

Challenges of Da'wah in Singkawang, Indonesia: A Context-Sensitive Policy Agenda for Islamic Da'wah Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Singkawang is frequently celebrated as one of Indonesia's most tolerant cities, but high tolerance does not eliminate the challenges facing Islamic da'wah; it changes their form. This article examines how da'wah institutions can strengthen Muslim religious life while protecting trust in a city shaped by Malay, Chinese, Dayak, and other communities and by multiple religious traditions. An integrative documentary review synthesized official statistics, policy documents, Singkawang-specific field studies, wider Indonesian research, and theoretical literature. Evidence was differentiated by geographic scope so that national or comparative findings were not treated as direct evidence of local conditions. The synthesis identifies six analytic domains: culturally intelligent communication; ethnoreligious boundaries; sustained and non-coercive convert accompaniment; digital religious learning; institutional coordination; and the transition from activity-centred programming to measurable social benefit. Local evidence is strongest for multicultural relations, religious moderation, and convert care, whereas digital and citywide organisational claims remain policy propositions requiring field validation. The article proposes a Context-Sensitive Islamic Da'wah Model linking da'wah bil-hikmah, cultural competence, convert accompaniment, digital literacy, institutional collaboration, and da'wah bil-hal to trust and social cohesion. Policy recommendations include coordinated governance, preacher competency standards, a confidential convert-care pathway, locally grounded digital content, service-oriented programmes, and outcome

monitoring. Effective da'wah in Singkawang should therefore be theologically clear, culturally respectful, voluntary, institutionally accountable, and publicly beneficial.

Keywords

Da'wah
Digital Religion
Multiculturalism
Religious Moderation
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Introduction

Da'wah is not only the transmission of Islamic teachings. It is also a public practice of communication, education, care, and moral example. Its effectiveness depends on the credibility of the preacher, the needs of the audience, and the social setting in which the message is delivered. These conditions are especially important in Singkawang, West Kalimantan, a city whose identity has been shaped by long interaction among Malay, Chinese, Dayak, and other groups. The city's temples, mosques, churches, cultural associations, markets, and festivals make religious and ethnic difference visible in everyday urban life [1]–[5].

Singkawang's strong reputation for tolerance is an opportunity for da'wah, not evidence that strategic problems have disappeared. SETARA Institute ranked Singkawang first in its 2018 Tolerant City Index, with a score of 6.513 [6]. More recently, the 2025 index placed Singkawang second nationally, behind Salatiga, with a score of 6.391 [7]. The shift in rank does not imply a collapse of tolerance; rather, it underscores that tolerance is a dynamic governance and social achievement that requires continual maintenance. Scholarship nevertheless warns that coexistence may be cordial yet segmented: communities can cooperate economically and ceremonially while retaining limited substantive contact or fragile trust [2], [3]. In such a setting, careless preaching can turn theological difference into ethnic suspicion, while excessively generic preaching can fail to address the real religious, economic, and psychosocial needs of Muslims.

The challenge is therefore dual. Da'wah institutions must maintain clarity regarding Islamic belief and practice, but they must do so through wisdom, good counsel, and communication that recognises the dignity and citizenship of religious others. They must also respond to internal Muslim diversity: established Malay-Muslim communities, Chinese and Dayak converts, women, workers, young people, and residents in peripheral neighbourhoods do not necessarily require the same language, schedule, medium, or programme. Singkawang-specific field research records family pressure, limited religious knowledge, livelihood constraints, scheduling and access difficulties, and weak coordination in convert care [8]. Related studies of Chinese converts in other Indonesian settings report identity, psychological,

and post-conversion social challenges [9]. Meanwhile, wider Indonesian research shows that digital media expand access to religious knowledge but also increase exposure to decontextualised authority, polarising content, misinformation, and engagement-driven preaching [10]–[14].

This article asks: (1) what structural, socio-cultural, organisational, and digital challenges shape da'wah in Singkawang; and (2) what policies can da'wah institutions adopt to respond without weakening interfaith harmony? It contributes an applied policy framework that treats tolerance not as passivity or doctrinal relativism, but as a civic condition within which persuasive, ethical, and socially beneficial da'wah can operate. In da'wah terms, the framework is organised around *bil-hikmah* (wise and context-sensitive communication), cultural competence, sustained accompaniment, digital literacy, institutional collaboration, and *bil-hal* (socially visible service), with trust and social cohesion treated as public outcomes. Because the evidence base is uneven, the article explicitly distinguishes Singkawang-specific findings from national or comparative evidence and theoretical inference.

Methods

This study used an integrative documentary review. The approach is appropriate when a policy problem requires the combination of empirical studies, official statistics, legal frameworks, and conceptual literature rather than the estimation of a pooled effect [15]–[17]. The review covered material available up to 1 August 2026, allowing the evidence base to be updated during manuscript revision without implying that all searches occurred after the original submission. Searches and update searches were conducted through Google Scholar and institutional websites using Indonesian and English combinations of “Singkawang,” “dakwah/da'wah,” “religious harmony,” “Malay–Chinese relations,” “mualaf/convert,” “religious moderation,” “FKUB,” and “digital da'wah.” Backward citation checking was used for locally relevant studies.

Selection proceeded through four stages: identification, relevance screening, full-text eligibility assessment, and thematic inclusion. Dynamic search-engine hit totals were not treated as reproducible study counts; instead, sources retained in the final corpus were checked for topical relevance, source credibility, and geographic applicability. Priority was given to official sources, peer-reviewed research focused on Singkawang or West Kalimantan, and wider Indonesian studies that explained digital religion, moderation, or institutional collaboration. Sources were excluded when they concerned unrelated regions without transferable conceptual value, repeated claims without an identifiable evidence base, or reported local facts that could not be corroborated. The revised evidence corpus comprised 33 sources. Each source was coded in an evidence matrix for geographic scope (Singkawang-specific, wider Indonesia, or international/theoretical), source type, target population,

challenge, institutional mechanism, claim supported, and policy implication. Codes were consolidated into six thematic domains and compared across source types. When evidence came from outside Singkawang, it was treated as comparative or inferential rather than direct local evidence. Themes were also interpreted using contact theory and social-capital concepts: repeated, equal-status cooperation can reduce prejudice, while bridging networks connect otherwise separated groups [18], [19]. Because no interviews, observation, sermon analysis, programme audit, or audience survey was undertaken, the findings are analytical propositions for field validation rather than prevalence estimates.

Table 1 summarizes the contextual conditions shaping da'wah in Singkawang. Religious and ethnic diversity, strong tolerance structures, segmented coexistence, convert vulnerability, and digital religious engagement highlight the need for culturally responsive, inclusive, sustained, and evidence-based da'wah strategies.

Table 1. Contextual conditions shaping da'wah in Singkawang

Condition	Evidence-based interpretation	Implication for da'wah
Religious and ethnic plurality	Malay, Chinese, Dayak, and other identities intersect with several religious traditions [1]–[5].	Audience mapping and cultural competence are essential; one uniform message is unlikely to fit all groups.
Strong tolerance infrastructure	Recognition in the Tolerant City Index remains high: Singkawang ranked first in 2018 and second in the 2025 index, alongside active roles for local government, FKUB, and religious leaders [4], [6], [7].	Da'wah can build on trusted institutions and should protect the city's civic reputation.
Potentially segmented coexistence	Studies describe both cooperation and boundaries between ethnoreligious communities [2], [3], [20].	Programmes should create sustained cooperation, not only ceremonial encounters.
Convert vulnerability	Singkawang field research documents family, livelihood, learning, access, and coordination difficulties in convert care; broader studies add comparative evidence on identity and post-conversion adjustment [8], [9], [21].	Confidential, long-term, non-transactional accompaniment is required.
Digitally mediated religion	Indonesia's internet access reached 72.78% in 2024; digital-religion studies indicate growing online religious authority, but the reviewed corpus contains no direct study of Singkawang's digital da'wah ecology [10]–[14], [22].	Digital content and media-literacy capacity are reasonable policy priorities, but local audience behaviour should be validated empirically.

Source: authors' synthesis of the cited literature and official documents.

Table 2 summarizes the evidence base across six domains. Singkawang-specific evidence is strongest for multiculturalism, religious moderation, and convert care, while digital

da'wah and service-oriented programmes rely more heavily on national studies, comparative evidence, and theoretical frameworks.

Table 2. Evidence base of the review by domain and geographic scope

Domain	Singkawang-specific evidence	Indonesia-wide evidence	International/theoretical role
Multiculturalism and ethnoreligious relations	Strong: multiple local field and documentary studies	Supplementary comparative literature	Contact and social-capital concepts
Religious moderation and FKUB	Strong: local field research and Singkawang-specific moderation studies	National policy and moderation framework	Limited; mainly conceptual support
Convert care	Strong: direct field evidence on problems and institutional support	Comparative evidence on Chinese converts	Limited; psychosocial framing
Digital da'wah	Limited: no direct Singkawang digital-audience study identified	Strong: Indonesian digital-da'wah and literacy studies	Digital religion and mediatization theory
Institutional coordination	Partial: local evidence exists in convert care and FKUB	Comparative evidence from other Indonesian regions	Bridging social-capital concepts
Service-oriented da'wah	Illustrative local practice; no programme-effect study identified	Conceptual and policy support	Development, ethics, and social-cohesion framing

Results

Six analytic challenge domains emerged. Their evidentiary status is not identical: cultural and ethnoreligious relations, religious moderation, and convert care are supported by Singkawang-specific field studies, whereas digital disruption, citywide coordination, and programme-outcome claims rely more heavily on national, comparative, or conceptual evidence. Accordingly, the latter are framed as policy risks and propositions for local validation rather than as established prevalence findings. First, da'wah must translate theological content into culturally intelligent communication. In Singkawang, language, food, kinship, ritual calendars, and ethnic memories influence how a message is heard. Cultural accommodation does not require accepting every practice as religiously valid; it requires distinguishing between doctrine, cultural expression, and civic respect. Local studies show that religious leaders and shared cultural spaces can mediate this distinction and reinforce harmony [3]–[5]. Preachers who lack this competence may unintentionally use ethnic stereotypes, present Islam as belonging to one ethnic group, or treat local culture only as an obstacle.

Second, ethnoreligious boundaries can complicate outreach to Chinese and Dayak audiences. Atmaja et al. describe aspects of Singkawang's multicultural life as “pseudo-

multiculturalism,” indicating that visible tolerance can coexist with exclusivist boundaries, competition, and social vulnerability [2]. Conversion may therefore be interpreted not merely as a religious decision but as abandonment of family or ethnic belonging [20], [21]. A da’wah model that implicitly demands cultural erasure can deepen resistance and isolate converts. Conversely, culturally respectful mentoring can demonstrate that Islamic commitment and appropriate elements of Chinese or Dayak heritage need not be mutually exclusive.

Third, convert accompaniment is one of the best-supported local challenge domains. Hidayati’s field research in Singkawang identified problems at the level of converts themselves, PITI, and the local Ministry of Religious Affairs and proposed comprehensive counselling as a response [8]. New Muslims may need foundational learning, marital and family mediation, livelihood advice, peer friendship, and protection of confidentiality. Work patterns, distance, and access constraints can make fixed mosque-based classes difficult [8]. Related studies of Chinese converts outside Singkawang provide comparative evidence on identity, psychological, and social changes after conversion [9], [21]. Short ceremonial programmes or material assistance without a learning pathway risk discontinuity or the perception that conversion is transactional.

Fourth, religious learning is being reorganised by digital media at the national level. Nationally, 72.78% of the population accessed the internet in 2024 [22]. Social media permit low-cost outreach and multilingual micro-learning, but popularity can replace competence as the marker of authority. Indonesian digital-da’wah research, including studies conducted outside Singkawang, highlights challenges of regulation, decontextualised authority, inclusion, and media literacy [10]–[14]. This national digital shift suggests the need for locally recognisable religious voices in Singkawang able to answer local questions before audiences rely on distant or polarising sources; it should be read as a policy implication, not as a documented finding about Singkawang’s digital audiences.

Fifth, the evidence supports concern about coordination gaps, but not a claim of citywide institutional fragmentation. Previous research on convert care in Singkawang identified weak coordination among relevant stakeholders [8], while research in Solo Raya shows that collaboration among religious institutions and government agencies can remain sporadic and incidental [23]. These findings justify examining whether similar gaps occur across mosques, Islamic organisations, MUI, PITI, zakat bodies, schools, and government offices in Singkawang. The specific existence of separate databases, calendars, curricula, or referral practices has not been established by the reviewed Singkawang literature and is therefore not asserted here as a local fact.

Sixth, the reviewed literature suggests that some da’wah programmes may remain event-centred and output-oriented, but the present review did not include programme audits,

mosque observation, or interviews with da'i in Singkawang. Event-centred programming is therefore treated as a hypothesis for field validation rather than an established citywide condition. A stronger policy orientation is to distinguish outputs—such as sermons, participants, booklets, or social-media posts—from outcomes such as improved literacy, sustained participation, family resilience, reduced vulnerability, and intergroup trust. Islamic social finance, counselling, education, health promotion, environmental action, and livelihood support can make da'wah publicly useful and embody religious teaching [4], [24], [25]. The policy challenge is to connect such services to accountable learning and referral systems while ensuring that assistance is never conditioned on religious participation or conversion.

Table 3. Da'wah challenge matrix with evidence-sensitive framing

Challenge	Principal risk	Priority response	Suggested indicator
Cultural translation	Ethnic stereotyping or rejection of local identity	Mandatory intercultural competence and local-language resources	Share of preachers certified; audience trust score
Ethnoreligious boundaries	Islam perceived as ownership of one ethnic group	Inclusive representation and sustained neighbourhood dialogue	Diversity of facilitators and participating neighbourhoods
Convert accompaniment	Isolation, shallow learning, or transactional support	Confidential case management with mentors and referrals	12-month retention; learning milestones; resolved referrals
Digital disruption (policy inference)	Misinformation, polarisation, and weak authority	Local content studio, scholar review, safeguarding protocol	Reach plus completion, correction time, and sentiment quality
Institutional coordination (partially evidenced)	Possible duplication or service gaps; citywide fragmentation not established	Map current coordination first; then use shared calendars, needs mapping, referral standards, and annual review where gaps are confirmed	Coverage by district; referral completion; documented coordination gaps resolved
Programme outcomes (provisional)	High activity with uncertain sustained social value; local prevalence unconfirmed	Evaluate outcomes before scaling outcome-based funding and service-oriented da'wah	Change in literacy, participation, welfare, and intergroup trust

Source: authors' synthesis of the cited literature and official documents.

Discussion

The findings suggest that Singkawang requires neither an aggressive expansion model nor a purely ceremonial “harmony” model. The first can turn persuasion into pressure and threaten social trust; the second can reduce da'wah to polite symbolism with little religious formation. A better approach is context-sensitive, confident-relational da'wah: theologically grounded, voluntary, dialogical, culturally literate, and demonstrated through service. This formulation gives practical content to bil-hikmah by treating wisdom not as vagueness, but as the capacity to communicate clear religious commitments in a manner proportionate to

audience, context, and social consequence. It aligns with Indonesia's religious-moderation framework, which combines national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture [26], as well as the national policy architecture established through Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 [27].

Policy should begin with governance. A Singkawang Da'wah and Social Cohesion Council could be formed—or an existing coordination mechanism strengthened—under existing legal authority rather than as a new bureaucracy. Its first task should be to map current coordination arrangements and service gaps before assuming that fragmentation is citywide. It could connect the Ministry of Religious Affairs office, MUI, Islamic organisations, mosque networks, PITI, zakat and waqf bodies, women's and youth organisations, universities, and—with a limited harmony mandate—FKUB. The 2006 Joint Regulation of the Ministers of Religious Affairs and Home Affairs already provides a framework for local harmony and FKUB [28]. The mechanism should not control theology or homogenise organisations; it should coordinate needs assessment, safeguarding, referrals, training, and evaluation where coordination needs are empirically identified.

Second, preacher development should move from occasional workshops to competency-based certification. Core competencies should include Qur'anic and hadith grounding, fiqh al-da'wah, Singkawang's social history, Chinese and Dayak cultural literacy, conflict-sensitive language, convert safeguarding, counselling boundaries, referral skills, digital verification, and child protection. Bahasa Indonesia should remain the common language, while selected resources and facilitators should use relevant local varieties where audiences prefer them. Women and young preachers should be intentionally included because audience access and trust are partly relational.

Third, convert care should be organised as a voluntary twelve-month pathway, extendable when needed. This proposal builds directly on Singkawang field evidence showing that convert problems extend beyond initial religious instruction and require coordinated counselling and support [8]. Intake must be confidential and separate religious learning from financial eligibility. Each participant should be offered a trained mentor, modular learning, flexible evening or mobile sessions, family-sensitive counselling, peer support, and referrals for legal, livelihood, health, or domestic-safety concerns. Consent, privacy, and freedom from coercion are non-negotiable. Aggregate data may guide services, but identities should not circulate across organisations without permission.

Fourth, a small shared digital studio can produce short, local, evidence-reviewed content and maintain a question-and-answer channel. Content should address practical worship, family relations, commerce, local cultural questions, and misinformation in Indonesian and, where feasible, additional locally useful languages. Editorial review should

distinguish correction from humiliation: misinformation should be answered quickly and calmly, with sources. Success should be measured through meaningful viewing, learning completion, trusted questions, and referrals—not views alone. UNESCO's media and information literacy framework provides useful principles for critical engagement with digital content [29].

Local field evidence also supports the institutional bridge assumed in the policy model. Widodo's study of FKUB Singkawang, based on interviews, documentation, social media, and direct observation, found that dialogue and strategic advocacy were used to promote moderation in Islamic education and to prevent radicalism [30]. This evidence supports involving FKUB in social-cohesion and referral functions while preserving the autonomy of Islamic da'wah institutions in matters of doctrine and internal religious formation.

Taken together, the evidence can be organised as a Context-Sensitive Islamic Da'wah Model. The model begins with da'wah bil-hikmah: clear Islamic communication delivered with wisdom and sensitivity to audience and local culture. Cultural competence then enables convert accompaniment and digital literacy to be adapted to actual social conditions. Institutional collaboration provides continuity across services, while da'wah bil-hal translates religious values into visible social benefit. The intended public outcomes are trust and social cohesion. Literature on cultural da'wah in plural societies supports adaptation to local culture without surrendering religious principles [31], while bil-hal scholarship emphasises exemplary conduct and concrete social action as complements to verbal preaching [32].



Fig. 1. Context-Sensitive Islamic Da'wah Model

Finally, service-oriented da'wah can build bridging social capital. Joint blood donation, disaster response, neighbourhood sanitation, stunting prevention, livelihood mentoring, and environmental activities allow Muslims to enact mercy and justice while cooperating with other citizens. A local illustration comes from a 2020 Ministry of Religious Affairs report in Singkawang that framed Idul Adha qurban distribution as assistance for residents in need, including non-Muslims [33]. This example should not be generalised as proof of all da'wah practice, but it shows how Islamic social action can create cross-community benefit. Contact theory predicts stronger prejudice reduction when interaction is sustained, cooperative, and supported by legitimate institutions [18]. Such programmes must remain transparent: humanitarian assistance should never be conditioned on attending religious instruction or converting. This ethical boundary protects recipients and strengthens the credibility of da'wah itself.

Table 4. Three-phase policy roadmap for da'wah institutions

Phase	Institutional actions	Deliverables and accountability
0–6 months: Map and protect	Map current coordination arrangements and service gaps by district; establish or strengthen a coordination forum only where needed; adopt safeguarding, consent, privacy, and referral standards; audit digital channels.	Public terms of reference; evidence map; service map; code of conduct; baseline indicators; confidential complaint mechanism.
6–18 months: Build and pilot	Train and certify an initial preacher cohort; pilot convert-care pathway in selected neighbourhoods; launch shared digital studio; run recurring humanitarian projects.	Competency results; pilot monitoring report; reviewed content calendar; referral logs; beneficiary feedback disaggregated without exposing identities.
18–36 months: Scale and learn	Expand based on evaluation; use outcome-based grants; conduct annual social-cohesion and religious-literacy survey; commission an independent review.	District-level coverage; annual dashboard; budget-to-outcome analysis; corrective action plan; published learning brief.

Source: authors' synthesis of the cited literature and official documents.

Conclusion

The central challenge of da'wah in Singkawang is not religious diversity itself, but whether institutions can work effectively within that diversity while maintaining doctrinal clarity and public trust. Singkawang remains a strong tolerance performer—ranking second in the 2025 Tolerant City Index—but tolerance should be understood as a dynamic social achievement rather than a completed condition. The review provides the strongest local evidence for ethnoreligious relations, religious moderation, FKUB, and convert care. By contrast, claims about Singkawang's digital da'wah ecology, citywide institutional fragmentation, and the prevalence of event-centred programming are not sufficiently established and should remain propositions for field validation. The proposed Context-Sensitive Islamic Da'wah Model links bil-hikmah, cultural competence, convert

accompaniment, digital literacy, institutional collaboration, and bil-hal to trust and social cohesion. Policy priorities therefore include competent and culturally literate preachers, confidential convert accompaniment, locally grounded digital content, evidence-based coordination, service-oriented programmes, and outcome monitoring. Such an approach does not dilute Islamic teaching; it increases the likelihood that teaching is understood, trusted, voluntarily embraced, and expressed as benefit to society. The next stage should test these propositions through interviews, focus groups, programme audits, and neighbourhood-level studies involving preachers, converts, women, youth, mosque managers, PITI, MUI, FKUB, government offices, and non-Muslim community leaders across Singkawang's districts.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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