BUSINESS MODEL SHIFTS: *MASJID* KITCHENS AS SOUP KITCHENS, JOBS EMPLOYMENT AND EMPOWERING *ASNAF* ENTREPRENEURS, AND INCOME GENERATION FOR THE *MASJID*

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ABSTRACT*:* The UNICEF report titled "Families on The Edge" dated October 2020, stated that COVID-19 crisis has pushed more low-income or poor B40 urban Malaysian families into poverty. The poverty rate of these B40 urban families in 2020 is higher than last year, with 50% of the families now living in absolute poverty. 70% of these households reported that COVID-19 had affected their ability to meet their basic living expenses. 37% reporting that they struggle to purchase enough food for their families, while 35% are unable to pay their bills on time. This paper adapted the Design Thinking (DT) methodology. This is to understand and define the key B40 urban families problems; ideation of possible solution options, validation of solution options by various customer segments; and to suggest a conceptual business model as possible solution. This includes conducting literature review and benchmarking, and conducting interviews. An initial business model using Business Model Canvas (BMC) framework was formulated; tested and validated by various customer segments. Hence, the main contribution of this paper is to offer a validated conceptual business model in transforming current *masjid* kitchen (or mKitchen) as a potential in (a) providing soup kitchen for the poor B40 and *Asnaf* community, (b) providing job employment while reskilling, empowering, and nurturing the *Asnaf* as food entrepreneurs, and (c) generating income for the masjid via rental of existing kitchen facilities. This is to turn the *Asnaf* community '*Dari Penerima Zakat ke Pembayar Zakat'* or from Zakat receivers to Zakat contributors. The conceptual mKitchen business model can be adopted or adapted for possible implementation, in general, by *masjid* or mosques.

1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has brought about new challenges as well as new opportunities to businesses, societies, and nations. The pandemic has changed the daily life activities and business landscape. The lack of vaccines and social distancing requirements made daily life and businesses more challenging. The lockdowns measures have exacerbated the survival of businesses and has pushed more of the low-income or poor B40 urban Malaysian families into poverty. Innovative initiatives need to be explored, formulated and established in order to assist this B40 community, including leveraging on existing and under-utilized community-based resources such as mosques kitchens due to the pandemic and MCO. According to JAKIM, there are about 6,500 mosques in Malaysia. Generally, mosques in Malaysia have kitchen facilities. Hence, this paper is to explore, formulate and offer a conceptual mKitchen business model by leveraging and turning masjid kitchens as a potential (a) soup kitchen for the B40 and *Asnaf* community, (b) providing job employment, while reskilling, empowering, and nurturing *Asnaf* as food entrepreneurs, and (c) income generation for the *masjid* via rental of kitchens. This includes providing mind-set shift, upskilling and reskilling programmes to turn the poor B40 and *Asnaf* community '*Dari Penerima Zakat ke Pembayar Zakat'.* The conceptual validated mKitchen business model can be adopted or adapted for possible deployment by *masjid* or mosques.

2. BACKGROUND, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

2.1. The Impact of COVID-19 and MCO on Lives and Livelihood

COVID-19 kills people and fuels fear. It cripples businesses and shrinks bank accounts. Pity the countless workers, especially the B40 workers, who have or may lose their jobs. And the numerous employers who feel they are sinking in a financial quicksand. Based on different scenarios for the impact of COVID-19 on global GDP growth, the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2020) estimates indicate a rise in global unemployment of between 5.3 million ("low" scenario) and 24.7 million ("high" scenario) from a base level of 188 million in 2019. ILO calls for urgent, large-scale and coordinated measures across three pillars: (i) protecting workers in the workplace, (ii) stimulating the economy and employment, and (iii) supporting jobs and incomes. Underemployment is also expected to increase on a large scale, as the economic consequences of the virus outbreak translate into reductions in working hours and wages. A survey conducted by the Department of Statistics Malaysia in May 2020 has found that: (a) 46.6% of self-employed respondents had reported losing their jobs; (b) an estimated 90% respondents were still working with lower than usual salaries; (c) more than two-thirds (71.4%) of self-employed respondents have sufficient financial savings for less than one month; and (d) the majority of respondents said they are unprepared if the duration of the MCO was extended except for employees under Government Linked Companies and multinational companies. The "Families on The Edge" UNICEF report dated October 2020, stated that COVID-19 crisis has pushed more of the low-income or B40 urban Malaysian families into poverty. The poverty rate of these poor B40 community is higher than last year, with 50% of them now living in absolute poverty;

70% reported that COVID-19 had affected their ability to meet their basic living expenses; 37% reported that they struggle to purchase enough food for their families; while 35% of them are unable to pay their bills on time.

2.2 Booming of Digital Business Models with Less Face-to-Face Interactions

The biggest impact of Covid-19, in the short term, is that there less or will no longer be any face-to-face interactions. Almost everything will have to done online (Fong, 2020). Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the growth of the digital economy, thereby helping build economic resilience (EPU, 2021). Consumers who may not have otherwise tried your business model may do so now. From buying goods and services to payment transactions; online businesses and e-Commerce are booming. What a great opportunity to show how the digital platform economy works. If you are, for example, an online financial aggregator, would your partners (banks and insurance companies) not need your digital acquisition model more than ever to find customers? Branches are closed. Sales team and insurance agents are home-bound. The traditional channels are closed, while the demand online channels are on the rise. The demand for online transaction including payments has taken on a new urgency in recent weeks (Jones, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has placed enormous pressure on consumers and small businesses struggling to generate income as public health concerns force travel, retail shopping and billions of dollars in business activity to a halt. The growth within the digital economy has accelerated as the pandemic has forced changing to new digital businesses, forced traditional brick-and-mortar businesses to pivot online, and saw millions of Malaysians go virtual for their daily needs including eCommerce, entertainment, and education (EPU, 2021).

2.3 Malaysian Government Stimulus Packages

The Strategic Programme to Empower the People and Economy (Pemerkasa), which is aimed at assisting the unemployed and the poor particularly the B40 group, as well as the tourism and retail sectors, worth RM20 billion, was announced on March 17, 2021 (PMO, 2021). Pemerkasa is the latest and the sixth stimulus package since the start of the pandemic. This sixth stimulus package provides various forms of micro credit facilities to Micro SMEs, especially for those who need funds to restart or reboost their business. About a year ago i.e. on March 27, 2020, the Malaysian government has issued its second stimulus package to combat the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Medina, 2020). This second package includes addressing the growing and urgent needs of cripple small businesses and the countless workers who may lose their jobs. The second package, valued at RM250 billion, enhances the existing financing facilities issued in the first stimulus package. It also aims to support businesses, especially micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), assist low and middle-income households, and provide fiscal injections to strengthen the national economy.

2.4 Masjid and Surau in Malaysia

The first city component introduced by Rasulullah s.a.w. in Madinah was the masjid institution, the Prophet's Mosque. Since its inception, the masjid functioned as a community development center (Omar et al., 2019; Spahic, 2020). Different types of activities were conducted within its realm. In addition to serving as a place for congregational prayers, as well as for other collective worship ('*ibadah*) practices, the Mosque, likewise, provided the Muslims with other essential social

amenities and services. *Masjid* as center for community engagement and empowerment have been understood by most of the Muslims, but the reality shows that the mosques are somewhat between a place of rituality and a place of people empowerment. If this perception and practices are not deconstructed, the mosque would lose the "Rahmatan lil-alamin" role and function to empower Muslims to have *sejahtera*, inner and outer wellbeing, in this world and the hereafter. It should play its role to empower society. Revitalization of the roles and functions of the mosque with various systems is much needed (Omar et al., 2019; Spahic, 2020), especially during this post-pandemic and digital era.

There are more than 17,200 mosques and surau in Malaysia, as shown in Table 1 (http://masjid.islam.gov.my/index.php?data=c3RhdGlzdGlrLnBocA==).

Table 1: Mosques and *surau* in Malaysia

KOD	NEGERI	KATEGORI MASJID					KATEGORI SURAU	
		Masjid Kerajaan	Masjid Negeri	Masjid Daerah/Jajahan	Masjid Mukim/Kariah	JUMLAH	SURAU	Surau
01	JOHOR	9	4	15	794	822	10	1,953
02	KEDAH	0	1	9	567	577	140	1,925
03	KELANTAN	0	1	9	574	584	1	1,067
04	MELAKA	8	2	0	184	194	0	801
05	N. SEMBILAN	9	1	11	277	298	28	1,057
06	PAHANG	1	1	30	566	598	20	1,666
07	PULAU PINANG	0	1	5	207	213	0	540
08	PERAK	0	1	16	631	648	13	1,897
09	PERLIS	0	1	1	97	99	1	198
10	SELANGOR	11	1	9	400	421	7	1,904
11	TERENGGANU	19	2	7	456	484	1	1,846
12	SABAH	8	1	21	1,042	1,072	63	1,065
13	SARAWAK	0	1	35	333	369	62	750
14	W.P. KUALA LUMPUR	1	1	1	64	67	7	427
15	W.P. LABUAN	0	0	0	15	15	0	28
16	W.P. PUTRAJAYA	2	0	0	1	3	0	86
	JUMLAH	68	19	169	6,208	6,464	353	17,210

Table 2: The number of staff by mosques and *surau* in Malaysia

KOD	NEGERI	KATEGORI MASJID							KATEGORI SURAU					JUMLAH KESELURUHAN
		IMAM			BUKAN IMAM			JUMLAH	KAKITANGAN SURAU				JUMLAH	
		MENERIMA IMBUHAN	TIADA IMBUHAN	JUMLAH	BILAL	NOJA	JUMLAH		IMAM	BILAL	NOJA	JUMLAH		
01	JOHOR	1,383	399	1,782	274	408	682	2,464	738	401	4	1,143	1,143	3,607
02	KEDAH	1,057	250	1,307	225	993	1,218	2,525	15	5	3	23	23	2,548
03	KELANTAN	930	11	941	499	549	1,048	1,989	0	0	1	1	1	1,990
04	MELAKA	354	19	373	170	477	647	1,020	0	0	0	0	0	1,020
05	N. SEMBILAN	553	32	585	329	328	657	1,242	0	0	0	0	0	1,242
06	PAHANG	834	78	912	799	756	1,555	2,467	15	15	9	39	39	2,506
07	PULAU PINANG	388	19	407	335	363	698	1,105	0	0	0	0	0	1,105
08	PERAK	999	293	1,292	1,521	1,102	2,623	3,915	55	66	37	158	158	4,073
09	PERLIS	189	4	193	161	280	441	634	1	0	1	2	2	636
10	SELANGOR	657	110	767	685	688	1,373	2,140	135	134	135	404	404	2,544
11	TERENGGANU	787	204	991	1,056	0	1,056	2,047	0	0	0	0	0	2,047
12	SABAH	1,108	516	1,624	303	276	579	2,203	26	4	5	35	35	2,238
13	SARAWAK	541	74	615	260	244	504	1,119	12	6	6	24	24	1,143
14	W.P. KUALA LUMPUR	111	106	217	144	47	191	408	148	92	43	283	283	691
15	W.P. LABUAN	19	18	37	27	14	41	78	22	20	11	53	53	131
16	W.P. PUTRAJAYA	0	15	15	9	0	9	24	30	16	12	58	58	82
	JUMLAH	9,910	2,148	12,058	6,797	6,525	13,322	25,380	1,197	759	267	2,223	2,223	27,603

These mosques and *surau* have more than 27,000 staff, as shown Table 2 (http://masjid.islam.gov.my/index.php?data=c3RhdGlzdGlrLnBocA==). With these human resources plus other assets such as land, property and kitchens, mosques should play their leading roles to empower the society including providing free foods, creating job employment, as well as nurturing these poor B40 community as entrepreneurs by leveraging on the mosques' resources and assets.

2.5 Soup Kitchens and Food Providers Business Models

The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is a relatively new mindset shift to business modelling. It was popularised by Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur in their book titled "Business Model Generation: A Handbook for Visionaries, Game Changers, and Challengers" (Osterwalder&Pigneur, 2010). The nine blocks of BMC capture the business big picture and its logic. Soup kitchen has been around for some time such as Imaret, built throughout the Ottoman Empire from the 14th to the 19th centuries. An Imaret is one of a few names used to identify the public soup kitchens. These public kitchens were often part of a larger complex known as a Waqf- an inalienable religious endowment in Islamic law. It could include hospices, mosques, caravanserais and colleges. The imarets gave out food that was free of charge to specific types of people and fortunate individuals (Wikipedia, 2014). The Ottoman soup kitchens or the imarets survived from income generated by the public endowments. Since waqf cannot be repealed and perpetually owned by the public interest, the soup kitchens were able to sustain their operations for a long time - enabling them to go beyond soup kitchen - building capacity to provide comfortable places to socialise, offer counselling, medical attention, places for cleaning (the public baths *hammams*) and overnight stay (Ibrahim & Dahlan, 2015).
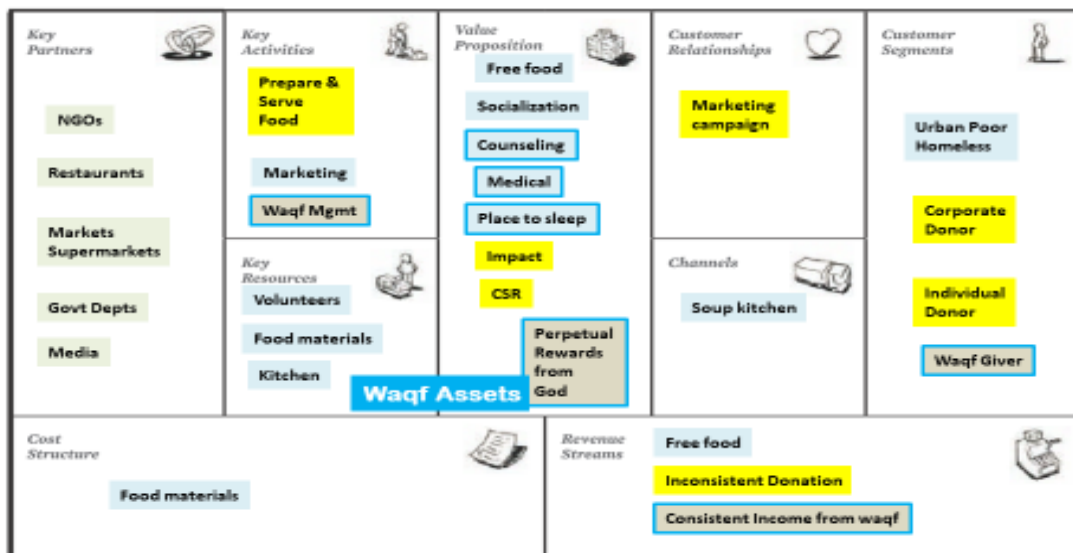

Fig. 1: Soup Kitchen with *Waqf* Business Model

Sustainable soup kitchens then have the capacity to help rejuvenate the neighbourhood, gradually transforming the landscape by getting the B40 and *asnaf* community back on their own two feet. The Ottoman *Waqf* Soup Kitchen Model - A Benchmark: The Ottoman *Waqf* Soup Kitchen Model, as shown in Fig. 1, provided an excellent benchmark towards a sustainable and socially desirable soup kitchen business model (Ibrahim & Dahlan, 2015). Historical evidence has described it to be highly successful until the fall of the Ottoman Empire (Wikipedia, 2014). It

provided free food, offering added value propositions to the poor B40 and homeless as a one stop centre for them to improve their existing conditions - getting out of poverty and homelessness. An important point to note, the *Waqf* Assets are both resources to be used (e.g. building/space for soup kitchen) and a key value proposition. A soup kitchen with the backing of waqf assets would be very compelling in attracting more donors and sponsors.

A profit-oriented Food and Delivery Service Providers like *UberEats, DahMakan* and Swiggy business model are shown in Fig. 2, Fig. 3, and Fig. 4 respectively.

Fig. 2: UberEats Business Model
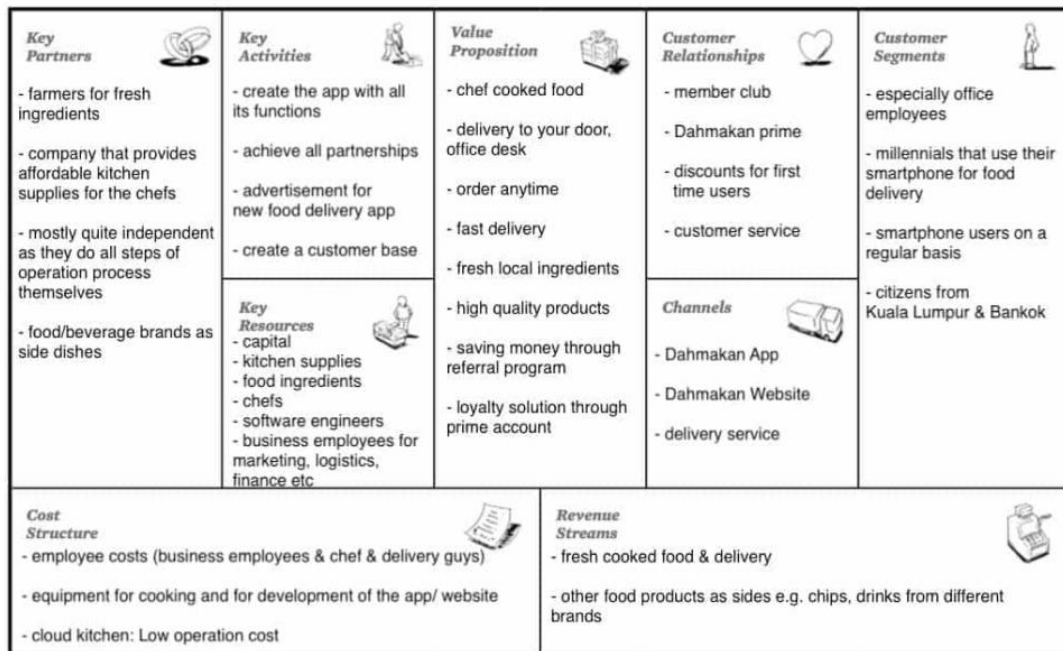
Fig. 3: DahMakan Business Model

Fig. 4: Swiggy Business Model

3. **Initial mKitchen Business Model**

This paper adapted the Design Thinking methodology, where literature review, benchmarking, and informal discussions with the community of masjid on blending the soup kitchens and food providers business models were made. The initial mKitchen business model, using the business model canvas framework, was formulated (see Fig. 5), validated, tested and piloted as a proof-of-concept (PoC) implementation at MASG for a period of 4 weeks or 1 month. As this paper is written, the PoC implementation is still on-going, and has another 1 more week to complete.

Fig. 5: Initial mKitchen Business Model (adopted from Dahlan et al., 2021)

4. Key Findings, Output and Outcome of Pilot Implementation

The initial key findings, output and outcome of mKitchen after a duration of 3 weeks PoC implementation include the followings:

Table 3: The initial key findings, output and outcome of mKitchen

|	Key Target	Output/Outcome
1.	Soup Kitchens for B40/*Asnaf*	Provide and deliver free daily food packs to at least 100 B40/*Asnaf* & mKitchen crews by 5.30pm
2.	Sales of food packs - change in Revenue Streams model due to insufficient donation fund	Average daily sales of 150 food packs. Sales start at 4.30 pm. Unsold packs are distributed to B40/Asnaf starting at 5.30 pm
3.	Job creation for B40/*Asnaf*	Employed 26 asnaf as cooks, assistant cooks, kitchen & food delivery assistants, packaging assistants, delivery riders
4.	Mindset shift, upskilling, empowering, and nurturing *Asnaf* Entrepreneurs	a. Upskilling of 4 Asnafpreneurs b. Building-up the mKitchen brand in Gombak district
5.	Utilisation of masjid kitchen	mKitchen pilot implementation with no rental cost
6.	Sponsorship & donations	a. Received corporate sponsorship after 17 days of pilot implementation kick-off. b. Received individual donation as iftar sponsorship a few days before pilot implementation kick-off.

5. Enhanced mKitchen Business Model
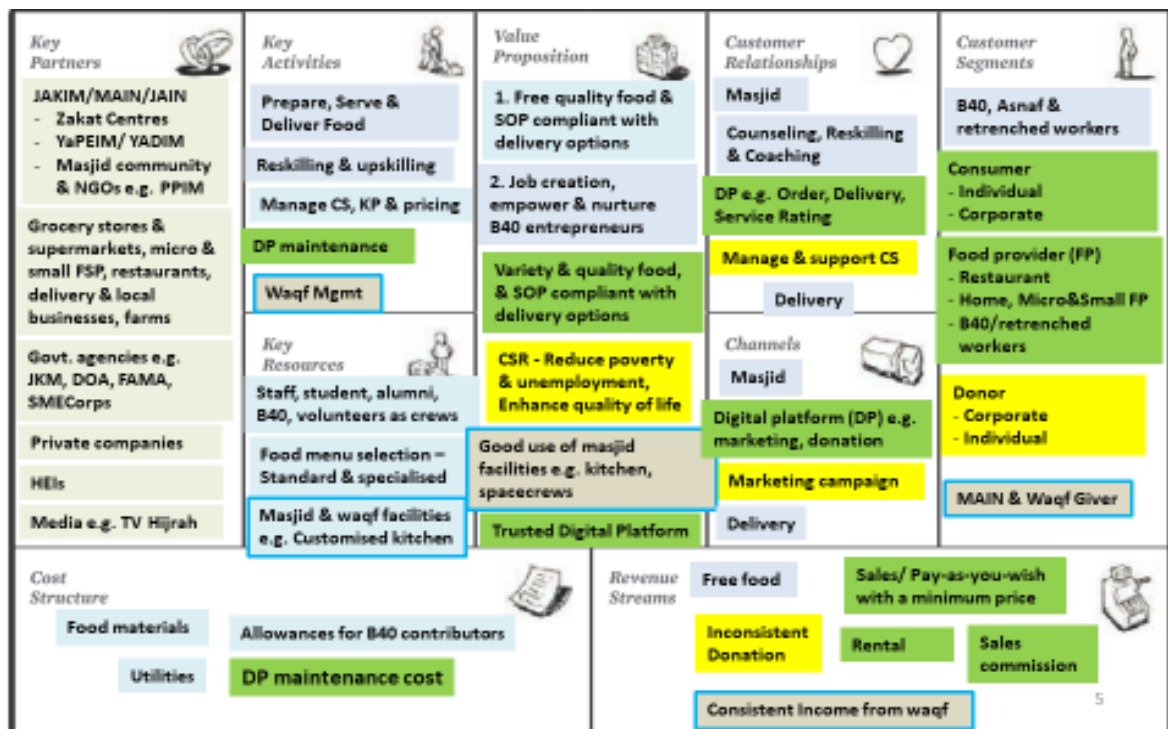
Fig. 6: Enhanced mKitchen Business Model

The enhanced *mKitchen* business model is based on the first 3 weeks pilot implemention feedback and experiences, shown in Fig. 6, is presented using the Business Model Canvas (BMC) framework. It is a combination of the soup kitchen and commercial food and delivery business models. The nine blocks of the BMC capture *mKitchen* business big picture and its logic, and are described as follows:

a. Value Proposition (VP): The VP describes the bundle of products & services that create value for each stakeholders and Customer Segment (CS) in terms of *Job-to-do, pain relievers, gain creators.* For *mKitche*n, the VP and benefits include: Free quality food & SOP compliant; Job creation, reskilling, empowering and nurturing B40/*asnaf* (zakat recipients) as food entrepreneurs; Variety and quality food & SOP (Standard Operating Procedures) compliant for individual and corporate consumers; CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) for donors in terms of reducing poverty & unemployment, and enhance B40 (Bottom 40% based on the categorization used by the government to determine financial assistance) quality of life; and the good use of masjid & *waqf* facilities including kitchen and space.

b. Customer Segments (CS): The CS defines the different groups of people or organizations *mKitchen* via products & services aims to reach and serve. The customer segments of *mKitchen* include: B40/*asnaf*/retrenched workers; Consumers - individual & corporates; Food service providers such as restaurants and home cooking; Donors - individual & organizations; Majlis Agama Islam Negeri (MAIN) & *Waqf* contributors.

c. Channels (CH): How a *mKitchen* communicates with & reaches its various CS to deliver the VP and benefits. These include physical and digital infrastructure such as *masjid*, social media & digital platforms, and delivery services.

d. Customer Relationships (CR): The types of relationships *mKitchen* establishes & sustains with various CS including physical and digital engagement such as *masjid*, social media & digital platforms, counseling, mindset shift, reskilling & upskilling, and food ordering, delivery and service rating apps.

e. Revenue Streams (RS): Represents the donations and sales income *mKitchen* generates from various CS excluding the B40/*asnaf*/retrenched workers. Other potential RS includes sales commissions and rental of kitchen space & facilities. These RS are to cover the costs incurred to operationalize *mKitchen*. The B40, *asnaf*, and retrenched workers will be getting free foods, provided with employment opportunities as well as mindset shift, reskilling & upskilling in entrepreneurship with basic digital marketing, ordering, delivery & customer service knowledge, skills, and competencies.

f. Key Partners (KP): The network of partners and suppliers that enable *mKitchen* to successful deliver its VP and benefits to the various CS. The key partners include grocery stores & supermarkets, micro & small FSP, restaurants, delivery & local businesses, farms; JAKIM/MAIN/JAIN, YaPEIM, YADIM, Zakat Centres, *masjid* community & NGOs e.g. PPIM; government agencies e.g. JKM, DOA, FAMA, SME Corp; companies, MNCs and GLCs; Higher Education Institutions; and media.

g. Key Activity (KA): The most important tasks *mKitchen* must do that enable the successful delivery of its VP and benefits to the various CS. The key activities include procure, prepare, serve and food delivery; mindset shift, reskilling & upskilling in food & beverages management and digital entrepreneurship;

manage & enhance digital platform; manage CS, KP & costing/pricing structure; and Waqf facilities management.

h. Key Resources (KR): The most important assets required to make *mKitchen* business model work e.g. Competency, Financial, Intellectual, physical. The key resources include staff, student, alumni, B40 crew, and community volunteers; food offerings with specialized and standard menu; *masjid*, staff & *waqf* facilities e.g. Kitchen & space.

i. Cost Structure: All costs incurred to operate *mKitchen* that include procurement of food materials; storage, cooking & packaging equipment; utilities; incentives for B40 contribution in preparing, cooking, packaging, and delivery services; and maintenance cost of *mKitchen* digital platform/apps.

6. CONCLUSION

The *mKitchen* is a freemium multi-sided platform business model. However, nothing is really free. Someone has to pay for the free food, services, facilities, and equipment. A multi-sided platform business model makes it possible for the *mKitchen* to give away free food. This is doable by leveraging on masjid kitchens at no cost, while donors and sponsors will actually pay for the food cost. The sustainability of *mKitchen* is dependent on the consistency of the sponsorships, donations, gifts, and waqf from the complementary customer segments - individual and corporate donors and sponsors. This can be seen during the first 3 weeks' pilot implementation of *mKitchen*. Secondly, its sustainability is dependent on the sales, and later on sales commission of standard and variety quality food prepared by *mKitchen* as well as by other food providers respectively. Thirdly, *mKitchen* sustainability is dependent on the potential of masjid kitchen and space rental income in the long run. On the other side, the amount and consistency of donations depends on the innovative value propositions being offered by *mKitchen* such as free food, employment, upskilling and reskilling, empowering and nurturing the B40 community as entrepreneurs. This paper offers an enhanced *mKitchen* business model, based on the first 3 weeks' pilot implementation, with value propositions and benefits in transforming *masjid* kitchens as potential (a) soup kitchens for the B40 and *Asnaf* community, (b) job employment, reskilling empowering, and nurturing of the *Asnaf* entrepreneurs, and (c) income generation for the *masjid* via rental of kitchens and space. This is to turn the B40/*Asnaf* community from Zakat Receivers to Zakat Contributors. The conceptual business model can be adopted or adapted for possible implementation by many more *masjid*. Eventually leading to the formation of network-of-mosque, in the form of both physical and digital platforms. Similar transformation concepts can be applied to other key resources of *masjid* like land and properties. Hence, rejuvenate and revitalizing the "*Rahmatan lil-alamin*" roles and functions of mosques in empowering the society, especially during this post-pandemic and digital era.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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