culture, or weak law, by showing that prevention proceeds through the creation of social and institutional connectedness that was previously absent.

Conceptually, these findings reinforce the importance of understanding child marriage as a socio-structural problem that operates within a system of relations rather than as an isolated individual event. This resonates with social systems theory, which suggests that social problems are produced and reproduced through interrelated networks of communication, authority, and practice (Luhmann, 1995). In the context of this study, prevention became more effective when intervention moved beyond message delivery and altered the flow of social communication that had previously justified child marriage, transforming it into a new communicative order that framed the practice as a social risk requiring collective prevention. This shift became visible in the transformation of religious narratives, the involvement of customary leaders, and the creation of safe spaces for children. Social change in these findings, therefore, did not emerge merely from regulation or individual awareness, but from the reorganisation of the relationship between meaning, authority, and protection mechanisms operating at community level.

The findings also indicate that community-based religious organisations can function simultaneously as normative, institutional, and cultural mediators. At the normative level, Nahdlatul Ulama through the INKLUSI Programme shifted centres of legitimacy by involving religious and customary leaders as communicators of prevention norms rather than as parties capable of legitimising child marriage. At the institutional level, the programme linked Children's Forums, village task forces, LKP3A, the Office of

Religious Affairs, village government, and basic services into a more structured workflow. At the cultural level, the intervention showed that change was more readily accepted when it did not confront local norms directly, but was negotiated through actors with recognised social authority. This reading is consistent with the perspective of legal pluralism, which holds that state law, religious norms, and customary rules do not operate in separate spaces, but negotiate with one another in the same social arena (Griffiths, 1986; Von Benda-Beckmann, 2002). In this context, the initial changes visible in Bayan, Lembata, and Sorong suggest that child marriage prevention is more likely to endure when formal change is translated into social and cultural language that communities can accept.

The study further confirms that sustainable social change requires intervention to be embedded in local structures. This finding is consistent with the idea of embedded social change, which suggests that social transformation is more likely to last when intervention is rooted in local social and cultural relations (Polanyi, 2002). In this article, such embeddedness is evident in the adaptation of intervention forms to local contexts, from the involvement of Hindu leaders in North Lombok and Catholic communities in Lembata and Sorong to the differentiated development of Children's Forums in Malang, Indramayu, Sorong, and Lembata. What this suggests is that programme effectiveness does not depend on a single uniform model, but on the ability to preserve the core functions of intervention, namely normative change, early detection, accompaniment, and referral, within social forms suited to the specific character of each community. One of the article's important contributions lies here: not merely in showing that sociocultural intervention can work, but in explaining that such intervention becomes effective when it is built as an adaptive process that nevertheless maintains a child protection orientation.

More broadly, the article offers both empirical and analytical contributions to scholarship on child marriage prevention. Empirically, it shows that a community-based religious organisation can play a strategic role in strengthening prevention ecosystems in settings marked by religious, customary, and social plurality. Analytically, it proposes that child marriage prevention cannot be reduced to normative intervention, legal reform, or service provision in isolation, but must instead be understood as the outcome of an orchestration among legitimacy actors, community mechanisms, and basic protection systems. The novelty of the article lies precisely in its explanation of how sociocultural intervention works not only to change attitudes, but also to reorganise the relationship between norms, communities, and service institutions within a living prevention ecosystem. In practical terms, the findings imply that child marriage prevention policy

needs to move beyond top-down models and take more seriously the building of local actors, community structures, and service connectedness as parts of a single working configuration.

Conclusion

This study shows that child marriage prevention becomes more effective when it is built as ecosystemic work connecting normative change, local legitimacy actors, community mechanisms, and basic services. Across the six intervention areas, child marriage persisted within layered vulnerabilities shaped not only by economic or cultural factors, but also by weak social protection and the lack of connected prevention mechanisms at community level. Within this context, the INKLUSI Programme implemented by Nahdlatul Ulama demonstrated that sociocultural intervention can strengthen the prevention ecosystem through two principal pathways, namely the strengthening of actors holding normative authority and the institutionalisation of community-based services. The outcomes were visible in emerging social norm shifts, stronger inter-institutional coordination, and increasingly open access for children to safe spaces and protection services.

Scientifically, the article contributes to the development of scholarship on child marriage prevention by showing that intervention effectiveness cannot be explained adequately through causal factors or formal policy approaches alone, but must be understood as the result of orchestration among norms, communities, and service institutions. In this respect, the article adds a conceptual contribution by positioning community-based religious organisations as normative, institutional, and cultural mediators in the strengthening of child marriage prevention ecosystems. The article's novelty therefore lies in its explanation of how sociocultural intervention not only changes attitudes, but also reorganises the relationship between local actors and protection systems in socially plural settings.

At the same time, the study has several limitations. First, it places greater emphasis on explaining intervention mechanisms and observable early changes than on measuring long-term impact quantitatively. Secondly, the multiple-case design means that each intervention area has not been explored with the depth possible in a single-case study. Thirdly, the strong variation in local context suggests that intervention effectiveness still needs to be examined over a longer time horizon and in other settings. Future research should therefore develop more systematic measures of normative change, service effectiveness, and ecosystem sustainability, while also pursuing deeper case-specific work in each intervention area so that local dynamics can be explained in greater detail.

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