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# Muhammadiyah's Advocacy: Empowerment and Policy Protection for Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan

Bachtiar Dwi Kurniawan\*

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Alim Bubu Swarga

Khon Kaen University, Thailand

Article History	Abstract
Received February 28, 2025	<p><i>This article explores how Muhammadiyah's leadership, through its overseas branches, advocates for and empowers Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. Grounded in the empowerment framework developed by Laverack and Labonté, the study investigates how faith-based civil society engagement can offer protection and capacity-building for vulnerable migrant populations. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key organizational leaders and members, a multi-country focus group discussion involving Indonesian migrant workers, analysis of internal documents, and online observation of program implementation between February 2023 and July 2023. The findings reveal that Muhammadiyah's initiatives encompass three interrelated domains—legal assistance, economic empowerment, and spiritual reinforcement—implemented through programs such as legal aid clinics, vocational and religious education, financial literacy training, and cross-border advocacy networks. These efforts have helped workers navigate legal uncertainty, secure basic rights, and build collective resilience. Yet, limitations persist, particularly due to Muhammadiyah's status as a non-state actor without formal authority over migrant affairs, leading to bureaucratic barriers with official institutions, alongside persistent challenges in coordination, volunteer continuity, and sustaining attention and funding through uncertain donation-based resources. This study concludes that Muhammadiyah represents a promising model of transnational Islamic advocacy that integrates moral, social, and institutional elements to support the empowerment of migrant communities navigating complex legal and institutional environments abroad.</i></p>
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\* Correspondence: Bachtiar Dwi Kurniawan, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
[bachtiar\\_dk@umy.ac.id](mailto:bachtiar_dk@umy.ac.id)



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## INTRODUCTION

The global economy increasingly relies on migrant labor, yet the legal and social protections afforded to these workers

often lag behind their contributions (Chan and Piper 2024; Fanning and Piper 2021; Palmer 2024). For Indonesian migrant

workers in Taiwan, this tension is felt daily—between opportunity and precarity, between promise and exploitation. The global mobility of Indonesian migrant workers (*Pekerja Migran Indonesia/PMI*) has become a central concern in migration policy and civil society discourse (Manning 2017; Rohani et al. 2024). While migrant labor contributes significantly to Indonesia's economy through remittances and employment absorption (Bryan and Morten 2017; Lu 2013), it is also accompanied by serious risks of vulnerability, exploitation, and isolation. The Taiwanese labor market continues to serve as one of the largest destinations for Indonesian workers, particularly in domestic care, fisheries, and factory sectors. As of October 2024, Taiwan hosted more than 79,000 Indonesian migrant workers (see Table 1), making it the second most common placement country after Hong Kong (BP2MI 2024).

**Table 1.** Top five destination countries for Indonesian migrant workers

Countries	Sep '24	Oct '24	Percentage	Proportion
Hong Kong	7.663	7.576	▼ 1,14% (87)	33,57%
Taiwan	6.719	6.600	▼ 1,77% (119)	29,25%
Malaysia	1.675	2.520	▲ 50,45% (845)	11,17%
Japan	1.055	1.198	▲ 13,55% (143)	5,31%
Singapore	889	1.083	▲ 21,82% (194)	4,80%
Other Countries	2.734	3.589	▲ 31,27% (855)	15,90%

\*The data period is taken on November 1, 2024

Source: BP2MI (2024)

Despite the economic significance of this migration, serious protection gaps remain. Multiple cases of abuse and exploitation have emerged in recent years. In 2023, a live-in caregiver in Taipei was physically assaulted and underpaid for over

a year by her employer, sparking protests from advocacy groups (Taiwan News 2023). In early 2024, ten Indonesian fishers aboard the You Fu vessel reported non-payment of wages and hazardous working conditions (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre 2024a). Meanwhile, the case of Supriyanto, an Indonesian fisherman who died in detention after months of abuse, continues to haunt the public conscience and expose weaknesses in the state's bilateral labor agreements (Focus Taiwan 2025b). Reports have also documented cases of sexual harassment, particularly among live-in domestic workers whose labor takes place in isolated, unregulated settings (Focus Taiwan 2025a). Other recurring issues include unpaid overtime (Routed 2023), the denial of weekly rest and leave days (Taipei Times 2024), contract substitution (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre 2024b), and inadequate access to legal aid or interpretation services (Taipei Times 2023).

Addressing these problems demands the involvement of various stakeholders, including civil society organizations. While Taiwan has taken steps to improve labor protections, these cases reveal the limitations of state-led mechanisms in reaching all corners of the migrant workforce (Hung et al. 2022; Liu 2013). Many workers, particularly women in informal sectors, face not only structural vulnerabilities but also cultural and linguistic barriers that hinder their ability to seek help or assert their rights. In this context, civil society actors have emerged as essential in bridging institutional gaps and responding to migrants lived realities.

One such organization is Muhammadiyah, a major Muslim organization in Indonesia that aims to uphold Islamic values and foster a genuinely Islamic society through education and social outreach (Merdeka.com 2021). The growing influence of Muhammadiyah extends internationally, with branches in twenty-

nine countries (Muhammadiyah Jateng 2022). Among these overseas branches is the *Pimpinan Cabang Istimewa Muhammadiyah* (PCIM) or Muhammadiyah's Leadership in Taiwan, which plays a key role in supporting diaspora communities. Muhammadiyah's Leadership in Taiwan performs essential functions such as facilitating networking, acting as a mediator between Muhammadiyah and local authorities, enhancing membership quality, disseminating Muhammadiyah's religious and ideological principles, and implementing da'wah programs grounded in Islamic values (IDNTimes 2023). To fulfil these functions, Muhammadiyah formally established PCIM Taiwan through Central Board Decree No. 39/KEP/I.O/B/2014 on February 25, 2014 (Al-Hamdi 2020).

Since then, PCIM Taiwan has expanded rapidly through four regional branches—North, South, East, and Central Taiwan (Al-Hamdi 2021). It now oversees a growing network of affiliated institutions, including the women's wing Aisyiyah (PCIA), Muhammadiyah Institute for Alms, Infaq, and Sadaqah Management (Lazismu) KL Taiwan, and the youth martial arts division Tapak Suci (PCI). These are complemented by an array of innovative community initiatives such as Surya Formosa TV, Surya Formosa Papers, Surya Formosa Express (remittance services), Surya Formosa Radio, a Virtual Islamic Boarding School, PKBM Muhammadiyah Taiwan, and even an integrated All-in-One Clinic. Together, these platforms represent a holistic ecosystem of services aimed at empowering Indonesian migrant workers socially, economically, and spiritually.

More than a religious outpost, Muhammadiyah has evolved into a transnational advocacy actor offering tangible protections to Indonesian migrant workers. Through a combination of legal education, financial literacy training, spiritual counselling, and hotline-based

assistance, Muhammadiyah provides multidimensional support to workers navigating Taiwan's complex legal and labor environment.

Given these insights, this article seeks to answer the following research question: How does Muhammadiyah empower and protect Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan through faith-based community advocacy? It investigates the practical strategies, institutional networks, and values-driven mechanisms employed to address migrant vulnerabilities. It also critically examines the internal constraints Muhammadiyah faces in this transnational advocacy role including bureaucratic hurdles, limited formal authority, and fluctuating resources. By doing so, the article contributes to broader debates on civil society engagement in migrant rights, the governance of Indonesian diaspora communities, and the evolving role of Islamic organizations in global labor mobility governance.

## Literature Review

The empowerment and protection of migrant workers have been the subject of sustained academic interest, particularly given the persistent vulnerabilities Indonesian workers face abroad. Numerous studies have documented exploitation, fraud, and physical and psychological abuse experienced by migrant workers, underscoring the limited capacity of host-country regulations and sending-state institutions to offer adequate protection. These realities have brought renewed focus to the role of civil society organizations (CSOs), including faith-based actors, in providing support services and advocacy that transcend formal policy frameworks.

Faith-based organizations such as Muhammadiyah offer a distinctive approach to empowerment by integrating religious values, social solidarity, and practical service delivery. Their activities

often blend spiritual guidance with legal education, health access, and economic self-sufficiency programs extending the meaning of empowerment beyond conventional, secular paradigms. This study builds on the expanding body of literature that examines the role of CSOs in migrant protection, with particular attention to the transnational operations of Muhammadiyah in Taiwan as a case of faith-informed advocacy.

Scholars agree that empowerment in the migration context is inherently multidimensional, requiring long-term interventions across legal, economic, and social spheres. Dahl et al. (2021) argue that effective empowerment must operate at both individual and collective levels, ensuring migrants can access rights while also mobilizing broader community-based support. Similarly, other researchers emphasize that sustainable empowerment depends not only on skills training and legal literacy but also on the consistency of institutional partnerships and the responsiveness of policy environments (Ammar et al. 2012; Brown 1997; Cramer 2005; Fischer and Rose 1995; Sharma 2001). While this literature identifies key enablers of empowerment, it tends to center on secular or state-led initiatives, often overlooking the strategic role of faith-based CSOs in migrant contexts.

Indonesian CSOs have actively influenced labor diplomacy by elevating migrant issues into public discourse, yet this body of literature short of analyzing the religious dimensions that may shape these interventions (Chan 2017; Septiyana 2019; Williams 2008). Masmuh (2020) goes further by highlighting Muhammadiyah's socio-economic programs in marginalized communities, both in Indonesia and abroad. Still, a focused analysis of how Muhammadiyah operates within a host-country setting like Taiwan—under distinct political, legal, and cultural constraints—remains absent from current scholarship.

This study addresses that gap by examining Muhammadiyah's institutional strategies in Taiwan and advocacy tools in supporting Indonesian migrant workers.

Moreover, Muhammadiyah's global expansion has resulted in over two dozen overseas branches, each navigating different host-country conditions. As of 2020, PCIM branches had been established across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North America (Al-Hamdi 2020). The programming varies depending on institutional resources and host-country labor regimes. For example, PCIM Saudi Arabia has emphasized humanitarian relief and financial assistance, while PCIM Sudan has prioritized education and healthcare in partnership with Lazismu (Muhammad 2022; Syifa 2022). These cases demonstrate that while Muhammadiyah's commitment to service is consistent, the modalities of implementation are shaped by local opportunity structures.

PCIM Malaysia offers a particularly useful comparison, especially regarding labor rights diplomacy. There, the organization has engaged in direct advocacy to support female domestic workers facing legal discrimination and abusive treatment (Anam et al. 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, PCIM Malaysia also expanded its aid programs to include emergency assistance and food distribution for migrant workers affected by movement restrictions (Mukhlis 2022). However, these efforts have often encountered systemic barriers, including limited access to formal policy channels and entrenched legal exclusions in Malaysia's labor system. These constraints parallel the situation in Taiwan, where migrant protections are inconsistently applied and religious advocacy must operate within a secular bureaucratic context.

In Taiwan, Muhammadiyah's Special Branch in Taiwan has designed an array of programs focused on health, financial literacy, legal education, and religious

support. Notably, the DAGUSIBU health program offers preventative services such as blood pressure and glucose screening, improving physical well-being while fostering health awareness among workers (Yunita and Atmadani 2021). These initiatives illustrate how Muhammadiyah embeds care-based interventions within a broader advocacy agenda. Yet the literature remains limited in its analysis of how such faith-based approaches intersect with host-country legal systems, economic pressures, and the lived realities of undocumented or under protected migrants.

This review therefore highlights two key gaps. First, while prior research recognizes the general contribution of CSOs to migrant protection, it rarely explores how faith-based organizations operationalize empowerment through both religious and institutional means. Second, most studies treat empowerment as a domestic or intergovernmental issue, without examining how transnational CSOs like Muhammadiyah navigate power asymmetries in host countries. By focusing on Muhammadiyah's leadership in Taiwan, this research contributes empirical insight into how faith-based networks mobilize resources, cultivate partnerships, and sustain community outreach under restrictive legal and cultural conditions.

Accordingly, this study advances the literature in three ways. First, it provides a grounded account of Muhammadiyah's advocacy programs and their impact on migrant worker agency and resilience in Taiwan. Second, it identifies the organizational constraints—such as limited funding, volunteer turnover, and bureaucratic delays—that shape implementation outcomes. Third, it offers a conceptual contribution by showing how religious legitimacy can function as a form of soft power, enabling access, trust, and mobilization where formal institutions fall short. These insights hold relevance not only for Indonesian diaspora communities

but also for scholars and practitioners engaged in transnational labor governance, civil society studies, and faith-based development.

### Conceptual Framework

Civil society, as articulated by John Keane (1998), refers to a socially embedded sphere in which individuals and groups interact with a spirit of tolerance, participation, and collective problem-solving—distinct from both the state and the market. In this space, communities deliberate over public concerns, mobilize support, and address social issues with limited state intervention. Civil society is thus essential for sustaining democratic norms such as accountability, transparency, and inclusive participation (Arkorful et al. 2022; Foley and Edwards 1996; Hall 2013). In democratic systems, including Indonesia's post-*Reformasi* governance model, civil society organizations (CSOs) flourish when protected by rights to association, expression, and religious freedom (Lussier and Fish 2012; Setiawan and Tomsa 2023; Weiss 2014).

Indonesia's civil society landscape has expanded rapidly since 1998, comprising secular NGOs, grassroots movements, and faith-based organizations. These actors play a dual role: acting as watchdogs of state performance and as catalysts for bottom-up social change (Calhoun 2001; Hedman 2001; Lewis 2013; Weiss 2023). Religious organizations like Muhammadiyah occupy a unique position in this ecosystem, operating across education, healthcare, and humanitarian relief while being grounded in Islamic moral teachings. Muhammadiyah's blend of spiritual commitment and public engagement defines it as a faith-based civil society organization—or what some scholars refer to as a religiously inspired non-state actor with a social mission (Aljunied 2011; Maftuhin and Muflihati 2022; Muttaqin et al. 2023; Weiss 2014).

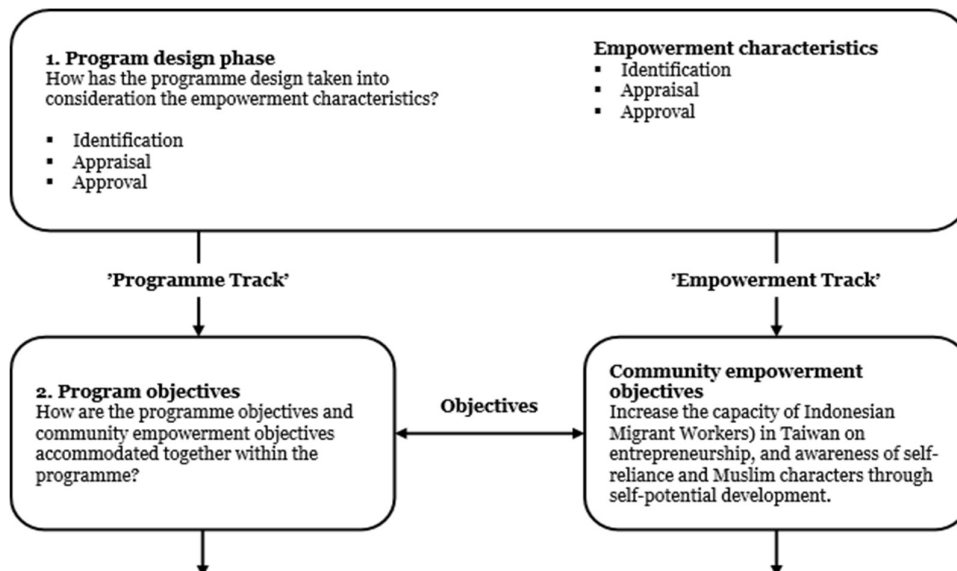
While secular NGOs may frame their interventions through rights-based universalism, Muhammadiyah's approach combines spiritual solidarity with practical advocacy. This orientation enables deeper trust and cultural alignment with Indonesian Muslim beneficiaries—especially those in marginal or vulnerable positions such as migrant workers. Its transnational engagement, particularly through overseas branches like Muhammadiyah in Taiwan, extends this logic across borders, adapting religious outreach to address structural injustices in the global labor market.

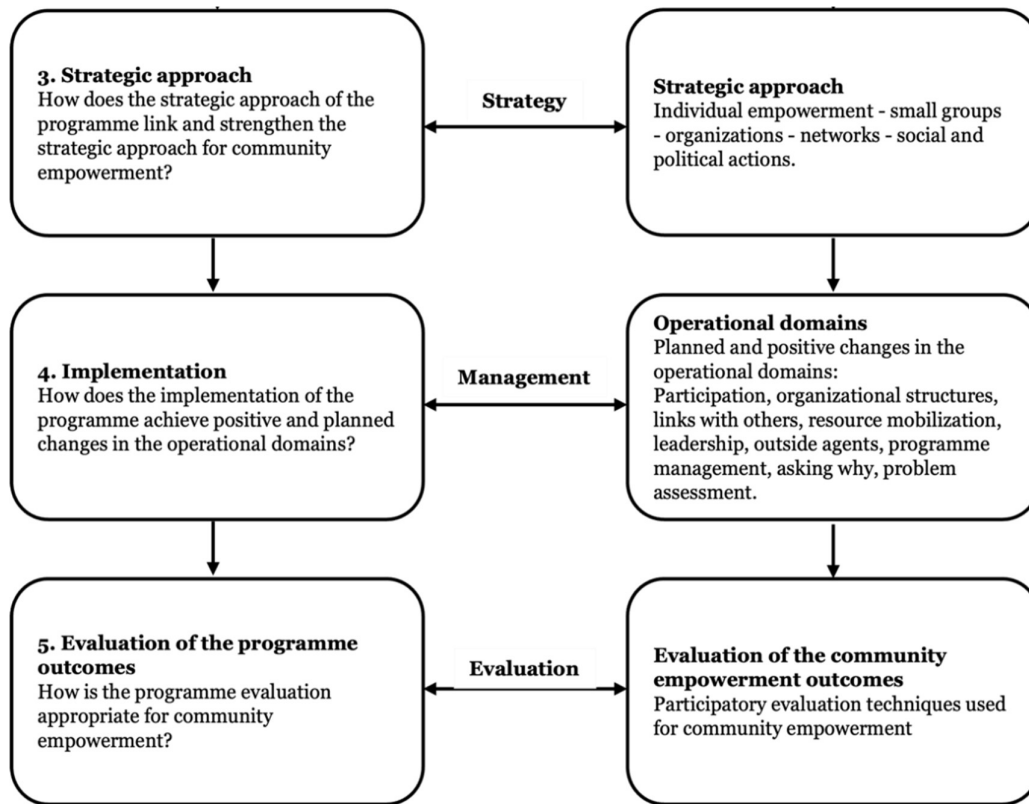
To analyze how Muhammadiyah empowers migrant workers in Taiwan, this study applies Laverack and Labonté's (2000) community empowerment framework. Their model outlines five interconnected stages: program design, objectives, strategic approach, implementation, and evaluation—each tied to empowerment indicators such as participation, self-determination, leadership, and resource mobilization. This framework bridges normative empowerment theory with concrete

indicators, offering a practical lens for evaluating how civil society efforts translate into social impact.

Figure 1 illustrates how this model is operationalized in the context of Muhammadiyah's leadership programs in Taiwan. The left side of the diagram ('Program Track') captures the design, planning, and institutional logic of Muhammadiyah's interventions. The right side ('Empowerment Track') reflects how those interventions aim to shift power dynamics by building skills, strengthening agency, and fostering resilience among Indonesian migrant workers. The model also incorporates critical empowerment characteristics such as attention to marginalization, time commitment, and inclusivity—essential in transnational contexts where workers face legal, cultural, and linguistic constraints.

**Figure 1.** Applying Laverack and Labonté's community empowerment framework through Muhammadiyah's advocacy for Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan





Source: Laverack and Labonté (2000)

In this study, each dimension of the framework is directly linked to empirical findings: 1) Program design is reflected in Muhammadiyah's leadership in Taiwan, particularly through initial needs assessments and the appraisal process used to define priorities such as financial literacy, spiritual well-being, and access to legal assistance; 2) Objectives focus on enhancing the self-reliance of Indonesian workers through entrepreneurship, religious education, and community-based support networks rooted in Islamic values; 3) Strategic approaches combine individual and group empowerment through participatory learning, small-group mentoring, and transnational collaboration with institutions like the Council for Community Empowerment of the Central Executive of Muhammadiyah (MPM PP Muhammadiyah) and Lazismu.; 4) Implementation is carried out through coordinated service delivery, including

DAGUSIBU health programs, remittance management workshops, and legal aid clinics, often delivered via Surya Formosa platforms; 5) Evaluation draws on both formal monitoring and informal participatory feedback loops from migrant communities, with an emphasis on collective benefit rather than individual outcomes alone.

By embedding these dimensions within the fieldwork analysis, the study moves beyond abstract theory to offer a grounded interpretation of Muhammadiyah's role in migrant empowerment. It shows how a faith-based civil society actor can design and deliver targeted interventions that respond to migrant workers' real conditions navigating both bureaucratic and emotional landscapes with limited resources but strong social legitimacy.

Ultimately, this framework highlights the relational and adaptive nature of community empowerment. It also reveals how Muhammadiyah's religious values—centered on justice (*keadilan*), solidarity (*ukhuwah*), and service (*amal*)—are translated into institutional strategies that address both material and spiritual aspects of vulnerability. The theoretical lens thus allows us to interpret Muhammadiyah not only as a religious actor, but also as a policy-relevant civil society force capable of protecting rights, shifting agency, and building resilience in precarious global labor environments.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine how Muhammadiyah empowers and protects Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan through faith-based community advocacy. The case study approach was chosen for its ability to explore complex institutional dynamics, particularly in understanding how religious organizations design, implement, and sustain empowerment strategies across transnational contexts (Creswell and Creswell 2017). By focusing on a single organization—Muhammadiyah, through its Special Branch in Taiwan—this study captures the institutional, social, and cultural dimensions that shape migrant-centered advocacy within a non-state, civil society setting.

Data collection was conducted remotely between February and July 2023 through a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, document analysis, and online observation. The study focused on three key cities in Taiwan—Taipei, Taichung, and Tainan—which were purposively selected due to their sizable populations of Indonesian migrant workers (Taichung City Government 2022; Tainan City Government 20025; Taipei City Department of Labor 2025). These cities

represent both formal and informal employment sectors, including factories, caregiving, domestic work, and fisheries. Importantly, they also reflect the geographic focus of Muhammadiyah's Special Branch in Taiwan community outreach, educational programs, and faith-based services, making them critical zones for observing Muhammadiyah's advocacy in practice. Although direct fieldwork was not possible due to logistical and ethical constraints, program documentation, digital outreach materials, and video archives provided contextual insight into each setting.

Primary data were collected through five semi-structured interviews with purposively selected key informants, each chosen for their central role in Muhammadiyah's advocacy ecosystem. These individuals were not intended to represent the entire migrant population but were selected for their institutional insight and strategic positioning: 1) The Chairman of MPM PP Muhammadiyah provided an overarching perspective on Muhammadiyah's transnational mission and its organizational model for migrant worker empowerment; 2) The Chairman and Secretary of Muhammadiyah's Leadership in Taiwan offered detailed accounts of local program implementation, inter-organizational partnerships, and the coordination challenges faced on the ground; 3) Two senior migrant community representatives in Taiwan contributed grounded reflections on the accessibility, limitations, and lived impact of Muhammadiyah's programs from a worker's point of view.

Although the number of interviewees was limited, this selection reflects the principle of information-rich cases in qualitative research (Palinkas et al. 2015; Patton 2002). Each informant held strategic knowledge of different layers of Muhammadiyah's intervention—national, transnational, and grassroots—ensuring a



multidimensional understanding. Rather than emphasizing numerical coverage or demographic representativeness, this study prioritizes interpretive depth and institutional analysis.

To broaden the scope and validate emerging themes, a structured focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted in coordination with MPM PP Muhammadiyah. The FGD included representatives from Muhammadiyah's migrant programs in other countries, allowing for cross-country comparison and contextualization of Taiwan-specific findings within broader patterns of transnational advocacy.

Triangulation was achieved through the systematic review of institutional documents, including program reports, memoranda of understanding, visual media, and social media publications. These materials were collected from MPM PP Muhammadiyah and Muhammadiyah's Special Branch in Taiwan. Publicly available news reports, academic literature, and migrant protection data were also consulted to strengthen the evidence base. Therefore, the table below outlines the geographic scope of the study and the types of migrant labor sectors considered in each city:

**Table 2.** Locations and types of Indonesian migrant work in Taiwan

Location	Type of Migrant Workers
Taipei	Formal and Informal
Tainan	Formal and Informal
Taichung	Formal and Informal

Source: Processed by the Authors

This methodology prioritizes the institutional dimension of community empowerment over individual case narratives. Rather than mapping personal stories across Taiwan, the study seeks to understand how Muhammadiyah defines its

advocacy role, mobilizes resources, and addresses systemic challenges through its faith-based model. The combination of elite interviews, comparative FGD input, and document-based triangulation offers a comprehensive view of how religious civil society can contribute to migrant empowerment within complex host-country environments.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Muhammadiyah's transnational advocacy through its Special Branch in Taiwan offers a compelling illustration of how faith-based civil society organizations mobilize religious identity and institutional networks to empower Indonesian migrant workers. Applying Laverack and Labonté's (2000) community empowerment framework, this section examines how Muhammadiyah articulates program objectives, develops strategic approaches, implements interventions, and evaluates their outcomes—while also acknowledging internal organizational limitations and normative tensions.

### *Design Phase: Centering Faith, Rights, and Resilience*

Muhammadiyah, as a religious and social movement, consistently highlights the importance of uplifting marginalized groups through both faith-based teachings and concrete interventions. One significant dimension of this mission is the community empowerment of Indonesian migrant workers abroad a population that frequently contends with precarious working conditions, unscrupulous brokers, and limited social protections. In line with its broader organizational goals, Muhammadiyah has formulated a systematic plan to address the specific needs of these workers. As noted by Chairman of MPM PP Muhammadiyah, during a public discussion on the

“Undocumented,” many migrant workers fall victim to trafficking, abuse, and other forms of exploitation that persist due to insufficient oversight, inadequate legal frameworks, and gaps in community support (Hallo! Jakarta 2023). This situation underscores why Muhammadiyah considers migrant workers a priority in its empowerment agenda.

Muhammadiyah’s commitment to these issues is evident in the community empowerment program matrix outlined by its 2015–2020 Community Empowerment Assembly. The matrix delineates key strategies such as skills and employability training, remittance management, and the defense of migrant workers’ rights all framed by measurable indicators of success (see Table 3). These indicators include the fulfillment of standardized work skills, accessible remittance services, and professional advocacy for migrants facing workplace grievances. By structuring the program this way, Muhammadiyah not only communicates its intent to tackle core problems like financial vulnerability and abuse but also provides a roadmap for assessing the effectiveness of ongoing and future initiatives. This systematic approach highlights the organization’s seriousness in fostering a safe and empowering environment for Indonesian migrant workers overseas.

**Table 3.** Community empowerment program matrix for Indonesian migrant workers abroad (Taiwan) Muhammadiyah 2015-2020 Period

Community Empowerment Programs	Activities	Indicators of Success
Assistance for Migrant Workers and Migrant Workers' Families	1. Skills and Employability Training 2. Management of Migrant Worker Remittance Traffic	1. Fulfillment of Work Skills Standards under their respective fields of work, as well as Provision of Life Knowledge in the

3. Defense of Migrant Workers' Rights	destination country. 2. Provision of remittance services from migrant workers to their families quickly, easily, and affordably 3. Defending the rights of migrant workers on problems that occur to them during their work 4. Availability of candidates or domestic workers who can work professionally
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Source: Processed by the Authors

Beyond these structured efforts, Muhammadiyah’s faith-based orientation drives an additional layer of outreach—one that extends beyond purely technical or legal solutions (Jamil 1970). As evidenced by Muhammadiyah in Taiwan initiatives, empowerment is not confined to skill-building or financial literacy but also embraces a socio-economic da’wah approach. This means that Muhammadiyah integrates Islamic teachings and moral values into its training and advocacy, aiming to cultivate resilience, ethical consciousness, and communal responsibility among Indonesian migrant workers. According to Muhammadiyah’s Special Branch Member in Taiwan (personal interview, June 5, 2025), the problems these workers face include fraud, psychological distress, and indebtedness even before they depart for Taiwan. Such complex realities underline why Muhammadiyah collaborates with the Indonesian Trade Office in Taipei and other institutions, establishing not only a complaint center but also more holistic empowerment programs. Workers often require multi-dimensional support—legal guidance to navigate employment contracts, psychological counseling to manage stress, and spiritual encouragement to maintain hope and motivation.

Importantly, this study reveals that Muhammadiyah's approach transcends direct assistance or crisis response. While immediate help—such as financial aid or legal referrals—remains crucial, an equally significant aim involves cultivating long-term change in how migrant workers perceive their rights and social positioning. Through socio-economic da'wah, Muhammadiyah encourages workers to recognize their inherent dignity, guiding them to proactively shape their economic and spiritual trajectories. By hosting regular discussions, religious study circles, and advocacy seminars, the organization empowers workers to articulate concerns related to contract violations, excessive work hours, or unfair wage deductions. Over time, this combination of practical support and spiritual reinforcement builds a stronger collective identity among migrant workers, making it easier for them to engage with local authorities or seek redress in challenging situations.

In essence, the evidence from interviews and documented programs underscores Muhammadiyah's multi-level strategy: while formally structured training and advocacy remain central, the organization's faith-based ethos delivers deeper communal bonds and individual motivation. Such an integrated method tackles both external pressures—like exploitative employers or convoluted bureaucratic procedures—and internal constraints, such as low self-confidence or limited knowledge of one's legal protections. This comprehensive model, carried out by Muhammadiyah's leadership in Taiwan, demonstrates Muhammadiyah's ongoing dedication to ensuring that Indonesian migrant workers are not merely rescued from immediate difficulties but also placed on a sustainable path toward self-reliance and ethical empowerment.

This design phase directly reflects the first element of Laverack and Labonté's

community empowerment framework, where the focus is on identifying needs and building a foundational structure that integrates local realities with strategic values. It sets the stage for translating Muhammadiyah's faith-based mission into a practical and context-sensitive program architecture.

#### *Program Objectives: Operationalizing Faith-Based Empowerment Goals*

Muhammadiyah's empowerment initiatives for Indonesian migrant communities in Taiwan revolve around three interrelated objectives. First, there is a concerted effort to bolster the capacity of Indonesian Migrant Workers in areas such as entrepreneurship, industrial work skills, and the development of strong *Muslim/Muslimah* character. By prioritizing self-reliance and optimizing local potential, Muhammadiyah hopes to equip workers with both the hard skills necessary for professional growth and the spiritual grounding that reinforces ethical behavior and personal resilience. Second, the programs focus on safeguarding the basic rights of workers, encompassing economic, social, religious, and political dimensions. This focus acknowledges that the challenges faced by migrant workers often extend beyond the workplace, requiring legal advocacy and systemic intervention that protect them from exploitation. Third, forging networks of business partnerships with industries, financing institutions, and other social actors is central to broadening the economic horizons of migrant workers. By fostering collaborations, the organization aspires not only to enhance awareness of entrepreneurship but also to establish pathways for more sustainable and rewarding employment.

These aims emerged from extensive discussions with MPM PP Muhammadiyah and Muhammadiyah's Leadership in

Taiwan, both of which recognized that Indonesian migrants in Taiwan often work in two major sectors—the formal sector (e.g., factory and manufacturing) and the informal sector (e.g., domestic work). Workers in formal sectors sometimes encounter unclear contracts or language barriers, whereas those in the informal sector frequently endure irregular working hours that exceed contractual agreements. As underscored by Indonesian migrant worker in Taiwan (Public hearing between MPM PP Muhammadiyah and Indonesian migrant workers, May 28, 2023), such inconsistencies arise partly from limited financial literacy, insufficient language training, and a general lack of awareness about legal rights. Although many in the informal sector prioritize immediate earnings, few possess the information or institutional support needed to negotiate equitable contract terms, save effectively, or transition into more stable roles upon returning home.

By taking note of these realities, Muhammadiyah strengthens its advocacy and empowerment strategies for migrants in Taiwan. The interviews reveal that Muhammadiyah's Leadership in Taiwan and MPM PP Muhammadiyah collaborate to design targeted programs—including financial education workshops, legal counseling sessions, and community discussions on contract best practices—that aim to address the very gaps identified by workers. Over time, these combined efforts not only mitigate immediate risks tied to exploitative work conditions but also lay the groundwork for broader economic and social transformations, ensuring that Indonesian migrant workers gain the confidence, knowledge, and institutional support they need to thrive in their host environment.

This objective-setting phase aligns with the second component of Laverack and Labonté's model, where clearly articulated

goals help to direct interventions toward relevant community concerns. It also demonstrates how religious and cultural values can shape empowerment targets that resonate with both institutional priorities and workers lived experiences.

#### *Strategic Approach: From Grassroots Feedback to Institutional Dialogue*

Muhammadiyah's strategic approach to community empowerment in Taiwan hinges on robust collaboration and comprehensive data gathering before any interventions are launched. At the outset, MPM PP Muhammadiyah worked closely with Central Executive Board of 'Aisyiyah (PP 'Aisyiyah), the Special Branch Leadership of Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah in Taiwan (PCIM and PCIA Taiwan), the Tabligh Assembly, Muhammadiyah Universities (PTM), and Lazismu to map the challenges faced by Indonesian migrant workers. These stakeholders jointly established databases documenting entrepreneurial progress, economic constraints, and broader social difficulties that workers typically confront—ranging from contract disputes to psychological stress. By consolidating this information through consistent public hearings and socialization activities, Muhammadiyah ensures that empowerment programs directly reflect migrants' authentic experiences and needs.

Central to this strategy is the practice of listening to workers' complaints, thereby affirming that top-down planning yields to community-based perspectives. In doing so, Muhammadiyah tailors its programs be they legal assistance, financial guidance, or skill-building seminars to local circumstances rather than generic templates. Equally vital is the cultivation of political will and goodwill among government officials. By fostering close communication with both Indonesian authorities and Taiwan's local institutions,

Muhammadiyah can influence policy discussions related to migrant labor, advocate for more equitable regulations, and assemble the resources needed for sustainable outreach. This blend of grassroots feedback and stakeholder coordination cements the organization's capacity to mount effective, long-term initiatives. The resulting network not only streamlines communication but also bolsters trust, making it more likely that Indonesian migrant workers will seek help, voice emerging issues, and ultimately benefit from institutional support aimed at improving their welfare.

This phase reflects the third pillar in Laverack and Labonté's empowerment framework, where strengthening community participation and leadership through inclusive planning enables tailored interventions. It illustrates how Muhammadiyah strategically operationalizes feedback loops to ensure relevance, ownership, and legitimacy in its empowerment agenda.

#### *Implementation: From Program Delivery to Moral Engagement*

Having identified and mapped the key challenges Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan, Muhammadiyah proceeded to implement a series of targeted empowerment programs through the Special Branch Leadership of Muhammadiyah in Taiwan. One cornerstone of this implementation strategy involves facilitating the growth of business ideas among migrants, particularly those lacking formal entrepreneurial experience. By promoting joint ventures or individual business projects, Muhammadiyah seeks to enhance migrant workers' industrial skill sets, financial acumen, and professional confidence. As noted by Muhammadiyah's Special Branch Chairman in Taiwan, establishing a Teaching and Learning Center (PKBM) was crucial in ensuring that

migrant workers could update or complete their formal education (e.g., B- and C-package exams) while simultaneously expanding their entrepreneurial potential (personal interview, May 20, 2023). Through this dual emphasis on education and business development, migrants are better positioned to transition from low-wage positions to more sustainable livelihoods.

In addition to building entrepreneurial capacity, the programs reflect Muhammadiyah's holistic approach to community development. A notable example is the organization's focus on *Muslim/Muslimah* character formation, which goes beyond purely economic objectives. Seminars, workshops, and online study groups cover not only business management and motivation but also Islamic values that reinforce ethical conduct, mutual assistance, and responsible financial planning. By complementing technical skills with moral guidance, Muhammadiyah's Special Branch in Taiwan aims to foster a culture where self-sufficiency and spiritual well-being develop in tandem. This religiously grounded ethos resonates strongly with many Indonesian migrants in Taiwan, as illustrated by mass marriage ceremonies and counseling for those interested in learning more about Islam—initiatives that simultaneously address communal ties and personal faith (personal interview, May 20, 2023).

Beyond individual capacity-building, Muhammadiyah's advocacy and assistance programs target structural barriers that often marginalize Indonesian migrant workers. The economic, social, and political rights of Indonesian migrant workers require systematic protection, prompting Muhammadiyah to devise problem mapping, workshops, and awareness campaigns that clarify workers' entitlements under Taiwanese and Indonesian labor laws. To operationalize

these efforts, various organizational wings—including PCIA, MPM, PP 'Aisyiyah, and LazisMU—coordinate the creation of advocacy teams. These teams provide legal counseling; help file formal complaints when labor contracts are violated and encourage workers to adopt stronger financial management practices. By combining offline legal consultations with online platforms, Muhammadiyah ensures that information on regulations, complaint mechanisms, and negotiation strategies can reach those who might otherwise remain uninformed.

Alongside addressing immediate legal and social needs, Muhammadiyah also invests in establishing robust networks that can sustain long-term empowerment. The business partnership program exemplifies this vision: it connects migrant-owned enterprises with potential markets, sources of capital, and training resources. For instance, Muhammadiyah's Special Branch in Taiwan facilitates dialogue between Indonesian migrant workers business groups and financial institutions such as banks or non-bank financing bodies to secure working capital. In parallel, specialized forums are established so migrants can learn marketing techniques, production management, and other pertinent skills. Such networks not only expand the economic opportunities available to these workers but also reduce the sense of isolation that many experience in the host country.

Taken together, the implementation phase reflects Muhammadiyah's determination to address both the practical necessities of Indonesian migrant workers such as skill-building and legal advocacy and their deeper aspirations, including spiritual growth and social cohesion. This implementation phase closely aligns with Laverack and Labonté's focus on developing empowering structures through program delivery. It demonstrates how

empowerment is enacted in practice through skill development, institutional partnerships, and ethical reinforcement.

#### *Evaluation: Evidence of Change, and the Need for Deeper Reflexivity*

Following the deployment of various programs and initiatives, the final step in Muhammadiyah's advocacy cycle for Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan involves a systematic evaluation to ascertain the programs' effectiveness. Data sourced from MPM PP Muhammadiyah indicates that three primary initiatives (capacity-building workshops, legal advocacy, and entrepreneurial support) have collectively yielded encouraging results. Several migrant workers, upon completing mentoring sessions, have successfully established independent enterprises, sometimes in collaboration with peers, and leveraged the technical assistance provided by Muhammadiyah's Special Branch in Taiwan. These ventures range from joint businesses and cooperatives to more formal entities known as BUMBM (Business Entities Owned by Migrant Workers), which illustrate practical achievements that reinforce the overarching goals of empowerment.

Just as importantly, changes in attitudes and behaviors point toward deeper transformations. Muhammadiyah's Special Branch in Taiwan observes that Indonesian migrant workers have internalized core values related to mutual support, ethical conduct, and legal awareness outcomes that align with Muhammadiyah's emphasis on faith-based guidance and universal norms. This mindset shift is often attributed to the continuous communication facilitated by regular meetings and information technology platforms. Through these channels, migrant workers not only share experiences and best practices but also connect with potential business partners, financing sources, and volunteer advocates.

By cultivating multi-stakeholder partnerships for marketing and capital access, Muhammadiyah's Special Branch in Taiwan effectively positions entrepreneurship as more than an income-generating activity; it becomes a vehicle for collective progress and social solidarity.

Nevertheless, gaps remain in achieving full openness and engagement from Indonesian migrant workers. According to MPM PP Muhammadiyah Chairman, numerous these migrant workers remain reluctant to disclose personal challenges, family conflicts, or financial struggles (Public Hearing, May 28, 2023). This limited transparency can hinder early interventions and targeted support, underscoring the need for programs that encourage confidential conversations, psychological counseling, or peer-to-peer networks where individuals feel safe to voice sensitive issues. As a result, Muhammadiyah's Special Branch in Taiwan and MPM PP Muhammadiyah recognize the importance of further refining outreach strategies—including providing more culturally sensitive counseling services and enhancing trust-building measures.

From a policy perspective, these evaluation findings can guide governmental bodies and other institutional stakeholders in formulating more responsive frameworks for migrant worker protection. For instance, official agencies might collaborate with Muhammadiyah to streamline complaint mechanisms, integrate financial literacy modules into pre-departure training, or reinforce bilingual legal aid initiatives that reduce language barriers. By taking stock of both successes and persistent hurdles, the evaluation phase not only validates Muhammadiyah's interventions but also positions the organization as a knowledgeable partner capable of informing broader policymaking for overseas Indonesian workers. Eventually, strengthening these empowerment

programs requires sustained commitments from all parties (faith-based groups, government institutions, private-sector partners, and the workers themselves) so that migrant laborers in Taiwan can continue to thrive both economically and socially.

This phase embodies the evaluation component of Laverack and Labonté's empowerment model—where outcomes are measured not only through output metrics but through shifts in power relations, capabilities, and structural access. By institutionalizing reflection and refinement, Muhammadiyah ensures that its community-driven advocacy remains both adaptive and impactful.

### *Internal Challenges and Critical Reflections*

While Muhammadiyah's empowerment efforts through Muhammadiyah's Leadership in Taiwan present an inspiring model of transnational civil society advocacy, several internal limitations continue to affect the scale, consistency, and sustainability of its programs. These organizational challenges though not always visible in reported outcomes are essential to consider for improving long-term effectiveness.

One of the core challenges lies in Muhammadiyah's position as a non-governmental actor. Unlike state agencies, Muhammadiyah's Leadership in Taiwan does not have formal authority over the administration of migrant worker protection. Its civil society status restricts direct access to state mechanisms, particularly in areas such as legal enforcement, immigration services, or formal labor negotiations (Lan 2006). Although Muhammadiyah maintains cooperation with institutions like the Indonesian Economic and Trade Office in Taipei, these collaborations often encounter

procedural hurdles and institutional asymmetries, limiting Muhammadiyah's ability to swiftly respond or influence formal policy agendas.

Another issue arises from the internal coordination structure within Muhammadiyah itself. Programme and budgetary decisions involving Muhammadiyah's Leadership in Taiwan frequently depend on approval from the central board in Jakarta. While this ensures organizational accountability, it can delay rapid responses and reduce the flexibility of local initiatives. Volunteers in Taiwan have observed that such bureaucratic processes occasionally hinder immediate action in crisis scenarios, such as labor disputes or legal emergencies (Jaenudin and Fauziana 2022).

In addition to structural limitations, Muhammadiyah faces significant operational constraints related to finance and human resources. Compounding these challenges is the over-reliance on student volunteers for programme delivery. As conveyed by Muhammadiyah's Taiwan Leadership Chairman (personal interview, May 20, 2023), the majority of volunteers are students whose enthusiasm and cultural proximity to migrant workers are invaluable assets. However, their limited time, lack of professional training, and short-term involvement reduce the consistency of programme implementation and hinder institutional continuity. Furthermore, the small number of Indonesian migrant workers actively participating in Muhammadiyah Leadership in Taiwan's initiatives constrains the formation of a broader advocacy base, making it harder to achieve sustainable outreach.

Engagement with the wider migrant community also remains limited. Although many workers acknowledge Muhammadiyah's role, long working hours, fear of employer retaliation, and limited awareness restrict their participation

(personal interview with Indonesian migrant worker in Taiwan, June 11, 2025). MPM PP Muhammadiyah has observed that some workers hesitate to disclose personal hardships such as family problems or financial stress which complicates the delivery of timely and targeted support.

Despite these internal limitations, Muhammadiyah remains steadfast in its commitment to social justice, spiritual growth, and long-term resilience. The moral resolve and service orientation of its volunteers reflect a deeply rooted ethical tradition within the organization. While these constraints pose real barriers, they also present opportunities for institutional learning, stronger coordination, and more sustainable future programming.

This section highlights the reflexive orientation embedded in the Laverack and Labonté model, which calls for ongoing learning, organizational self-assessment, and capacity strengthening. Acknowledging these internal constraints is not a sign of failure, but a necessary condition for sustaining authentic and accountable empowerment.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study establishes that Muhammadiyah has emerged as a critical agent of empowerment for Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan, who, despite their vital economic contributions, continue to face significant legal, financial, and social vulnerabilities. Through its overseas branch and in coordination with its central Community Empowerment Council (MPM PP Muhammadiyah), the organization has developed a holistic model that integrates legal advocacy, entrepreneurship training, and faith-based spiritual guidance. This research contributes to the literature on civil society by demonstrating how faith-based organizations can effectively extend empowerment frameworks, such as that of



Laverack and Labonté, by incorporating spiritual solidarity and collective identity as core components of migrant resilience. The adaptability of Muhammadiyah is particularly evident when comparing its structured, development-focused programs in Taiwan's open civic space to its logistical role in Malaysia or its emergency relief work in Saudi Arabia, underscoring its contextual responsiveness.

However, the findings must be considered in light of the study's limitations. The analysis relies primarily on organizational perspectives rather than a broad cross-section of workers, was conducted remotely, and is contextually specific to Taiwan, which may limit the generalizability of the results to more restrictive environments. Furthermore, the long-term sustainability of these largely volunteer-driven initiatives remains an open question that warrants further investigation.

Despite these limitations, the implications are significant. Conceptually, this case affirms that empowerment models must account for the spiritual and cultural dimensions that shape migrant experiences. Practically, it calls for greater collaboration between Indonesian state institutions, such as BP2MI, and trusted faith-based organizations to create more effective pre-departure, in-country, and reintegration support systems. Future research should build on this study by employing comparative, field-based methodologies to assess Muhammadiyah's impact across different countries. Quantitative analysis of program outcomes and focused studies on women-led networks like 'Aisyiyah would further enrich our understanding of transnational labor governance. Ultimately, in an increasingly complex global labor landscape, the Muhammadiyah model offers invaluable insights for practitioners and policymakers seeking to build more inclusive, values-driven, and effective

strategies for migrant protection and community development.

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