

FOSTERING MODERATION THROUGH EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Tulang Bawang Regency, located in Lampung Province, Indonesia, represents a multicultural society marked by ethnic, religious, and socio-cultural diversity. This diversity, while enriching, also brings challenges such as social inequality, conflicting identities, and differing interpretations of moderation values. This study aims to explore the implementation of moderation values in fostering social harmony within this complex environment. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Fifteen key informants—including religious leaders, traditional figures, and community activists—were purposively selected. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis framework. The findings reveal that challenges in implementing moderation stem from contrasting views about its meaning, external disruptions (such as social media), economic disparities, and insufficient political consistency. Nonetheless, significant opportunities exist, including interfaith education, the proactive role of traditional leaders, youth engagement, and civil society initiatives. Educational programs and strong leadership were found essential to shaping early tolerance. This study concludes that the consistent promotion of moderation values requires an integrated approach involving inclusive education, equitable policies, media literacy, and the active participation of all societal elements. The research offers valuable insights for policymakers and educators aiming to strengthen social integration in multicultural settings. Future research is recommended to evaluate the long-term impact of moderation-based policies and to explore comparative studies in other culturally diverse regions.

Keywords: Civic Engagement, Education, Moderation, Multiculturalism, Social Harmony.

INTRODUCTION

Tulang Bawang Regency in Lampung Province, Indonesia, is characterized by a vibrant multicultural society composed of various ethnic groups, religious affiliations, and socio-cultural identities. The region is a microcosm of Indonesia’s pluralism, where the richness of diversity becomes both a cultural asset and a potential source of friction. While diversity should ideally lead to unity and mutual enrichment, without shared values that guide intergroup relations, it can evolve into tension or even conflict. In this context, the value of moderation—emphasizing balance, tolerance, and mutual respect—emerges as a critical principle for maintaining harmony in diverse communities (Muntoha et al., 2023). Moderation, or “wasatiyyah,” is not merely a religious principle but a social philosophy that encourages peaceful coexistence, self-restraint, and respect for differing perspectives. In Indonesia’s multicultural landscape, the national ideology Pancasila provides a philosophical foundation for such values, but the practical application of moderation often encounters challenges, especially at the grassroots level. The implementation of moderation values in Tulang Bawang is crucial in building social cohesion amidst religious, ethnic, and socio-economic differences. As Muntoha et al. (2023) emphasize, effective moderation practices are urgently needed to prevent societal polarization, discrimination, and intergroup conflict.

Despite the significance of moderation values in multicultural governance, their practical implementation remains problematic. One of the main issues in Tulang Bawang is the inconsistency between normative aspirations of harmony and the realities on the ground, which include social inequality, prejudice, and political manipulation of identity (Bahri et al., 2024). Education on moderation is sporadic, often reactive rather than proactive, and not sufficiently embedded in community-based institutions.

Moreover, the fragmentation between civil society actors and local authorities results in disjointed efforts to promote mutual understanding. The general solution to this problem lies in designing an integrated approach that addresses the socio-political and cultural roots of intolerance. This includes promoting inclusive education, strengthening civil society participation, implementing equitable policies, and ensuring open communication across diverse groups. These strategies must be supported by a collaborative governance model that includes community leaders, religious figures, policymakers, and educators.

Literature on social integration and peace education offers multiple models for promoting moderation in diverse societies. Susanti (2022) defines moderation as a balanced attitude that promotes mutual respect and self-control, especially in heterogeneous settings. Educational institutions play a vital role in embedding these values through curriculum content, teacher training, and community engagement. Furthermore, Derung et al. (2023) stress that social counseling and educational interventions tailored to local cultural contexts can effectively instill values of tolerance and pluralism. Programs that involve religious leaders, educators, and youth organizations have been shown to generate greater acceptance of diversity and reduce radical tendencies. The implementation of moderation should also be supported by strategic communication. Firmansyah et al. (2021) argue that dialogical communication facilitates the negotiation of social meanings across different cultural groups, allowing for the exchange of perspectives without coercion. This communication is particularly important in an age of digital interconnectedness, where social media can either bridge or deepen divisions. Moreover, political and economic structures must be aligned with the goal of promoting moderation. According to Manap (2022), political will and policy consistency are prerequisites for long-term social harmony. Discriminatory regulations or neglect of minority rights can undermine community trust. Khomsinnudin et al. (2024) add that economic inequality exacerbates social tensions; hence, inclusive development and social protection policies are essential for reducing resentment and fostering solidarity.

Despite the abundance of theoretical frameworks and international case studies on moderation and pluralism, there is a paucity of empirical studies that examine how these values are operationalized in specific regional contexts like Tulang Bawang. Previous studies have often generalized the Indonesian experience without capturing the unique interplay between local culture, governance practices, and grassroots community dynamics. For instance, while Susanti (2022) and Derung et al. (2023) offer valuable conceptualizations of moderation, their studies do not delve into the political, economic, and institutional complexities at the district level. Furthermore, literature often treats education and communication as isolated interventions rather than parts of an integrated moderation ecosystem. The role of public policy and local government strategies is underexplored. Although Manap (2022) discusses policy implications, the focus remains theoretical and does not include field-based insights from regions with multicultural challenges like Tulang Bawang. Similarly, the economic dimension of moderation is largely overlooked, with Khomsinnudin et al. (2024) only beginning to touch upon its significance. Hence, there is a clear research gap in understanding how social, political, cultural, and economic factors converge to influence the actual practice of moderation in Tulang Bawang. This study seeks to fill this gap by employing a qualitative approach to analyze how these factors interact and how communities perceive, adapt, and resist moderation values in their everyday lives.

This study aims to comprehensively investigate the implementation of moderation values in Tulang Bawang Regency, focusing on the socio-cultural, political, communicative, and economic dimensions that shape this process. Specifically, the research will: Examine community-level perceptions and practices related to moderation; Analyze the role of education, civil society, and religious leaders in fostering tolerance; Investigate the influence of public policy and local governance on social cohesion; Explore how economic disparities influence intergroup relations and moderation outcomes. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated analytical framework, which goes beyond the usual focus on education or religious discourse. By incorporating political and economic variables, the research offers a more holistic understanding of the drivers and inhibitors of moderation in a multicultural context. This multi-dimensional approach is relatively rare in existing literature, which often compartmentalizes social phenomena and overlooks their interconnectivity. Moreover, the study is timely and policy-relevant. As Indonesia faces growing polarization and identity-based conflicts, especially during political cycles, insights from this

research can inform local governance, education policy, and social development initiatives. The research also contributes to broader theoretical debates on pluralism, social cohesion, and democratic resilience in diverse societies. In terms of scope, the study is limited to Tulang Bawang Regency but aims to develop transferable insights that could be applied to other multicultural districts in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. It utilizes a qualitative case study methodology, including interviews with community leaders, policy makers, educators, and religious figures, as well as document analysis and participatory observation.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore and understand the implementation of moderation values in a multicultural society, specifically within Tulang Bawang Regency, Lampung Province. The qualitative paradigm was chosen to allow the researcher to gain in-depth insights into the social, cultural, and political contexts in which moderation values are practiced or hindered (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study method is particularly appropriate for capturing the complexity and uniqueness of social interactions in a real-life context (Yin, 2018). By focusing on a single bounded system—Tulang Bawang—the research attempts to examine contextual conditions that are closely tied to the implementation of moderation.

Research Location and Context

The research was conducted in Tulang Bawang Regency, which is known for its demographic plurality, comprising ethnic Lampung, Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, Bugis, and Chinese communities, among others. This area was selected due to its potential for both social harmony and conflict, making it a relevant site to study the dynamics of moderation values in a multicultural setting (Muntoha et al., 2023).

Data Collection Methods

This study employed triangulated data collection methods to enhance credibility and ensure the richness and depth of information. The three primary techniques used were in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document study. First, in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format with a total of 15 key informants. These informants included religious leaders such as Islamic clerics, pastors, and Hindu priests; traditional leaders such as adat elders and cultural activists; and community members actively involved in multicultural or interfaith activities. The interviews were held in Bahasa Indonesia or local dialects, with each session lasting between 45 to 90 minutes. The questions asked were focused on participants' experiences with social diversity, their perspectives on tolerance and moderation, and their evaluations of government or community-based programs designed to support moderation efforts. Second, the researcher conducted participatory observations during various public meetings, religious ceremonies, and intergroup social events. As a participant-observer, the researcher closely examined how individuals from different social and religious backgrounds interacted with one another, how they handled potential sources of conflict, and how effectively the values of moderation were being practiced in real-life social settings. Third, a document study was conducted to analyze secondary data relevant to the study. This included the review of policy documents, local government regulations, reports from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, media publications, and community archives. Particular attention was given to documents addressing the management of diversity, the implementation of intergroup dialogue programs, and the role of civil society in fostering a culture of tolerance and moderation (Bahri et al., 2024; Manap, 2022). This triangulated approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of moderation values in Tulang Bawang Regency from multiple perspectives and sources.

Research Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with a criterion-based selection strategy to identify individuals most knowledgeable about and involved in issues of social diversity and moderation. The composition of participants is outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Participant Distribution by Category and Role

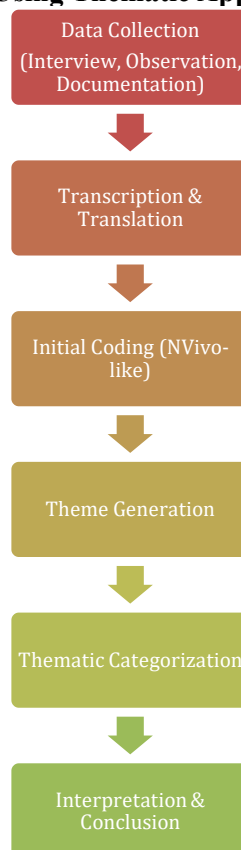
Participant Group	Number of Participants	Role in Community
Religious Leaders	5	Clerics, Pastors, Religious Teachers
Traditional Leaders	4	Customary Elders, Cultural Advocates
Community Members	6	Interfaith Volunteers, Youth Activists
Total	15	

These participants were selected based on their active engagement in multicultural dialogue, traditional ceremonies, or religious activities that bring together diverse community members.

Data Analysis

Data in this study were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which consists of six sequential phases: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. All collected data—from interviews, observations, and document reviews—were first transcribed and, when necessary, translated into a consistent format. The transcripts were then manually coded to identify significant patterns and recurring ideas relevant to the research questions. The coding process incorporated both inductive and deductive strategies. Inductive coding allowed themes to emerge naturally from the raw data, ensuring that the findings were grounded in participants' actual experiences without the imposition of pre-established categories. On the other hand, deductive coding was conducted based on theoretical frameworks concerning moderation, tolerance, and intercultural communication, as presented in existing literature (Susanti, 2022; Firmansyah et al., 2021). This dual coding approach enabled the researcher to uncover both anticipated and unexpected patterns within the data. The entire analytical process—starting from raw data to thematic interpretation—was organized and documented clearly, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Data Analysis Procedure Using Thematic Approach



Validity and Reliability (Trustworthiness)

To ensure the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the research findings, several validation strategies were systematically employed throughout the research process. First, triangulation was utilized by comparing data gathered from interviews, participatory observations, and document studies. This strategy allowed the researcher to cross-verify information, validate emerging themes, and reduce potential researcher bias, thereby strengthening the overall trustworthiness of the results (Patton, 2015). Second, member checking was conducted as a form of respondent validation. After thematic summaries were developed from the interview data, these summaries were shared with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and to ensure that their views were correctly represented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process helped to enhance the authenticity and reliability of the data. Third, the researcher maintained an audit trail, systematically documenting field notes, coding decisions, thematic development processes, and reflective memos. This comprehensive record-keeping ensured transparency and allowed for future replicability of the research methodology by other scholars. Lastly, reflexivity was practiced consistently throughout the study. The researcher kept a reflexive journal to monitor personal assumptions, document the evolving relationship with the research context, and reflect on how positionality may have influenced data collection and interpretation. This reflexive approach was essential for acknowledging and managing subjectivity in qualitative inquiry.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards in social research, ensuring that the rights and well-being of all participants were respected throughout the study. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were given clear explanations about the research objectives, procedures, and their voluntary participation, including the right to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. To protect participants' privacy, confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms and removing any identifying information from the data during transcription and analysis. This measure ensured that individuals could not be personally linked to the statements they provided. Furthermore, the study received ethical approval from the academic institution overseeing the research, which reviewed the research protocol to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines. Participants were also provided with a summary of the study's purpose and the expected benefits of the research, thus fostering transparency and trust throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Moderation Value in Multicultural Society of Tulang Bawang Regency: Challenges and Opportunities

In this study, the application of the value of moderation in the multicultural society of Tulang Bawang Regency shows that there are various challenges and opportunities that can affect the achievement of social harmony. One of the main challenges found is the different views among community groups regarding the concept of moderation itself. Some groups feel that implementing the value of moderation could threaten their local and religious values, while others see moderation as a means to create peace. This creates tensions that hinder the full implementation of the value at the community level. In addition, diversity also poses a challenge as it makes it difficult to reach consensus on inclusive social policies. Tensions between groups with different religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds are still visible in some social interactions, despite efforts to introduce the value of moderation by the local government.

One of the opportunities found in this research is the initiative of the local government to actively introduce moderation values through interfaith education and dialogue programs. This program aims to improve people's understanding of the importance of tolerance and self-control in social life. Based on findings from interviews with religious and community leaders, most residents support this effort, although there are challenges in terms of consistent implementation. Programs that combine formal and non-formal

education, such as counseling in schools and meetings between religious leaders, have shown positive results in raising public awareness about the importance of moderation (Djami et al., 2022). In addition, the active role of traditional leaders also has a positive influence on the application of the value of moderation, where they function as arbiters in social conflicts that arise due to differences.

However, the biggest challenge in implementing the value of moderation is the external influence that sometimes worsens the situation in Tulang Bawang Regency. For example, social media is often used to spread hoaxes and hate speech between groups. This triggers social tension, which makes it increasingly difficult for people to have open and honest dialogue about their differences. Research by (Fatimah et al., 2025) states that social media can exacerbate inter-group tensions in areas of high cultural diversity, as misinformation is often spread without clarification. Local governments and community organizations need to be more proactive in dealing with the negative impact of social media, by providing good media literacy to the community.

In addition, although many programs have been run, the successful implementation of the value of moderation is highly dependent on the involvement of all elements of society. Not only the government, but also civil society, religious leaders and traditional leaders must work together to ensure that the value of moderation is consistently applied in daily life. One of the challenges found in this study is the lack of effective communication between different groups, both within religious and cultural communities. This finding is in line with the results of research by (Pustikayasa, 2020) which revealed that poor communication between different groups is a major obstacle in creating an inclusive and tolerant society. Therefore, improving the quality of communication between groups is one important aspect in overcoming this challenge.

The importance of moderation education at the school and family levels was also highlighted in this study. Many respondents stated that moderation education should start early to form an attitude of tolerance in children. Educational programs based on the values of togetherness and respect for differences are expected to reduce the potential for conflict in the future. A study by (Faruq & Noviani, 2021) shows that character education based on moderation values can help reduce the potential for radicalization among the younger generation. Therefore, there is a need for synergy between educational institutions and society in instilling moderation values from an early age, both inside and outside school.

One aspect that needs to be considered in implementing the value of moderation is strengthening the capacity of community leaders and religious leaders in understanding and teaching these values. Although many religious leaders support the implementation of the value of moderation, their understanding of this concept is still limited. Research by (Heriyanto et al., 2022) reveals that the lack of understanding of moderation among religious leaders can hinder efforts to spread the value to the community. Therefore, it is important to organize training and seminars for religious leaders so that they can be more effective in teaching the value of moderation to their people.

Meanwhile, the important role of younger groups in spreading the value of moderation is also one of the main findings of this study. The younger generation, who are more open to new ideas, tend to be more receptive to the concept of moderation and become agents of change in society. This finding is in line with research by (Dompas et al., 2024) which suggests that younger groups can serve as key drivers in a more inclusive and moderate social transformation. Therefore, it is important to involve more young people in programs that aim to introduce and implement moderation values.

However, another obstacle that arises is the economic inequality that still exists in Tulang Bawang Regency. Economic inequality often causes social tensions that affect the application of moderation values, as underprivileged communities tend to feel marginalized and more vulnerable to radicalization. A study by (Hababil et al., 2024) revealed that social inequality can exacerbate intergroup tensions and hinder the

creation of social harmony. Therefore, in addition to introducing the value of moderation, it is important for local governments to address the issue of economic inequality through more inclusive policies.

Opportunities to improve the implementation of the value of moderation can be seen from the existence of various social institutions that have played an active role in creating dialog between groups in Tulang Bawang Regency. These institutions have attempted to bring together different groups, both in terms of religion and culture, to talk and understand each other. This program is in line with the results of research by (Oktaviyani et al., 2024) which states that intergroup dialogue is the main key in creating a harmonious and moderate society. Therefore, local governments need to support the existence of these institutions to expand the reach of dialog and understanding between groups.

One important factor in the implementation of moderation values is the strong commitment of regional leaders. In this study, it was found that the political commitment of regional heads greatly influences the implementation of policies that are pro-social harmony and moderation. Research by (Nisa, 2024) shows that regional heads who have an inclusive and moderate vision are able to create policies that support social integration and harmony between groups. Therefore, regional leaders must ensure that the policies implemented reflect the values of moderation and can be accepted by all levels of society. Ultimately, the biggest challenge in implementing the value of moderation in Tulang Bawang Regency is external influences and fast-changing social dynamics. Therefore, there needs to be a joint effort from the government, religious leaders, traditional leaders, and the community to maintain social stability and implement moderation values consistently. This research hopes to contribute in formulating a more effective strategy to improve the implementation of moderation values in a multicultural society.

Factors Affecting the Application of Moderation Value in Social Life in Tulang Bawang Regency

In this study, it was found that there are various social, political and cultural factors that influence the application of moderation values in Tulang Bawang Regency. The most striking social factor is the difference in education levels between community groups. Community groups with higher levels of education tend to more easily accept and apply the value of moderation in their daily lives. Conversely, groups with lower education levels tend to be more influenced by a narrow understanding of religious, ethnic and cultural differences. This is in accordance with research findings by (Sartika et al., 2020) which states that education has a major influence in shaping attitudes of tolerance in society. Therefore, improving access and quality of education is one of the important steps in supporting the implementation of moderation values in the Tulang Bawang community.

On the political side, the role of local government is crucial to the successful implementation of moderation values. The local government of Tulang Bawang district has initiated various programs aimed at introducing the value of moderation to the community, especially through education and dialogue between religious and cultural groups. However, major challenges arise when the implementation of these policies is inconsistent and sometimes affected by local political dynamics that often exacerbate tensions between groups. Research by (Rohim, 2024) reveals that political instability can be an obstacle in creating inclusive and moderate policies. Therefore, the consistency of political policies and the sustainability of moderation programs are needed in order to have a real impact on people's social lives.

Cultural factors also play an important role in the implementation of moderation values in Tulang Bawang Regency. Communities in this area have a strong tradition of respecting local customs and values, which can sometimes conflict with the more inclusive value of moderation. This finding is in line with research by (Lede, 2022) which shows that a strong traditional culture can be an obstacle when communities are asked to adopt more universal and moderate values. Nonetheless, there is an opportunity to harmonize

moderate values with local values, provided it is done with a culturally sensitive approach. In this case, traditional leaders play an important role in conveying and adapting moderation values to existing traditions.

In the social aspect, economic inequality is an equally important factor in the application of the value of moderation. People who experience economic inequality often feel marginalized and more vulnerable to radicalization and exclusive ideologies that ignore the principle of moderation. Research by (Edison & Andriansyah, 2023) shows that social and economic inequality increases the potential for tension between different groups. One way to address this is to introduce more inclusive and equitable economic programs that not only improve welfare but also strengthen the sense of community among different social groups.

In addition, the factor of open communication between community groups also plays an important role in the successful implementation of the value of moderation. In this study, it was found that poor communication between religious and ethnic groups in Tulang Bawang often adds to existing tensions, thus exacerbating efforts to achieve more harmonious social integration. For example, limited communication between Muslim groups and other religious minorities creates negative perceptions that hinder open dialogue. This is consistent with the results of a study (Fatimah et al., 2025) which states that a lack of effective communication can exacerbate social segregation and hinder integration. Therefore, improving the quality of communication between groups is one of the strategic steps to strengthen the application of moderation values in this area.

Another influential factor in the implementation of the value of moderation is social media. Social media is often used to spread inaccurate information or even hoaxes that can exacerbate tensions between groups. Research by (Anggraeni, 2025) shows that social media can be a means of spreading hatred and discrimination, especially in areas with high diversity. Therefore, it is important to conduct more effective media literacy, both at the individual and group levels, so that people can sort out information more wisely and avoid spreading hate speech. On the other hand, social media can also be utilized as a tool to spread the value of moderation through positive campaigns that promote tolerance and mutual understanding between groups.

In addition, the presence of religious leaders and local community leaders is very influential in the application of the value of moderation. In Tulang Bawang district, many religious leaders have taught the principles of moderation in their daily lives. However, their understanding of moderation is still limited, making it difficult for them to explain and teach this value to their followers. Research by (Heriyanto et al., 2022) shows that training and debriefing religious leaders on moderation can improve their understanding of the value and strengthen their role as agents of social change in society. Therefore, education and training for religious leaders need to be strengthened to ensure that they can play a maximum role in spreading the value of moderation.

Character education based on the value of moderation is also an important factor in the implementation of this value. In this study, it was found that most schools in Tulang Bawang district have started to include materials on tolerance and moderation in their curriculum, although not yet fully consistent. This finding is in line with research by (Nole & Serdianus, 2023) which shows that moderation-based education can help shape the character of students who are more open to diversity. This education program needs to be strengthened so that the younger generation in Tulang Bawang Regency can better understand and appreciate differences, and adopt moderation values in their lives.

In addition to education, the role of civil society is also very important in introducing and implementing the value of moderation. Community organizations that support dialogue between religious and cultural groups in Tulang Bawang district have succeeded in reducing tensions and introducing the value of moderation more widely. Research by (Asman & Arqam, 2023) shows that civil society involvement in moderation programs can create space for people to talk about differences and find solutions together.

Therefore, strengthening the role of civil society organizations in moderation programs can help create a more harmonious and inclusive society. And another important factor is local government policies that support the implementation of moderation values. The Tulang Bawang district government has issued various policies that encourage tolerance and social integration, but there are still challenges in implementing these policies at the community level. Research by (Setiawan et al., 2023) reveals that government policies that are inclusive and pro-diversity are very important in creating a moderate society. Therefore, consistency in the implementation of policies that support the value of moderation must be maintained, so that the government's efforts to create social harmony can run well.

Finally, external factors such as the influence of globalization also affect the application of moderation values in Tulang Bawang Regency. Globalization has a positive impact in introducing new cultures and ideologies, but it also brings challenges in terms of adjusting to more moderate local values. Globalization can exacerbate social tensions if not balanced with a good understanding of the values of togetherness and moderation. Therefore, it is important to develop policies that can balance the influence of globalization with moderate local values.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the implementation of the value of moderation in Tulang Bawang Regency is faced with significant challenges, including differences in views between community groups regarding moderation, social inequality, as well as external influences from social media and globalization. Nonetheless, there are great opportunities to strengthen the implementation of moderation through education based on the values of tolerance and self-control. Educational programs involving schools, families and civil society can help shape attitudes of tolerance early on and accelerate the process of social integration. In addition, more effective communication between groups and the active role of religious and traditional leaders in introducing moderation values are key to strengthening its implementation in society.

On the other hand, to achieve success in implementing the value of moderation, inclusive and sustainable government policies are needed, especially in creating equitable social welfare through economic policies based on equity. Improving the capacity of community and religious leaders in understanding and teaching moderation is also an important factor in promoting social change. This research emphasizes that a culturally sensitive approach and involving all elements of society in efforts to implement the value of moderation will create a more harmonious and inclusive society in Tulang Bawang District. The successful implementation of moderation depends on close collaboration between the government, the community and relevant organizations.

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