Interfaith Dialogue, Collective Trauma Healing, and Youth Peacebuilding in the Global South: A Comparative Study of Trustbuilding Programs in Indonesia and Kenya

Anisa Eka Putri Kusmayani[1*], Miftahul Huda[2], Dan Mugera[3]

1 Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
2 Initiatives of Change Indonesia, Indonesia
2 Initiatives of Change Kenya, Kenya

* Corresponding Author: anisaekaputrikusmayani@mail.ugm.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of the Trustbuilding Program (TBP) in fostering interfaith dialogue and healing collective trauma among youth in Indonesia and Kenya. The research aims to explore how youth, often viewed merely as victims or perpetrators of radicalization, can become key agents of peacebuilding when provided with safe spaces and creative dialogical methods. A qualitative research design was employed, combining participatory observation and document analysis, including stories of change, program reports, videos, and modules. The first author participated directly in TBP camps in Indonesia, while program managers in Indonesia and Kenya contributed practitioner perspectives. The findings reveal that TBP in both countries emphasizes four pillars: starting with self-transformation, healing historical wounds, engaging in honest conversations, and building diverse teams. In Kenya, the program is implemented through universities and strengthened by religious leaders, while in Indonesia it is carried out through community-based camps that integrate creative tools such as storytelling, board games, and reflective practices. Both approaches enabled youth to articulate inherited traumas, build trust across faith lines, and create inclusive narratives of coexistence. The study contributes to peacebuilding scholarship by foregrounding collective trauma as a central variable in interfaith dialogue and demonstrating the flexibility of TBP methods across different socio-historical contexts in the Global South. Practically, the results suggest that sustainable interfaith dialogue requires not only global frameworks but also local adaptations that address historical grievances, social polarization, and structural inequalities. The originality of this study lies in its comparative perspective on TBP in Indonesia and Kenya, highlighting how trauma-informed dialogue methods enable youth to transform historical wounds into resources for reconciliation and pluralism. Unlike previous studies that focus either on theological values or grassroots activism, this research situates trauma as both a challenge and an opportunity for interfaith peacebuilding.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran *Trustbuilding Program (TBP)* dalam mendorong dialog antaragama dan penyembuhan trauma kolektif di kalangan pemuda di Indonesia dan Kenya. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana pemuda, yang sering dipandang hanya sebagai korban atau pelaku radikalisasi, dapat menjadi aktor utama perdamaian ketika diberikan ruang aman dan metode dialog yang kreatif. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif dengan mengombinasikan observasi partisipatif dan analisis dokumen, termasuk *stories of change*, laporan program, video, dan modul. Penulis pertama terlibat langsung dalam pelaksanaan TBP Camp di Indonesia, sementara manajer program di Indonesia dan Kenya memberikan perspektif praktis dari sisi implementasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa TBP di kedua negara menekankan empat pilar utama: memulai dari transformasi diri, menyembuhkan luka sejarah, melakukan percakapan jujur, serta membangun tim yang beragam. Di Kenya, program ini diimplementasikan melalui universitas dan diperkuat oleh keterlibatan tokoh agama, sementara di Indonesia program dilaksanakan melalui kamp berbasis komunitas dengan integrasi metode kreatif seperti *storytelling*, permainan papan, dan praktik reflektif. Kedua pendekatan tersebut memungkinkan pemuda mengartikulasikan trauma yang diwariskan, membangun kepercayaan lintas iman, serta menciptakan narasi kebersamaan yang inklusif. Kontribusi penelitian ini terhadap kajian *peacebuilding* terletak pada penempatan trauma kolektif sebagai variabel utama dalam dialog antaragama, sekaligus menunjukkan fleksibilitas metode TBP di berbagai konteks sosial-historis di Global South. Secara praktis, hasil penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa keberlanjutan dialog lintas iman membutuhkan tidak hanya kerangka global, tetapi juga adaptasi lokal yang mampu menjawab luka sejarah, polarisasi sosial, dan ketidaksetaraan struktural. Keaslian penelitian ini terletak pada perspektif komparatif terhadap TBP di Indonesia dan Kenya, yang menunjukkan bagaimana metode dialog berbasis trauma mampu mengubah luka sejarah menjadi sumber rekonsiliasi dan penguatan pluralisme. Berbeda dengan studi sebelumnya yang cenderung berfokus pada nilai teologis atau aktivisme akar rumput, penelitian ini menempatkan trauma sebagai tantangan sekaligus peluang bagi pembangunan perdamaian antaragama.

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of interreligious interaction in contemporary plural societies reveals increasingly complex dynamics (Neelam Bano, Javaria Hassan, & Shama Urooj, 2021). In countries with high religious diversity such as Indonesia and Kenya, these interactions are often marked by tensions, prejudices, and even violence. Both nations have a long history of religiously motivated conflicts exacerbated by the rise of extremist groups—for instance, Al-Shabaab in Kenya (Cannon & Ruto Pkalya, 2019) and the legacy of *Darul Islam* in Indonesia (Temby, 2010). Suicide bombings involving youth, such as the 2011 Solo incident, underscore the vulnerability of younger generations to radicalization (Arifin, 2016). At the same time, youth are often framed merely as victims or perpetrators of violence, whereas they in fact hold tremendous potential to become peacebuilders and agents of social change. This phenomenon deserves scholarly attention not only because of its implications for socio-political stability but also for the sustainability of coexistence in multicultural societies.

Recent data further reinforces the urgency of this issue. In Indonesia, the SETARA Institute recorded a rise in intolerance cases, from 217 incidents with 329 actions in 2023 to 260 incidents with 402 actions in 2024 (SETARA Institute, 2024). The Ministry of Religious Affairs (2025) also reported 41 cases of religion-related social conflict during 2023–2024, highlighting that intolerance and violence in the name of religion remain a serious threat to social cohesion. A parallel situation exists in Kenya. In 2014, Al-Shabaab militants attacked a bus in Mandera, killing 28 non-Muslim passengers after forcibly separating them from Muslims—a strategy intended to incite religious war (BBC.com, 2015). A senior advisor to President Uhuru Kenyatta described this attack as a systematic effort to provoke interreligious conflict. Moreover, the *2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Kenya* documents a series of intolerance-related incidents, ranging from church and mosque attacks during protests, massacres of congregants by extremist groups, to the Shakahola Forest tragedy where hundreds of church followers perished due to deviant religious practices (USDOS – US Department of State, 2023). The report further notes that although the constitution provides guarantees for freedom of religion, Muslim communities continue to report intimidation, arbitrary arrests, and discrimination by security forces.

Within this context, interfaith dialogue emerges as a crucial strategy for building bridges of understanding across identities. Dialogue is not merely a formal conversation but a transformative social practice involving self-reflection, openness to differences, and the creation of safe spaces for mutual learning. Nevertheless, such efforts do not always proceed smoothly. One critical factor affecting the quality of dialogue is collective trauma. Communities carrying the legacy of trauma — whether as victims or as perpetrators—face significant obstacles in developing trust. For youth in particular, this trauma is inherited as a narrative of identity that can reinforce internal cohesion while simultaneously erecting exclusive boundaries against others. Thus, collective trauma must be acknowledged as both a challenge and a potential opportunity in understanding the dynamics of interreligious dialogue.

The literature on interreligious dialogue can be mapped into three main tendencies. First, normative literature emphasizes the philosophical and theological dimensions of dialogue. Swidler (2014) and Braybrooke (1992) argue that dialogue is not about reaching consensus but rather about self-transformation, the affirmation of difference, and the construction of communal life. This stream highlights the intrinsic value of dialogue but pays less attention to social contexts such as youth engagement or the impact of trauma. Second, practice-oriented literature focuses on interfaith dialogue in education and grassroots movements. Lattu (2019), Jati et al. (2024), and Husein (2019) demonstrate that community-based approaches, such as *Pesantren Damai*, YIPC, and YIFoS, are more effective in involving youth than state-driven top-down initiatives. These studies underscore the importance of participatory spaces, peer-based initiatives, and youth creativity in building interfaith bridges. However, they rarely connect these participatory experiences to historical or social traumas that shape collective identity. Third, post-conflict and counter-radicalization studies highlight dialogue as a tool for healing and prevention. Muketha (2022) examined the case of Garissa University in Kenya after a terrorist attack, while Airo et al. (2024) explored the Catholic Church's role in fostering social cohesion through youth interfaith activities. These works reveal that dialogue can promote social healing and counter extremism, yet the dimension of collective trauma remains implicit rather than a central variable in designing dialogical methods.

From this review, a significant research gap becomes evident: few studies explicitly connect interreligious dialogue, youth participation, and collective trauma. Most existing scholarship focuses either on the normative value of dialogue or on the effectiveness of community-based approaches, but rarely interrogates how historical and social trauma influences young people's willingness to engage, build trust, and construct inclusive interfaith narratives.

This study seeks to address that gap by examining the *Trustbuilding Program (TBP)* initiated by *Initiatives of Change* in Indonesia and Kenya. The program frames interfaith dialogue not only as a method of communication but also as an ethical-relational process to mend fractured trust caused by trauma. The focus is placed on how youth practice dialogue for healing, both as

inheritors of victim narratives and as members of communities distanced from direct traumatic experiences. By comparing these two Global South contexts—each marked by a history of religious conflict—this research aims to uncover patterns and dialogical methods relevant to post-conflict and multicultural settings.

The central argument of this study is that trustbuilding-based interfaith dialogue holds a dual potential: first, as a means of healing collective trauma among youth; and second, as a strategy for constructing shared and more inclusive narratives within plural societies. Hence, this study advances the hypothesis that the success of youth interfaith dialogue depends not only on facilitation methods and institutional contexts but also on the extent to which such programs can engage with inherited trauma and transform it into positive energy for reconciliation and cross-faith identity formation.

2.   RESEARCH METHOD

This study focuses on the *Trustbuilding Program (TBP)* implemented by *Initiatives of Change (IofC)* in Indonesia and Kenya. The unit of analysis is the experiences and engagement of youth in the program, particularly in the context of interreligious dialogue and the healing of *collective trauma*. The study positions youth not merely as passive objects but as key actors who facilitate, experience, and develop interfaith dialogue practices. In addition, the research examines the social dynamics, organizational strategies, and program modules that form the framework of TBP implementation in both countries.

The research employed a *qualitative approach* (Maxwell, 2009; Ziaul Haq, Philips, Viktorahadi, & Wibisono, 2023). This method was selected to enable a deep understanding of the processes, experiences, and meanings constructed by TBP participants and facilitators. A *qualitative approach* allows the researcher to capture social dynamics in their natural setting, including interactions, emotional expressions, non-verbal communication, and narratives that may not emerge in formal interviews (Setia, Truna, & Hannah, 2025). Furthermore, the researcher's direct involvement as both academic and TBP facilitator situates the study within a *participatory framework*, providing rich reflection and an insider perspective.

The data derive from two main sources: *primary data* and *secondary data*. Primary data were obtained through the researcher's direct experience in TBP programs in Bandung and Yogyakarta, as well as through the reflections and insights of TBP program managers in Indonesia and Kenya. Secondary data consist of program documentation, including program reports, *Stories of Change (SoC)*, videos, and the modules and guidelines used in program delivery. The SoC provide insights into changes, challenges, and participants' personal experiences, while program reports offer an overview of program dynamics and opportunities for further development. Videos and modules serve to illuminate the strategies, values, and approaches adopted in program facilitation.

Data collection combined *participant observation* and *document analysis*. Participant observation was conducted by the first author, who joined TBP Camps as both participant and facilitator, enabling deeper observation of social interactions, group dynamics, and the practices of interreligious dialogue. This position also allowed access to non-dominant narratives that may not appear in formal forums. Document analysis was carried out on SoC, program reports, modules, and videos, which provided additional perspectives on participant experiences, organizational strategies, and program achievements.

The data were analyzed using *thematic analysis* (Neuendorf, 2018). This process involved organizing the data according to key themes, such as the dynamics of interreligious dialogue, experiences of trauma healing, the role of youth, and trustbuilding strategies. Data from both observations and documents were manually coded to identify patterns, similarities, and differences between the Indonesian and Kenyan contexts. The analysis was conducted reflectively, taking into account the researcher's embedded position in the program, ensuring that the interpretation went beyond description to include critical and analytical insights. Through this

approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of interreligious dialogue practices for trauma healing among youth.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Trustbuilding Kenya: Initiatives between Muslim and Christian Youth after Bombings

In Kenya, discrimination and marginalization of certain ethnic and religious groups have deep roots dating back to the colonial period (Mukanda, Okoth, & Lusambili, 2024; Onyango, Okoth, Lusambili, & Ochieng, 2024; Unmasking Ethnic Minorities and Marginalized Communities in Kenya, 2017). After independence, these patterns persisted as the government neglected development in Muslim-majority regions, particularly in the North Eastern Province and coastal areas (Alio, 2022; Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010; Ndzovu, 2014). This mistrust and tension repeatedly erupted into conflict, ranging from the 1992 ethnic clashes to the post-election violence of 2006–2007 (Atieno Odhiambo, 2004; Brosché, Fjelde, & Höglund, 2020; Kisaka & Nyadera, 2019). Furthermore, the end of Somalia's civil war opened pathways for the jihadist group Al-Shabaab to cross borders and operate in Kenya. These conditions deepened social wounds, especially as Kenyan youth were recruited into terrorist actions (Omenma, Hendricks, & Ajaebili, 2020). The peak of this tragedy occurred in 2015, when Al-Shabaab attacked Garissa University, killing 147 people—most of them Christian students (Calamur & Chappel, 2015). Ironically, the gunman leading the attack was a 24-year-old law student at the University of Nairobi and the son of a government chief in Mandera (Kenyan university attacker identified as official's son, 2015).

This series of attacks widened the gulf of suspicion between Christian and Muslim communities. At the same time, government counterterrorism policies were often perceived as biased by Muslim communities, which intensified feelings of injustice (Nyamwata & Mutei, 2024). It was this complexity that prompted *Initiatives of Change (IofC) Kenya* to launch the *Trustbuilding Program (TBP)* in 2019. The program focused on creating safe spaces for youth from diverse religious backgrounds to engage in dialogue, build trust, and promote peaceful coexistence. TBP began with *training of trainers (ToT)* for lecturers at Garissa University and Mombasa University, and then expanded to students. Its primary aim was to equip young people with the capacity to facilitate interfaith and interethnic dialogue and to strengthen their involvement in fostering social cohesion.

As part of the international network, TBP Kenya adopted four key steps from the *International Trustbuilding Program*: (1) starting with oneself, (2) healing historical wounds, (3) engaging everyone in honest conversation, and (4) building cross-boundary teams. The first step emphasized personal responsibility to let go of victimhood or blame. The second step—healing historical wounds—was considered crucial because it acknowledged the power of *collective memory* in shaping community narratives. This process invited participants to see history through the eyes of "the other," not only as an act of empathy but also as a vital step toward creating a more just collective memory. The third step required the presence of all stakeholders in inclusive spaces, enabling dialogue that is transformative rather than merely informational. The fourth step—building teams across political, class, ethnic, and geographic boundaries—was essential for generating sustainable change, since authentic teamwork reflects real-life relationships in daily practice (The International Trustbuilding Program Impact Report 2020-2021, 2021).

Although it followed a global framework, the TBP Kenya team adapted the methods to make them more relevant to local youth. One important innovation was inviting Imam Ashafa and Pastor James from Nigeria in 2020 to share their reconciliation journey. The TBP team believed that *storytelling* is a powerful tool to bridge personal emotions with collective memory, making complex conflicts more human and comprehensible (Charles & Fowler-Watt, 2023; Friskie, 2020; Pentón Herrera, Trinh, & Park, 2023). Through real-life stories, youth were not asked to bury their wounds but rather to confront them openly, affirm their dignity, and strengthen their agency (Gonzales, Thissell, & Thorat, 2022; Verheijen, Rutz, Barendregt, & Pot, 2025). TBP Kenya also incorporated creative methods such as sports and gardening. Sports helped dismantle stereotypes as youth

collaborated in teams, while gardening fostered a shared sense of responsibility in caring for plants as symbols of peace.

Tangible changes began to emerge. A participant named Collins from Mombasa stated that the program transformed relations between Christian and Muslim communities around his church. Trust increased, and new collaborations developed—even to the point that Muslim youth helped ensure church security so that Christians could worship peacefully (Reverend Collins, 2022). Another participant, Mariam from Garissa, shared that she now feels called to take responsibility for her community, having realized that change cannot happen if one simply waits for others to act (Mariam, 2022). These stories demonstrate that interfaith dialogue is not merely a means of communication but also a bridge for healing historical wounds, enabling the creation of new narratives toward an inclusive and peaceful post-conflict society.

Table 1. Visualization of Findings from the Trustbuilding Program (TBP) Kenya

Aspect	Description
Socio-historical context	Colonial and postcolonial discrimination against Muslim communities in the North Eastern and coastal regions; development marginalization; ethnic conflicts (1992, 2006–2007).
Triggers of conflict and radicalization	Entry of Al-Shabaab after the Somali civil war; Garissa University attack in 2015 (147 deaths); youth recruitment into extremist groups.
Initial TBP response	Launched in 2019 by IofC Kenya; began with *Training of Trainers (ToT)* for lecturers in Garissa and Mombasa; later expanded to students.
Four steps of trustbuilding	(1) Starting with oneself; (2) Healing historical wounds; (3) Honest and inclusive conversations; (4) Building cross-identity teams.
Innovative methods	*Storytelling* (e.g., testimonies of Imam Ashafa and Pastor James); sports (cross-identity collaboration); gardening (shared responsibility as a peace symbol).
Impacts and changes	Increased trust between Christian and Muslim communities (e.g., Collins in Mombasa); strengthened sense of community responsibility (e.g., Mariam in Garissa).

Table 1 summarizes the dynamics of the *Trustbuilding Program (TBP)* in Kenya. The program emerged from a long socio-historical context marked by discrimination against Muslim communities that began during colonialism and persisted under post-independence governance. These conditions were exacerbated by recurring ethnic conflicts and the infiltration of the terrorist group Al-Shabaab, which recruited local youth and carried out deadly attacks, most notably the 2015 Garissa University tragedy that claimed 147 lives.

In response, *Initiatives of Change (IofC) Kenya* launched TBP in 2019 through a participatory approach that began with training lecturers and students. The TBP framework drew on four main steps: self-reflection, healing historical wounds, fostering inclusive conversations, and strengthening cross-identity teamwork. While the program was guided by global modules, the Kenya team adapted its methods using innovative approaches more relatable to youth, including *storytelling*, sports, and gardening.

The program's impact became visible in tangible ways. Intercommunity relations between Christians and Muslims improved through new forms of collaboration, such as Muslim youth taking part in ensuring church security in Mombasa. In addition, personal transformations emerged, exemplified by Mariam from Garissa, who developed a strong sense of responsibility to initiate positive change within her community. These outcomes demonstrate that interfaith dialogue within TBP not only contributes to healing historical wounds but also enables the creation of new narratives toward an inclusive and peaceful society.

Trustbuilding Indonesia: Fostering Muslim-Christian Youth Dialogue to Sustain Diversity

In Indonesia, the emergence of terrorist attacks and the growing strength of radical and fundamentalist Islamist movements became more visible after the Reformasi era (Arifianto, 2020; Bertrand & Soedirgo, 2016; Fealy, 2004; Heiduk, 2012). Youth have been one of the primary targets for recruitment in continuing the ideological agenda of such groups (Idris, 2018; Maunah, 2022; Sugihartati, Suyanto, & Sirry, 2020). The 2021 suicide bombing outside the Makassar Cathedral, carried out by a 26-year-old man, demonstrated that the threat of radicalism remains urgent and persistent (Azanella & Kurniawan, 2021; Iqbal, 2021). Incidents of religion-based violence have left profound *collective wounds* among young people, generating mistrust toward other communities and increasing the risk of renewed conflict (Kanas, 2022). In this context, *Initiatives of Change (IofC) Indonesia* launched the *Trustbuilding Program (TBP)* in 2021 with the goal of "inspiring mutual trust and understanding to strengthen social cohesion and prevent radicalization" (Building Trust across the World's Divides: Case Studies and Best Practices, 2023).

Since its launch, TBP Indonesia has developed several initiatives to counter intolerance and radicalization among youth. One of its flagship initiatives is the *Trustbuilding Camp (TBP Camp)*, which has been held since 2021 in Yogyakarta, Makassar, Bandung, and Jakarta. These camps bring together youth from diverse religious, ethnic, racial, gender, and cultural backgrounds to process historical wounds collectively in a safe space that encourages reconciliation. TBP Camp emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and confronting *collective trauma,* as these wounds often obstruct inter-identity relationships and hinder peacebuilding processes (Manan, Hadi, & Saputra, 2021; Tol, Reis, Susanty, & de Jong, 2010).

As part of the international network, TBP Indonesia adapted modules from *Trustbuilding International* but redesigned them through creative methods relevant to young people. *Storytelling* became a central method because it enables participants to connect more deeply with themselves and with the narratives of others (Gupta & Jha, 2022). The TBP team also introduced *board games* as educational tools that make issues of conflict and radicalism easier to understand, more engaging, and appealing for youth (Asmara & Rulyansah, 2024; Schlegel, 2021). In every session, participants were invited to engage in *quiet time* and personal reflection to listen to their *inner voice,* write about family or community experiences of wounds, and then share them in *honest conversations*. Through these processes, participants not only recalled their wounds but also learned to articulate them as an initial step toward healing and interfaith understanding.

From the author's observations, many participants discovered connections between their personal wounds and the broader historical trajectory of the nation. For example, one participant recounted the story of grandparents who had to flee during the DI/TII rebellion. Another realized that the discrimination they face today is rooted in the colonial era, when society was stratified into rigid social classes: Europeans at the top, Arabs/Indians/Chinese in the middle, and indigenous populations at the bottom. By recognizing these historical continuities, participants were encouraged to build more honest and empathetic conversations. In this sense, interfaith dialogue extended beyond an exchange of faith perspectives to become a collective process of acknowledging historical wounds and embracing shared responsibility for a peaceful future.

The tangible impact of TBP Indonesia is evident in the story of Cayes, a participant of the 2024 TBP Camp. Cayes admitted to having harbored deep resentment toward Muslims after experiencing bullying. However, the *healing historical wounds* session helped her recognize the pain she had long suppressed. Through the *fish bowl session*—a method where stories are shared within a circle of peers—she experienced catharsis, articulated her wounds, and reached self-acceptance. Following the program, she expressed readiness to re-engage with Muslim communities and emphasized the importance of *inner listening* as part of her reconciliation journey (*Trustbuilding Program Indonesia Report 2024*, 2024). Her story illustrates how TBP Indonesia expands the meaning of interfaith dialogue: not merely cross-faith encounters but also a journey of personal healing that cultivates *inner peace* and readiness to build trust with others.

Nevertheless, TBP Indonesia faces several challenges. The two main obstacles are funding and participant recruitment. Although part of an international network, TBP Indonesia relies largely on crowdfunding campaigns and independent activities, making financial limitations a recurring constraint. Recruiting participants also remains difficult, as many young people perceive issues of peace, radicalism, and interfaith dialogue as abstract or sensitive. Limited promotion of the program has compounded this challenge. To overcome these barriers, the TBP team has experimented with gamification in campaigns and advertisements to attract greater youth participation.

Through reflective, creative, and participatory approaches, TBP Indonesia demonstrates that interfaith dialogue for youth is not merely a discussion but a process of both personal and collective transformation. This process connects historical experiences, heals social wounds, and simultaneously strengthens national cohesion in the midst of diversity that is often threatened by intolerance and radicalism.

Table 2. Visualization of Findings from the Trustbuilding Program (TBP) Indonesia

Aspect	Description
Socio-historical context	Post-Reformasi era marked by the rise of radical and fundamentalist Islamist movements; youth targeted for ideological recruitment; 2021 Makassar suicide bombing by a 26-year-old; *collective trauma* from conflict and intolerance.
Initial TBP response	Launched in 2021 by IofC Indonesia to prevent radicalization and intolerance; aim: to inspire trust, mutual understanding, and strengthen social cohesion among youth.
Program format	*Trustbuilding Camps (TBP Camps)* in Yogyakarta, Makassar, Bandung, and Jakarta; brought together youth across religion, ethnicity, race, and gender to process historical wounds in safe spaces.
Methods and approaches	*Storytelling* for the healing journey; *board games* to make radicalism issues more accessible; *quiet time* and personal reflection; writing about historical wounds from colonial to modern eras.
Healing process	Participants wrote and shared personal or family experiences of historical wounds (e.g., trauma from DI/TII, colonial discrimination); then engaged in honest and empathetic interfaith conversations.
Impacts and changes	Story of Cayes (2024): from harboring hatred toward Muslims to catharsis and self-acceptance through a *fish bowl session*; developed readiness for dialogue, forgiveness, and cross-community trust-building.
Challenges	Limited funding (relying on crowdfunding and self-generated activities); difficulties in participant recruitment due to perceptions of issues as abstract/sensitive; lack of promotion. Solution: gamification in campaigns and event advertisements.

Table 2 illustrates the dynamics of the *Trustbuilding Program (TBP)* in Indonesia. The post-Reformasi socio-historical context has been marked by the rise of radical Islamist movements, increasing intolerance, and acts of terror involving young people—such as the 2021 Makassar suicide bombing. These events generated *collective trauma* and deep mistrust across communities. In response, *Initiatives of Change (IofC) Indonesia* launched TBP in 2021 with the goal of building trust, fostering mutual understanding, and strengthening social cohesion among youth.

Its flagship program is the *Trustbuilding Camp (TBP Camp)*, conducted in several cities to bring together youth from diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The program employed *creative-participatory methods* such as *storytelling, board games*, and personal reflection sessions (*quiet time* and writing about historical wounds). This process enabled participants not only to recognize *collective wounds*—such as the legacy of colonial discrimination or trauma from the DI/TII rebellion—but also to address them honestly in interfaith conversations.

The transformative impact was evident in the story of Cayes (2024), a participant who had long harbored resentment toward Muslims due to experiences of bullying. Through the *fish bowl session*, she experienced catharsis, articulated her wounds, achieved self-acceptance, and became ready to re-engage in dialogue and trust-building with other communities. Nevertheless, TBP Indonesia faced significant challenges, particularly limited funding and difficulties in recruiting participants. The program sought to overcome these constraints by adopting *gamification* strategies in campaigns and advertisements to increase youth engagement.

Through reflective, creative, and participatory approaches, TBP Indonesia has demonstrated that interfaith dialogue among youth is not merely cross-faith discussion but also a journey of personal healing that strengthens national social cohesion in the face of diversity often threatened by intolerance and radicalism.

Comparative and Reflective Analysis of Trustbuilding Indonesia and Kenya Initiatives

Although the *Trustbuilding Program (TBP)* in Kenya and Indonesia developed within different socio-historical contexts, both share similar foundational values. In both countries, TBP emphasizes the importance of healing historical wounds, building trust among interreligious and intercultural youth, and using international modules developed by *Trustbuilding International* (The International Trustbuilding Program Impact Report 2020-2021, 2021; 2022-2023, 2023). Four central pillars—starting with oneself, healing historical wounds, engaging in honest conversations, and building cross-identity teams—serve as the foundation for creating safe spaces for personal reflection as well as transformative dialogue. In practice, *storytelling* has been employed in both contexts as a primary method, as it enables individuals to connect with their historical wounds and fosters healing processes (Gupta & Jha, 2022; Rosenthal, 2003). Participants are invited to acknowledge their historical wounds and reconstruct them into new narratives, thereby enabling deeper and more meaningful conversations across religious and ethnic identities.

Differences arise in program implementation strategies and contextual adaptations. TBP Kenya has emphasized an institutional approach, engaging universities such as Garissa and Mombasa, and inviting international religious leaders such as Imam Ashafa and Pastor James from Nigeria as models of reconciliation (The International Trustbuilding Program Impact Report 2022-2023, 2023). By contrast, TBP Indonesia has prioritized grassroots community approaches through the organization of *Trustbuilding Camps* in various cities, relying on youth-driven creativity and participatory methods. Diverse innovations have been introduced, including *board games* to simplify complex issues of radicalism and conflict for easier understanding by younger generations (Asmara & Rulyansah, 2024). In terms of context, Kenya has faced wounds stemming from historical discrimination against Muslim communities and extremist attacks by Al-Shabaab, while Indonesia has struggled with social polarization fueled by increasing conservatism and radicalism in the post-Reformasi period (Fealy, 2004). Thus, even though both programs are rooted in the same framework, their implementation demonstrates the flexibility and contextual relevance of TBP methodology in addressing local social and cultural dynamics.

Interfaith dialogue within TBP is not understood merely as an exchange of theological perspectives but as a reconciliation process centered on healing *collective trauma* caused by historical conflicts. Peace studies literature emphasizes that acknowledging historical wounds is a prerequisite for rebuilding fractured trust (Barsalou & Baxter, 2007; Ross, 2007). In this framework, TBP functions not only to promote interfaith conversation but also to create safe spaces for individuals to reflect on traumatic experiences and process them collectively within their communities.

In Kenya, postcolonial discrimination against Muslim communities and a series of extremist attacks—including the Garissa University tragedy—deepened mistrust between Muslim and Christian communities. These wounds were not only the result of violent incidents but also products of long-standing structural marginalization (Ndzovu, 2014). TBP Kenya responded by organizing *healing historical wounds* sessions designed to challenge stereotypes, improve intergroup relations, and encourage collaboration through joint activities such as sports and gardening. This approach

aligns with Lederach's (2010) emphasis on the importance of creating dialogical spaces that enable relational transformation through emotional engagement and collective action.

In Indonesia, challenges emerged from the rise of radicalism and religion-based violence in the post-Reformasi era. Participants' experiences demonstrated that unacknowledged histories—whether from past conflicts such as the DI/TII rebellion or from ethnic and religious discrimination—can serve as potential sources of renewed conflict. Through methods such as the *fish bowl session*, *storytelling*, and personal history writing, TBP Indonesia has helped youth not to suppress their wounds but to articulate them within dialogical spaces. This approach is supported by literature highlighting the role of narratives in reshaping social identities and bridging divides between polarized groups (Clark, 2010).

The comparison between Kenya and Indonesia demonstrates that, despite their distinct socio-historical contexts, both require interfaith dialogue oriented toward trauma healing. TBP in both countries illustrates the application of conflict transformation principles that emphasize recognition, honesty, and authentic interpersonal relationships (Bloomfield, Barnes, & Huyse, 2003). Thus, interfaith dialogue rooted in the healing of historical wounds becomes not only a bridge for reconciliation but also a platform for building a shared vision of a more just and peaceful future.

The findings of this study indicate that TBP in Kenya and Indonesia effectively address challenges in interfaith relations among youth affected by historical trauma and violent conflict. Both emphasize personal reflection, collective narratives of wounds, and safe spaces for dialogue, which have demonstrably altered participants' perceptions of other groups and strengthened bridges of trust. These results reinforce earlier literature on the importance of trauma healing and transformative dialogue in building sustainable peace (Barsalou & Baxter, 2007; J P Lederach & Appleby, 2010). Despite sharing the same basic approach, local contexts remain significant: TBP Kenya relies more heavily on public figures and institutional support, while TBP Indonesia emphasizes youth-centered creative community engagement. These differences highlight that program success depends on sensitivity to sociocultural contexts, while also underscoring the urgency of experiential and trauma-based approaches in cultivating meaningful and sustainable interfaith dialogue.

Table 3. Comparison of the Trustbuilding Program (TBP) in Indonesia and Kenya

Aspect	TBP Kenya	TBP Indonesia
Socio-historical context	Colonial and postcolonial discrimination against Muslim communities; development marginalization; extremist attacks by Al-Shabaab (e.g., Garissa University 2015).	Post-Reformasi rise of radicalism and intolerance; terrorist attacks (e.g., 2021 Makassar suicide bombing); legacy of past conflicts (DI/TII, ethnic discrimination).
Primary focus	Rebuilding Muslim–Christian trust; responding to wounds caused by structural discrimination and terrorist attacks.	Preventing radicalization and intolerance; healing *collective historical wounds* and strengthening interfaith and interethnic social cohesion among youth.
Implementation strategy	Institutional approach through universities (Garissa and Mombasa); involvement of international religious figures (Imam Ashafa and Pastor James).	Grassroots approach through *Trustbuilding Camps* in Yogyakarta, Makassar, Bandung, and Jakarta; focus on youth communities across diverse identities.
Creative methods	*Storytelling*; sports (dismantling stereotypes); gardening (symbol of shared responsibility).	*Storytelling*; *board games* (education on radicalism); *quiet time* and personal reflection; writing about historical wounds; *fish bowl session*.

Healing process	*Healing wounds* sessions: deconstructing stereotypes, building empathy, and fostering collaboration through joint action.	*Healing wounds* sessions: personal reflection and family narratives, articulating historical wounds within interfaith dialogue spaces.
Tangible impact	Strengthened Muslim–Christian trust (e.g., Collins in Mombasa); youth embracing social responsibility (e.g., Mariam in Garissa).	Catharsis and self-acceptance (e.g., Cayes, 2024); youth readiness for dialogue, openness, and building interfaith relationships.
Challenges	Post-attack mistrust; structural discrimination trauma; reliance on public figures and institutional support.	Limited funding (crowdfunding); difficulties in recruiting participants due to perceptions of abstract/sensitive issues; need for innovative campaigns and gamification.

Table 3 highlights that although TBP Kenya and Indonesia share the same international framework, their implementation has been profoundly shaped by local contexts. TBP Kenya has focused on Muslim–Christian reconciliation in response to structural discrimination and Al-Shabaab terrorism, employing an institutional approach through universities and support from religious leaders. In contrast, TBP Indonesia has emphasized grassroots, community-based initiatives through multi-city *Trustbuilding Camps*, relying on youth-driven creativity and participatory methods such as *board games*, personal reflection, and *fish bowl sessions.*

Both programs underscore the centrality of *healing historical wounds* and building interfaith trust, yet they tailor their strategies to align with participants' needs. Kenya has leaned on public reconciliation symbols and collaborative actions, while Indonesia has emphasized internal processes, personal reflection, and youth creativity. The outcomes are equally tangible: intercommunity relations have improved, social trust has increased, and young people have developed a renewed sense of agency as peacebuilders.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the *Trustbuilding Program (TBP)* in Kenya and Indonesia has effectively addressed the challenges of interreligious relations among youth by emphasizing the healing of historical wounds, personal reflection, and the creation of safe spaces for interfaith dialogue. In Kenya, TBP developed in response to structural discrimination against Muslim communities and the trauma of Al-Shabaab attacks, such as the 2015 Garissa University tragedy. In Indonesia, TBP emerged from the rise of post-Reformasi radicalism, the legacy of older conflicts (such as DI/TII), and growing intolerance that have deeply affected younger generations. Both programs employed the global modules of *Trustbuilding International* but adapted them to local contexts: Kenya emphasized an institutional approach through universities and religious leaders, while Indonesia prioritized grassroots community engagement through creative methods such as *storytelling, board games, fish bowl sessions*, and personal reflection.

The success of TBP in building interfaith bridges in both countries can be explained by two primary factors. First, the program targeted the personal dimension through self-reflection, the acknowledgment of historical wounds, and the transformation of identity narratives. This process is crucial because religious conflict is not only structural but also embedded within *collective memory* and personal identity. Second, TBP created safe and collaborative spaces that enabled cross-identity encounters to take place with honesty, equality, and transformative impact. Methods such as *storytelling* and joint activities (sports, gardening, board games) proved effective in dismantling stereotypes, fostering empathy, and expanding intercommunity networks.

When compared with existing literature, this study contributes *novelty* by placing *collective trauma* at the center of analysis. Normative literature such as Swidler (2014) and Braybrooke (1992)

emphasizes the philosophical value of dialogue as a means of self-transformation and affirmation of difference but does not account for the impact of historical trauma. The works of Lattu (2019), Jati et al. (2024), and Husein (2019) highlight the effectiveness of grassroots movements and participatory spaces for youth, but they do not explicitly link these practices to inherited historical wounds. Meanwhile, Muketha (2022) and Airo et al. (2024) mention the role of dialogue in post-conflict social healing, yet they treat *collective trauma* only implicitly. This research advances the discussion by positioning *collective trauma* as a core variable and demonstrating how TBP in Kenya and Indonesia has engaged with historical wounds to foster interfaith reconciliation.

Historically, these findings affirm that interfaith dialogue becomes meaningful only when it confronts the legacies of colonialism, armed conflict, and structural discrimination that shape *collective identity*. TBP functions as a platform to acknowledge these histories while simultaneously creating new, more inclusive narratives. Within this framework, historical memory plays a central role in the construction of *collective identity*. Research indicates that *collective memory* enables communities to understand and connect with their past, allowing them to respond to identity crises more reflectively (Mosinyan, 2018). Yet public memory involves not only remembering but also the politics of "remembering and forgetting," which determines how societies relate to their histories (Errera & DeIuliis, 2023). In the digital era, this process becomes increasingly complex with the involvement of new media—for instance, digital museums—that reconstruct religious identity and strengthen individuals' connections with their traditions (Xu, 2025).

At the same time, *interfaith dialogue* continues to evolve as a vehicle for reconciliation. History demonstrates that interfaith dialogue, such as the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in America since the nineteenth century, has played a vital role in repairing relationships and fostering reconciliation (Ariel, 2005). In the contemporary context, Muslim–Christian dialogue has become an urgent necessity to address global challenges such as poverty, climate change, and human rights (Hazaymeh, 2024). This dialogue is not merely theoretical but also enacted in direct human encounters, where face-to-face practice and interpersonal interaction strengthen cross-faith understanding (Sukdaven, 2019).

Furthermore, the literature on *historical dialogue* affirms that investigating *collective memory* is an integral aspect of conflict transformation. Through what is termed *historical dialogue,* history is not only retold but also mobilized as a form of advocacy to address the legacies of violence and facilitate reconciliation (McQuaid, Petersen, & Price, 2019). Such initiatives can be expanded through digital platforms to enable intercultural historical dialogue, where individuals from diverse backgrounds share their narratives and deepen their understanding of others' experiences (Perez-Manjarrez & Duraisingh, 2024). The integration of historical memory and interfaith dialogue thus becomes a crucial bridge to address *collective trauma,* reinforce more inclusive identities, and establish the foundations for sustainable peace.

Socially, this study shows that youth are not only victims of radicalization but also central actors in building social cohesion. With safe spaces and creative methods, youth can transform wounds into energy for reconciliation. This finding aligns with global evidence of youth agency in peacebuilding. For example, following the 2016 peace agreement in Colombia, youth contributed both directly and indirectly to shaping peace discourses, even when tensions arose between state-led agendas and their own ideals (Pinkeviciute, Harrowell, Antón, & Ortiz Hernández, 2025). In Northwestern Cameroon, youth fostered social cohesion through community dialogues, digital advocacy, and participation in local governance structures (Mboumien & Leclerc, 2026). Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), despite limited participatory opportunities, youth have remained engaged in civil society initiatives and local peacebuilding efforts (Natil, 2021).

In Moldova, youth organizations have taken on issues such as hate speech and multiculturalism, though their contributions to formal peacebuilding processes remain limited (Larionov & Drăgălin, 2026). In the Great Lakes Region of Africa, youth organizations have promoted a culture of peace at the community level, despite significant constraints in institutional and financial support (A. C. Kasherwa, 2020). Meanwhile, in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of the Philippines, youth civil society organizations have played pivotal roles in peacebuilding, supported by development

assistance and institutionalized avenues for participation (Tagorda & Magno, 2023). In Muslim Mindanao, young people have even utilized social media to counter Islamophobia-driven hate speech, demonstrating that youth agency can flourish outside traditional structures (Ragandang, 2020).

Arts-based approaches also serve as significant avenues for youth peacebuilding. Studies in Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Indonesia, and Nepal reveal that participatory arts—such as drama, music, dance, and visual arts—enhance community well-being and strengthen social cohesion while expanding youth participation in peacebuilding (Breed, Marambio, Pells, & Timalsina, 2024). Nevertheless, youth agency faces persistent barriers. Structural challenges such as marginalization by older political elites, intergenerational divides, and limited institutional support continue to restrict their full participation (A. Kasherwa, 2025). Consequently, research has recommended inclusive policies, sustained support, and the strategic use of digital platforms to amplify youth voices in peacebuilding processes. Within this framework, TBP in Indonesia and Kenya finds its relevance: it provides safe spaces, creative methods, and community support that enable youth to maximize their agency in reconciliation and social cohesion.

Ideologically, TBP expands the meaning of *interfaith dialogue*: it is not merely the exchange of theological perspectives but also a form of *identity politics* aimed at dismantling exclusive hegemonies, challenging intolerant narratives, and affirming *pluralism* as a foundational value of coexistence. Within this framework, *interfaith dialogue* is understood as a respectful and constructive engagement between people of different faiths, with the aim of building mutual understanding, dispelling prejudice, and discovering shared ethical values (Moreau, 2025). Such dialogue can take diverse forms—from academic forums and interfaith councils to everyday encounters, often described as the *dialogue of life*, which occurs in the ordinary contexts of community life (Awang & Hambali, 2017).

The principle of *pluralism* provides a vital foundation for sustaining dialogue. *Liberal pluralism* justifies interfaith dialogue by promoting egalitarian exchange and recognizing the fallibility of all truth-claims, thereby ensuring that each participant is valued in good faith in the pursuit of truth (Rouméas, 2015). In an era of globalization, *practical pluralism* has become increasingly essential as interfaith encounters intensify, particularly in urban centers, demanding new forms of cooperation to safeguard social cohesion (Grabus, 2012; Keaten & Soukup, 2009). Religious traditions themselves provide unique theological bases for dialogue: in Islam, interfaith engagement is often linked to *da'wah*; in Buddhism, it emphasizes liberation from suffering; while in Christianity, figures such as Lesslie Newbigin highlight a humble orientation toward God and others, grounded in faithful witness (Collier-Robinson, 2019; Ramli, Ashath, & Moghri, 2023).

Ethically, several thinkers such as Levinas have emphasized that both *pluralism* and *particularism* risk failing to acknowledge *alterity*—the radical otherness of "the Other." For this reason, the ethics of openness and hospitality toward the stranger become a fundamental principle in shaping interfaith dialogue (Moyaert, 2012). Nonetheless, challenges remain, such as the tension between subjectivity, theological truth, and the presence of the Other in dialogical space (Pratt, 2007). Despite these tensions, the opportunities are considerable: interfaith dialogue can strengthen social cohesion, support reconciliation, and play a significant role in public policy, conflict resolution, and the building of inclusive societies (Moreau, 2025). In this light, through the principle of *pluralism*, TBP affirms that interfaith dialogue constitutes an ideological praxis that dismantles exclusive domination while advancing a more just and harmonious social order.

This study presents two reflective dimensions: *functions* and *dysfunctions*. Functionally, TBP has proven effective in bringing together youth across faiths, restoring trust, and fostering both personal and collective transformation. Dysfunctionally, TBP continues to face structural constraints—such as limited funding in Indonesia or reliance on public figures and institutions in Kenya—that restrict the program's sustainability. Moreover, not all young people show interest in peace-related issues, as they are often perceived as abstract or sensitive, making participant recruitment a persistent challenge. This finding aligns with research that underscores the lack of financial resources and political commitment as major barriers to sustaining peacebuilding programs (Douglas &

Mazzacurati, 2017). Another critical factor is *local ownership* and the participation of civil society, which are frequently overlooked by international actors but remain essential to ensuring long-term peace processes (Mouly, 2008). For instance, TBP Indonesia, which operates at the community level, demonstrates that grassroots approaches are more easily accepted by youth, though they still require consistent structural support. Furthermore, scholarship highlights that *holistic and integrated approaches*—combining elements of human rights, sustainable development, and conflict resolution—strengthen the resilience of peacebuilding programs (Ricigliano, 2003). In the case of TBP, this integration could involve linking personal reflection spaces with collaborative activities and youth economic empowerment to broaden the program's overall impact. Thus, the dysfunctions faced by TBP in both countries underscore the necessity of sustainability strategies that extend beyond reliance on international modules to include financial, political, participatory, and integrative dimensions for long-term peacebuilding.

To address these dysfunctions, three action plans are required. First, TBP must strengthen institutional support through partnerships with universities, schools, and religious organizations, thereby gaining legitimacy and expanding its participant base. Second, the program should pursue innovative financial sustainability models through partnerships with donors, governments, and private sector actors committed to tolerance and social inclusion. Third, TBP needs to adopt creative communication strategies by leveraging digital media, gamification, and youth-driven narrative campaigns to increase interest and participation. By implementing these measures, TBP can broaden its impact, reach more young people, and contribute to sustainable peacebuilding in the *Global South*.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Trustbuilding Program (TBP) in Kenya and Indonesia plays a significant role in addressing the challenges of interfaith relations among youth, particularly those affected by *historical trauma, radicalism,* and *intolerance.* The main findings indicate that TBP serves as a platform for young people to process collective wounds, build trust, and create safe spaces for transformative dialogue. Through creative methods—such as *storytelling*, personal reflection, board games, and collaborative activities like sports and gardening—youth are no longer viewed merely as victims of radicalization but as key actors in fostering social cohesion and reconciliation. These findings affirm that healing historical wounds and interfaith dialogue can move forward together as strategies for sustainable peace.

The scholarly contribution of this research lies in positioning *collective trauma* as a central variable for understanding the dynamics of interfaith dialogue in the *Global South*. While previous studies have tended to emphasize the philosophical value of dialogue or the effectiveness of grassroots initiatives, this study demonstrates how the legacies of *colonialism, armed conflict*, and *structural discrimination* shape the collective identity of youth and influence their readiness to engage in dialogue. By comparing the contexts of Kenya and Indonesia, this research also highlights the methodological flexibility of TBP: an institutional approach involving public figures in Kenya, and a community-based creative youth approach in Indonesia. This analysis enriches the literature on *interfaith dialogue* by showing that the integration of historical memory, safe spaces, and participatory methods is essential for reconciliation and the strengthening of pluralism.

Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. First, the author's dual role as both facilitator and researcher may introduce reflective bias, although this position also provided valuable experiential depth. Second, data limitations required the study to rely more on qualitative descriptions than on quantitative measurements of program impact. Third, the research focused exclusively on two *Global South* contexts, making generalization to other regions tentative and requiring further investigation. Future research could therefore examine the longitudinal impact of TBP on youth attitude transformation, compare *Global South* and *Global North* contexts, or explore the role of digitalization in interfaith dialogue.

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