

**COOPERATIVE BEHAVIOR (TA'AWUN) BETWEEN MOSQUES AND
CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS IN EMPOWERING ASNAFPRENEURS
THROUGH IIUM M-KITCHEN® PROJECT**

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of cooperative behaviour (ta'awun) between mosques and civic organizations in empowering asnafpreneurs through IIUM-Mkitchen® Project. Cooperative behaviour (ta'awun) enables unity and solidarity in the society to sustain humanity civilisation. Ta'awun is an outcome of good bonding (ukhuwwah) that gone through well-nurtured (tarbiyyah) in continuous study circle (usrah) with stimulating environment (bi'ah solehah). The ta'awun among individuals leads to the family and society. Mosques as central societal entities collaborate with civic conscious organizations for the betterment of the society. In pandemic covid-19 situation, mosques and civic conscious organizations have intensified their collaboration with IIUM Mkitchen® Project to empower asnafpreneurs with business ventures in food and beverages. This study obtains the views of mosque officials, representatives of civic-conscious organizations, and lead asnafpreneurs on the sustainability of IIUM-MKitchen® Project in empowering asnafpreneurs into food and beverages venture. The informants argued that IIUM Mkitchen Project has the driver of ta'awun with key elements of sustainability. The synergy between various stakeholders in the project empowers asnafpreneurs.

Keywords: Cooperative behavior, Ta'awun, Asnaf, Civic organisations.

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic covid-19 has created a lot of challenges. People lost employment, income and livelihood (Abidin, Ahmad & Ogundare, 2021; Khalid, 2021; Hossain, 2021). Nobody is able to tell when the pandemic could end (Ho & Sia, 2020; Khalid, 2021). There have been new variants of corona viruses (Dhaiban & Jabbar, 2021). There is no medicine to cure covid-19 but vaccination could build immunisation from being infected (Basiri et al, 2021; Deana, 2021). However, the vaccination process is not speedy as expected due to supplies of vaccines from major suppliers.

Infection continues at a major scale while the vaccination takes a slow pace. This situation has prompted the authorities to enforce a long term lock down (Ho & Sia, 2020; Khalid, 2021). Only essential economic sectors are allowed to operate with reduced workforce and strict adherence to strict procedures (Khalid, 2021; Hossain, 2021). This means that other sectors are not able to operate. Thus, it made more people unemployed.

There have been various agencies and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that came to the affected community with food supplies. The question is how long these NGOs could continuously supply food and other essential items? There is a need to empower the affected community, who are unemployed, poor and unable to meet basic needs, to venture for businesses and employment into the essential economic sector (Ho & Sia, 2020; Khalid, 2021). Food and beverages are in the essential economic sector.

Food and beverages contribute significantly to the economy. This sector is growing very well despite the locked down or Movement Control Order (MCO) and continuous locked down.

Besides government agencies and NGOs, there are more than 17,000 mosques in Malaysia that are located within the community heartland to distribute food and other essential items (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, 2021). These mosques could also empower the affected community with some economic ventures under the essential economic sector like in F&B (Izzah, Dilaila & Yao, 2021; Kee et al, 2021). Almost every mosque has facilities including a kitchen (Malik, 2017; Aliyasa et al, 2019; Ali et al, 2020). These kitchen facilities are underutilised. During MCO, all mosques ceased operation.

Besides mosques, there are civic conscious organizations who have been working with the community to address unemployment, social illness and so forth. All this while, they have been working in isolation from other organizations. There is a need for greater collaboration among people, mosques, and civic organizations in empowering *asnaf* through IIUM M-kitchen®. Thus, this study explores the influence of cooperative behaviour (*ta'awun*) between mosques and civic organizations in empowering asnafpreneurs through the IIUM-Kitchen® Project.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study discovers a gap in the cooperation among mosques and civic organizations to meet social and economic objectives which is the *ta'awun*-based cooperative behaviour. Indeed, this study explores the influence of cooperative behaviour (*ta'awun*) between mosques and civic organizations in empowering asnafpreneurs through the IIUM-Kitchen® Project.

Cooperative Behaviour and Ta'awun

Cooperative behaviour refers to the willingness of individuals or organizations to collaborate in order to attain common goals. The degree of cooperation differs according to resources, capability and competitive advantage. The decision to cooperate will also refer to vertical and horizontal integration. Cooperation among members of society has been practiced globally through unity and solidarity among community members through co-operatives (Abd Rahman & Zakaria, 2018; McKee, Kagan & Ghosh, 2019). Indeed, social co-operatives have been championing economic and social objectives (Mazzarol & Rebound, 2020; Adusei, Adeleye & Okafor, 2021).

The nature cooperative behaviour resembles the Islamic mutual cooperation or *ta'awun*. *Ta'awun* (mutual cooperation) reinforces unity and solidarity among members of the society to achieve economic goals (Al-Haddad, 2015; Zar'um, 2016). In Malaysia, there has been *ta'awun* practice through communal work (gotong-royong) in various economic and social aspects. Each member needs to have the willingness and readiness to work through communal assemblies (gotong-royong) (Mhd. Sarif, 2015). Without the willingness, people might not be able to contribute to the fullest potential (Mhd. Sarif, 2017). Urban communities might have different ways to conduct communal work due to different urbanized contexts (Mhd. Sarif, 2018). The emphasis is always *taqwa* (piety).

Mosques

Mosques are vital social institutions in building and reinforcing relationships between humans with Allah, among humans and with other members of the society. Primarily mosques provide space for obligatory worship like five times obligatory prayers in congregation. Beyond this, society expects proactive roles of mosques in social innovation (Omar, Hussin & Muhamad, 2015). There should be economic activities (Omar, Husin & Muhamad, 2017).

While educating the congregation about obligatory worship (*fardu ain*), mosques should educate the society about other knowledge (*fardu kifayah*) like vocational, technology, entrepreneurship, and so forth (Omar, Husin & Muhamad, 2019). People should not view that mosques are about obligatory activities only. All kinds of activities should be within mosques (Omar, Ilias, Teh & Borhan, 2019). In fact, in crisis, mosques provide temporary shelters for the victims (Utaberta & Asif, 2017)

Civic organizations

Civic organizations are established by members of the society for the benefit of the society. Civic organizations include places of worship, charities, neighborhood associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profits, and community-based organizations (Klingner, 2021).

Empower *asnaf*

Zakat offices in Malaysia have offered entrepreneurship schemes to empower *asnaf* capital assistance, advisory and business support (Harun & Ab Rahman, 2021). For example, Lembaga Zakat Selangor has introduced “Bantuan Pembangunan Ekonomi,” “Skim Bantuan Ekonomi” by Baitulmal of Wilayah Persekutuan (Harun & Ab Rahman, 2021).

Primarily, *asnaf* recipients received zakat in cash terms. There is no obligation from the *asnaf* to repay the zakat received in cash. When *asnafs* are offered to join *asnaf* entrepreneurship schemes, zakat offices are empowering them valuable opportunities in the economic activities. Thus, they are able to earn a living and are able to pay zakat as well in the future (Shiyuti, Zainol, & Ishak, 2021).

In Terengganu, the Baitulmal has developed *asnaf* entrepreneurship scheme (Abdul Ghafar, Zakaria, Yusoff, Kamaludin & Abdul Ghani, 2017). The *asnaf* entrepreneurship scheme has proven that some *asnafs* are able to transform themselves to be *asnaf* entrepreneurs (Abdul Hamid, 2013). *Asnafs* have the talents to transform themselves as *asnaf* entrepreneurs when they are trained and coached by successful entrepreneurs (Hazlina, Jamaliah, Syarifah Norzehan, Abdul Halim, Said, and Syed Yusuf, 2012). There is a need to provide a scheme of entrepreneurship for *asnaf* to be zakat payers (2020).

IIUM M-Kitchen®

The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), as a public university in Malaysia that was established in 1983 has contributed mercy to all the nations. The vision and mission of IIUM are not isolated to the physical campus of the university. IIUM has to engage with the society in

achieving the sustainable development agenda to be aligned with the world Sustainable Development Goals.

Realizing the potential of kitchen facilities at mosques, a group of academics established the “Masjid Kitchen” project. The group consulted officials of mosques, representatives of civic organizations, zakat officials for making kitchens as a platform for *asnaf* to build competencies in ventures into various business activities.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses qualitative research methods through personal interviews with informants who are involved in asnafpreneurship development through IIUM M-Kitchen® projects. The researchers are part of the IIUM M-Kitchen® project and have established very good rapport with the participants in IIUM M-Kitchen®.

The data collection is through conversational personal interviews with representatives of participants (MacDonald *et al.*, 2013; Ngozwana, 2018). Even though the conversation is casual, the researchers still need to do preparation before the interview (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Majid *et al.*, 2017), such as securing informed consent, research permits and validated interview protocol (Yeong *et al.*, 2018).

MAIN RESULTS

This study obtains the views of mosque officials, representatives of civic organizations, and lead asnafpreneurs on the sustainability of IIUM MKitchen® Project in empowering asnafpreneurs into food and beverages ventures.

A group of academicians from IIUM approached several mosque officials, representatives from civic-organizations and zakat officials to discuss what could mosques, community and zakat offices do to assist *asnaf* and instant *asnaf* that emerged due to the locked down orders. The locked down orders meant almost all economic and social sectors could not operate. They could not generate sales and they had to terminate their employees.

When the researchers asked about cooperative behaviour between mosques, civic organizations and *asnaf* to empower asnaf with entrepreneurship ventures, a civic organization representative (COR) welcomed such remarks. The person said:

“We have suggested mosques to allow for the community to establish business activities within the compound of the mosques. But our mosques rejected our proposals. Mosques as part of the community should allow the community to use the spaces within the mosques for income generating activities. For unemployed people, they can be agents or trade representatives for the community. Since they can’t afford to rent a space in the mall, they should be given some space in the mosque’s areas. “

However, when the researchers asked the views of mosque officials, the researchers were informed by the mosque officials that the mosques have valid reasons for not allowing mosques to offer commercial venues for the people and also for the *asnaf*. The Masjid Official (MO) said:

“We always uphold our values that the masjid is not the place for commercial activities. We cannot allow our spaces to be used as commercial spaces. We have our charity committees. In fact, we have a special donation box for a food charity. Giving free food, groceries, and financial assistance have been our welfare activities. We have issues when masjid is involved in commercial or business activities. Our people are very sensitive about conducting business in the masjid even with the label charitable business. To avoid our jamaah, we made reports to the authorities and we have to answer with the authorities. This is bad for us.”

Then, the researchers obtained the views of zakat officials about the cooperation between mosques and civic organizations to develop asnafpreneurs. The zakat officials argued that mosques should be the venue for *asnaf* to build their skills and confidence to make a reasonable living. Zakat Official (ZO) said:

“We have to remember that zakat distribution is for asnaf, the 8 recipients only. Needy and poor are among the 8 asnaf. They are receiving cash and food from the zakat office. Zakat officials are tracing the needy and poor in many areas with the help of mosque officials and local community leaders. House rental, food items, medical needs and so on. Not all asnaf among the needy and poor could work. They are really sick, bed-ridden, and unable to attend to themselves. Their family members also cannot work just to nurse them. Mosques could help zakat officials in educating the needy and poor who are healthy and could work to join employment.”

Zakat Official (ZO) further explained:

“Another issue is our asnaf. Some of them are permanent asnaf due to sickness and disability. Nothing we could help. Some people suggested we retrain them with some vocational skills. But we have to look at their willingness and ability too. If they are bed-ridden, definitely we can't push them to learn some skill in order to make money. They are sick. We must help them. However, those asnaf who are healthy but unable to work because of nursing sick family members, perhaps we could persuade them.”

Mosques have no issue to cooperate with zakat offices, civic organization and any individual to bring goodness to the society, especially in the development of asnafpreneurship. However, mosque officials insisted that mosques have to abide by the regulations. Another Masjid Official (MO2) mentioned

“Masjid is a place of worship. The religious council regulates it. The committee members must adhere to the regulations. Even collection of money from the public also requires permission from the authority and we have to report to the authority. There is an audit unit at the religious office that will do regular audit and surveillance. For activities of masjid too must adhere to guidelines. No freedom for us. Now in pandemic, we must adhere to the strict SOP. When the government does not allow for masjid to operate during the MCO, we have to abide by the directive. We can help the poor and need, but must go through the procedures. To ask asnaf to cook and to sell what they have cooked is doing business in masjid. The directive is to identify asnaf, list them and send the list to the zakat office. Then, the zakat office will distribute it to the asnaf. We have the list of the asnaf. But we are not allowed to approach them for employment or

entrepreneurship. On a one to one basis, we could talk to them to consider selling food. But they are not happy with our suggestion. “

Mosques are regulated organizations in Malaysia under the Islamic administration law. However, the regulation does not restrict mosques from being proactive in conducting activities that can bring benefits to the community (Bakar, Zakaria & Salleh, 2016; Mokhtar, Abdullah, Abd Majid & Aini, 2021). The leadership of mosques could work with various entities in the communities while observing the regulations (Omar, Ismail, & Ilyas, 2021). There is a need of willingness and commitment between mosques and other entities in the community to collaborate for the benefit of the society.

CONCLUSION

There is cooperative behaviour (*ta'awun*) among the participants. Everyone has an important role in empowering *asnaf*. Mosques and civic organizations could cooperate in getting moral support, and funding from the community. Cooperation among neighbourhoods provides financial and moral support in empowering *asnaf* to be entrepreneurs. The use of kitchen facilities of masjid enables *asnaf* to gain competency in F&B entrepreneurship.

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