

Building Harmony in Diversity in Papua

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Abstract

Papua is one of the most heterogeneous regions in Indonesia, with more than 261 ethnic groups and over 250 local languages, making it a unique laboratory of multiculturalism. This diversity presents both opportunities for harmony and risks of tension, thus requiring wise strategies for management. The Community Service Program (PkM) entitled "Building Harmony in Diversity in Papua" at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua aimed to strengthen awareness of tolerance, intercultural dialogue, and respect for both customary and religious values. The program was carried out through interactive lectures and discussions facilitated by the Head of STAKPN Sentani. The results revealed that harmony is not merely the absence of conflict but a dynamic process nurtured through justice, solidarity, and respect for differences. Discussions highlighted the role of students as agents of tolerance and religious leaders as social mediators. In conclusion, harmony in Papua can only be achieved if indigenous traditions, religious values, and inclusive education are consistently practiced as foundations of unity in diversity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Papua has at least 261 ethnic groups and more than 250 regional languages that are alive and passed down from generation to generation, making it the most heterogeneous region in Indonesia. In West Papua, the largest ethnic group (Javanese) comprises only 14.76% of the population, while in Papua, the largest group (Dani) comprises around 23.32%. Many ethnic groups are very small, each comprising less than 1% of the population, indicating a high level of fragmentation [1].

In terms of religion, Papuan society adheres to various beliefs, ranging from Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, to local beliefs, and lives together in harmony. Local principles such as 'Satu Tungku Tiga Batu' and 'Satu Rumah Empat Pintu' serve as the glue that binds social harmony, supported by the values of Pancasila [2].

However, diversity also has the potential to cause friction if it is not managed wisely. Papua's history records social, political and religious conflicts rooted in differences in interests and identities. The influx of Muslim migrants from outside Papua into predominantly Christian areas has caused social and religious tensions. However, religious conflicts in Papua tend not to escalate into large-scale violence as in other regions, thanks to local mechanisms and cultural wisdom that promote peace [3].

This situation emphasises that building harmony amid diversity is not merely an option, but an urgent necessity for a peaceful and just future for Papua. Thus, harmony must be established as the foundation of communal life. Sociologically, Papua can be viewed as a laboratory of multiculturalism that showcases interactions between diverse ethnicities, religions, and cultures. Migration from various regions in Indonesia has enriched Papua's social dynamics. Newcomers bring new traditions and customs which, on the one hand, drive economic

development, but on the other hand require integration efforts so that differences do not lead to segregation. Therefore, a strategy is needed to build harmony in this multicultural space.

Adaptive and dialogical cross-cultural communication, as well as religious moderation practices, are key to building trust and reducing segregation between migrants and the indigenous population [4]. Religious figures and local leaders play a vital role in mediating differences and encouraging collaboration [3]. Harmony should not be understood merely as a state without conflict, but rather as an active process of building social balance through justice and respect for others.

Research confirms that harmony is not a static state without conflict, but rather the result of integrating personal, family and community values such as honesty, responsibility, justice and tolerance. This process involves intergenerational dialogue, values-based education and community participation to overcome differences and build inclusive and equitable social cohesion [5], [6]. In the context of Papua, harmony means respecting local customs and wisdom, acknowledging the contributions of migrants, and opening up space for dialogue across cultures and religions. With harmony, Papua's diversity can be transformed into positive energy that strengthens unity in diversity.

Tolerance serves as a bridge that connects differences, whether religious, cultural, linguistic, or social identity. Without tolerance, differences can easily become dividing lines that lead to conflict. Conversely, with mutual respect, differences enrich our shared lives. Therefore, tolerance must be actively practised through daily interactions, education, and formal dialogue between religions and cultures.

The experience of Papua shows many examples of tolerance practices that are deeply rooted in community life. For example, Christians help their Muslim neighbours during Eid al-Fitr, or Muslim youths guard churches during Christmas. These simple practices show that tolerance is not just an abstract concept, but lives in the daily lives of the community. This interfaith and intercultural life builds mutual trust, which is the foundation of social harmony in Papua.

The Community Service Programme (PKM) themed 'Building Harmony in Diversity in Papua' at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua served as a space for reflection and academic dialogue. This activity aims to strengthen the awareness of lecturers, students, and the wider community about the importance of nurturing diversity with values of harmony and tolerance. Through public lectures, it is hoped that a critical understanding of Papuan multiculturalism will grow, while encouraging real action in social life.

Students, as the young intellectual generation, play a strategic role in instilling values of tolerance and brotherhood. They can become agents of education, culture, and society who spread the spirit of peace in various public spaces. Through this Community Service Programme (PkM), students are encouraged to take an active part in maintaining Papua as a peaceful land that sets an example of diversity.

Furthermore, this activity also emphasises the importance of religion as a source of peace, not conflict. Religious teachings that emphasise love, brotherhood, and respect for others must be lived out in the multicultural society of Papua. Thus, spirituality can become a moral force that strengthens tolerance, harmony, and solidarity in a diverse society.

Based on this background, the community service activities carried out by the Head of STAKPN Sentani at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua are not only academically relevant, but also have high social value. The theme 'Building Harmony in Diversity in Papua' is a moral call to nurture plurality with justice, tolerance, and brotherhood. With a shared commitment, Papua can emerge as a symbol of peaceful diversity, as well as a role model for Indonesia and the world.

2. METHOD

The implementation of Community Service (PkM) activities at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua used a lecture and question-and-answer method. In this method, the Head of STAKPN Sentani, as the main speaker, explained the importance of building harmony in diversity in Papua

to all lecturers and students of IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua, which had been designed in PowerPoint format.

After that, the speaker gave the lecturers and students of IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua the opportunity to discuss issues related to the material. This activity took place on Thursday, 4 September 2025, from 10:00 to 12:00 WIT. The participants consisted of lecturers and students from IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua. The community service at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua, based on a programme directed by the STAKPN Sentani institution, is expected to provide solutions to various problems faced by lecturers and students, thereby creating harmony in diversity in Papua.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Papua as a Multicultural Space

Papua is one of the regions richest in ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity in Indonesia. Sociologically, Papua can be viewed as a unique multicultural laboratory because it presents hundreds of ethnic identities interacting in one social space. This condition not only creates colourful Papuan society, but also shows how differences can coexist. Within the framework of multiculturalism, Papua provides a concrete illustration that diversity is not a threat, but rather a social resource that can enrich communal life.

Ethnic and linguistic diversity are the main characteristics of multiculturalism in Papua. Papua (including Papua and West Papua) is the region with the highest level of ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity in Indonesia, and even in the world. There are at least 261 ethnic groups in Papua, with a very even distribution—no single group dominates significantly. In Papua, the largest ethnic group (Dani) comprises only about 23% of the population, while in West Papua, the largest group (Javanese) comprises only 14% [1].

In addition, Papua has around 270–280 regional languages, which is more than a third of the total languages in Indonesia [7]. These languages are divided into two major groups: Austronesian and non-Austronesian (Papuan), with highly diverse linguistic characteristics [8]. Language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of collective identity that marks the uniqueness of each tribe. The existence of these languages shows how deep the roots of local culture are, which continue to be passed down from generation to generation, while also serving as an important foundation for maintaining diversity.

Religious plurality enriches Papua's multicultural landscape. Religious life in Papua encompasses Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and local beliefs. The presence of these religions shapes a social dynamic characterised by cohesion and relatively harmonious interaction. Although friction occasionally arises in practice, the spirit of building togetherness remains the mainstream. This plurality shows that Papua is a space for interfaith dialogue that requires wise management.

The phenomena of migration and urbanisation have also shaped the face of multiculturalism in Papua. The influx of migrants from various regions in Indonesia, such as Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, and Manado, has enriched social interactions in Papua [1], [9]. This migration not only brought new traditions and cultures, but also created integration challenges. On the one hand, the presence of migrants expanded economic networks and development; on the other hand, it demanded a willingness to understand one another and blend together within the framework of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).



Picture 1. The Head of STAKPN Sentani presents Papuan material as a Multicultural Space.

A small portrait of Papuan multiculturalism can be found at Hamadi Market in Jayapura. In this space, interactions between indigenous Papuan traders and Bugis, Javanese, Batak, and other traders take place daily without rigid barriers. Economic transactions become a meeting place that unites various ethnic and religious identities. The market proves that the necessities of life can serve as a bridge that breaks down barriers of difference, while also affirming that harmony can flourish in everyday practices.

Papua's cultural diversity can be likened to a flower garden with a variety of colours and scents. Differences do not negate beauty; rather, they create an enchanting blend. This metaphor teaches us that multiculturalism in Papua is not merely a demographic reality, but a social heritage that needs to be nurtured. Each tribe, religion, and community group is like a flower that gives collective meaning to social life in Papua. Thus, diversity in Papua is an asset that has both aesthetic and ethical value.

However, diversity also carries the potential for friction if not managed wisely. Papua's history records social, political and religious conflicts triggered by differences in interests and identities. Conflicts in Papua are often rooted in ethnic identity struggles and the basic rights of indigenous peoples who feel marginalised by development policies and the presence of migrants [10]. Religious conflicts, particularly between Christians (the majority in Papua) and Muslims (the majority of migrants), are often politicised and become symbols of the struggle for identity and land ownership [11].

These conflicts show that multiculturalism is not a static condition, but rather a process that requires collective awareness. In other words, Papua faces a double challenge: nurturing diversity as a source of wealth, while avoiding the pitfalls of conflict arising from differences. Papuan multiculturalism requires an inclusive approach to education. Education can be a strategic medium for instilling values of mutual respect and appreciation for diversity from an early age. Through local content, schools in Papua are beginning to introduce the importance of respecting cultural identity. Inclusive education not only strengthens local identity, but also instils the ability to interact openly with other cultures. This is important so that the young generation of Papua can become agents of peace.

Intercultural and interfaith dialogue is also an important requirement in building a multicultural space in Papua [12]. Official forums such as FKUB (Forum for Religious Harmony) act as mediators to reduce potential conflicts [13]. In addition, informal spaces such as cultural festivals, traditional events, or religious celebrations can serve as a means of bringing together different identities. This kind of dialogue builds awareness that differences are not a dividing line, but rather a space for encounter that enriches us all.

Within the framework of multiculturalism, customs and local wisdom play a central role. Papuan local wisdom teaches the importance of togetherness and mutual cooperation. Philosophies such as 'Satu Tungku, Tiga Batu' from Fakfak, for example, represent the values

of unity and mutual support in diversity [14]. Customs are not only symbols of identity, but also social instruments that maintain balance in communal life. This shows that multiculturalism in Papua is rooted in strong local traditions.

In addition to customs, religions in Papua also teach universal values that support harmony. Teachings about love, justice, and interfaith brotherhood are in line with the need to build a multicultural society. In this context, religion should serve as a source of peace, not conflict. If religious values are lived sincerely, they can become a moral force that strengthens multiculturalism in Papua. The combination of customs and religion shows that the social foundations of Papua are complementary.

The economy is also an important aspect of multiculturalism in Papua. Economic interaction enables integration and cooperation across identities. Markets, cooperatives, and small and medium-sized enterprises are social spaces where people from different backgrounds meet and depend on each other. It is this economic dynamic that makes multiculturalism in Papua more than just an idealism, but a reality in everyday activities. The economy has proven to be a social glue in diversity.

However, multiculturalism in Papua also faces challenges in the form of discrimination and stereotypes. There is still mutual suspicion among different groups, which is exacerbated by development gaps. Economic inequality can lead to a sense of injustice that results in social jealousy. Therefore, it is important to have development policies that promote social justice, so that multiculturalism does not become a source of tension. Equitable development is key to creating social integration.

Identity politics also poses a serious challenge to multiculturalism in Papua. When a group excessively emphasises a particular identity, the dividing line between 'us' and 'them' becomes stronger. Identity politics can erode a sense of togetherness and disrupt social cohesion. Therefore, strategies for building multiculturalism must be directed towards creating equal and inclusive spaces for dialogue. A cultural politics that prioritises unity is more needed than a divisive identity politics.

With all its uniqueness and challenges, Papua is a multicultural space full of potential. Ethnic, linguistic, religious and migratory diversity can be a social strength if managed wisely. Multiculturalism in Papua requires a shared role: the state through fair policies, society through dialogue and tolerance, and the younger generation through education and concrete action. Thus, Papua is not only Indonesia's multicultural laboratory, but also a model for the world in maintaining harmony in diversity.

2. Harmony as the Foundation of Community Life

Harmony in the context of social life cannot be understood merely as the absence of conflict, but rather as a dynamic process that is continuously built through justice, mutual respect, and respect for others. Papua, with its diversity of ethnic groups, religions, and cultures, needs a foundation of harmony so that this diversity becomes a source of strength, not a source of division. Harmony acts as a balancing force that allows different groups to coexist peacefully.

The aspect of harmony in society and culture creates balance between individuals and society, tolerance, and solidarity [15]. In a social and religious context, harmony means living together with mutual respect, tolerance, and recognition of the rights of each group [16]. From a psychological perspective, harmony is an important prerequisite for creating inner balance, flexibility, and openness to differences [17].

Harmony is an important prerequisite for social cohesion. It serves to maintain balance in interactions between individuals and groups in a heterogeneous society. Papua, as a multicultural space, requires social mechanisms that ensure differences do not become threats. With harmony, communities can manage differences in interests and identities in a healthier and more productive manner.



Picture 2. The Head of STAKPN Sentani presents Harmony as the Foundation of Community Life.

Harmony in Papua can be achieved through respect for customs and local wisdom. Each tribe has traditions rich in values of togetherness and mutual cooperation, which can be used as a basis for building a shared life [18]. Local wisdom acts as a bridge that unites communities across ethnic and religious lines, because its values are universal. By reviving traditional values, harmony can grow stronger. In addition to customs, harmony also requires recognition of the contributions of migrants to regional development. Migration has enriched the social dynamics of Papua, both economically and culturally. The presence of migrants should be seen not as a threat, but as partners in building shared prosperity [19]. With this recognition, a sense of togetherness can be fostered so that relationships between groups become more inclusive.

Interfaith and intercultural dialogue is one of the main instruments for building harmony. Dialogue provides opportunities for communities to understand, respect and work together to resolve issues. In Papua, religious harmony forums and cultural festivals can be effective mediums for strengthening interactions across identities. Through dialogue, prejudices can be eroded and solidarity strengthened.

The case study of the Sentani Lake Festival is a concrete example of how harmony can be expressed through art and culture. In this festival, traditional Papuan dances are performed alongside cultural performances from outside Papua. The diversity on display reflects an inclusive attitude, where every culture is given space to express itself without discrimination. This reflects the tolerance that exists in cultural practices.

Harmony as the foundation of communal life requires the principle of social justice. Without justice, harmony is fragile because marginalised groups will feel excluded [20]. Equitable development in Papua is an important part of efforts to create a sense of justice within a multicultural society. Justice is not only about economic distribution, but also access to education, health care and political participation.

It is important to note that harmony does not arise automatically, but must be consciously maintained. It is the result of a collective commitment by all elements of society to place humanity above differences. This awareness requires humility, mutual respect, and a willingness to share living space. Without collective awareness, harmony remains an abstract concept without realisation.

In a global context, harmony in Papua can be seen as an important contribution to Indonesia's national stability. As a strategic region, Papua has become a symbol of how diversity is managed within the framework of nationality. If harmony is successfully maintained, Papua will not only be a peaceful home for its people, but also an example to the world of how to manage plurality.

Harmony also has a spiritual dimension. Almost all religions in Papua teach the principles of love, brotherhood, and respect for others. These spiritual values can become a moral foundation that strengthens multicultural life. Religion, in the context of harmony,

should function as a source of positive energy that encourages unity, not as a trigger for conflict that divides society.

Expressions of harmony in Papua are evident in the daily lives of people of different faiths. For example, Christians help their Muslim neighbours during Eid al-Fitr, or Muslims help guard churches during Christmas celebrations. These practices show that harmony is not just a discourse, but is present in real social actions. These interfaith relations strengthen mutual trust and keep communities away from potential conflicts.

In the cultural sphere, harmony is also manifested through local philosophical values, such as the expression ‘Satu Tungku Tiga Batu’ (One Stove, Three Stones) from Fakfak. This philosophy conveys the meaning that differences are a source of unity, not a barrier. Local values such as these inspire us to believe that harmony can grow from the wisdom of the community itself, without always having to rely on external intervention.

Strong harmony will create high social solidarity. This was proven when a natural disaster struck Sentani in 2019, where people from various backgrounds worked together to help the victims [21]. Churches opened their buildings to refugees, mosques provided public kitchens, and students organised interfaith aid efforts. This solidarity shows that harmony can give rise to collective strength in the face of crisis.

Nevertheless, harmony still faces challenges in the form of discrimination, stereotypes, and identity politics [22]. These challenges can weaken the sense of community if not managed properly. Therefore, building harmony in Papua requires a sustainable strategy: inclusive education, cross-cultural dialogue, and equitable development policies. Harmony can only be sustained if it is supported by a fair social and political system.

Thus, harmony as the foundation of communal life in Papua is not a utopian concept, but rather an urgent necessity. It is a prerequisite for diversity to become a source of strength, rather than a source of division. Harmony built through customs, religion, dialogue, justice, and solidarity will be the main capital for a peaceful future for Papua. If harmony is maintained, Papua can emerge as a model of diversity that thrives in a world often divided by differences.

3. Tolerance as a Bridge

Tolerance in a multicultural society is not merely an attitude of accepting differences, but rather a bridge that enables healthy interaction between identities [23]. Papua, with its plurality of ethnicities, religions and cultures, demands tolerance as a connecting mechanism. It serves to bridge diversity that has the potential to trigger conflict, so that differences become a source of strength. In this context, tolerance is a prerequisite for building sustainable social cohesion.

Conceptually, tolerance means giving others space to live according to their beliefs without feeling threatened. Tolerance is not only passive, but actively builds interactions that respect human dignity. Thus, it requires awareness that every identity has the same right to be present in the public sphere. Papua is a clear example of where tolerance must be practised as a social necessity, not merely a moral choice.



Picture 3. Presenters taking a group photo with lecturers and students of IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua

Without tolerance, differences can turn into dividing lines that cause friction. The history of Papua shows how identity conflicts often stem from a lack of tolerance. Conversely, with tolerance, diversity can be transformed into positive energy that strengthens unity. Tolerance, in this case, acts as a glue that keeps society intact in the face of global and local challenges.

Tolerance in Indonesia's diverse society is a social bridge that maintains national unity. This view is relevant in Papua, where diversity of identity is a daily reality [24]. Without a bridge of tolerance, differences will be easily exploited by certain parties for political identity purposes. Therefore, tolerance needs to be practised in a tangible way in various aspects of social life.

Tolerance has been proven to be a key mediator in positive interactions, strengthening social relationships and encouraging healthy collaboration. Without tolerance, interactions tend to be superficial and conflict-ridden. Conversely, with tolerance, the potential of individuals and groups can be optimally developed through constructive interactions [25]. This means that people must not only avoid conflict, but must engage in cooperation across differences. Papua needs a form of active tolerance that creates inclusive social networks, where all groups feel they have a place. Active tolerance ensures that differences become opportunities, not threats.

Interfaith relations are the main arena for the practice of tolerance in Papua. The Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) plays an important role as a forum for dialogue and mediation. Through this forum, potential conflicts between communities can be mitigated before they escalate. The existence of the FKUB shows that tolerance is not just a slogan, but an institutionalised social system for maintaining peace. This also demonstrates the importance of formal mechanisms in building harmony.

In addition to official forums, tolerance is also taught through education. Schools in Papua have begun to incorporate local content that emphasises the importance of respecting differences. These efforts are in line with national programmes such as the Love Curriculum launched by the Ministry of Religious Affairs [26]. Education serves as a strategic means of instilling tolerance from an early age, so that the younger generation becomes accustomed to living with differences.

The practice of tolerance is also reflected in the daily lives of Papuan society. A clear example of this can be seen when Christians help their Muslim neighbours during Eid al-Fitr, or when Muslims guard churches during Christmas celebrations. These simple actions show that tolerance is not just a theoretical concept, but is present in real actions. Such social relations build a sense of mutual trust that is difficult to break by conflict.

One notable case is when Muslim youths guard churches during Christmas, while Christian youths guard mosques during Eid al-Fitr. This pattern of mutual protection demonstrates a form of active tolerance rooted in solidarity. Such practices show that tolerance is not merely about restraint, but the courage to be there for others. It manifests as a strong social bond.

Tolerance is also important in the economic sphere. Markets in Papua, such as Hamadi Market, are social spaces where different identities meet and cooperate. Economic transactions take place regardless of ethnic or religious differences. These activities show that the necessities of life can break down identity barriers, as long as society is able to uphold an attitude of tolerance. Thus, the economy can be a medium for strengthening tolerance.

However, tolerance is not without its challenges. Discrimination, stereotypes, and identity politics remain threats that can weaken social cohesion in Papua. When differences are politicised, tolerance is often tested by narrow interests. Therefore, society needs to develop a critical awareness that intolerance will only weaken communal life. Tolerance must be upheld as a shared value that is higher than group interests.

Strong tolerance requires equitable public policies. The government plays an important role in providing space for dialogue, equitable development, and protection for

vulnerable groups. Without inclusive policy support, tolerance will be fragile in the face of discrimination. Thus, tolerance is not only the responsibility of individuals, but also of the state as the guarantor of a just and peaceful social life.

In addition to structural aspects, the media also plays a role in strengthening or weakening tolerance. Narratives that corner certain groups can trigger intolerance, while narratives that emphasise brotherhood can strengthen social cohesion. Therefore, the media in Papua must play a constructive role in nurturing tolerance. The media has the potential to be a means of public education to foster mutual respect in diversity.

Tolerance also has a spiritual dimension. Almost all religions teach love and respect for others. By sincerely living out religious values, tolerance can take root in society. Religion should be a moral force that strengthens social bridges between groups. In this case, tolerance is not merely a social strategy, but also a spiritual calling that strengthens humanity.

Tolerance is a bridge that connects differences to create a peaceful coexistence [27]. He actively breaks down barriers of identity, fosters mutual trust, and cultivates solidarity. Tolerance in Papua shows that diversity does not have to lead to conflict, but can instead become a collective strength. If tolerance continues to be nurtured, Papua can become a national and even global example of how to live with differences.

4. CONCLUSION

The Community Service Activity with the theme ‘Building Harmony in Diversity in Papua at IAIN Fattahul Muluk’ emphasises that Papua is a unique multicultural laboratory with hundreds of ethnic groups, hundreds of languages, and religious plurality living side by side. This diversity is not merely a demographic fact, but rather a valuable social asset when managed with local wisdom, social justice, and mutual respect. Papua shows that multiculturalism can be a source of collective strength, with harmony as the foundation of communal life that maintains balance in interactions, and tolerance as a bridge that allows differences to merge into solidarity.

This lecture emphasises the importance of the role of all elements of society—from traditional leaders, religious leaders, migrants, to students—in strengthening the commitment to nurture diversity through dialogue, education, and concrete actions in everyday life. Harmony and tolerance that grow from traditional values, religious spirituality, and daily socio-economic practices are the main assets for Papua to emerge as a national and global role model in managing plurality. Papua is not only a home of diversity, but also a source of inspiration on how differences can be a blessing for communal life.

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