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INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE PESANTREN ECONOMY: THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF THE LAMPUNG PROVINCE PESANTREN ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS ASSOCIATION (HEBITREN)

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Abstract

This study analyzes how the Lampung Province Pesantren Economic and Business Association (Himpunan Ekonomi dan Bisnis Pesantren, Hebitren) facilitates the institutional transformation of the economic activities of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) through regional coordination and an inter-pesantren secondary cooperative. The study employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected from July to October 2025 through semi-structured interviews with 12 informants, comprising Hebitren administrators, cooperative administrators, and pesantren business managers, supplemented by field observations and institutional documents. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, with source and methodological triangulation. The results show that Hebitren's strategy rests on institutional formalization, human resource strengthening, the application of Islamic economic principles, data management, education, and inter-institutional partnerships, with the inter-pesantren secondary cooperative serving as the core mechanism for collective procurement, equipment sharing, and coordinated marketing. However, the transformation remains uneven and is constrained by limited managerial and financial literacy, limited capital, dependence on middlemen, and differences in participation across pesantren. The study proposes a four-stage pathway of institutional transformation: formalization, capacity building, integration through the inter-pesantren cooperative, and the formation of a multi-stakeholder economic ecosystem. Its novelty lies in identifying the inter-pesantren cooperative as a strategic instrument for integrating Islamic economic institutions at the regional level, and its findings highlight the importance of synergy among pesantren, the government, and Islamic financial institutions in building an independent pesantren economic ecosystem.

Article Info

- ***Received*** *: 22 July 2026*
- ***Revised*** *: 23 October 2026*
- ***Published*** *: 11 November 2026*
- ***Pages*** *: 763-783*
- ***DOI*** *: 10.33019/ijbe.v10i4.1631*
- ***JEL*** *: P13, L31, Z12*

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• ***Keywords*** *: Hebitren, Pesantren Economic Institutions, Inter-Pesantren Cooperatives, Institutional Transformation, Collaborative Governance.*

1. Introduction

As Islamic educational institutions, pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) play a significant role not only in shaping religious knowledge, character, and spirituality but also in fostering social and economic development in their surrounding communities (Arwani & Masrur, 2022). The expanding role of pesantren in economic activities reflects their potential to function as socio-economic institutions that mobilize human resources, social networks, productive assets, and community trust. Consequently, pesantren are increasingly recognized as potential agents of community economic empowerment and as institutional actors capable of contributing to the development of an Islamic value-based economy (Qalbia & Saputra, 2023). Their extensive grassroots networks, substantial human resources, and strong relationships with local communities provide an important institutional foundation for developing economic activities oriented toward independence, collective welfare, and Islamic values (Khamis, 2021).

Despite this potential, pesantren economic development remains constrained by several structural and managerial problems. Many pesantren continue to rely heavily on donations and have not yet developed professional and sustainable business management systems (Mujibno, 2024). Other challenges include limited financial literacy, weak partnerships with the business sector, inadequate managerial capabilities, and limited institutional support for pesantren-based economic activities (Oktavia et al., 2024; Rahmatika & Abimanyu, 2021). These constraints have resulted in considerable variation in pesantren capacity to manage productive economic activities. Consequently, the existence of business units within pesantren does not necessarily translate into institutional economic independence or sustainable economic empowerment (Kusuma Chrisantina, 2024; Triwibowo, 2020).

These conditions suggest that the economic problem of pesantren cannot be understood solely as a problem of entrepreneurship, financing, or business development. More fundamentally, it represents a problem of institutional coordination (Kahf, 2022). Economic activities in many pesantren remain organized around individual institutions and are often fragmented across different business units, management structures, and local networks. Differences in managerial capacity, organizational governance, business orientation, and market access limit the ability of pesantren to build collective economic strength. In this context, economic transformation requires more than increasing the number of business activities; it requires changes in the institutional arrangements that govern how pesantren coordinate resources, develop organizational capabilities, establish economic networks, and engage with external markets (Bashori, 2019; Verhoef et al., 2021).

In this study, institutional transformation refers to changes in the formal arrangements, managerial practices, and inter-organizational relationships through which pesantren organize and coordinate their economic activities. Drawing on North's (1990) institutional

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perspective and Scott's (2014) institutional pillars, such transformation can be examined through several observable dimensions: the formalization of economic organizations, the development of governance and accountability mechanisms, the professionalization of business management, and the establishment of collective economic relationships among pesantren. These dimensions provide an analytical basis for distinguishing institutional transformation from the mere expansion of business activities. Accordingly, the existence of cooperatives or collaborative programs does not automatically indicate successful transformation; rather, transformation needs to be understood through changes in organizational practices, coordination mechanisms, and patterns of economic interaction.

The emergence of the Himpunan Ekonomi dan Bisnis Pesantren (Hebitren) provides an important institutional response to these challenges. Established through collaboration between Bank Indonesia and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Hebitren was designed as a collaborative platform for strengthening pesantren economic activities through business development, managerial capacity building, networking, and market integration (Hebitren, 2024). Within this institutional arrangement, Hebitren can be understood as a coordinating organization that facilitates relationships among pesantren and connects them with external stakeholders. However, its institutional role must be distinguished from the operational functions of the inter-pesantren cooperative. Whereas Hebitren facilitates networking, institutional coordination, capacity development, and strategic partnerships, the secondary cooperative provides a more formal organizational mechanism through which participating pesantren can undertake collective economic activities. This distinction matters because institutional coordination at the association level does not necessarily lead to operational integration among pesantren. The relationship between Hebitren and the cooperative therefore provides a relevant empirical setting for examining how broader collaborative initiatives are translated into organizational arrangements and repeated economic interactions.

This institutional issue is particularly relevant in Lampung Province, which has considerable potential for pesantren-based economic development. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs' 2025 dataset, Lampung recorded 1,353 pesantren, reflecting a substantial institutional base for developing collective economic activities (Kemenag, 2025). However, Hebitren's organizational reach remains relatively limited. In 2025, Hebitren Lampung consisted of 26 member pesantren, while 14 pesantren were affiliated with the inter-pesantren secondary cooperative (Ereza, 2025). These figures indicate an important distinction between participation in the broader Hebitren network and membership in the formal cooperative structure. Although the number of participating institutions remains small relative to the total pesantren population, their involvement provides an opportunity to examine emerging mechanisms of inter-pesantren economic coordination.

The participating pesantren operate in diverse productive sectors, including agriculture, freshwater aquaculture, livestock, and premium horticulture. Nevertheless, differences in managerial capacity, access to working capital, production arrangements, and marketing networks continue to shape their ability to participate in collective economic activities. The institutional challenge therefore concerns not only expanding Hebitren membership but also developing effective coordination mechanisms that connect existing economic resources

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(Dahan & Altheeb, 2023; Morais et al., 2011; Spognardi, 2019). This raises an important question about how Hebitren and the secondary cooperative facilitate institutional integration and why economic transformation remains uneven across participating pesantren.

Previous studies have examined pesantren economic development from different perspectives. Saputro et al. (2022) investigated Hebitren's role in supporting pesantren economic empowerment in Solo Raya, emphasizing the development of business networks and productive economic activities. Similarly, Tobing et al. (2024) explored the optimization of Hebitren through halal value chain development, highlighting the importance of connecting pesantren businesses with broader Islamic economic activities. Meanwhile, Ali et al. (2024) and Maulidiyah and Hasib (2023) examined the role of Hebitren business holding arrangements in strengthening pesantren economic resilience through an asset-based community development approach. These studies offer important insights into Hebitren's organizational and economic potential. However, their analytical emphases leave room to investigate how inter-pesantren cooperation develops into formal institutional arrangements and how these arrangements shape everyday economic coordination.

Research on cooperative-based pesantren economic development also offers relevant insights. Mujibno (2024) examined pesantren financial independence and resilience through cooperative-based business organizations, while Prasetyawan et al. (2024) discussed cooperation among pesantren cooperatives in supporting economic sustainability through business collaboration and operational management. Together, these studies indicate the relevance of collective business arrangements for pesantren economic development. Nevertheless, further empirical research is needed to understand how a regional intermediary organization and a secondary cooperative interact to facilitate institutional change across multiple pesantren with different economic capacities and organizational characteristics.

Despite these contributions, an important empirical and conceptual gap remains in understanding the institutional mechanisms that connect regional coordination initiatives with collective economic practices among pesantren. Existing studies have provided valuable explanations of economic empowerment, business development, cooperative collaboration, and pesantren economic resilience. However, less attention has been paid to how a regional intermediary organization, such as Hebitren, interacts with a secondary cooperative to facilitate changes in organizational governance, resource coordination, and inter-pesantren economic relationships. Furthermore, the distinction between establishing formal collaborative institutions and achieving substantive changes in economic practices remains insufficiently examined. Addressing this gap requires investigating both the mechanisms that facilitate institutional integration and the organizational conditions that enable or constrain changes in collective economic activities. The Lampung case provides an opportunity to examine these processes within a regional network characterized by diverse productive sectors and varying levels of institutional readiness.

To address this gap, this study examines Hebitren Lampung as a regional institutional intermediary and the inter-pesantren secondary cooperative as an organizational mechanism for facilitating collective economic activities. The analysis draws primarily on North's (1990) institutional perspective and Scott's (2014) institutional pillars to examine changes in formal

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arrangements, organizational norms, and managerial practices, while Collaborative Governance Theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008) offers a complementary perspective on coordination among pesantren and external stakeholders. Rather than proposing the cooperative as an entirely new organizational form, this study explains how interaction between regional institutional coordination and cooperative-based economic arrangements may facilitate institutional transformation. Its expected contribution is to identify the mechanisms, organizational changes, and contextual constraints that shape the development of collective economic relationships among pesantren.

Accordingly, this study examines how Hebitren Lampung facilitates the institutional transformation of pesantren economic activities through regional coordination and inter-pesantren cooperative arrangements. Specifically, it seeks to identify the institutional mechanisms through which Hebitren and the secondary cooperative support collective economic coordination, examine changes in organizational governance and managerial practices, and explore the constraints that influence the development of inter-pesantren economic relationships. By focusing on these processes, the study contributes to the literature on Islamic economic institutions by providing an empirically grounded understanding of institutional intermediation and cooperative-based coordination within a regional pesantren network. The findings are expected to offer context-specific insights for strengthening pesantren economic governance while recognizing that institutional transformation is an evolving process shaped by differences in organizational capacity, participation, and access to resources.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Studies on Hebitren and the Pesantren Economy

Studies on the economic independence of pesantren are growing in line with increasing awareness of the importance of transforming religious institutions into productive and competitive ones. Pesantren now function not only as educational and preaching institutions but also as centers of community economic empowerment based on Islamic values (Putri et al., 2021). In this context, the institutional transformation of the pesantren economy is understood as a transition from a traditional charity-based economy to a productive economy oriented toward independence, efficiency, and sustainability (Chang, 2011; Dutt, 2011). Studies on strengthening pesantren are therefore crucial for assessing how well these institutions adapt to modern socio-economic changes.

Saputro et al. (2022) highlighted Hebitren's role as a platform for empowering pesantren economies in Solo Raya by strengthening micro-enterprises and sharia-based business networks. Their results showed that Hebitren's presence improved pesantren economic literacy and strengthened small businesses within the santri community. However, this research focused on the operational aspects of economic empowerment and did not address the institutional dimensions and structural transformation among pesantren. Tobing et al. (2024) examined Hebitren's optimization strategy through the halal value chain, emphasizing halal product development and integration with the sharia value chain. Although relevant to

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pesantren economic development, this approach remains sectoral and does not address the institutional governance aspects at the heart of pesantren economic transformation.

Maulana Rohimat et al. (2024) explored the factors influencing the entrepreneurial interest of santri within the Hebitren network, particularly the role of self-efficacy and the social environment of pesantren. This study emphasized the importance of human resource development in strengthening pesantren economies; however, its approach remained oriented toward individual santri rather than the institutional level. Meanwhile, Faizah and Aisyah (2023) highlighted the importance of integrating *zakat*, *infaq*, *sedekah*, and *waqf* (ZISWAF) as social resources in developing the pesantren economy. They demonstrated that ZISWAF can strengthen the economic independence of pesantren if managed institutionally, but they did not explain how to build an effective institutional system to manage this potential sustainably.

Using the asset-based community development (ABCD) approach, Ali et al. (2024) explain how pesantren can strengthen their economic resilience through the Hebitren business holding. This study makes an important contribution to understanding the economic dynamics of community-based pesantren; however, it remains conceptual and does not address implementation strategies in diverse local contexts such as Lampung Province. Meanwhile, Chamidi (2023) and Septa Danu Yudo and Enggrani Fitri (2023) emphasize the economic empowerment of pesantren through business unit management, reporting increased income and greater financial independence. However, these two studies remain limited to the micro level and do not describe how institutional integration among pesantren can be carried out systematically.

These studies show that research on Hebitren and the pesantren economy still focuses on empowering individual businesses, developing santri entrepreneurship, and optimizing microeconomic potential. Few studies have explicitly discussed Hebitren's institutional strategies for integrating pesantren into collective economic networks based on Islamic cooperatives. This indicates a research gap in understanding the institutional dimensions and structural transformation of the pesantren economy at the regional level. This gap is crucial because the institutional realm is where the independence and sustainability of the pesantren economy can be realized.

2.2. Theoretical Framework and Novelty

Theoretically, this study contributes to Islamic institutional economics by integrating the institutional theories of Douglass North and W. Richard Scott into the study of the pesantren economy (North, 1990; Scott, 2014). This approach enables a more comprehensive analysis of changes in the structures, norms, and operational mechanisms of sharia-based economic institutions. Furthermore, this study adapts the theory of collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Greif & Mokyr, 2017) to explain how synergy among pesantren, the government, and financial institutions can strengthen Islamic economic networks at the institutional level (Battilana et al., 2009). Thus, this study not only explains the economic strategies of pesantren but also maps the institutional transformation process underlying Hebitren Lampung's development.

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The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to uncover the inter-pesantren cooperative model as an instrument for collaboration-based economic institutional transformation, a topic that has not been widely explored in prior research. This model shows how pesantren can shift from traditional economic entities to a professional, integrated, and collective economic system grounded in Islamic values. Practically, this research offers an empirical framework for developing economic-institutional strategies for pesantren in other regions and enriches the theoretical discourse on Hebitren's role as a catalyst for institutional change in the contemporary Islamic economy.

3. Research Methods

This study used a qualitative case study design to examine Hebitren Lampung's institutional role in facilitating economic coordination and organizational change among pesantren. Hebitren Lampung was selected as a single institutional case because it serves as a regional coordinating organization that connects pesantren economic activities with an inter-pesantren secondary cooperative. The case provides an opportunity to investigate how institutional arrangements and collaborative mechanisms operate across pesantren engaged in different productive sectors. The research focused on the relationship between Hebitren's coordinating functions, the cooperative's operational activities, and emerging changes in economic governance and inter-organizational collaboration. Fieldwork was conducted in Lampung Province between July and October 2025.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in Hebitren Lampung, institutional responsibilities, knowledge of cooperative operations, and experience in managing pesantren economic activities. A total of 12 informants participated in the study: two key institutional actors and ten cooperative administrators or business managers representing different productive sectors. The key informants provided information on institutional coordination, strategic partnerships, and cooperative governance, while the other informants contributed operational perspectives from agriculture, freshwater aquaculture, livestock, and premium horticulture. This selection enabled the study to examine institutional arrangements from both strategic and operational perspectives.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and field observations, supported by relevant institutional documents where available. The interviews explored organizational coordination, cooperative participation, managerial practices, resource sharing, market relationships, and constraints affecting collective economic activities. Field observations were used to contextualize the interview accounts, while documentary materials provided additional information on organizational arrangements and cooperative activities.

Data analysis was guided by the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview and observation materials were organized according to their relevance to institutional coordination, organizational governance, managerial capacity, and collective economic activities. The coding process involved identifying meaningful statements, grouping related codes into broader categories, and developing themes concerning institutional transformation and its constraints. These themes were then interpreted using Institutional Theory and

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Collaborative Governance Theory to examine the relationships among organizational arrangements, collaborative mechanisms, and changes in economic practices. Conclusions were developed by comparing informants' accounts and available supporting evidence, with particular attention to differences between institutional objectives and actual operational practices.

The trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through source triangulation (cross-confirmation of data across informant categories) and methodological triangulation (comparison of interview results, observation notes, and documentary evidence). In addition, member checking with key informants was conducted to reduce interpretive bias, and an audit trail and field notes were systematically maintained to ensure dependability and confirmability across all stages of analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Institutional Context of Pesantren Economic Transformation in Lampung

The findings indicate that pesantren economic transformation in Lampung occurs in a context of considerable economic potential but remains constrained by uneven institutional capacity and fragmented economic management. The province has many pesantren with diverse economic resources and productive activities; however, only a limited proportion of them have been actively integrated into the collective economic network facilitated by Hebitren. This condition demonstrates that the main challenge faced by pesantren is not necessarily the absence of economic potential but rather the limited institutional capacity to connect and manage this potential within a coordinated and sustainable economic system (Ereza, 2025).

Pesantren in Lampung have developed relatively diverse economic activities, including agricultural production, greenhouse-based red chili cultivation, freshwater fish farming, corn and chili production, broiler farming, melon cultivation, garment making, bottled drinking water, and other productive enterprises. This diversity indicates that pesantren possess considerable productive resources that could be developed as part of a broader pesantren-based economic ecosystem (Ereza, 2025). Nevertheless, these productive activities have not always been connected through an integrated mechanism of production, distribution, marketing, and financing.

Before Hebitren's institutional consolidation, many pesantren managed their economic activities independently, based on their respective institutional capacities and resources. This pattern resulted in relatively fragmented economic activities that, in some cases, depended on the initiative of individual pesantren leaders or managers. The findings also indicate differences in managerial capacity, financial literacy, business planning, and human resource competence among pesantren. Consequently, the economic potential of individual pesantren has not always been translated into sustainable and professionally managed economic institutions (Rofiudin, 2025).

This situation shows that transforming the pesantren economy requires more than developing individual business units; it requires an institutional mechanism that connects existing productive resources and transforms them into a collective economic network. In this context,

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Hebitren's role becomes increasingly important because it provides an institutional platform through which pesantren can strengthen organizational capacity, develop partnerships, access resources, and gradually integrate their economic activities.

4.2. Hebitren's Strategy for Institutional Consolidation

Hebitren Lampung's strategy for developing the pesantren economy focuses primarily on institutional consolidation. Rather than focusing solely on providing financial assistance or creating individual business units, Hebitren seeks to strengthen the institutional foundations that enable pesantren to manage their economic potential more systematically and collectively.

One of the most important strategies identified is encouraging pesantren to establish or strengthen legally recognized cooperatives and business entities. The formalization of economic activities is considered important because it provides a clearer organizational structure, strengthens accountability, and reduces the risks associated with businesses being managed informally or being overly dependent on the personal authority of pesantren leaders. Through formal institutional arrangements, economic activities can be managed as organizational assets rather than as personal initiatives (Ereza, 2025).

The findings identify five interconnected dimensions underlying Hebitren's strategy: human resource strengthening, the application of Islamic economic principles, data and information management, education and socialization, and inter-institutional coordination and cooperation. These dimensions demonstrate that Hebitren's institutional strategy is multidimensional and does not rely on a single intervention (Rohman, 2025).

The first dimension concerns human resource strengthening. Hebitren develops partnerships with external institutions, including educational institutions, to improve managerial, entrepreneurial, and Islamic financial literacy among pesantren economic actors. The involvement of alumni and santri as sociopreneurs also represents an important element of this strategy. Through this approach, pesantren seek to combine their existing social and religious capital with more professional business management.

The second dimension involves applying Islamic economic principles to the development of pesantren economic activities. The businesses developed within the network include productive and halal sectors such as agriculture, garment making, bottled drinking water, and Islamic microfinance. Economic development is viewed not solely from the perspective of profitability but also in connection with the principles of justice, balance, cooperation, and public benefit.

The third dimension concerns data and information management. Collecting and organizing information on pesantren, their business units, and their productive potential provides an important basis for mapping economic resources and identifying areas for institutional development. More systematic information is expected to support decision-making and strengthen coordination among Hebitren, pesantren, government institutions, and external partners.

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The fourth dimension concerns education and socialization. Hebitren seeks to encourage a gradual shift in the way pesantren perceive economic activities. Economic enterprises are increasingly understood not merely as supplementary activities but as an important component of pesantren independence and community empowerment. This process therefore involves a broader institutional change in which economic development becomes more closely integrated with the social mission of pesantren.

The fifth dimension is inter-institutional coordination and cooperation. Hebitren operates as an intermediary that connects pesantren with various external stakeholders, including Bank Indonesia, Islamic financial institutions, educational institutions, government agencies, and other strategic partners. Through these relationships, pesantren can obtain access to training, business assistance, financial resources, infrastructure, and broader market opportunities.

Taken together, these findings suggest that Hebitren's strategy represents a shift from an individually oriented economic development model toward a more integrated institutional approach. The central emphasis is on strengthening pesantren capacity while creating mechanisms to connect and manage their economic resources collectively.

4.3. The Inter-Pesantren Cooperative as the Core Institutional Mechanism

Among the strategies identified in this study, the establishment and development of the Koperasi Konsumen Serikat Bisnis Pesantren Lampung emerged as one of the most important institutional mechanisms for transforming the pesantren economy. The cooperative provides a formal platform through which economic activities that were previously managed separately can be connected within a broader institutional network (Hebitren, 2024).

The cooperative is structured as a secondary cooperative whose membership consists of pesantren institutions and their primary cooperatives. This arrangement allows the cooperative to function as an institutional aggregator that connects the economic activities of participating pesantren. Rather than replacing the existing business units of individual pesantren, the cooperative strengthens their interconnection by facilitating collective activities in production, distribution, marketing, procurement, and access to economic resources (Koperasi Konsumen Serikat Bisnis Pesantren Lampung, n.d.).

The cooperative performs several interconnected functions. First, it serves as a production aggregation mechanism by identifying and connecting the productive capacities of different pesantren. Second, it functions as a distribution and marketing platform through which pesantren products can be introduced to a broader market. Third, it provides an institutional channel for strengthening access to financial and productive resources. Fourth, it supports human resource development through education, training, and entrepreneurial capacity building.

The cooperative provides an organizational setting for repeated inter-pesantren transactions, although the extent of integration differs across sectors. Field interviews document collective fish feed procurement, shared agricultural machinery, and joint marketing initiatives, alongside payment delays and continued dependence on established intermediaries (AH, 2025; AK, 2025; ARF, 2025; HA, 2025; KL, 2025; YKD, 2025). As aquaculture managers explained:

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> *"Purchasing feed through secondary cooperatives is very helpful in keeping costs down. The challenge lies in the post-harvest payment chain, which is often delayed for weeks, while the pond cycle must begin immediately." (HA, AK, & ARF, aquaculture managers, interview, 2025)*

This cooperative mechanism has gradually changed the economic relationships among participating pesantren. Previously, each pesantren tended to operate its economic activities within its own institutional boundaries. Through the cooperative network, pesantren are increasingly positioned as part of a collective economic system in which one institution's productive capacity can complement another's needs.

The findings provide evidence of emerging inter-pesantren value chain relationships. Pesantren involved in garment making, for example, have supplied products to other pesantren through the cooperative network, while pesantren engaged in agricultural production have contributed agricultural commodities to the cooperative's distribution network. These arrangements demonstrate that the cooperative is beginning to function as a connecting mechanism among producers, distributors, and consumers within the pesantren economic network.

The cooperative's significance therefore extends beyond its role as a conventional business entity. It represents an institutional bridge that connects fragmented economic activities and creates opportunities for collective action. Through this mechanism, the economic potential of individual pesantren can be mobilized as part of a broader network that supports mutual exchange, market access, and institutional strengthening. However, food crop managers also highlighted persistent constraints:

> *"Collective mechanization makes it easier to cultivate the land quickly. The biggest challenge is breaking long-standing relationships with local middlemen who are willing to provide cash advances at the start of the planting season." (KL, YKD, & AH, food crop managers, interview, 2025)*

4.4. Changes in Economic Management and Institutional Professionalization

The field evidence indicates emerging changes in selected economic practices, particularly joint purchasing, equipment sharing, and coordinated marketing. However, these developments should not be equated with a comprehensive reform of bookkeeping, standard operating procedures (SOPs), or accountability systems (North, 1990; Scott, 2014). Earlier business arrangements were frequently described as decentralized and dependent on individual pesantren managers. Although the interviews provide evidence of operational coordination, this study did not systematically compare financial statements, written SOPs, or decision-making procedures before and after the cooperative's establishment; conclusions about these dimensions therefore remain provisional (field interviews, 2025).

Institutional professionalization is best understood here as an uneven and continuing process. Cooperative coordination creates incentives for more predictable planning and shared responsibilities, but actual improvements in managerial performance vary across activities and require longitudinal evidence (Miles et al., 2014; Scott, 2014).

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The findings further indicate that the cooperative has developed an organizational structure that includes management, supervisory functions, and various business activities. Some of these activities involve alumni and santri who have received training in entrepreneurship and business management. The involvement of these actors allows pesantren to develop a new generation of economic managers who understand both pesantren institutional values and the practical requirements of professional business management.

This process also reflects a gradual redistribution of responsibility in managing pesantren economic activities. Although pesantren leaders remain important institutional figures, economic activities are increasingly managed through organizational structures involving managers, alumni, santri, and other professional actors. Such developments provide a foundation for reducing excessive dependence on individual leadership and strengthening the sustainability of economic institutions. The emerging institutional practices and their limitations are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Evidence of Emerging Institutional Practices and Remaining Verification Gaps

Dimension	Earlier Condition/Issue	Observed Practice or Limitation	Evidence
Procurement	Separate local purchases	Collective fish feed purchasing; reported 8–12% reduction in input costs	HA, AK, ARF interviews (2025); estimate not audited
Production resources	Individual access to equipment	Shared tractors and combine harvesters	KL, YKD, AH interviews (2025)
Marketing	Dependence on local intermediaries	Some coordinated marketing, but advance-payment ties persist	KL, YKD, AH interviews (2025)
Premium horticulture	Limited access to differentiated markets	Premium positioning of Sultan melons; rejected produce and key-person dependence	MMB, AR interviews (2025)

Source: Field interviews, processed by the authors (2025).

4.5. Collaborative Governance and the Formation of an Economic Ecosystem

The transformation of pesantren economic institutions identified in this study is not the result of a single institution's actions. Rather, it emerges through collaboration among multiple actors with different resources, capacities, and institutional roles. The findings identify pesantren, Hebitren, Bank Indonesia, educational institutions, Islamic financial institutions, government stakeholders, and other external partners as important actors within this collaborative arrangement (AR, 2025).

Pesantren occupy a central position as the primary actors managing productive activities and providing the social and institutional foundation of the economic network. Hebitren functions as a facilitator and coordinator, connecting pesantren with external resources and partners. Meanwhile, external institutions contribute specific forms of support, including training, technical assistance, financing, infrastructure, business development, and market access.

This collaborative arrangement enables pesantren to access resources that may be difficult to obtain when operating independently. Through Hebitren, pesantren can build relationships with institutions that have expertise and resources in areas such as Islamic finance,

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entrepreneurship, business management, digitalization, and economic development. Hebitren has thus developed an intermediary role between the internal economic potential of pesantren and the external institutional environment. This role is particularly important because many pesantren possess productive resources but lack the institutional capacity, networks, or access required to develop them at a larger scale (KL, 2025; Mahmud, 2025; MMB, 2025).

The collaborative process has also contributed to the emergence of an economic ecosystem in which production, distribution, financing, training, and institutional support are increasingly interconnected. However, this ecosystem remains in a developmental stage: pesantren participation is not yet uniform, and the intensity of collaboration varies across institutions. The process should therefore be understood as an ongoing institutional transformation rather than a fully consolidated economic ecosystem.

4.6. Institutional Challenges and Uneven Transformation

Despite the progress observed, the transformation of pesantren economic institutions still faces several structural and institutional challenges, which explain why the process does not occur at the same pace or intensity across all participating pesantren (AH, 2025; YKD, 2025).

The first challenge concerns differences in managerial capacity. Pesantren possess varying levels of experience in business management, financial administration, human resource development, and strategic planning, which influence their ability to participate actively in collective economic activities.

The second challenge concerns economic and Islamic financial literacy. Some pesantren still require further assistance in financial management, business planning, investment, and access to Islamic financial services. This indicates that institutional formalization alone cannot guarantee sustainable economic development; formal structures need to be accompanied by continuous capacity building.

The third challenge concerns institutional adjustment and resistance to change. Introducing new management practices may require pesantren to redefine the roles of leaders, managers, alumni, and santri. In institutions where economic activities have traditionally been closely connected to the authority of religious leaders, the transition toward more professional and collective management may require time and careful institutional adaptation.

The fourth challenge is uneven participation. Although the cooperative has provided an institutional platform for collective economic development, not all pesantren participate with the same intensity. Some institutions have stronger business capacities and are better prepared to engage in collective production and distribution, while others remain at an earlier stage of institutional development.

These conditions demonstrate that institutional transformation is neither linear nor uniform. Formal organizational structures may provide a foundation for transformation, but meaningful change requires the gradual alignment of organizational structures, managerial capacities, shared values, and patterns of behavior.

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4.7. Opportunities for Scaling Up the Pesantren Economic Ecosystem

The findings also reveal significant opportunities for expanding the pesantren economic ecosystem in Lampung. The large number of pesantren in the province represents a substantial potential base for developing a wider economic network, and the existing network facilitated by Hebitren can be seen as an initial institutional foundation that can be expanded through gradual consolidation and broader participation. Another important opportunity lies in the strong social capital embedded within the pesantren community, which includes extensive networks of alumni, santri, local communities, religious institutions, and community-based organizations that can provide important social and economic resources for strengthening collective business activities (ARF, 2025; KL, 2025).

Growing interest in entrepreneurship among santri and pesantren communities also offers an opportunity to develop new generations of economic actors. When combined with professional training, mentoring, and access to financial resources, this entrepreneurial potential can strengthen the sustainability of pesantren-based economic institutions.

Partnerships with government institutions, Islamic financial institutions, educational institutions, social investors, and philanthropic organizations can further expand the resource base available to pesantren and support the development of business capital, infrastructure, technology, training, and market access. However, scaling up the economic ecosystem requires more than increasing the number of participating pesantren. Expansion must also be accompanied by improvements in institutional quality, governance, human resource capacity, and coordination; without these supporting elements, rapid expansion may create new coordination problems and weaken the effectiveness of the collective institutional structure (Rofiudin, 2025).

4.8. The Emerging Model of Hebitren-Based Institutional Transformation

Based on the findings, the institutional transformation facilitated by Hebitren Lampung can be understood as a gradual process consisting of several interconnected stages. The process begins with the formalization of economic institutions, followed by capacity development, inter-pesantren economic integration, and ultimately the formation of a broader multi-stakeholder economic ecosystem (AK, 2025; HA, 2025).

The first stage is institutional formalization, in which pesantren are encouraged to establish or strengthen cooperatives and legally recognized business entities. Formalization provides the organizational and regulatory foundation needed to improve accountability and sustainability. The second stage is institutional capacity building, which includes managerial training, entrepreneurship development, Islamic financial literacy, business mentoring, and the involvement of alumni and santri in economic activities, enabling formal institutions to function more effectively.

The third stage is institutional integration through the inter-pesantren cooperative, which connects the productive capacities of individual pesantren and facilitates relationships across production, distribution, marketing, and resource mobilization; at this stage, economic activities begin to move beyond individual pesantren. The fourth stage is the emergence of a multi-stakeholder economic ecosystem, in which collaboration among pesantren, Hebitren,

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government institutions, Islamic financial institutions, educational institutions, and other partners gives the economic network access to broader resources and opportunities. This transformation pathway is illustrated in Figure 1.

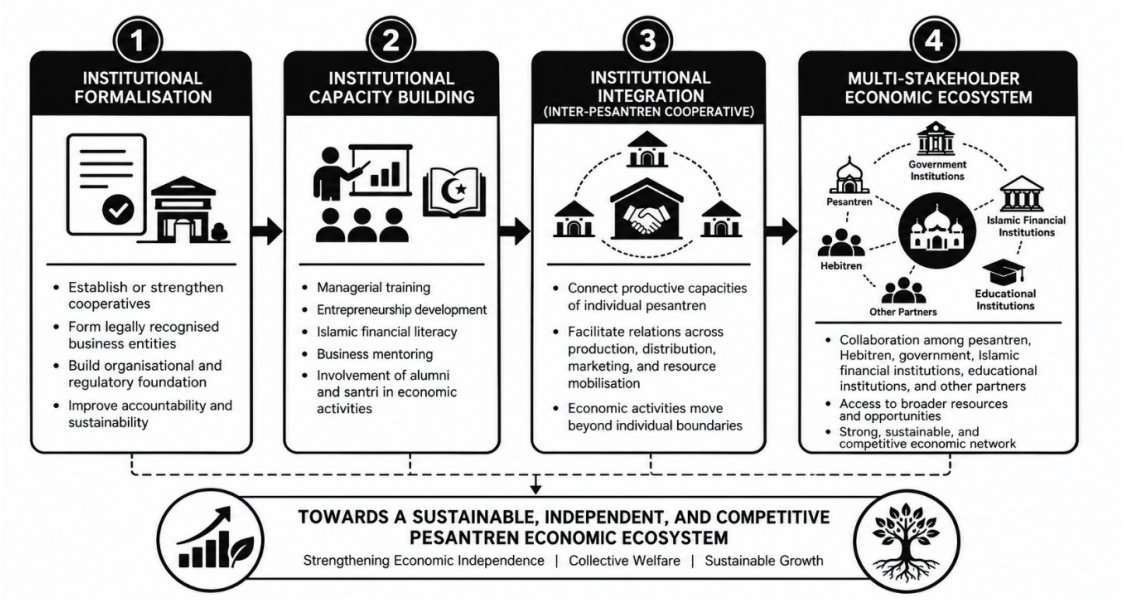


Figure 1. Hebitren-Mediated Pathway of Pesantren Economic Institutional Transformation
Source: Developed by the authors based on the study findings

This model shows that Hebitren's role extends beyond developing individual pesantren businesses. Its more fundamental contribution lies in facilitating the transformation of fragmented economic activities into an interconnected institutional network, in which the inter-pesantren cooperative serves as the central organizational mechanism connecting individual productive capacities with broader networks of production, distribution, financing, knowledge, and market access. At the same time, the transformation remains an ongoing process. The limited scale of participation, differences in institutional readiness, uneven managerial capacity, and the continuing need for organizational adaptation demonstrate that developing a sustainable pesantren economic ecosystem requires long-term institutional consolidation. The transformation achieved through Hebitren should therefore be understood not as a final institutional outcome but as an evolving process through which pesantren gradually develop stronger organizational capabilities, more professional economic management, and greater capacity for collective economic action.

4.9. Discussion

The findings indicate that Hebitren Lampung's contribution to the economic transformation of pesantren cannot be assessed solely by the organization's existence or the formation of the secondary cooperative. More important is how these two institutions foster coordination and promote economic cooperation among pesantren. North (1990) explains that institutions shape the rules and patterns of economic interaction. In this context, the secondary cooperative provides a framework that enables pesantren economic activities to be managed

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more effectively. Joint procurement of business supplies and collective use of equipment demonstrate a shift in cooperation patterns among pesantren. Nevertheless, this shift has not yet been fully realized, as some pesantren still rely on middlemen in their business activities (field interviews, 2025).

The roles of Hebitren and the secondary cooperative are closely intertwined, although they serve distinct functions. Hebitren plays a greater role in building networks, aligning interests, and fostering coordination among pesantren at the regional level, while the secondary cooperative serves as a means of direct economic cooperation, such as purchasing production supplies, using business facilities, and marketing products. This division of roles demonstrates that an institutional network must be accompanied by tangible economic activities so that participating pesantren can experience the benefits of cooperation. This is consistent with Ansell and Gash (2008), who identify coordination and stakeholder engagement as key elements of successful collaborative governance.

The ongoing institutional changes can also be understood through Scott's (2014) three institutional pillars: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. From a regulative perspective, the secondary cooperative provides a more formal organizational foundation for joint economic activities. In the normative dimension, cooperation is supported by the values of community, mutual aid, and responsibility that have long been part of pesantren life. The cultural-cognitive dimension becomes evident when pesantren administrators establish new practices in running their businesses, particularly through joint procurement and the collective use of resources. However, the interviews indicate that these changes are more readily observed in business practices than in the implementation of standardized administrative systems, financial reporting, and accountability mechanisms. Thus, institutional transformation is still proceeding gradually and has not yet progressed equally across all aspects of governance.

The success of economic cooperation among pesantren also depends heavily on each party's willingness to engage actively, as membership in an organization does not always reflect participation in joint economic activities. Ansell and Gash (2008) emphasize that trust, shared understanding, and commitment are key factors in building collaborative governance. In Hebitren Lampung, efforts to build cooperation still face several challenges, particularly differences in business characteristics, managerial capabilities, capital needs, and production cycles. As a result, not all pesantren can participate in collective activities at the same level; a shared goal of strengthening the pesantren economy does not necessarily translate directly into sustainable business cooperation (field interviews, 2025).

This picture becomes clearer when examining business practices in several sectors within the pesantren cooperation network. In the freshwater fisheries sector, collective purchases of fish feed are reported to reduce procurement costs by approximately 8–12% compared with retail purchases. In the agricultural sector, the shared use of agricultural tools and machinery reduces the need for pesantren to procure equipment independently. Meanwhile, premium melon cultivation opens opportunities to reach markets with higher selling prices, although it still faces challenges in handling produce that does not meet premium market standards and a reliance on specific marketing networks. These cost-saving figures are based on

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informants' accounts and have not been verified through independent impact assessments; they are therefore best understood as initial indications of the benefits of the economic cooperation currently being developed.

The central novelty of the proposed model lies in its combination of institutional autonomy and collective economic interdependence. The cooperative does not eliminate the identity or independence of individual pesantren but creates a shared institutional space in which diverse productive capacities can complement one another. In this framework, Hebitren functions not merely as a business association but as a strategic institutional intermediary that facilitates the transition from fragmented economic activities toward an integrated, sustainable, and value-based Islamic economic ecosystem. The study thus contributes a conceptual model that explains how traditional religious institutions can develop modern economic governance mechanisms while preserving and mobilizing their normative, cultural, and social institutional capital.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study concludes that the strategy implemented by Hebitren Lampung has facilitated the transformation of pesantren economic institutions from fragmented, traditionally managed activities toward a more collaborative, sharia-based model. This transformation is realized through the establishment of an inter-pesantren secondary cooperative, increased human resource capacity, strengthened partnership networks, and the application of Islamic economic principles in institutional governance. Hebitren serves as an agent of institutional change, connecting the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive dimensions of pesantren institutions to strengthen the community economy. However, the transformation remains gradual and uneven: changes are most visible in joint procurement, equipment sharing, and coordinated marketing, whereas improvements in administrative systems, financial reporting, and accountability have yet to be consolidated. Academically, this study contributes to Islamic institutional economics by showing that institutional transformation can emerge from the synergy of pesantren values, structures, and social networks, offering a model that may be adapted to strengthen the Islamic economy in other regions of Indonesia.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthening institutional intermediation.** Hebitren and the inter-pesantren cooperative should strengthen their role as institutional intermediaries by integrating production aggregation, distribution, marketing, financing, data management, and knowledge exchange. A clear institutional roadmap and systematic mapping of pesantren productive capacities are needed to build stronger value chains and reduce fragmentation.
2. **Human resource development and professionalization.** Needs-based capacity building and continuous mentoring should be prioritized, addressing different levels of institutional maturity, from basic financial management and governance to strategic management, digital marketing, supply chain management, and business expansion. The involvement of alumni and santri should be strengthened through structured entrepreneurship programs.

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3. **Integrated and differentiated government policies.** Government support should focus on cooperative governance, business legality, Islamic financing, digitalization, market access, and human resource development. A tiered development framework could align policy interventions with the varying capacities of pesantren and reduce fragmented or overlapping programs.
4. **Collaborative governance.** Long-term partnerships among Hebitren, government agencies, Islamic financial institutions, educational institutions, and private-sector partners should emphasize knowledge transfer, institutional capacity building, sustainable financing, applied research, mentoring, and market access, supported by clear roles and measurable outcomes.
5. **Digital ecosystem.** Hebitren and the cooperative should develop an integrated digital ecosystem to support business information, product marketing, financial management, inventory, supply chain coordination, and data-driven decision-making, accompanied by improvements in digital literacy and organizational capacity.
6. **Cooperative governance.** The inter-pesantren cooperative should strengthen transparency, accountability, member participation, professional management, and sustainable revenue mechanisms. A clear division of roles among pesantren leaders, cooperative managers, alumni, santri, and professional staff is essential to prevent institutional conflicts and ensure the equitable distribution of benefits.
7. **Inter-pesantren value chains.** Hebitren should expand inter-pesantren value chain collaboration by systematically mapping internal supply and demand. Strengthening internal procurement and distribution networks could increase economic circulation among pesantren, reduce dependence on external markets, and improve the competitiveness of pesantren products.

Future research should examine the long-term effectiveness of the inter-pesantren cooperative-based institutional transformation model through longitudinal and comparative studies, including the development of quantitative indicators covering the regulative, normative, cultural-cognitive, managerial, and collaborative dimensions.

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