# Islamic Philanthropy Adaptation Towards Financial Social Exclusion Among Independent Oil Palm Smallholder

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JEL Classification:	Abstract
A13	Social exclusion among independent smallholders of the oil palm
G21	sector is a socio-economic problem that is closely linked to the
J24	incidence of poverty and economic inequality. However, several
Q02	Islamic banking institutions provide micro-credit to the farmers
Z12	but have not received much response due to lack of attractiveness
Received: 14 December 2020	and non-competitive features, especially to independent smallholders. Therefore, other channels like philanthropy are seen as an alternative for smallholder empowerment in the
1 <sup>st</sup> Revision: 11 February 2021	form of integration between zakat business capital and business incubators as mechanisms to address these issues. This study
2 <sup>nd</sup> Revision: 15 November 2021	aims to examine the role of Islamic philanthropic instruments of Zakat and waqf in addressing the problem. The methods
3 <sup>rd</sup> Revision: 16 February 2022	used in this study are based on a qualitative approach like research interviews, observations, written expert experiences, and
Accepted: 20 February 2022	research publications. The findings provide valuable insights for stakeholders into Islamic philanthropy role and the importance of exposure in improving ISH performance, which could help them (re-)align their agricultural practices and formulate strategies for industry players' guidance.
	Keywords:
	social exclusion Islamic philanthropy micro-credit oil palm

social exclusion, Islamic philanthropy, micro-credit, oil palm, independent smallholders

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#### INTRODUCTION

The achievement of inclusive economic growth (IEG) is tremendously important in the national economic development agenda. This condition can be seen when the Malaysian government incorporates elements of inclusivity as one of the fifteen main Guidance Principles to support the objectives of the Shared Prosperity Vision (SPV2030) introduced by former Prime Minister of Malaysia, YAB Tun Dr. Mahathir in 2019<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the government has made inclusive premises one of the main ideas for the 12th Malaysia Plan (RMK-12) approach and theme. A premise would be to function to deliver the core strategy of the SPV2030.

The definition of inclusiveness is to ensure that all communities fully benefit from the country's wealth shared in holistic growth and pay attention to the effects of persistent inequality on economic growth and poverty eradication (NEAC 2010). IEG is a growth capable of generating sufficient employment, providing equal opportunities, and distributing benefits to all segments of society, especially the Independent Smallholder (ISH). At the same time, IEG refers to economic growth that creates opportunities for all segments of the population and distributes dividends to increase prosperity in monetary and non-monetary equity to all citizens (OECD, 2014).

IEG is very important as it ensures equitable access to aspects of economic participation among the people towards forming a just and equitable society. Thus, all citizens of the country can fully enjoy the benefits of collective wealth (NEAC 2010). When this happens, the country will achieve economic justice and high growth, efficiency, and sustainability (Asian Development Bank, 2011). Ultimately, this creates healthy well-being among all people in the country (Claridge et al., 2001). So one of the steps to achieve IEG is to treat socio-economic problems known as social exclusion.

Social exclusion (SE) is a new concept of social vulnerability (Silver, 1994), life difficulties, and social pressures (Bakar et al., 2009). This term is often used to refer to a subordinate group of individuals (Bakar et al., 2009). From the historical point of view, the term SE was introduced by René Lenoir, who was the secretary of state social action for the Chirac government (De Haan, 1999). In France at that time, the SE referred to a marginalized and effectively isolated population from the French social protection system (Scutella et al., 2009).

From an economic perspective, the broader context of SE includes the inability to access opportunities within mainstream economic markets. The mainstream market is not limited to the labor market but includes the financial or credit markets, insurance markets, and goods and services markets. These markets are considered fundamental because they play a crucial role in causing poverty and inequality. ISH sometimes faces difficulties in enhancing their quality of life without involving debt.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The word (inclusive) was formally introduced as one of the main guidance of the Malaysian economic policy in the text of the presentation Shared Prosperity Vision (SPV2030) by the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, YAB Tun Dr Mahathir Mohammad at Kuala Lumpur on October 5 2019

Economic growth was described to be inclusive when there is a decline in the incidence of poverty among the marginalized and disadvantaged groups (Deshpande, 2013). Meanwhile, SE in the niche aspect refers to the inability to engage in a high-paying job market to meet basic needs (Breman, 2004). These basic needs include food, clothing, security (personal, family, and property), social services, housing, and health and education (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 1997). Order to get part of basic needs among ISH is complicated because of constraining to access a financial facility. It is a very worst condition if the crude palm oil price is facing instability in the market, which would affect them in terms of income and poverty.

Some independent smallholders' failure to access financial markets puts them at risk of being trapped in poverty. The poverty cycle not only impoverishes the poor but also gives birth to the poor generation (Ismail et al., 2015). It can negatively affect human development, such as poor educational attainment, poor health, and poor nutrition. Among the factors contributing to the prevalence of SE in terms of economic dimensions are unemployment, disability status, low education level, and poor health (Flotten, 2006). From the existing research, no one has examined the alternative initiative for solving financial and social exclusion problems like using philanthropy instruments. As we know, the sharia financing model can be an alternative source of financing and empowerment of micro-business (Hasan & Herianingrum, 2019).

Therefore, this research was conducted to fill in the gaps in the study that was already done. This research aims to develop a philanthropy instruments framework to reduce social exclusion among ISH. It also contributes to providing input and consideration in deciding to overcome financial and social exclusion. It has important implications for policymakers and industry players to create another application without a specific community outside the mainstream economic market system, including labor and credit markets. These are several novelties of this present study, and we are hoping we can contribute to the literature on Islamic philanthropy.

### **METHODS**

This study uses qualitative research methods. Mack et al. (2005) explain that in qualitative research, data collection can provide platforms to obtain data. The methodology used in this study uses library research and field study. The discussion design has been selected to enable understanding related to the ISH in Malaysia. This study requires a study by analyzing secondary data, including reading resources in the library from various writings to facilitate the data obtained has been analyzed. In this regard, among the libraries visited to obtain data and materials are Malaysia Palm Oil Board Library, Tun Sri Lanang Library Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Department of Agriculture Malaysia, and the National Library of Malaysia to obtain journals, books, and materials -other materials related to the study.

Field research is the most effective approach to collecting in-depth and detailed data. In field studies, in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis are the

most effective data collection methods. This field study provides data on the development of the Islamic philanthropic framework. All data obtained were recorded and analyzed by the researcher. This field study took six to twelve months. The Regional Agricultural Officer(RAO) monitors the activities and financial assistance to ISH to ensure that any needs to increase productivity can be met (Table 1).

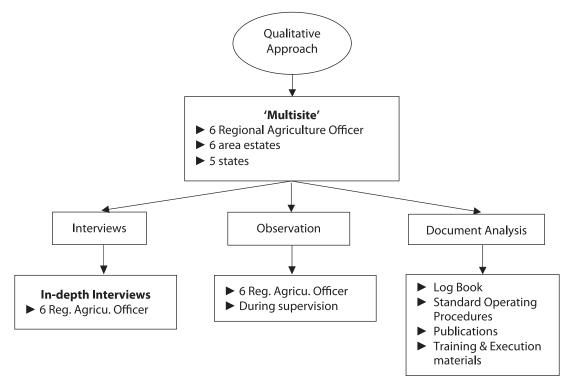
	RAO 1	RAO 2	RAO 3	RAO 4	RAO 5	RAO 6
No. of ISH	94	121	75	107	115	86
Total Hectare	334.85	502.75	307.83	489.17	519.32	322.47

Table 1. No of ISH & Total Area registered until 30 June 2020

Source: Field Studies (2020)

In-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis used were conducted on six Regional Agriculture officers with ten to twenty-five years of experience in six selected estates, namely Bukit Goh estate in Pahang, Bukit Cerakah estate in Selangor, Dengkil estate in Selangor, Sungai Siput estate in Perak, Sintok estate in Kedah and Pagoh estate in Johor. Knowledge and experience in cultivating for about ten years can reflect the actual situation (York-Barr et al., 2006). The data collection procedure is shown in the following Figure 1.

#### Figure 1. Data Collection Procedures



### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

A total of six Regional Agriculture Officers in six areas selected as participants in this study have agreed to be interviewed in-depth and involved in the process of observation and analysis of relevant documents. Researchers have met several times with these Regional Agriculture Officers to obtain information on the background, understand the mind and build rapport to gain knowledge in developing the Islamic philanthropic framework at this national level. Table 2 explains the background of the Regional Agriculture Officer related to age, gender, estate location, and experience in cultivating oil palm.

	No.	RAO 1	RAO 2	RAO 3	RAO 4	RAO 5	RAO 6
Gender							
Male	5	$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$		$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$
Female	1		$\checkmark$				
Age		57	48	37	41	37	45
State							
Pahang	1	$\checkmark$					
Selangor	2		$\checkmark$				$\checkmark$
Johor	1			$\checkmark$			
Perak	1				$\checkmark$		
Kedah	1					$\checkmark$	
Experiences		25 year	17 year	10 year	12 year	10 year	15 year

Table 2. Background of Regional Agriculture Officer

Source: Data processing (2020)

Data review to ensure reliability in data collection is critical. According to Cohen et al. (2000), expert consent in determining the theme in a qualitative study is important because the expert is an interrater, i.e., consent by the evaluator. The evaluator in this context is an outsider who confirms the consent of the theme constructed by the individual as a researcher (Cohen et al., 2000). To determine the reliability of the data from the interviews, the researcher referred to the value of the Cohen coefficient. Once all the results of the interview transcript were confirmed and rearranged, as well as the observation notes, the researcher compiled the data to obtain the themes and sub-themes of the study findings.

Interpretation	Cohen Kappa (level)
Very High	>0.90
High	0.70-0.89
Moderate	0.3-0.69
Low	0.30

Table 3. Kappa Scale Interpretation

Source: Wiersma (1991)

Once the pattern of findings of the study results is produced, the researcher prepares a set of expert consent forms on the themes and sub-themes constructed. Four experts in the Islamic finance and palm oil sector became interrater in the themes and sub-themes built (Table 4). The evaluation results of these four experts show that the construction of themes and sub-themes performed by the researcher has achieved the level of measurement Cohen Kappa at a very high level, as shown in Table 3. A very high level of interpretation is the best evidence to determine the reliability of the study data.

No	Name	Representative	Position	Expertise	Result (Cohen Kappa)
1	Expert A	Fakulti Pengajian Islam, UKM	Senior Lecturer	Wakaf management	Very High
2	Expert B	Pusat Zakat Selangor	Assistant Manager	Collection & Distribution fund	Very High
3	Expert C	Malaysia Palm Oil Board, MPOB	Deputy Director	Innovation smallholders	Very High
4	Expert D	Fakulti Ekonomi & Pengurusan, UKM	Associate Professor	Islamic banking & finance	Very High

Table 4. Analysis	s of Consent on	<b>Qualitative Data</b>
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Source: Data processing (2020)

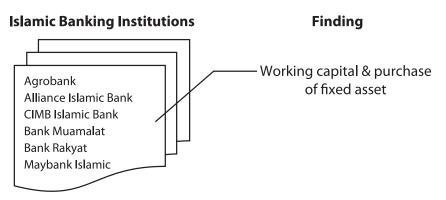
Based on the reality in this area, independent smallholders at risk of experiencing SE were usually impacted by the high cost of living and agriculture inputs. The government has introduced the Islamic financial system to help these people to access the financial market without committing themselves to the element of usury. Against this scenario, rural people still find it difficult to obtain loans from either Islamic or conventional banks as they are not eligible to apply for the loan based on the requirements set by the bank. Accordingly, the Islamic banking system provides a variety of financial products to meet the needs of the urban and rural populations.

Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) has outlined the steps to be implemented in the Financial Sector Plan 2011 – 2020 as the manifestation of several micro-financing phases to improve the social living standards of the rural communities (Bank Negara Malaysia, 2011). BNM encourages banking institutions to offer micro-credit<sup>2</sup> to the urban and rural population by improving the features of existing products to benefit the target group. Ten banking institutions offer micro loans to entrepreneurs in various sectors, including the agricultural sector (Ab Aziz, 2011). However, only six banking institutions offer sharia-compliant micro-credit to smallholders (see Figure 2). The regulatory framework of BNM has been the reference point for banking institutions in the operation of Islamic micro-financing.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Micro credit loans are small business loans and the loan amount is between RM1,000 to RM50,000 for micro entrepreneurs. Micro credit loans are provided for business purposes only such as financing working capital and purchasing fixed assets. These loans are not personal loans.

Some rural communities are positively affected by is the expansion of micro-credit facilities offered by the Islamic banking institutions. Although various facilities were offered, some of the ISH is still not interested in subscribing to any of the facilities. In Malaysia, there are 221,950 ISH, most of whom belong to the lower-income group (B40) because their monthly income is less than RM 2,537.00 (Economic Planning Unit, 2016). Due to the low-income ISH, they cannot manage the farm efficiently due to financial capital constraints. This data can be seen when the productivity of fresh bunches (FFB) in ISH farms is lower than that of FFB in farms undertaken by plantation companies (Cramb & Sujang, 2013).

Figure 2. Islamic Banking Institutions Offer Shariah-Compliant Micro-Credit to Agricultural Sector



Efforts to increase access to credit facilities by the government, BNM, and banking institutions should increase FFB productivity by 22 tonnes/hectare/year. However, FFB productivity and ISH revenue in 2015 were still low after the first phase of PIPLB.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, the ISH FFB productivity was only 17.33 tonnes/hectare/year, with an average monthly income of RM1,177.14. ISH still raises the difficulty of obtaining loans as they require loans to buy inputs, especially fertilizer. Since it is difficult for ISH to obtain micro-credit, many practices seasonal financing where FFB prices are high and depend on savings as working capital (Martin et al., 2015; Ramli, 2013).

Insufficient financial capital issues among ISH significantly impact FFB productivity (Belcher et al., 2004; Martin et al., 2015). However, many studies found that independent smallholders face financial problems and need credit facilities (Ayat et al., 2008; Claudine & Reza, 2012; Cramb & Sujang, 2013; Martin et al., 2015; Nkongho et al., 2014; Ramli, 2013). Shafiai et al. (2019) found the passion for subscribing to micro-credit among ISH declined as they could not meet the terms and conditions set by Islamic banking institutions. It has important implications for policymakers and industry players to create other applications like philanthropy instruments to reduce social exclusion in the community.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Rural Development Master Plan (PIPLB) was introduced by Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (KKLBW) to help improve access to credit facilities by the rural population.

From the description above, an agenda of pursuing the economic level of the group is vital because income is the basis of social participation through consumption, and it reflects the power of the people within their economic role (Byrne, 2008). Therefore, this study aims to focus on the proposed idea of how Zakat and waqf as instruments of Islamic philanthropy can play a role in addressing SE problems by enhancing their economic status. This condition indicates the need for conceptual development that starts with defining the concept.

Philanthropy is a civil society mechanism that establishes social justice in the economic system. The term philanthropy refers to love for human beings or charity. The word is derived from the Greek word Philos meaning love and human Anthropos, so philanthropy is that love for human beings is translated in the form of giving to others, especially those not in their own family (Bakar & Chaider, 2006). Philanthropy is born of altruistic behavior (Hasan, 2007). Inside the Islamic instrument, philanthropy is an essential element of the economic welfare system (Zaenal & Ismail, 2014), as it is the basis of efforts to achieve justice and social welfare for Muslims (Widyawati, 2011).

Generally, there are two categories of philanthropic instruments in Islam, obligatory and non-obligatory. The obligatory philanthropic instruments are Zakat, and the nonobligatory philanthropy instruments are waqf and charity. Zakat worships Islamic values that are fardhu ain because it is included in the fourth pillar of Islam. In economics, Zakat is an essential instrument in balancing the socio-economic status of Muslims (Karim et al., 2004). In addition, it has the potential to create equality (reduce socio-economic inequality) and inclusion in the economic system. Thus it can reduce the gap in the economic or income in society to a minimum (Karim et al., 2004).

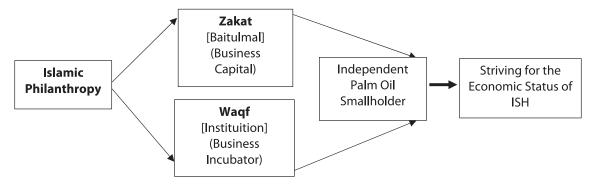
Waqf is a public financial instrument in Islam that has excellent potential as a medium of wealth allocation to address the socio-economic problems of the ummah. According to Islamic law, waqf means to retain a property that can be benefited from it and remains and is deprived of the management of the property from the appellant. Otherwise, for expenditure either from the proceeds of the waqf itself or to use the proceeds of the waqf for welfare purposes that may be associated with Allah SWT (Othman, 2013). Productive waqf has a role in accelerating public welfare (Rofa'i et al., 2016). In the context of practice in Malaysia, waqf refers to the disposition of any property that may be of benefit for any purpose of welfare, either as a general waqf or a specific waqf following Islamic law (Othman, 2013).

The form of the property that can be waqf is divided into two types: immovable ('aqar) and movable (manqul). Immovable property means a property that cannot be moved, such as land and buildings. Whereas movable property is the property that can be transferred from one place to another, for example, animals, merchandise, money, vehicles, measured property, and property weighed. However, governance and sharing responsibilities between the waqf institutions and the government can preserve the management of waqf land, especially in the care of their oil palm plantations (Nor & Ismail, 2020).

The only possible way to address the SE problem is to leverage the economic status of the ISH through the integration with the Islamic philanthropic instruments (Figure 3). In this case, Zakat serves as a scheme of assistance in the form of business capital to target groups in the form of cash and capital equipment for business use (Rahman et al., 2008). Distribution of zakat business capital is 100% free of charges without repayment. In order to ensure that the zakat business capital is well funded and its effectiveness, the zakat institution should monitor proactively to ensure this assistance is fully utilized by the beneficiaries (Rahman et al., 2008).

To further enhance this economic empowerment program, waqf instruments can be applied by establishing support infrastructure for targeted smallholders as a Business Incubator (BI). Business Incubators are created to accelerate and systematically organize the process of building a successful enterprise by providing comprehensive and integrated support to entrepreneurs, such as incubator space, business support services, and networking opportunities.

Figure 3. Mechanisms for Integrating Islamic Philanthropy Instruments (Zakat & Waqf)



This concept is often used as an organization that creates and shapes a supportive environment conducive to the "hatching" and development of new firms (Chan & Lau, 2005), especially in their early stages of growth (Al-Mubaraki & Busler, 2010). This effort can increase the survival and growth prospects of small firms in the early stages of their development.

The business incubator (BI) funding can be established through a combination of several approaches of waqf, such as real estate waqf, istibdal practices, and cash waqf. In the context of the waqf property approach, the authorities governing local waqf affairs, such as the State Islamic Religious Council (SIRC), play a role in identifying the untapped waqf land and selecting the most strategic waqf area to develop BI infrastructure. If the area of the existing waqf land is still insufficient, then an istibdal approach can be used to solve the problem.

An Istibdal approach is to buy another property with the proceeds of sale to serve as a waqf (mawquf) to replace the sale of any property acquired through replacement of the same or a better value (JAWHAR, 2010). The mission's objective is to maintain the mawquf of Muslims so that the benefits can be enjoyed continuously, guaranteeing the development of the mawquf in keeping with the current economic growth and avoiding freezing the uneconomical and idle mawquf (JAWHAR, 2010). To develop BIs, SIRC will identify any small size of waqf land that is located in a less strategic area than its waqf benefits. Subsequently, the SIRC, by its authority, acted to enforce the land. Then the proceeds of the sale of land through istibdal were used to buy a more extensive, strategic, and appropriate piece of land to develop BI infrastructure.

The fund is not only used to create BI physical infrastructure, but it also needs to be managed strategically so that it can generate income consistently to fund all of the BI's operating costs. In the context of BI, it not only requires significant funds, but it also needs those funds to be managed wisely so that the establishment and operation of the BI can sustain for a long time. Therefore, in the early stages of the development of BI and its supporting infrastructure, it will need to include government funds as seed capital and funds from corporate social responsibility by corporate companies. Then, BI is managed through strategic cooperation with a professional body or government agency specializing in this field.

The function of BI and other business incubators will act to assist participants, better known as incubators, in terms of business assistance and mediation. Business assistance includes entrepreneurial training and advice, business development, guidance, and related education with business planning, marketing, sales, and technical matters such as accounting, legislation, advertising, and financial assistance (Bergek & Norrman, 2008). From a mediation standpoint, incubators connect incubatees and the outside area in the form of networks such as providing information, knowledge, and expertise to ensure the survival of new entrepreneurs and reduce the uncertainties (Collinson & Gregson, 2003).

There is a mechanism for integrating zakat and waqf instruments in the form of economic empowerment programs (Ardiansyah & Kasdi, 2021). Those programs will be able to solve the fundamental problems experienced by new entrepreneurs seeking to start a business. These issues include lack of knowledge, capital constraints, and strategic market access to businesses. In this way, it can create opportunities for independent smallholders effectively through business. Furthermore, they can generate income and wealth through their own efforts. Eventually, these smallholders could improve their standard of living and engage in normal society. Nor & Ismail (2020) conclude that governance and sharing responsibilities between the waqf institutions and the government can preserve the management of waqf land in Malaysia, especially in the care of their oil palm plantations.

To ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of these economic empowerment programs, these mechanisms need to be implemented complementarily and not separate from the government's social systems or policies toward the well-being of the people. This condition means that the existence of this mechanism needs to be recognized and supported by the government. One of the ways to support participation in this mechanism is through tax rebates to the people who contribute to the philanthropic fund. This will encourage the people to continue contributing to the philanthropy fund. With all the facilities provided, it will empower new entrepreneurs to continue their business operations successfully and reduce the risk of failure, especially in the early stages of business.

## CONCLUSION

This study proposes a model to improve ISH productivity; industry players should pay attention to the close integration of financial innovation, ISH capability, and human capital drivers. Since Islamic banks have specific characteristics and visions, financial innovation is the key to developing competitive products and services to fulfill customer needs, achieve rural community visions, and satisfy stakeholders. These conditions can boost ISH performance, but sometimes innovation does not become the central necessary to strengthen ISH because they are less capable of fulfilling its requirement. An alternative channel like Islamic philanthropy is financial innovation can increase human capital drivers to overcome social exclusion.

There are main practical implications through objectives. Islamic banking should develop a product with a flexibility mechanism to encourage ISH to upgrade to agropreneur as part of innovation. However, the main internal challenges include the low level of knowledge and experience amongst management in monitoring progress in the field. So, involvement of Islamic philanthropy can overcome that challenge because business incubators need ISH to work as a team and not individually based on the cultivation area. It also supports good agriculture practices to reduce the risk of a debt trap if they do not make payments on a scheduled basis. It will continuously improve a participant's overall performance in the long run.

The proposed model creates from theoretical studies; an empirical study needs to evaluate the proposed model's practical applications. Further studies should emphasize the validation of the proposed model in terms of its significance and practicality. Testing the proposed model in an empirical situation (such as Baitulmal, State Islamic Religious Council, or Yayasan Wakaf Malaysia) will provide helpful information for professionals in implementing the proposed model. This paper has not yet demonstrated the general management practices that affect ISH performance. Further research should determine other management factors that affect ISH productivity in different contexts. An alternative area for future research is how to develop innovative financing, ISH capabilities, and human capital drivers in Islamic philanthropy and organizations in general.

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