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WOMEN RECHARGE: TRAINING AND ECONOMIC SANCTUARY FOR SINGLE MOTHERS IN TUMPAT, KELANTAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses into the pivotal role of helping single mothers to grow not only emotionally but also in economic aspect. Single mothers represent a growing but marginalised group both in urban and rural area of Malaysia. Single mothers often face dual responsibilities as caregiver and breadwinner. Hence, this paper explores the architectural aspect which envisioned “training and economic sanctuary” in order to help single mother grow and give them a better chance to sustain their life. One of the main interest is to recognise the growing presence of women in micro businesses particularly in Kelantan, which emphasise on *Batik* and tailoring. However, a combination of modern entrepreneurship is needed which lead to the presence of digital training aligned with current modernisation. These activities encourage both the growth of single mothers and empower the area of Tumpat, Kelantan as main hub for Batik production.

Keywords: Single mothers, Batik, Empowerment, Responsibilities, Training & Economical.

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INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the number of single mothers is steadily increasing due to divorce, widowhood, migration, accidental pregnancies, and single motherhood by choice. Studies confirm a strong link between single mothers and household poverty (Muzalwana, Khaleeda, Sharifah, & Adzmel, 2021; Yu, 2019). Many have low education, work in informal or low-paying jobs, or rely on aid. Beyond economic struggles, they face emotional challenges, children’s behaviour, and community stigma, all affecting their quality of life (Muzalwana et al., 2020).



Figure 1: Artist impression of the single mother training and economic sanctuary in Tumpat, Kelantan

ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

There are three main issues in this study, which are:

Limited Employment and Source of Income for Single Mothers

Employment is one of the most important source of income especially for single mothers in Malaysia. In Malaysia, specifically in Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah, single mothers tend to work in low-quality job resulting in vulnerable financial condition among them. Income drops are almost unavoidable among single mothers hence, their living standard also drop, which ten affected their children. Further, during the stable marriage, many women prefer to leave their jobs to care for their home and family. It is likely that after divorce or widowhood, women cannot easily find a job considering their condition (Zarina, 2022).

Family Responsibility

According to studies, having children reduced mothers participation in labour market. As a result, childcare and family responsibilities hindered women’s labour participation. One of the most crucial issue faced by single mothers particularly in rural area like Kelantan is family responsibilities, which directly affected their ability to participate in the workforce (Syed & Mansor, 2022). Unlike many dual parents households, single mothers are solely responsible in the upbringing of their children. Not only that, they are also responsible for the house duties, and ensuring financial stability. Hence, the constant juggling of roles lead to stress and physical exhaustion (Hashim, Azmawati & Endut, 2015).

• Lack of Community Support

Single mothers particularly in rural area of Kelantan often face stigma from the surrounding community. The stigma from society or negative perceptions towards single mothers are the biggest challenge for them to be able to play their role within the society. Many studies confirm that the impact of stigma towards single mothers will affect their mental health and self-esteem. However, the pressure of handling both paternal and maternal roles should be supported by the community and surrounding and their surrounding environment.

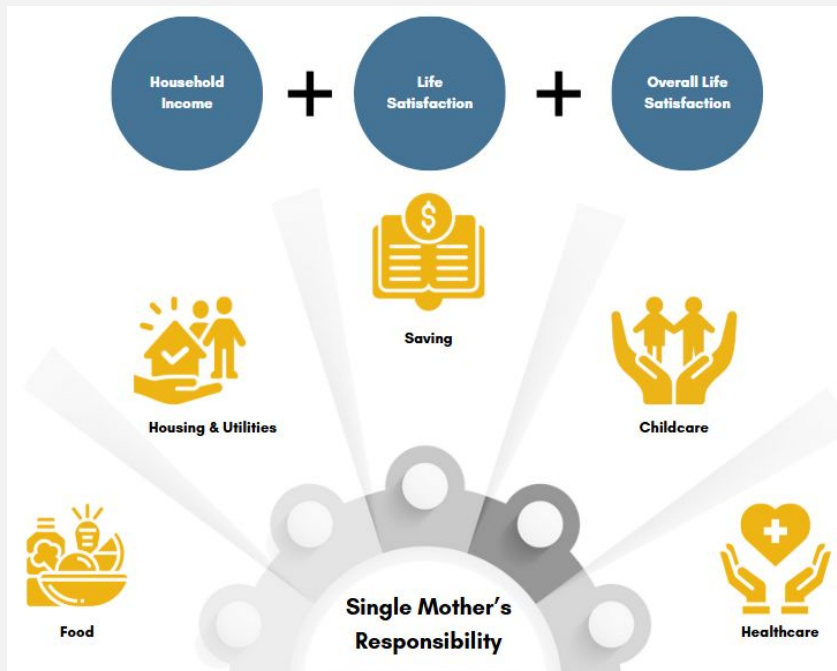


Figure 2: Single Mothers Multiple Responsibility

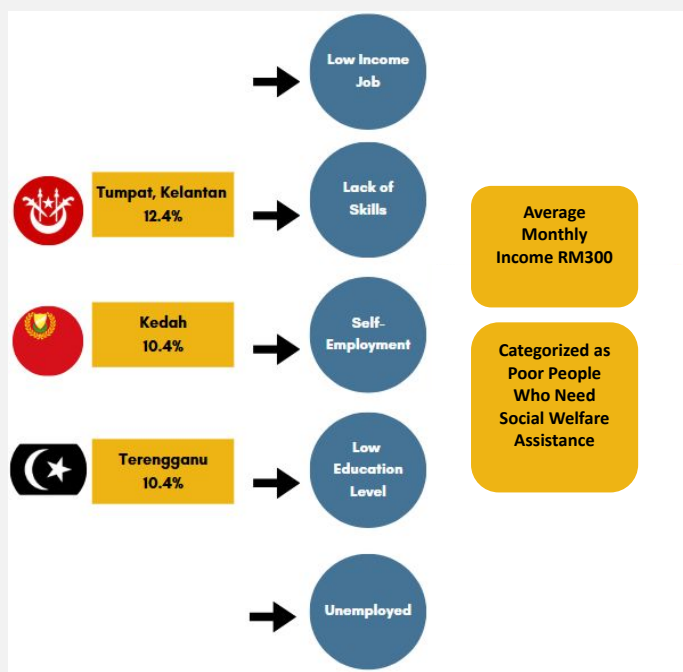


Figure 3: Single Mothers Poverty

STUDY AIM

The project aims is to design a sustainable and integrated architectural solution that fosters economic empowerment, social support, and environmental sustainability for single mothers in Kelantan. The project seeks to create a safe and multifunctional space that supports single mother, as well as their children while integrating with community.

OBJECTIVES

1. To design a multifunctional space for training and business incubation hub for single mothers.
2. To design on-site childcare to incorporate communal spaces for social support both mother and children.
3. To provide a good communal space where the community can gather.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This project is significant in addressing social and gender issue within context of rural Malaysians. Single mothers often face hardship in terms of economic, stigma and lack of support. By proposing an architectural response through design of the “sanctuary”, this project contributes to a growing knowledge on socially responsive design.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Single Mother in Malaysia

Single parenting is not a new phenomenon, in 89 countries respectively, over 101.3 million homes are led by single mothers. Most of them are living alone with their children. According to Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM - Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat), there are few definition to single mother which are: widowed, divorced or permanently separated, never married but have adopted child or child born out of marriage and spouses who are ill and unable to work. There are 910,091 women who fall under category of single mother (Women's Aid Organisation, 2024).

In Malaysia, single motherhood has gained increased attention due to its growing multifaceted challenges. According to Department of Statistic Malaysia (DOSM), the number of single mother in Malaysia is steadily rising with many of them categorised as low-income household particularly in three states which are Kelantan, Kedah and Terengganu. In more conservative state like Kelantan, the challenges faced by single mothers are intensified by traditional gender role and cultural expectation. Hence, there are a lot of initiatives from government and NGOs to help single mother financially. According to KPWKM, government effort such as *Skim Bantuan Ibu Tunggal* and any other programmes from Jabatan Pembangunan Wanita have been introduced.

Poverty Among Single Mother

In Malaysia, the measurement of poverty across all households income are by comparing income earned by the family with the standard income requirement. According to Economic Report 2009/2010, Kelantan is categorised as second highest for hardcore poor household income. According to Rohayu et al. (2021), the problem of poverty continues to occur in any kind of economic sector due to the lack of complement input. The inputs are land, capital and entrepreneurship. Hence, entrepreneurship is a vital element as a way to exit poverty. In Malaysia, the poverty related to women as leader to household income is high in Kelantan, Kedah and Terengganu (Rohayu, Sharipah, Yusmarwati, Maziana & Rasid, 2011).

Poverty occurs due to many factors, and one of them is low-income job. The large number of self-employment, low education level and lack of sufficient skills also contribute to poverty. Single mothers who have no working experience, skills or educational attainment face harder challenges in securing jobs. Hence, most of them work in a job that only provides low-income salary. Although many incentives and support were given in the form of finance and equipment, the numbers of *Bumiputera* entrepreneur including single mothers who failed in business are still high (Rohayu, Sharipah, Yusmarwati, Maziana & Rasid, 2011).

Table 1: Data of Poor Household in Malaysia

State	Hardcore Poor ¹	Poor ²	Vulnerable Poor ³	Total
Johor	1,502	2,542	5,555	9,599
Kedah	2,228	3,827	6,384	12,712
Kelantan	4,108	7,719	13,718	25,807
Melaka	474	1,157	2,925	4,556
Negeri Sembilan	394	801	3,408	4,618
Pahang	973	1,859	5,766	8,628
Perak	2,099	4,324	7,434	14,107
Perlis	439	1,225	3,290	5,129
Pulau Pinang	645	1,922	8,240	10,817
Sabah	18,295	15,746	13,820	47,862
Sarawak	12,537	14,528	18,740	45,805
Terengganu	4,377	9,322	14,194	28,015
WP. Kuala Lumpur	126	271	860	1,257

Women Empowerment in Kelantan

Women, especially single mothers act as vital economic contributors for the country's development. In Kelantan, women are often associated with business where B40 Kelantanese women face difficulties in living due to low household income (Suraya, Sabrina, Zuriati & Sakinah, 2021). Industrialisation and urbanisation era give a big impact on the status and role of single mothers in Malaysia especially in rural area like Tumpat, Kelantan. There are several agencies in Kelantan that help established few programmes for single mothers which are, Women's Development Program (PPW - Pusat Pembangunan Wanita), Kelantan State Embroidery Centre (PSNK) and Women's Development Centre (PPWK) (Suraya, Sabrina, Zuriati & Sakinah, 2021).

U-Kekwa (Urus Setia Kebajikan, Pembangunan Keluarga dan Wanita Kelantan) is now responsible in implementing all single mothers agenda aligned with Kelantan's Women Policy. The agency's main objective is to provide sufficient basic skills training to single mothers in Kelantan and to improve their ability to augment family economy. There are various programmes held to help single mothers in Kelantan in order to prepare themselves with knowledge and skills. Handicraft skills such as sewing, cooking and baking are offered through certain periods and they have received tremendous participations from local women. This being said, single mothers are very interested in this kind of efforts and activities. However, the problem is consistency in acquiring training and a proper centre for it.



Figure 4 : Example of Programme held by KPWN Kelantan

CASE AND PRECEDENT STUDIES

Ayu Fashion Kelantan

Ayu Fashion is not only a tailoring shop but also serves as a production and retail space. The owner, a local entrepreneur, manages sewing orders, fabric display, fitting sessions, and small-scale production all within the same premises. In this research, spatial observations from Ayu Fashion directly informed the zoning of training and production spaces, particularly in defining storage capacity, workflow layout, and display areas. The shop's efficient use of compact space underscores the need for a multi-functional hub where single mothers can train, work, and grow their businesses within an architecturally supportive and empowering environment.



Figure 5 : Ayu Fashion Kelantan

Laman Warisan, Kampung Laut Kelantan

The commercial shops at Kampung Laut represent a modest yet vibrant example of community-based, small-scale economic activity in a rural Kelantanese setting. Situated in close proximity to heritage and tourism areas, these shops serve both locals and visitors. This study focuses mainly on the layout and circulation of visitors, who are mostly locals.

The spatial layout and design observation for *Laman Warisan* is the linear arrangement of stalls. All stalls are arranged in row with open spaces in front of them to allow visibility and circulation. Furthermore, the open fronted design helps create an inviting environment for customers to browse easily.



Figure 6 : Laman Warisan, Kampung Laut Kelantan

METHODOLOGY

The methods of data collection for this study are the primary data and secondary data collection.

Primary Data

A site survey was conducted in Tumpat, Kelantan to observe and document the actual condition of the site and its surrounding environment. The site survey focused on a few prominent places of Tumpat, Kelantan, which are Bandar Baru Tumpat, Masjid Kampung Laut and Ayu Fashion. During the site survey, various physical aspects were recorded, including the orientation of the site, access points, road connections, availability of public transportation, sun path, and wind direction. The survey also took into account the proximity of schools, mosques, markets, and residential areas. These observations helped identify the best layout for the proposed functions.

In addition to the site visit, interviews with Ayu Fashion worker and single mother who work at Pasar Sumayyah were conducted. These interviews were important in gaining more information and in-depth understanding about the production of *batik*, which later will be

proposed at the centre and the activities of women in Tumpat Kelantan. The data collected from the interview enabled researchers to provide context and help in developing better understanding of the topic.

Secondary Data

In addition to primary data collected through field visits and interviews, this research also relies heavily on secondary data to provide a theoretical and contextual foundation for the design proposal. Secondary data was primarily gathered through a comprehensive literature review, focusing on issues surrounding women's empowerment, single motherhood in Malaysia, social architecture, and community-based economic models.



Figure 7 : Site Study, Pasar Sumayyah



Figure 8 : Site Study, Bandar Tumpat, Kelantan



Figure 9 : Interview with Puan Halimah

SITE LOCATION

Based on the background study and interviews, the site selection and nature of project is located at Tumpat Kelantan, as Tumpat holds the highest number of single mothers in Kelantan with high poverty rate. Located within the growing urban edge of Tumpat, this area presents a strong potential for development that balances accessibility, community integration, and economic opportunity key principles that underpin the thesis objectives.

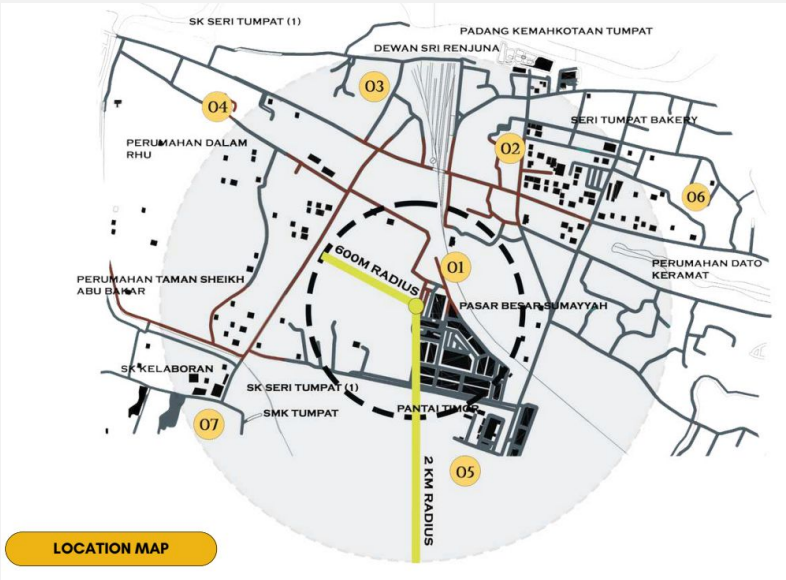


Figure 10 : Project Location map in Tumpat, Kelantan

NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTEXT

Tumpat is characterised by a predominantly Malay Muslim population, with minorities from Chinese and Thai. The diverse demographic contributes to modest yet culturally layered local identity. The neighbourhood context in Tumpat is inclined towards traditional *kampung* lifestyle that coexist with semi-urban setting and small scale commercial activities. Hence, Tumpat is a rich ground for community based and architectural interventions.

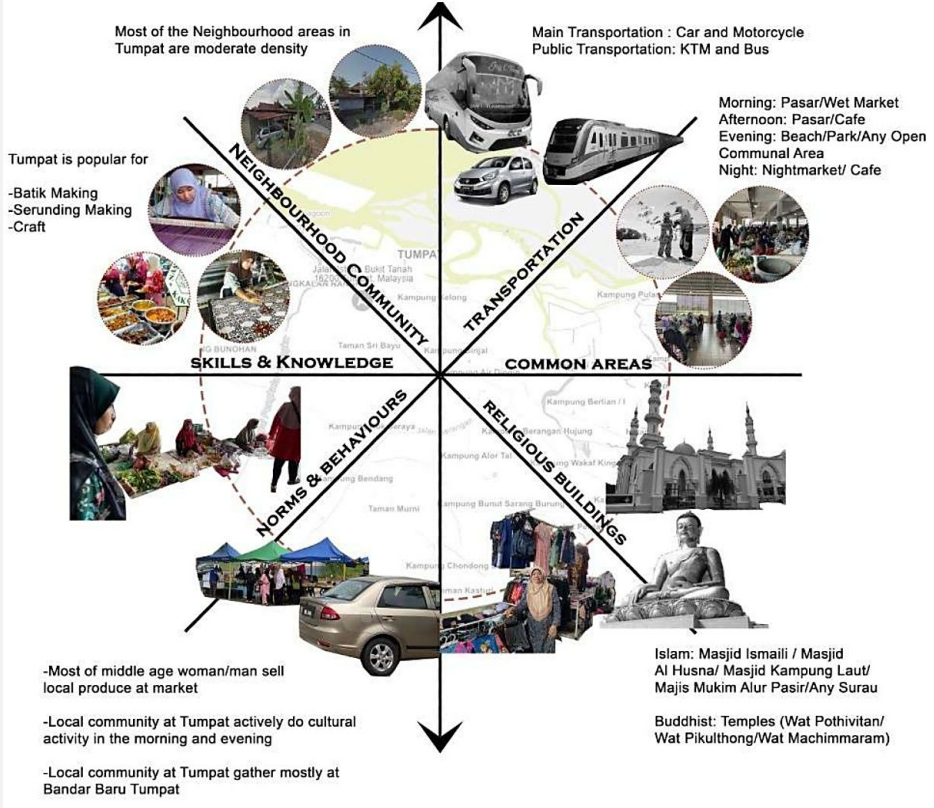


Figure 11 : Macro Context of Tumpat, Kelantan

DESIGN BRIEF

The design brief acts as the backbone of the project, clearly defining the purpose, objectives, user requirements, spatial needs, and design intentions that guide the development of the architectural solution.

The design brief started with the issues until the proposed architectural solutions, which in turn is used to develop the schedule of accommodation for the proposed single mother training and economic sanctuary in Tumpat, Kelantan.

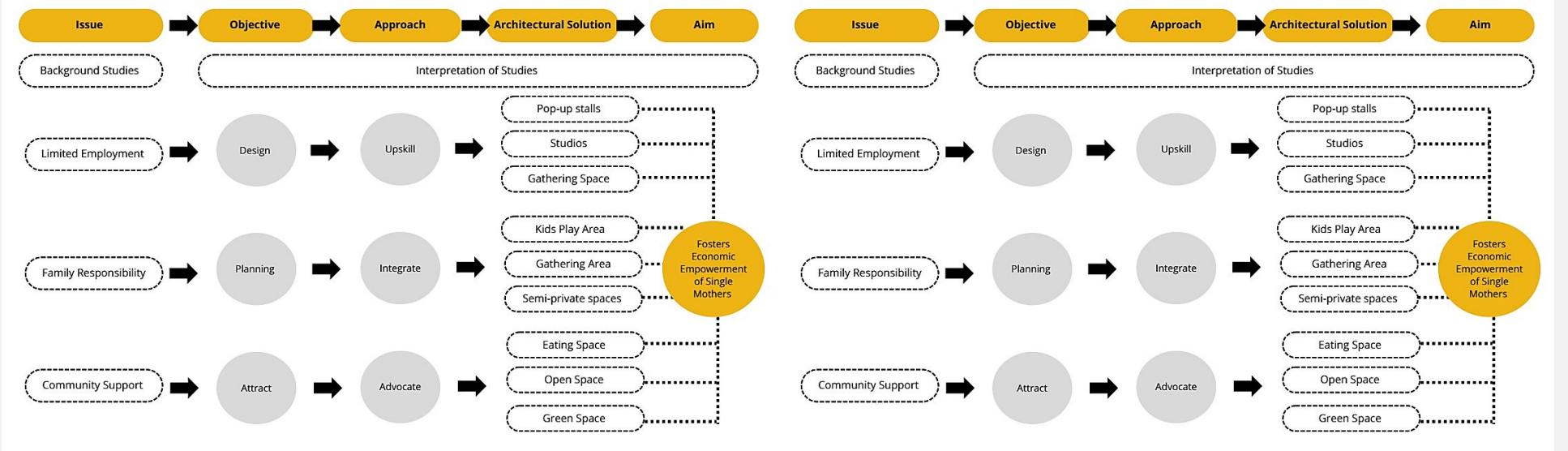


Figure 12 : Design Brief

PROJECT FINDINGS

Design Concept

The concept for this project is “Interposed Transit”.

The concept of “Interposed Transit” embodies the journey of growth and transformation in a supportive environment. The “Transit” represents the progression and interposition between spaces that create interconnected system that guide user for better future. It is to bridge the gap between single mothers, and with economic opportunities and quality of life. It serves as intermediary space where single mothers can recharge, learn and grow. The concept is reflected in layout and hierarchy of spaces.

The concept of Interposed Transit also reflects on how circulation is not merely a means of moving from one point to another but it emphasize on spatial experience that later connect people, space and purposes. As it core, the concept Interposed Transit is inspired by the flow and movement of daily activities where paths often overlap with living, working and selling.

Design Development

This phase of the project illustrates how the integration of functional zoning, user flow, and contextual sensitivity has informed the transformation of initial ideas into architectural form.

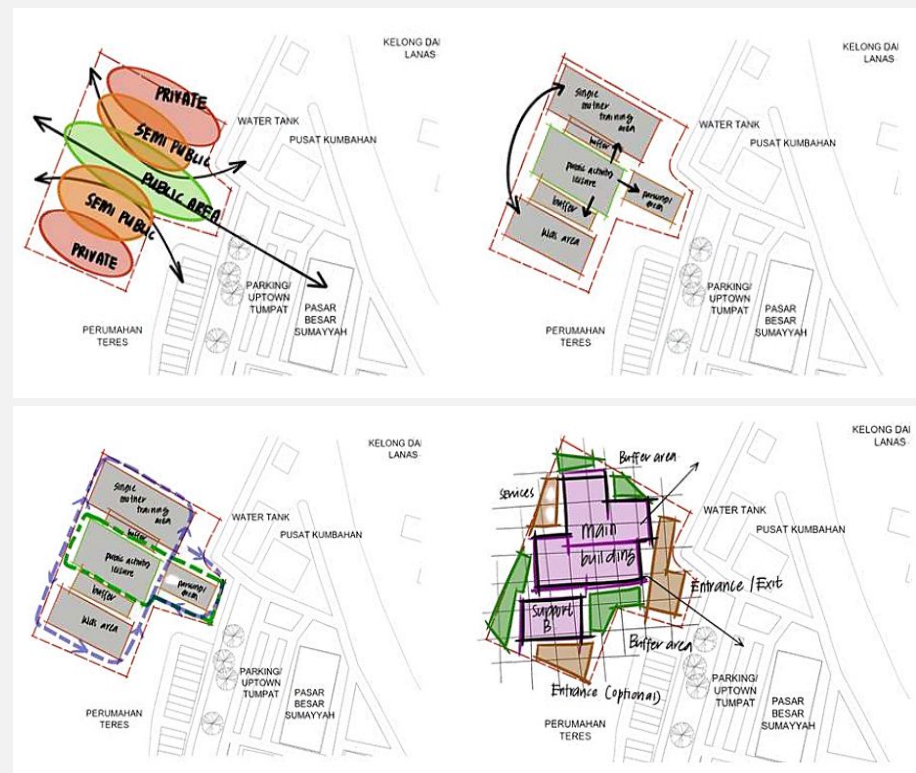


Figure 13 : Design Development Progress

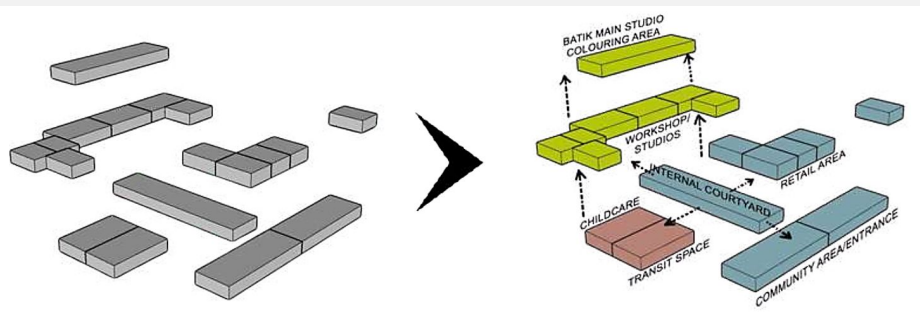


Figure 14 : Design Development Progress

The early stage of the design focuses on the separation of spatial zones according to the degree of privacy required.

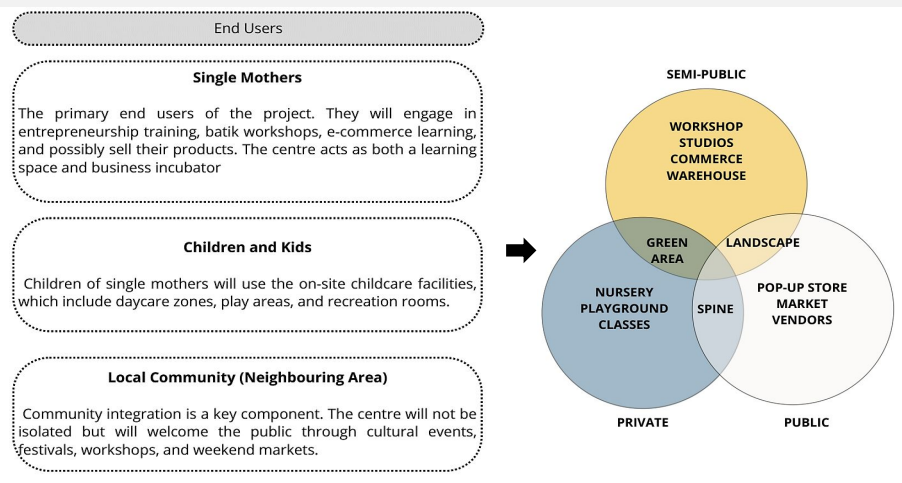


Figure 15 : The end users and associated zoning

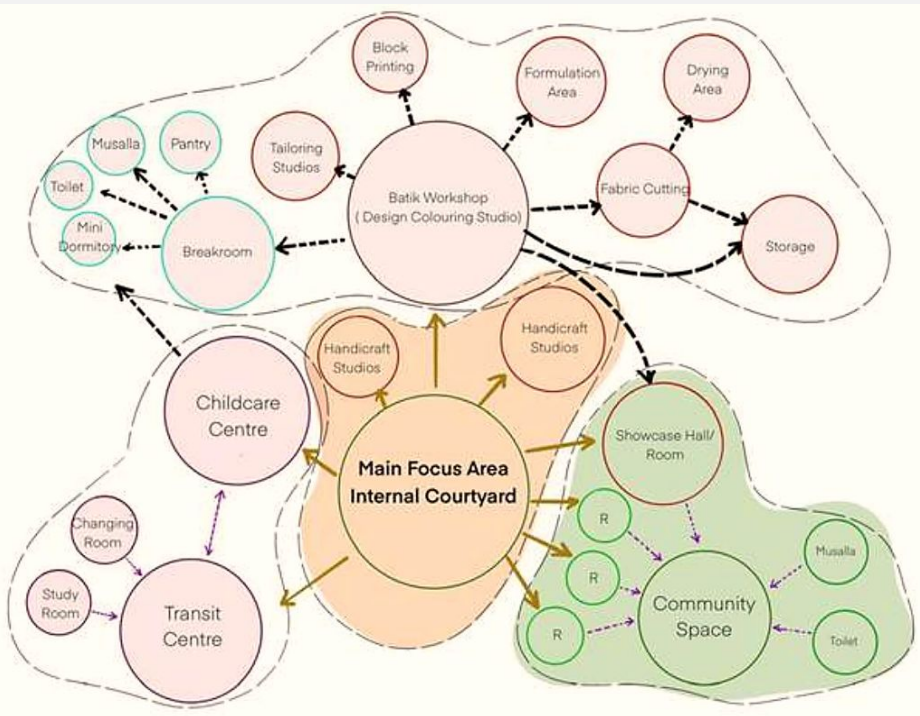


Figure 16 : Design Process

Floor Plans

The training and economic sanctuary features good walkways directly from Pasar Sumayyah. The centre has three separated buildings, which each holds their respective function. The design has a semi-open centralised plaza that can be access from all parts of the building and direct access from Pasar Sumayyah through shaded walkway. The plaza acts as a space for events such as food festival, batik event, daily event and entrepreneurship event.

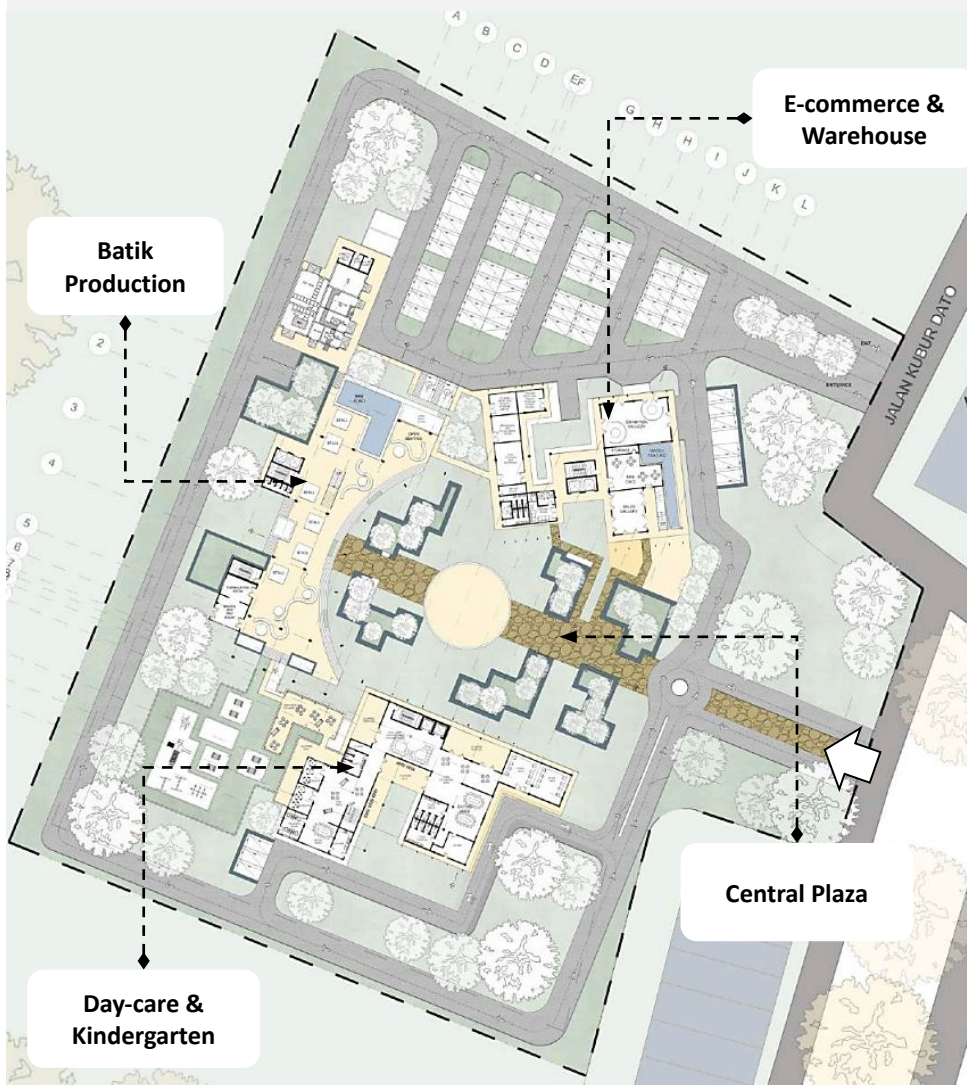


Figure 17 : Ground Floor Plan (NTS)

The main building (Batik Production)

Ground Floor: semi-open ground floor, for public use where single mothers can have their temporary stalls installed and public can have activity and gathering during the day or any event held at the centre.

First Floor: mainly for Batik production - public can access up until Batik colouring area only, all studios and workshop are restricted to single mothers.

Second Floor: consist of digital studios for single mother to do live selling and tailoring room for production. There is also batik colouring area that is open to the public.

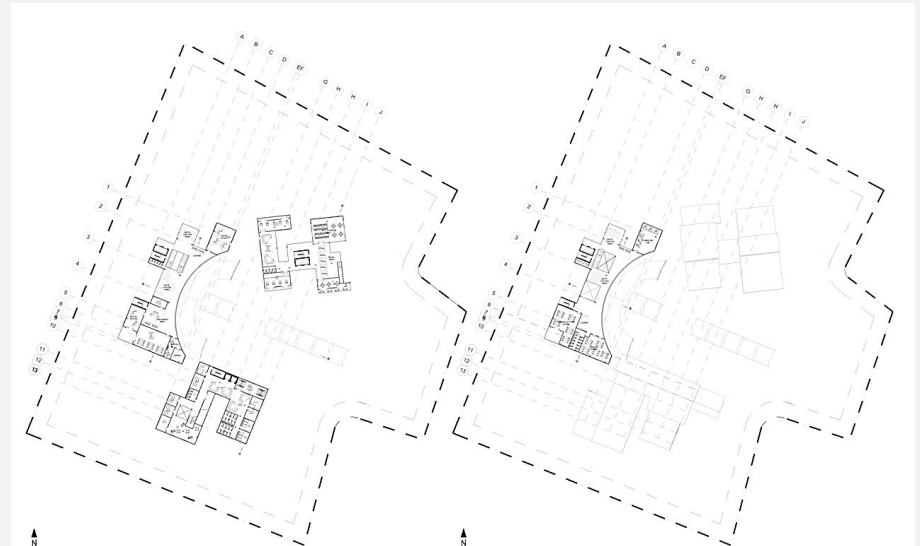


Figure 18 : First and Second Floor Plan (NTS)



Figure 19 : Tailoring Studio



Figure 20 : Batik Production

The secondary building (E-commerce and Warehouse)

Ground Floor: consists of storage room where the single mothers products are stalled. Mini warehouse and fulfilment room are proposed for online selling production. On the other side of the building, there is a cafe and exhibition gallery where Batik and other produced are showcased, and a cafe is accessible directly from the entrance.

First Floor: Single mothers' communal area and live host studios where they work for the online selling and temporary stalls are installed at the commerce area. A multipurpose hall is open to any events for public.



Figure 21 : Stalls/ Cafe Area



Figure 22 : Stalls/ Cafe Area

The Childcare building

Ground Floor: consists of covered play area, near the classroom so that it is easy for teachers and kids to be outdoor and indoor. The transit consists of study area, which is divided into male and female area respectively. Both areas have their own kitchen and eating space.

First Floor: consists of infant room and nursing room for more privacy. It is to protect the privacy of smaller kids and single mothers who need time with their kids. For transit area, there are female and male *musolla*, toilet, shower area and nap zone for them to have a rest after school.



Figure 23: Childcare Focus Area

The Outdoor Area/Facade

The facade of the building is mainly glass panels with Batik display to prevent direct heat and glare. A carved batik railings are installed at the main building and commerce building, to create a more traditional look as well as emphasising on Batik image.



Figure 24 : East Elevation



Figure 25 : The Facade/ Frontage from Pasar Sumayyah

The Program Hierarchy

The main building is the core, symbolising the main economic and function of the centre. It emphasises the project's vision of women empowerment through craft and skills, specifically in Batik production, which is the nature of Tumpat.

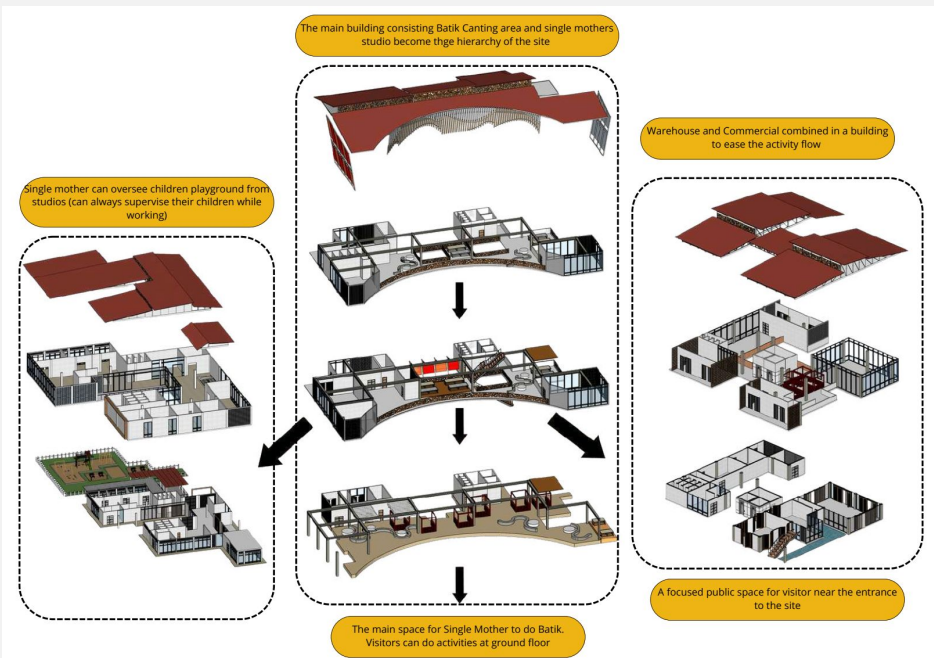


Figure 26 : The Program Hierarchy

Plaza Activation Through Community Based Festivals

The festivals are not isolated events. They are the vital programming tools that can activate the plaza as a space of empowerment. It transforms into a beacon of cultural pride of Tumpat, a symbol of single mothers' economic growth and social upliftment in Tumpat. These festivals promote the economic participation, cultural expression and social integration of women, especially single mothers while strengthening the local identity and community integration.



Figure 27 : Daily Activity at Plaza



Figure 28 : Batik Event at Plaza



Figure 29 : Digital Womenpreneur Bazaar

The central plaza of the proposed Centre of Training and Economic Sanctuary for single mothers in Tumpat Kelantan serves not only as a communal activity but also a flexible space designed to host diverse festivals and cultural activities throughout the year. Among the key elements are the Batik and Craft festival, where single mothers, artisan and trainees can display and sell their handcrafted textiles, accessories and tailoring products. Live demonstration will also be held at the main building, as well as workshops that allow visitors to appreciate the intricacy of Kelantanese Batik making directly from single mothers while also reinforcing the centre role in craft preservation and entrepreneurship. Similarly, the Kelantan Food Festival brings the community together through culinary tradition and empowering food vendors by single mothers.

CONCLUSION

The Training and Economical Sanctuary for single mothers in Tumpat serves as a holistic architectural response to the challenges faced by single mothers in Kelantan. The integration of training facilities, economic production areas, childcare support, and communal public space uplifts single mothers' livelihood through skills development and creates an opportunity for financial independence. To ensure long-term viability, the centre embeds self-sustaining features such as rental stalls, café operations, and periodic festivals that generate continuous income and community engagement. This centre also restores single mothers' sense of dignity and identity them as part of the surrounding community.

This study shows how architecture can move beyond function to become a catalyst for social integration by bridging the gap between opportunity, collective growth of single mothers, and fostering resilience.

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