

## The Ecosystem Management of the Da'wah Convert Programmes: A Prospective Framework for its Implementation in Sarawak

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### Abstract

The establishment of a community of New Brothers or Converts in the middle of Sarawak's population density has significantly contributed to the development of Islamic da'wah in the state of 'Darul Hana'. However, Muslims, including the convert community in Sarawak, are considered minority communities. Thus, preachers need to be equipped with effective proselytising knowledge and skills to avoid provoking racial and religious conflicts that could disrupt the harmonious religious life. This effort is aimed at ensuring the sustainability of the convert programme so that its content and approach continue to be relevant, as well as celebrating the socio-cultural diversity in Sarawak. Therefore, this paper aims to review the prospects that can be explored by preachers in empowering the da'wah programme in Sarawak. This study employs a qualitative method based on document analysis through the collection of scientific materials such as journals, theses, proceeding papers and seminars as well as newspaper clippings related to the topic of discussion. The results of the study found that the practice of amalgamation of cultures, the establishment of educational and moderating centres, the cooperation between regional Islamic countries, and the financing of village projects and the Community Service Centre (PKI) are among the "two-pronged" strategies that successfully support converts dynamically and consistently. Preachers can make the strategy as an opportunity and a space in boosting the implementation of da'wah programmes, especially in the rural areas of Sarawak.

**Keywords:** Da'wah Program Management, Da'wah Prospects, Ecosystem Management, Muslim Convert, Sarawak

### **Introduction**

The development of Islamic da'wah in Sarawak is progressing in tandem with the development of Islam in other states in Malaysia. Thus, the continuation of the da'wah effort after the colonial era of the Brooke family (1841-1941M) has successfully injected religious awareness to develop the eminence of Islam among Sarawak's rural Bumiputeras. This sentiment later sparked the establishment of the earliest da'wah organisations to safeguard the interests of Muslims in Sarawak, such as Pertubuhan Dar al-Ihsan (1915), al-Ikhwan (1915), Shuyukh Islam Council (1917), Sarawak Malay Association (1939), the Insaf Malay Youth Front (1952), the Sarawak Islamic Religious Council (MIS) (1952) and the Sarawak Islamic Welfare Organisation (PERKIS) (1952). These organisations were further strengthened with the support and assistance of Non-Governmental Da'wah Organisations (NGOs) such as the United Islamic Revival Force (BINA) (1968) which was rebranded with the recognised organisation Harakah Islamiah (HIKMAH) (1993).

Following this, the da'wah convert movement in Sarawak is now progressing progressively and dynamically through a joint venture between the USK unit (Unit Brother Kita), Sarawak Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) and the Islamic NGO Harakah Islamiah (HIKMAH) in mobilising and coordinating the da'wah convert programmes in all divisions and districts (Ghani & Jaya, 2003). The prospect of this collaboration is a factor in the success, smoothness, and sustainability of the efforts of the converts in the rural areas (Kadir, 2010).

The scholars associated with Majlis Islam Sarawak (MIS) directed their efforts towards da'wah centred around uplifting awareness about the perils of Western influence and cleansing the core principles of Islam. Using BINA or the Islamic Movement (HIKMAH) as a vehicle, they delivered their message in a methodical manner, adjusting to governance frameworks and making sure that da'wah was developing in accordance with Islamic teachings (Kadir et al., 2023).

Islam was once recorded as the dominant religion in Sarawak in 1980 due to the large part of the Malay community (77.2%) and Melanau (12.2%), with an average increase of 71.1% in the 1970s and 90.7% in the 1980s (Yusoff, 2019). However, there was a slight decrease in the number of recent converts in some rural areas such as Kapit, Betong, Serian and Sarikei Divisions, while some showed slight increases, such as Sri Aman, Mukah and Limbang divisions. In major cities such as Kuching, Sibul, and Bintulu, the numbers also remained maintained good. Figure 1 illustrates the number of Islamic conversions in Sarawak by division from the years 2015 to 2017:

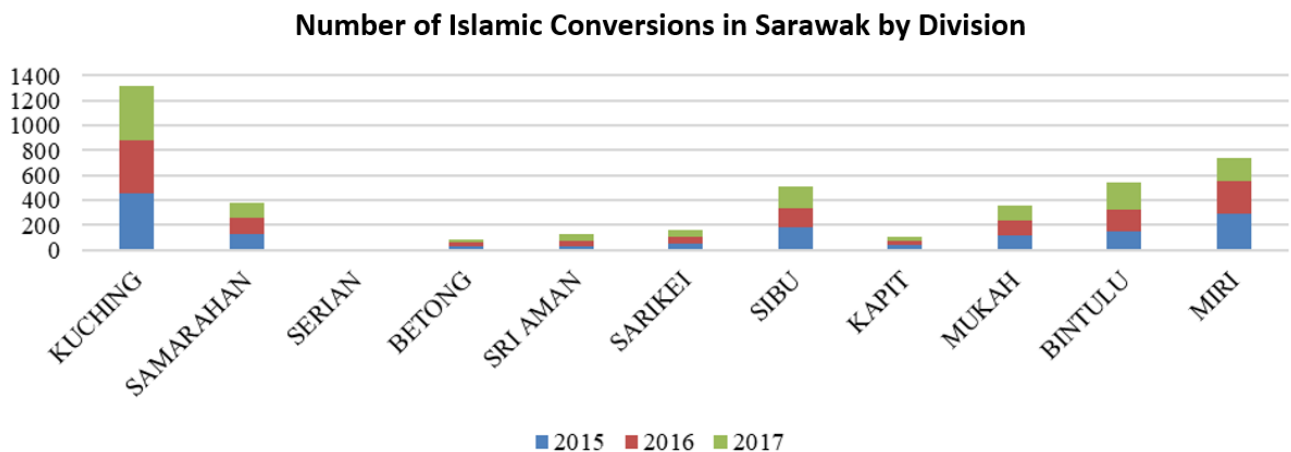


Figure 1. Number of Islamic Conversions in Sarawak by Division from the Years 2015 to 2017

The decrease in the number of converts in rural areas indicates that the Islamic organisation's da'wah programme in Sarawak has not been fully successful in attracting the non-Muslim community to the teachings of Islam. This situation is due to several issues and problems that put pressure on local Islamic organisations to move further forward in empowering the global, integrated, and interactive da'wah programmes.

The da'wah organisation in Sarawak is faced with the challenges of managing and implementing the da'wah programme. However, the environment of converts in Sarawak is slightly different from the convert community in Peninsular Malaysia, which is made up of Chinese Muslims, Indian Muslims, and Orang Asli. The differences are observed from three factors, namely the geographical and demographic structure of the population, socio-cultural characteristics, and the complex local political landscape. Geographical factors indicate the mountainous terrain of Sarawak and scattered settlements, as well as the poor quality of road networks and infrastructure facilities such as electricity and water supply, which are the main barriers to connecting with the convert community in the rural areas. The situation made it difficult for preachers to regularly monitor and supervise the performance of understanding, appreciation, and practice of the teachings of Islam among converts after the process of Islamisation (Mohamad et al., 2014).

Meanwhile, demographic factors recorded that most of the population in Sarawak are Christian, and some still adhere to the traditional practices and customs of their ethnicity, namely paganism (Rahman, 2018). Through ethnographic factors, the concept of assimilation and cultural amalgamation through inter-ethnic marriage greatly influenced the Islamisation factor in Sarawak. Some of them live private lives as converts with non-Muslim families after converting to Islam, especially in long houses (Hashim et al., 2019).

However, issues related to the development and welfare of Muslims in Sarawak are underserved and not so pronounced among local political leaders. Thus, the bumiputera development agenda managed to drown out such issues. This factor has enabled the Muslim political leaders in Sarawak to be more cautious in voicing views on Islam and da'wah to avoid religious sentiment among the Christian-majority community in Sarawak. In this regard, Muslim preachers are required not to be aggressive in the delivery of Islamic da'wah in public

and to carry it out according to the mould of local culture. The process of Islamisation should be carried out with wisdom and self-sufficiency without coercion (Rahman, 2018).

All issues are feared to affect the religious attitude of converts after undergoing the da'wah programme. This problem is related to the issue of self-adjustment and the issue of attachment of converts to their original religious beliefs, rituals, and practices. Realising that from the early stages of the Islamic process, they face the challenge of self-adaptation involving dressing, sociability, and selection of halal and *toyyiban* (Safety, Healthy & Cleanly) food. Cultural differences prevent non-Muslim families from understanding their drastic self-change. Thus, some converts feel hesitant, awkward, and reluctant to openly display their adherence to Islam in public (Don & Puteh., 2017; Guleng, 2014).

Furthermore, converts in Sarawak also have difficulty maintaining the Islamic way of life as their environment is dominated by the majority ethnic community such as the Dayak community who consume pork and alcohol during festive occasions, the issue of *aurat*, the issue of the ruling of keeping dogs, and the celebration of customary festivals (Hashim et al., 2019). In some cases, they will usually be urged to partake in animism ceremonies, and refusal may lead to exclusion from their families (Rahman, 2018). These challenges are indirectly a hindrance to the da'wah organisation to find the best solution in developing effective management and implementation methods based on cross-cultural factors and self-factors of converts after converting to Islam.

Studying the effectiveness of da'wah programmes in Sarawak is crucial for addressing the unique geographical, demographic, socio-cultural, and political challenges that set this region apart from others, ensuring the continued growth and acceptance of Islamic teachings. This research holds significant value for various stakeholders: for Islamic organisations, it provides insights to refine da'wah strategies; for the local Muslim community, it helps create a more supportive environment for new converts; for policy makers, it offers data to inform infrastructure and socio-cultural integration policies; for academia, it contributes to the understanding of religious conversion and cross-cultural integration; and for interfaith relations, it fosters better understanding and cooperation among different religious communities. This study aims to deliver practical recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of da'wah efforts, ensuring they are culturally sensitive and well-suited to Sarawak's unique context. Therefore, this study aims to scientifically explore the current prospects that can benefit Islamic da'wah organisations in implementing da'wah programmes in Sarawak, providing essential insights and recommendations to overcome these obstacles and improve the overall effectiveness of their efforts.

### **Preliminary Review of the Management of the Convert Da'wah Programme in Sarawak**

The da'wah programme is one of the best mechanisms in the process of mentoring and teaching converts in Malaysia. The construction of modules and syllabus programmes requires the expertise of preachers and da'wah organisations who understand the environment and conditions of converts during each transition period, from the initial phase, the middle phase to the level of adaptation of the Muslim culture and way of life. This effort makes it easier for preachers to design appropriate strategies and approaches tailored to the current challenges faced by converts, fostering better engagement and receptiveness to guidance and teachings consistently.

Defined in the Fourth edition of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) Dictionary, a programme encompasses policy plans as well as how to conduct an activity or competition in a systematic manner. It involves the process of organising, managing, and maintaining plans and activities. The arrangement and planning of a programme consider the factors of determining objects, goals, content, techniques, flexibility of time and manpower, ease of infrastructure and infrastructure and financial implications involved. These factors will determine the success of a programme and the improvements that need to be made in the future.

While the term 'da'wah', originating from Arabic, signifies calling, driving, and inviting. While from the point of view of scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradhawi (Al-Qaradhawi, 1978) and Muhammad Abu Fatih al-Bayanuni (Al-Bayanuni, 2010), followed by local scholars such as Abd al-Malik Abd al-Karim Amrullah (HAMKA) (Amrullah, 1984) and Zin (2006), formulate the definition of da'wah as a movement that calls for, bringing, convincing, and changing the situation of the individual and the Muslim community to the faith of tauhid and the spread of Islam as well as averting and saving people from destruction, and disbelief. It is considered an effort to connect the prophetic pamphlet to return to a perfect and complete system of Islamic life covering the aspects of nutrition, wearing, association, family, economy, community, and statehood.

In this regard, the meaning of the da'wah programme is a form of planning activities that call and teach people to recognise and obey the teachings of Islam as well as prevent from committing tyranny and damage to others. The process of formation and construction of the programme should focus on four important elements, namely *Da'i* (Preacher), *Maud'u* (Content), *Uslub/Manhaj/Wasilah* (method) and *Mad'u* (Da'wah Targets) (Zin, 2006).

'Mualaf' refers to a person whose heart is softened to convert and profess Islam, entitling them to receive zakat. Religious authorities in Malaysia tend to maintain the use of the term 'mualaf' due to the privileges and specific treatment in terms of educational and financial assistance given to the New Brothers (Mat et al., 2019; Subri et al., 2015). The term 'Mualaf', derived from the Arabic words *allafa*, *yua'llifu*, *ta'lifan*, means gathering or uniting something with something else (Ibn Manzur, 1994). However, the specific meaning of this phrase is detailed by Allah SWT through His statement in Surah al-Taubah 9:60:

Meaning:

"Indeed, the alms are for the poor, and the poor, and the amil-amil who take care of it, and the converts who are tamed by their hearts, and for the servants who want to set themselves free, and those who are in debt, and to spend in the way of Allah SWT, and those who are traveling on their way. (The ruling is as a decree from Allah SWT. And Allah SWT is well aware of the wisdom"

The *Mu'allafah Qulubuhum* group mentioned in the above verse is a group of people who are tamed with Islam and are categorised as one of the asnaf who are eligible to receive zakat to strengthen their faith towards the truth of Islam (Qutb, 1998). However, the converts often face both internal and external challenges from the previous, during and post-Islamic process (Abdullah, 2009; Ghani, 2017; Muhamat @ Kawangit, 2014). These challenges

contribute significantly to self-conflict, conflicts within the community, and influence the level of religious appreciation.

Highlights of past studies related to the development of da'wah in Sarawak have been conducted in various forms, including historical studies, biographies of figures, contributions, and survey studies on the level of understanding of converts in the da'wah programme. Historical and biographical studies highlight the figures of preachers who contributed to da'wah activities in Sarawak, especially JAIS and HIKMAH organisations at the management level up to the field such as Datuk Haji Abdul Kadir Hassan (Yasin, 2005), Abdul Rahman Ya'kub (Sebli, 2015), and Dato' Seri Pehin Abdul Taib Mahmud (Romji et al., 2018). The historical study of the development of da'wah converts in Sarawak focuses on the contribution of HIKMAH to increasing the number of Islamists in Kuching, Sarawak (1994-2017). The convert village project is among the pilot projects in creating a village environment equipped with complete infrastructure and various enrichment programmes that are jointly managed between the village community members and the government (Razali, 2018). Also studied is the role of the Da'wah HIKMAH Training Institute, which provides the best educational platform for honing da'wah leadership talents among converts (Yusman, 2018). The da'wah *bi al-hal* HIKMAH approach has successfully highlighted the feature of 'hikmah' in the filling of community and welfare programmes (Ibrahim & Nasir, 2018; Narawi et al., 2018).

In this regard, several studies were conducted to examine aspects of understanding and mastery of knowledge as well as the appreciation of religious converts in Sarawak. A collection of past studies showed the level of understanding of basic Islamic knowledge and the implementation of specific religious practices are beneficial for meeting the spiritual needs and primary obligations of Muslims (Hamrie, 2013; Guleng et al., 2019). The children of Sarawakian converts possess a strong understanding of Fardhu 'Ain knowledge, yet their practical implementation of that knowledge is moderate (Jalil et al., 2017). The situation is similar for the convert community in remote areas, like the Penan community, where there are challenges in performing Fardhu and Sunnah prayers, despite being able to understand the Islamic principles and faith well (Yusoff, 2010).

Preliminary studies have shown that converts under the supervision of the HIKMAH programme have failed to understand the concept of worship properly, leading to inconsistent performance in prayers and fasting (Peri, 1990). Another issue is the involvement and participation of women converts in the HELWA unit programme, part of HIKMAH, is hindered by time constraints and a preference for Islamic arts programmes like nasheed (Tibek, 2018). Therefore, to address these challenges, HIKMAH preachers should adopt various modern approaches leveraging technology and master communication and language skills, especially in the interior areas (Bujang et al., 2012). The preachers need to master the techniques of socialising with the local culture to choose a focused learning material that is suitable for the flexibility of the time, locations, and types of work of the target group (Basir et al., 2019).

Thus, the researchers examined the cocoon in past studies that led to the management and implementation of the convert da'wah programme in Sarawak. The impact studies of existing programmes are conducted without considering the barriers, tribulations, and strategic planning that are crucial for determining their success. Therefore, the scope of

the study should be expanded by looking at the prospects of the converts in Sarawak. This will ensure that various forms of filling and implementation are directed towards the development of regional da'wah within the context of ethno-religion da'wah.

### **Methodology**

This paper uses a qualitative study method using the design of document analysis studies such as books, journal articles, and proceedings related to study issues. The findings were obtained analytically and presented in the form of descriptive analysis. Such methods are very helpful for the authors to understand and identify issues and contexts of the study based on secondary information sources (Ismail & Ali, 2018).

Document analysis is important to obtain a more accurate and reliable level of research study. According to Rahman et al (2017), document analysis can help researchers obtain data directly without the need to refer to the individuals or officers involved. In terms of authenticity and proof, it is also unquestionable as it is ascertained and consistent. This data is also often used to present, amplify, and support information and can be used for comparing old data with new information. Therefore, the researchers will leverage the data to deepen the knowledge theoretically to make a thorough and detailed analysis of primary data. This involves researching scientific information and assisting in the process of writing more critical study reports.

### **Finding and Discussion**

This study focuses on review the prospects that can be explored by preachers in empowering the da'wah programme in Sarawak. The findings of this study are analyzed based on the following aspects:

#### *Amalgamation and Mixed Marriage*

The marriages of Muslim rulers to daughters of other empires during the Malacca Malay Sultanate era opened the door to the spread of Islam around the world (Osman, 1981). This influence continued in the post-independence era and contributed to one of the main factors in the increase in the number of Islamic conversions in Malaysia (Majid & Zin, 2015; Majid et al., 2017). Many converts decided to embrace Islam based on their love for a Muslim partner. However, legal practices in Malaysia do not allow interfaith marriages. As a result, non-Muslim couples have no choice but to convert to Islam before marriage (Awang & Khambali, 2015).

The impact of mixed marriages has succeeded in forming a minority and ethnic communities such as the Muslim Chinese community, Indian Muslims and others. Some of them assimilate into the culture of the Muslim-majority community in Malaysia, which is the Malay Muslim culture. This aspect of assimilation does not erode the original identity of the nation or their original ancestry despite being married into the Muslim community (Abdullah & Moiden, 2018). Nevertheless, Rahman (2017), does not consider marriage to be the main factor in attracting converts to Islam. On the other hand, there are those who convert to Islam out of their own will, not because they wish to marry a Muslim partner. Here are two situations of marriage of converts which are converts to Islam before marriage and same-sex marriage. This situation arises from the increased religious awareness of converts, overcoming the desire to pair exclusively with Muslim couples.

The marriage factor is the primary driver in Islamic conversion in Sarawak. Many individuals acquire the teachings of Islam after marrying a Muslim partner. As such, the prospect of preaching is widespread among the relatives of the couple despite the challenges involved in guiding them. Furthermore, Muslim couples have the potential to become Islamic ambassadors in displaying the beauty of Islamic morality and teachings to non-Muslim families. The living environment of converts in Sarawak is quite unique, with some still living with non-Muslim families in longhouses. In other situations, the intention of Islamisation is often welcome by non-Muslim families when their children marry Muslim spouses. This acceptance was driven by the positive Islamic experience that occurred among their immediate family members (Basir et al., 2019).

#### *Cultural Interaction and Integration*

In Malaysia, the concept of cultural integration is translated into state policy to create national cohesion based on the sharing of customs, legislation, leadership, and universal values. In the context of interaction, Sarawak tends to promote racial unity based on the concept of moderation and reject any form of extremism that mixes with racial, political, and religious sentiments. This cultural interaction is already nurtured in their system of education and daily association (Muis et al., 2021).

The application of Islamic interaction values such as *ta'aruf* (mutual acquaintance), *tafahum* (mutual understanding), *tasamuh* (mutual tolerance), *ta'amul* (mutual interaction), and *ta'awun* (helping each other) in the context of multi-ethnic relations aims to meet the prospects of multi-ethnic da'wah to create compatibility and comfort in inter-racial relations in Sarawak. This effort is not only limited to individuals of the same religion, but it is also aimed at promoting mutual understanding and unity. This is successfully realised through the *Ta'ayush* (co-existence) fiqh model in maintaining the harmony of religious life and respecting the culture of other races in accordance with the provisions of Article 3 (1) of the Malaysian Constitution (Khambali, 2020).

Through the environment of plural society in Malaysia, the non-Muslim community is significantly influenced by the practices and culture of the majority Malay Muslim community. Abdullah and Moiden (2018) considered two main factors that help the process of interaction, integration, and assimilation of the culture of converts before Islam. These factors include friendship and neighborhood. The friendship factor involves the influence of acquaintances in childhood and adolescence. While the neighbourhood factor shows that the Muslim and non-Muslim communities inhabit the same living area. Their association attracts a lot of attention and persuades converts to recognise, learn, and imitate the Muslim way of life. Over time, this leads to a gradual acceptance of the values of Islamic society such as help, respect, courteousness, generosity, and so on (Majid & Zin, 2015).

Zainudin and Abdullah (2018), also acknowledged that converts easily embrace Islam under the influence of friends, family members, and others. The success of Malay Muslim figures in the fields of career, business, education as well as affinity serves as an inspiration for converts to follow their footsteps, including adhering to their religion and beliefs. However, there are also individuals who follow without a strong religious awareness because they do not show any interest in learning and deepening Islam before converting. Such impulses require guidance from close acquaintances and the Islamic environment, which can



bring them closer to religious appreciation (Abdullah, 2009). This scenario is supported by the study of Ali and Abdullah (2020), which found that the association with other races helps converts in adapting to their new living environment in Sarawak. Friendly associations with the Malay community have managed to increase the understanding and interest of converts in practicing the teachings of Islam without coercion.

#### *The Role of Mass Media and Information Technology*

Da'wah through media communication and information technology is also one of the best approaches in conveying the message of Islam to converts. Awang (2015), acknowledges the role of the media as an effective communication tool in countering the negative responses of non-Muslim families to converts through civilisation dialogue. They can also directly understand Islam using audio and visual media, such as recording religious talks and recitations of the Quran on television and radio. Such media influence the lives of converts from the pre-conversion process of recognising, understanding to correcting misunderstandings related to the teachings of Islam.

In addition, Fuad and Ismail (2019), found that print media and new media based on technological sophistication play a significant role in disseminating information on the content of religious programmes conducted by religious bodies such as PERKIM. This medium is effective as all information provided can be communicated more quickly. Today, social media is also considered to dominate the younger generation as well as being a more convenient and cost-effective Islamic message delivery platform. Information on da'wah centres and guidance programmes from the da'wah muallaf organisation can be accessed more easily and quickly using social media in a prudent and careful manner.

According to Abdullah et al (2019), techno-daie groups and converts can take advantage of social media to enhance their understanding, knowledge, and sharing of information on Islamic teachings from authoritative and authentic sources. This is because the influx of Islamic information on social media needs monitoring and research to avoid the spread of false information distorting understanding and knowledge. Thus, the impact of media usage extends to the adaptation of mobile technology, such as smartphones, as a medium for learning among converts in Malaysia. For example, Phang et al (2019), used the M-Learning platform to build a free 'Edu-Muallaf' application based on online learning methods. This application provides facilities for converts to learn about Islam at any time and complete the learning modules according to their respective capabilities.

In Sarawak, the context of da'wah through the mass media is not yet widespread but is evolving with the development of da'wah media in Peninsular Malaysia. The success of TV stations such as Hijrah and Astro Oasis TV channels has inspired other local TV channels, such as TVS, to plan da'wah programmes that are in line with the reality of the community in Sarawak. A series of reality programmes and talk shows are among the preferred mediums for highlighting the delivery of Islamic messages in a relaxed and engaging manner (Saidpudin, 2017). In addition, the rise in gadgets usage and internet access has influenced the younger generation to turn to new media, particularly social media platforms like *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, and *TikTok*, which they choose to deliver Islamic da'wah interactively, creatively, and innovatively (Manaf, 2018; Mokhtar & Hassan, 2021). Therefore, various da'wah strategies are being planned through the media, including inviting prominent

preachers and religious figures, screenings Islamic dramas and sketches, broadcasting nasheed songs, and disseminating community projects from local Islamic NGOs such as YADIM, ABIM, MACMA, LAKAH, PDMK, HIKMAH, and HIKAM.

Not only that, but Sarawak has also pioneered the establishment of the Islamic Information Centre (IIC) on 17 August 2008 as a platform to disseminate Islamic-related information among the Sarawak community. This centre plays a crucial role in providing a profound understanding of the principles and values of Islamic universality across cultures, races, and religions. Good cooperation between this centre and Islamic NGOs in Sarawak has led to the implementation of scientific programmes, including programmes that connect the Muslim community and converts. The approach through media channels is leveraged by IIC in channeling information through programmes, talks, forums, arts and innovation festivals, community projects, and digital libraries. Various Muslim intellectuals and professionals from diverse backgrounds are invited to discuss and engage in forums on various contemporary Muslim issues, including the challenges faced by converts in Sarawak (Yusoff, 2018).

### **Religious Tolerance**

Sarawak is known as a state that practices the concept of religious tolerance in Malaysia. This situation is supported by a study conducted by Talib et al. (2014), which shows that 98% of Sarawak's ethnic respondents have a positive perception of religious tolerance. This is because the multi-ethnic community in Sarawak practices a culture of mutual respect among the adherents of different religions. Among the contributing factors are the result of a good understanding of Islam and a sense of accountability in building good relations within the religious community, thereby improving interfaith relations (Yusoff, 2010).

This scenario is further reinforced by the study of Khambali and Sintang (2014), which found that 92% of the respondents from the Bidayuh community do not have trouble associating with non-Muslim families because of their perception that all religions are true which promote goodness among their adherents. This is because the Bidayuh community is educated to exhibit respect, interact harmoniously, and get along well with people of different religions backgrounds. This tolerant attitude has successfully dispelled prejudices and misconceptions towards interfaith relations and is openly accepting inter-ethnic and religious diversity. Additionally, Yon et al (2011) explored the acceptance of the concept of civilizational dialogue, which is also among other factors contributing to the success of this culture of tolerance. A total of 53.5% of the respondents in their study understood the concept of life dialogue through daily interactions and activities such as *gotong royong* and celebrations with the non-Muslim community. In fact, they did not have a chance to discuss religious issues with non-Muslim acquaintances, yet they still showcased respect by attending *Gawai* celebrations, weddings, death ceremonies and even sitting in the same house with them. Such an atmosphere indirectly opens a space for the non-Muslim community to get to know Islam better.

This attitude, in turn, shaped religious life based on the norms of the multi-ethnic society in Sarawak. This situation affects people's thinking and behavior patterns, especially in terms of interaction, application, and conversation. The study of Chek (2019) shows how religious beliefs are influenced by a high level of understanding, practice, and acceptance of interfaith interactions among the Bidayuh community in Sarawak. The results of this study

affect the formation of a dynamic model of Muslim society for maintaining the well-being of religious life. Moreover, Saadon and Yusoff (2014) study illustrates the success of Kampung Senah Rayang in forming a dynamic social community. This success is attributed to various factors, including family, neighbourhood, community, leadership, Islamic social interactions, and efforts to maintain harmony with other religious adherents. This environment encourages cooperation between state proselytising bodies to increase religious programmes among the rural convert community in Sarawak.

#### *Regional Preaching Cooperation Network*

The increase in the number of Islamists every year has had a positive impact on the development of Islam in Malaysia. Malaysia continues to be known as a regional da'wah hub and is one of the preferred destinations for non-Muslim communities from various countries to recognise, understand, and learn Islam in peace and harmony. According to Don and Puteh (2017), the position of Islam in the Malaysian constitution, the government's da'wah initiative, and the existence of interracial interaction and communication are among the prospects of multi-ethnic da'wah that need to be cultivated by the da'wah bodies in Malaysia. Such encouragement opens the opportunity for Malaysia to establish regional and global ties with several Islamic countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Saudi Arabia, and others. This effort is a long-term strategic plan for planning and implementing global, intensive, and continuous da'wah programmes.

It is generally known that Malaysia-Indonesia relations have long been established and influence the development of regional da'wah in the context of the Malay World civilisation. Factors like employment migration, diplomatic relations, marriage, and student mobility between the two countries contribute greatly to the strength and empowerment of Islamic da'wah in terms of intellect, economic development, and unification of the *ummah*. According to Sulaiman and Othman (2015), the cultural characteristics and spirit of the Malay-Islamic community have managed to bind the unity of the Muslim Malays between these two countries with the same historical background through a network of scholars, works of local intellectuals, and preaching organisations. This network of cooperation is manifested in the context of educational and community preaching through the signing of memorandums of understanding (MoUs) between higher education institutions and da'wah organisations, organising seminars, conferences, and forums, as well as collaboration in community and humanitarian projects at the international level.

Sarawak is synonymous with this collaboration due to its location within the island of Borneo. In evidence, two figures, al-Marhum Prof. Dr. Amarallah Karim (HAMKA) and M. Natsir, were among the leadership of Indonesian scholars who had contributed greatly to the development of Islamic da'wah in Sarawak. Al-Marhum M. Natsir, for example, had a close relationship with the NGO BINA-HIKMAH, as he had sent several Indonesian preachers to Sarawak, while Prof. HAMKA was specially invited to the Islamic Seminar in 1975 in Kuching to share knowledge, ideas and experiences with youths who were about to pursue their studies abroad (BINA-HIKMAH 50 Years Souvenir Book 1969-2019).

Currently, the collaboration of regional preaching programmes takes place in academic networks and intellect through conference platforms between Public Institutions of Higher Learning (IPTA) and State Islamic Religious Institutions (IAIN). The conference brings

together Islamic academics and researchers from three countries, namely Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. For example, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Sarawak Branch, through the Borneo Islamic Development and Research Centre (PPIB), actively organises the Borneo Islamic International Conference (KAIB) every year in several regions of the Borneo archipelago, such as Sabah, Brunei, Banjarmasin, Samarinda, and Pontianak. The collection of academic papers is compiled from various perspectives on issues and areas of expertise covering aspects of economics, da'wah, halal, and Islamic education in Borneo. Academic studies related to the da'wah convert were also presented and debated, covering problems, challenges, prospects for the management of the converts' da'wah, and the economic empowerment and distribution of zakat to them.

#### *The Role of the Center and Institution of Proselytising*

The educational platform is the most important vehicle for the management of the da'wah institution to sustain relevant and conducive preaching programmes. Most da'wah organisations institutionalise schools, *madrassahs*, and severances according to their goals. Among their goals is to create a calibration centre to produce a generation of preachers who will continue the idealism and struggle of the organisation. Therefore, many NGOs and federal preaching bodies have established their own Da'wah Training Centers (PLD), some of which are partially rated as universities and university colleges. For example, there is the establishment of Kolej Darul Hikmah ABIM, Instiut Da'wah Islamiah PERKIM and Institute of Islamic Studies & Da'wah IPDAS, JAKIM Sabah Branch. IDIP and IPDAS focus on offering the field of study and da'wah skills to target groups among converts.

This development has also impacted the role of the da'wah bodies in Sarawak in establishing a centre of ideologicalism, vision, and the local environment. There are two well-known institutions in Sarawak that are geared towards the activities of converts in Sarawak, namely the Islamic Skills Institute of Malaysia Sarawak (IKMAS) under the control of JAKIM and the Da'wah Training Centre (PLD) under the management of the NGO da'wah HIKMAH. IKMAS is the earliest institution to offer academic courses in the field of Islamic science. Its establishment resulted from the agreement of ASEAN-level religious ministers (Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Brunei) in Langkawi in 1994. Subsequently, the Cabinet Meeting approved its establishment at Kg. Telaga Air, Kuching Sarawak on 21 September 1994. With the motto "*Fastabiqul Khairat*", IKMAS is committed to producing preachers equipped with religious knowledge and da'wah skills in line with current developments. In the context of da'wah converts, IKMAS offers the Basic Certification Programme of Islamic Studies (PERAPI) to train converts to guide the surrounding community according to the sunnah track, *manhaj ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* and the mould of ethnic customs in Sarawak (Mohamad et al., 2014; Yusoff, 2019).

The great contribution of the da'wah NGO BINA-HIKMAH is its emphasis on the integrated development of da'wah converts in rural areas through education, welfare, and community programmes. The education programme was highlighted through the efforts of BINA-HIKMAH, which actively sent local and foreign da'ie to rural areas to teach the Islamic faith and the basics of Fardhu 'Ain to converts. The educational channel among converts was successfully institutionalised through the history of the establishment of the HIKMAH Da'wah Training Centre. The centre strengthened the roles of Dar al-Rahmah (1975) and Institut Da'wah Dar Falah (IDDF) (1983). The centre is located at Batu 24, Jalan Lama Kuching Serian,

and started recruiting the first batch of students in 2014, specifically male students, and subsequently opening PLD for women in 2015. The establishment is the result of a joint venture between Lembaga Amanah Kebajikan Darul Falah and Tabung Baitulmal Sarawak (TBS), which focuses on the leadership of Islamic radicalisation among converts in Sarawak. The centre's efforts to cover the shortage of preachers among the converts were needed to continue the preaching efforts in their villages (Ibrahim & Nasir, 2018).

The courses offered include the 18-month Da'wah Basic Study Course, and students can also further their studies at several local and foreign universities, such as the Islamic University of Medina, Mohamad Riyadh Islamic University, Ma'ahad Tahfiz al-Quran Yemen, Mut'ah Jordan University, and IAIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Surabaya, Indonesia. The centre provides facilities such as hostels, dining, textbooks, lecture rooms, mosques, and sports facilities. Students are exposed to the basic Islamic learning syllabus such as tafsir, hadith, sirah, fiqh, tauhid, akhlak, tajwid, Arabic, and English.

#### *Construction of Islamic New Village Project (PBI)*

The construction of the Islamic New Village (PBI) is a community project supervised by the da'wah sector of NGO organisation BINA-HIKMAH. The New Islamic Village (PBI) refers to a village where most of the population is Muslim and subsequently led by Muslims from the local community. The various facilities provided in this project primarily include infrastructure equipment, such as surau, mosque, multipurpose hall and have teachers and preachers stationed there. The preachers are on full-time duty to carry out, supervise, and coordinate the activities of da'wah and religious in the rural areas.

Apart from that, the village administration is also streamlined with the establishment of a Village Development and Committee (JKKK) to ensure safety, security, and transparency of community and neighbourhood life. In addition, this project has had a significant positive impact by providing protection and comfort to the converts to live as Muslims without interference and threats from outsiders. Surau, mosques, and the Islamic Community Centre (PKI) serve as sites of various religious activities and programmes conducted by HIKMAH to ensure the welfare and process of religious guidance for the converts is not neglected (Ibrahim & Nasir, 2018).

The Islamic Community Centre (PKI) is an effort and contribution of HIKMAH to create a centre in the village of Brother Kita to be used as a place for worship and religious activities. HIKMAH took this initiative with the villagers, starting from site selection, forming a construction committee, to the completion of the centre at a moderate cost. To date, there are five PKIs that are actively forecasting construction, such as:

1. Temaga Dayak Village, Lundu/Sematan
2. Pueh Village, Embed
3. Kampung Punggu Mawang, Pantu, Sri Aman
4. Lot 118 Sg. Empila, Rituh
5. Plaman Toap Village, Padawan
6. Kampung Marasam Parit, Limbang
7. Delok B Scheme, Lubok Antu, Sri Aman

According to the request, there are several other villages that have contacted HIKMAH to build a similar centre in their place. HIKMAH will take positive steps on the matter to provide facilities for worship to the converts. With the existence of these centres, HIKMAH's efforts and services to converts become more practical, objective, and strategic. After completing construction, HIKMAH ensures a guidance programme is implemented at the centres, with da'wah officers conducting da'wah activities at the centre. This ensures that none of the converts drop out of religious guidance classes such as Fardhu 'Ain and recitation.

To date, there are several PBI projects that are listed as the best convert village models in Sarawak and are still in the process of being handed over to the Sarawak Islamic Religious Council (MIS). Some villages listed as Islamic New Village (PBI) under the supervision of HIKMAH include Darul Islam Belimbing Village (1980), Darul Iman Village, Tebedu (1982), Darul Huda Village, Tepoi, and Darul Falah Village, Tebedu (Yaman, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Sarawak's Islamic da'wah has flourished greatly since the establishment of New Brothers or Converts communities, especially considering the state's diverse population. However, it is important to understand that Muslims in Sarawak, especially the community of converts, are still regarded as minority groups. Therefore, preachers must possess the necessary knowledge and abilities for effective evangelising in order to prevent inciting racial and religious tensions that can jeopardise religious concord. Ensuring the convert programme's viability would require efforts to celebrate Sarawak's socio-cultural diversity while making sure its content and methodology stay current.

The study identifies a number of effective tactics, such as the practice of blending cultures, the establishment of centers for teaching and moderating, the promotion of cooperation amongst Islamic countries in the region, and the funding of village projects and Community Service Centers (PKI). Together, these tactics provide a "two-pronged" strategy that steadily and dynamically aids converts in Sarawak. These are the tactics that preachers can take advantage of in order to improve the implementation of da'wah programmes, particularly in Sarawak's rural areas. The da'wah programme can effectively reach and connect with diverse populations by adopting these tactics, which will promote tolerance, understanding, and unity within Sarawak's multireligious culture.

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