

# The Sustainable Development Strategy of Nahdlatul Ulama: A Century of Commitment to Globalization Advancement

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## Abstract

This research explores the sustainable development strategy employed by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), a prominent Islamic organization in Indonesia, over the past century. NU, founded in 1926, has played a crucial role in promoting education, social welfare, and economic development nationwide. Rooted in Islamic values, NU has demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainable development, encompassing social and political dimensions. Through active participation from community members and governmental bodies, NU has implemented various initiatives aimed at enhancing social welfare and political advancement. This research examines NU's sustainable development efforts, highlighting its long-standing dedication to fostering inclusive and sustainable progress in Indonesian society.

**Keywords:** Nahdlatul Ulama, sustainable development, social advancement, environmental conservation, islamic organization

## 1. Introduction

The Islamic social organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is a religious organization in Indonesia that has a significant influence in society. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), founded in 1926, stands as a cornerstone of Indonesia's religious and social fabric, wielding significant influence across the archipelago. Rooted deeply in Islamic teachings, NU has transcended its role as a religious organization to become a driving force behind social and environmental progress. Over the past century, NU has navigated Indonesia's complex socio-political landscape, steadfast in its commitment to promoting justice, equity, and sustainability [1], [2].

NU's transformation from a conventional organization to a populace-oriented one has been a lengthy process rooted in its early 20th-century establishment and deep ties to Javanese and Indonesian cultures [3]. Known for its inclusivity, NU has historically embraced members from diverse backgrounds, while actively providing community services such as education and healthcare, earning widespread support [4]. This transformation reflects NU's strong commitment to Islamic values, inclusivity, member participation, and adaptation to societal changes [5], [6].

As the world grapples with pressing challenges of inequality, poverty, and environmental degradation, the imperative for sustainable development has never been more urgent. In this context, NU emerges as a beacon of hope, exemplifying how religious institutions can be catalysts for positive change. Through its

multifaceted approach to sustainable development, NU has not only uplifted communities but also fostered a profound sense of social cohesion and environmental stewardship [7], [8].

The organizational renewal was pivotal at that time. Therefore, one of the approaches that NU organization can employ to thrive and address various challenges and opportunities is based on the Resources-based View (RBV). Through RBV, NU can establish sustainable competitive advantages by leveraging heterogeneous resources. One of the pillars in the dynamic RBV theory is the Capability Lifecycle (CLC). The capability lifecycle is a novel concept that comprehensively explains the general pattern of organizational capability development over time based on the dynamic resource-based theory approach. CLC provides a fundamental framework for the dynamic resource-based view of an organization. The resource-based view provides an explanation of competitive heterogeneity based on the notion that close competitors differ in resources and capabilities, thus affecting competitive advantages and disadvantages. The RBV concept emphasizes that organizational competitive advantages based on resources and capabilities will endure longer in steering the organizational wheel, compared to those solely based on positioning.

In the context of understanding the transformation of organizations towards a popular Nahdlatul Ulama and adaptation strategies in facing the era of globalization, this research aims to:

- Investigating the process of growth and development of the organization from conventional paradigms towards a populace-oriented Nahdlatul Ulama organization.
- Exploring the strategies adopted by the Nahdlatul Ulama organization in transforming into a modern and resilient to sustain in globalization

## 2. Literature Review

Recent research, have shed light on the emergence and evolution of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) within the context of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) culture. Ismail's study highlights the pivotal roles of figures like KH Abdul Wahab Hasbullah and KH Hasyim Asy'ari in shaping NU's formation process, underscoring the symbiotic relationship between religious scholars, students, and pesantren, which significantly contributed to NU's growth and development [9]. Furthermore, recent studies by various scholars have examined NU's significant contributions to Indonesian Islamic legal discourse and its adaptive approach to *ijtihad*. These studies emphasize NU's collective *ijtihad* model as an alternative approach in the Muslim world, addressing technical guidance gaps overlooked by traditional institutions [10].

Additionally, research by Anwar has focused on the implementation of digital libraries in education, with a particular focus on the NU Smart scholarship program [11]. This study utilizes Participatory Action Research (PAR) to empower scholarship recipients in digital library literacy, highlighting NU's efforts to foster a culture of literacy within its school communities across Indonesia. Collectively, these recent research studies [12], [13] underscore NU's multifaceted role in shaping religious ideologies, promoting inclusivity, and embracing technological advancements to enhance education and literacy among its members and beyond.

In this research, delves into the sustainable development strategy of NU, tracing its evolution and impact over the course of a century. By examining NU's initiatives through a holistic lens, encompassing education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and environmental conservation, we gain insight into the transformative power of religious organizations in shaping a more just and sustainable future. Against the backdrop of Indonesia's rich cultural tapestry and Islamic heritage, NU's journey serves as a testament to

the enduring relevance of faith-based approaches to development. As we embark on this exploration of NU's sustainable development strategy, we are reminded of the profound interconnectedness between religious values, societal well-being, and environmental resilience. Through nuanced analysis and critical reflection, we endeavor to uncover the lessons and insights that NU's century-long commitment offers for addressing contemporary global challenges.

### **2.1. The Flexibility in Organizational Agility**

Organizational agility is fundamental to an organization's survival amidst dynamic environments, denotes its ability to swiftly anticipate, respond, and adapt to internal and external shifts [14]. This multifaceted capability encompasses strategic flexibility, operational responsiveness, innovative prowess, and a culture of continuous learning. At its core, organizational agility relies on two pivotal components: sensing and responding. Sensing involves discerning and comprehending environmental changes, while responding entails taking timely and effective action in light of these changes. Knowledge management plays a crucial role in enhancing sensing capabilities, thereby enabling organizations to recognize and address evolving circumstances adeptly. Environmental changes, driven by factors like competitive maneuvers, regulatory shifts, and technological advancements, necessitate organizations to refine their agility strategies and approaches [15].

In navigating high levels of change and uncertainty, organizational agility can be cultivated through the integration of other pertinent concepts within management theory. These include dynamic capabilities, absorptive capacity, and strategic flexibility [16]. While sharing similarities with organizational agility, these concepts differ in terms of their conceptual nuances and the critical factors underpinning the creation of organizational agility itself. Organizations with strategic flexibility tend to possess significant, flexible resources with diverse strategic portfolios. Strategic flexibility pertains to strategic issues, which are actions by parties influencing organizational program activities and how to create competitive advantages. These strategic issues, both operational and tactical, are what drive environmental changes.

Unlike the concept of organizational agility, the concept of strategic flexibility delves deeper into addressing strategic issues or overcoming specific processes by providing a variety of strategic models. Meanwhile, organizational agility applies to building the capacity to respond to and address all changes in the organizational environment [17].

### **2.2. Leveraging Dynamic Capabilities and Absorptive Capacity**

Dynamic capabilities and absorptive capacity are critical components of an organization's ability to navigate and thrive in a rapidly changing environment [18]. Dynamic capabilities refer to the organization's capacity to rapidly integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address environmental changes effectively. This ability is essential for sustaining competitiveness over time. While dynamic capabilities encompass a broad spectrum of organizational processes aimed at enhancing adaptability, absorptive capacity focuses specifically on the acquisition, assimilation, transformation, and utilization of knowledge to develop dynamic organizational capabilities [19].

These concepts share similarities with organizational agility, competitive advantage, and other adaptive frameworks. However, dynamic capabilities and absorptive capacity offer a deeper understanding of how organizations can proactively respond to environmental changes. While absorptive capacity emphasizes knowledge management processes, dynamic capabilities encompass broader organizational processes aimed at enhancing agility [20], [21]. Therefore, understanding and activating both dynamic capabilities and absorptive capacity are crucial for achieving organizational agility and sustaining competitive advantage amidst environmental uncertainties

### 3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative research approach with an Ethnographic perspective, distinguishing between realist and critical ethnography [22], [23]. The study utilizes purposive snowball sampling, where sample selection is based on specific criteria established for the research objectives. Participants include founders of Nahdlatul Ulama, cultural and structural NU groups, and social units in society like Islamic educational institutions. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Written documents, archives, official records, personal notes or writings, and images or photos are also utilized.

Participants are divided into two categories: primary participants and analytical participants. Primary participants aim to provide information about the situation and conditions in the research setting. Meanwhile, analytical informants are utilized during the data processing stage using triangulation techniques, where the results from primary participants data are combined with those from analytical informants and other sources [24]. This approach enhances the depth and reliability of the data analysis by integrating multiple perspectives and sources of information.

To determine a sustainable development strategy, observation topics are utilized as materials in the process of observing and interviewing resources. These observation topics are based on previous empirical research related to organizational development. The list of observation topics is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Observation Topics**

Observation Topics	Empirical Study
<b>Conditions during the introduction of the Nahdlatul Ulama organization</b>	Organizational structure, slack resources and sustainable corporate socially responsible performance [25]
<b>The growth and development of the organization from conventional to a popular Nahdlatul Ulama organization?</b>	Religious Moderation in the Discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama’s Dakwah in the Era of Industry 4.0 [3]
<b>Organizational strategy in moving towards a modern Nahdlatul Ulama that is able to survive in the era of globalization?</b>	Successful organizational change: integrating the management practice and scholarly literatures [26]

The final research findings, formulated as propositions, are compared with relevant theoretical perspectives to mitigate individual researcher bias in interpreting findings or conclusions. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon and enhances the validity and reliability of the study's outcomes. The overall research design is depicted in the following Figure 1.

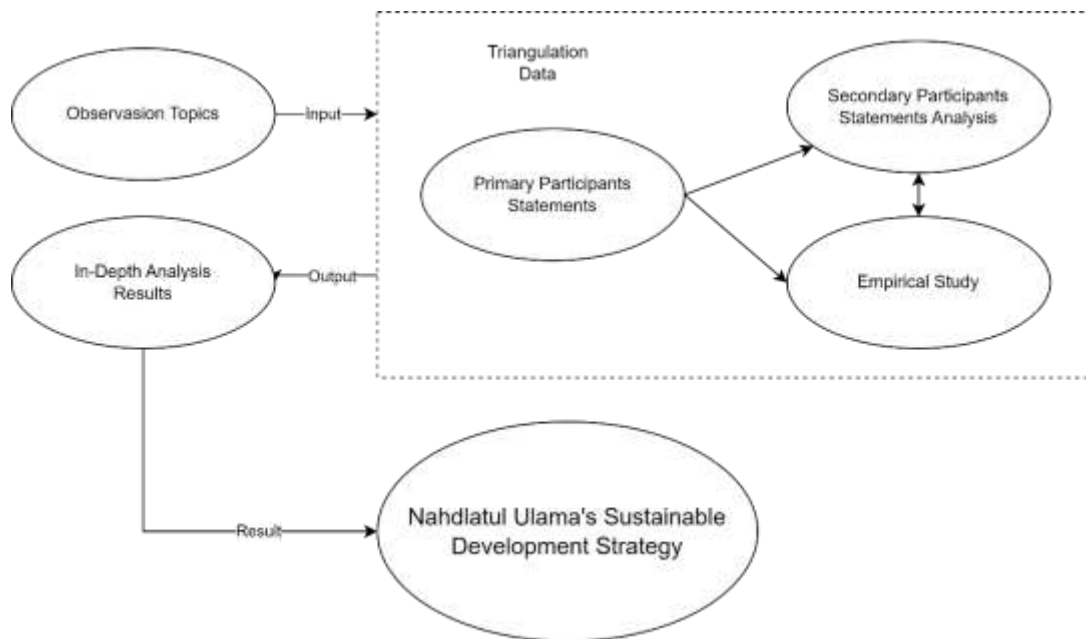


Figure 1: Research Design

#### 4. Results

Based on in-depth data analysis involving the main participants, various statements were obtained from each participant which have been presented in the following Table 2.

Table 2: Participant Statements

Main Objective	Statement
Conditions during the introduction of the Nahdlatul Ulama organization	In the process of NU's establishment, Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan received direct authorization from Syaikh Nawawi Al Bantani to form an organization of scholars, in response to Dutch colonialism and to uphold the teachings of <i>Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah</i> , as well as to provide a unified platform for various Islamic congregations in need of a collective body. Its establishment aimed to unite scholars from Islamic boarding schools to address national challenges in social, economic, and societal realms, with motives encompassing religious, nationalist, and defensive aspects of <i>Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah</i> teachings
The growth and development of the organization from conventional to a popular Nahdlatul Ulama organization?	The transformation of NU from a conventional organization to a populace-oriented, uniting in the struggle for Indonesian independence. While initially reactive, NU's leaders exhibited accommodative tendencies during periods of political change. This shift, perceived by some as opportunistic, marked a transition in NU's political behavior. Additionally, NU's legal formulations have served as reference points

Main Objective	Statement
<p><b>Conditions during the introduction of the Nahdlatul Ulama organization</b></p>	<p>In the process of NU's establishment, Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan received direct authorization from Syaikh Nawawi Al Bantani to form an organization of scholars, in response to Dutch colonialism and to uphold the teachings of <i>Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah</i>, as well as to provide a unified platform for various Islamic congregations in need of a collective body. Its establishment aimed to unite scholars from Islamic boarding schools to address national challenges in social, economic, and societal realms, with motives encompassing religious, nationalist, and defensive aspects of <i>Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah</i> teachings</p>
	<p>for resolving Muslim community issues, subject to reassessment as needed.</p>
<p><b>Organizational strategy in moving towards a modern Nahdlatul Ulama that is able to survive in the era of globalization?</b></p>	<p>In NU, the principle "NU is the small pesantren, and the pesantren is the large NU" underscores the mutual support between the two entities, where the existence of NU depends on pesantren and vice versa, enhancing NU's strength. The management of NU operates akin to the philosophy of <i>tasbih</i>, with NU as the focal point guiding various organizational aspects, while pesantren, NU's autonomous bodies, and its members follow directives from the central leadership. The role of <i>Kyai</i> and <i>santri</i> is inseparable from NU, as pesantren serves as its backbone, emphasizing the integral relationship between NU's management and pesantren education</p>

## 5. Discussion

Based on the findings derived from comprehensive analysis, it is evident that NU's transformation into a modern and resilient Nahdlatul Ulama entity in the era of globalization encompasses several key sectors. These sectors include politics, education, mass media communication, collaboration and Islamic legal perspectives upheld by the organization.

In the political sphere, NU has played a pivotal role since the early days of Indonesia's independence. The organization's involvement in politics dates back to the country's struggle for independence, where it actively participated in shaping the nation's political landscape. NU's influence extended beyond mere political representation; it contributed significantly to the formulation of key policies and ideologies that guided the newly established government.

Furthermore, NU's presence in politics provided a platform for advocating Islamic values and principles within the framework of a democratic system, thereby ensuring the representation of Muslim interests in national decision-making processes. Over the years, NU's political engagement has evolved to address contemporary challenges, adapting its strategies to navigate the complexities of Indonesia's dynamic

political environment. Today, NU continues to wield considerable influence in politics, advocating for social justice, religious tolerance, and democratic governance in line with its founding principles [3].

NU's ability to evolve and diversify its substantive offerings has contributed to its resilience. Through the establishment of various educational institutions under the NU Higher Education Institution (LPTNU), NU has been able to cater to a wide range of educational needs and interests within its community. The presence of 283 higher education institutions under the NU Higher Education Institution (LPTNU) further exemplifies NU's enduring legacy and commitment to education. These institutions, comprising 28 association bodies, 2 affiliates, and 253 foundations, collectively contribute to NU's mission of providing quality education and fostering intellectual development within its community[5], [7], [27].

NU's adherence to specific Islamic legal perspectives has also been instrumental in its longevity. By upholding certain interpretations of Islamic law that resonate with its members, NU has maintained its relevance and influence among its constituents[28].

## 6. Conclusion

Nahdlatul Ulama has evolved from humble beginnings to become one of the largest and most influential Islamic organizations in Indonesia. Its transformation from a conventional organization to one that is more populist and modern has enabled NU to endure for century in the face of globalization. NU's focus spans across several key sectors.

- NU's involvement in politics has been significant, particularly in shaping Indonesia's political landscape and advocating for the interests of its members within the democratic framework of the country.
- Education has always been a cornerstone of NU's mission. The organization has established numerous educational institutions, ranging from Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) to universities, to provide quality education and promote intellectual development among its community members.
- NU recognizes the importance of mass media in disseminating information and shaping public opinion. The organization actively engages with various media platforms to communicate its messages, advocate for social justice, and promote Islamic values.
- NU values collaboration both within its own community and with external partners. Through collaboration, NU seeks to address societal challenges and promote unity among Muslims. Additionally, NU upholds specific interpretations of Islamic law that guide its members' conduct and decision-making processes.

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