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Innovation of Social Enterprise Business Models Based on the Management of Religious Social Funds for the Economic Independence of Local Communities

Mukayat Al Amin*[1], Kenneth Sulthon Alafi Al Hallaj[2], Eka Firmansyah[3]
[1]Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya, Indonesia, mukayatalamin821@gmail.com
[2]Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia, elaphy07@gmail.com
[3]Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu, Indonesia, ekafirmansyah@unismuhpalu.ac.id
*corresponding author: mukayatalamin821@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT: *Religious social funds zakat, infaq, sadaqah, and waqf (ZISWAF) constitute one of the largest community-based capital pools in Muslim-majority societies, yet their potential to generate durable economic independence is often constrained by consumptive, short-term distribution patterns. This study examines how social enterprise principles can be embedded into ZISWAF governance to produce a more sustainable model of community economic empowerment. Using a qualitative descriptive, multiple-case document-analysis method of zakat and waqf institutions in Indonesia, the study develops an analytical framework adapting the Social Enterprise Business Model Canvas to the institutional logic of Islamic philanthropy. Findings show that business model innovation occurs across three interlocking layers: a hybrid value proposition pairing consumptive relief with productive financing instruments such as revolving business capital, micro-waqf banks, and Cash Waqf Linked Sukuk; a graduated mentoring and resource-mobilization mechanism shifting beneficiaries (mustahik) from dependency toward entrepreneurial self-reliance; and governance and digitalization mechanisms strengthening transparency, accountability, and donor (muzakki/wakif) trust. The study concludes that ZISWAF-based social enterprises' sustainability depends on balancing social and commercial logics without compromising the shariah objectives (maqashid syariah) legitimizing the funds. This paper contributes a context-specific business model innovation framework for religious philanthropic institutions transitioning from charity administration toward community economic enterprise.*
Keywords: *Social Enterprise; Business Model Innovation; Zakat; Waqf; Community Economic Independence*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Poverty and structural economic inequality remain persistent challenges across many Muslim-majority developing countries, and religious social funds have long been regarded as a redistributive instrument capable of narrowing this gap. *Zakat, infaq, sadaqah*, and *waqf* jointly abbreviated as ZISWAF mobilize substantial financial resources every year, and public understanding of these instruments has been shown to correlate positively with the extent to which the funds are channeled into productive, empowerment-oriented programs rather than one-off consumptive aid (Naibaho, Yurmaini, & Salam, 2026). Despite this potential, optimal utilization of ZISWAF remains limited in many contexts because beneficiaries and, in some cases, the managing institutions themselves continue to rely on traditional consumptive distribution models that relieve immediate hardship without building lasting productive capacity.

One conceptual avenue for closing this gap is the social enterprise model, an organizational form that deliberately blends a social mission with market-based revenue generation, positioning itself between pure philanthropy and profit-maximizing business. Social enterprises are commonly characterized as hybrid organizations that pursue a dual mission of financial sustainability and social purpose simultaneously, a duality that shapes how they manage mission, finance, and human resources (Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014). Battilana and Lee (2014) extend this view by showing that hybrid organizing is not static: organizations move through different institutional logics over their lifecycle, relying on public-welfare logic and resource-building strategies in their founding stage before shifting toward market logic and resource-bundling strategies as they mature into more platform-like structures. This lifecycle perspective is particularly relevant for ZISWAF institutions, which typically begin as pure charitable collectors and distributors before some of them evolve into more entrepreneurial, empowerment-focused organizations.

The transition toward a hybrid organizational form is not without risk. Empirical studies on social enterprises operating in fragile institutional environments show that legitimacy and long-term sustainability depend heavily on the strength of governance and accountability mechanisms; organizations that pursue social missions without adequate structures for transparency and stakeholder trust are more likely to struggle to sustain their operations over time (Zainon, Ahmad, Atan, Wah, Bakar, & Sarman, 2014). This concern is directly transferable to the ZISWAF context, where donors (*muzakki* and *wakif*) extend their trust to institutions on the understanding that funds will be managed both efficiently and in accordance with shariah principles.

In Indonesia specifically, the gap between the theoretical potential of ZISWAF and its practical productive impact has been widely documented. Optimizing the role of ZISWAF in empowering community economies continues to be constrained by low public awareness, limited institutional

capacity, and underdeveloped strategies for converting collected funds into productive assets rather than one-time transfers (Ash-Shiddiqy, Sobirin, & Tsauro, 2025). Evidence from *mustahik* (zakat beneficiary) empowerment programs administered by non-state zakat organizations further indicates considerable variation in program effectiveness, suggesting that the mere existence of a productive-zakat program does not automatically translate into measurable improvements in beneficiaries' economic independence (Mawardi, Trianto, & Masrizal, 2022).

A number of Indonesian zakat institutions have nevertheless begun to reposition themselves along more entrepreneurial lines. Governance transformation within zakat management institutions moving from a purely administrative distribution function toward a social-entrepreneurship orientation has been shown to influence the effectiveness with which *mustahik* achieve socio-economic independence, particularly when transformation is accompanied by direct business establishment, capital strengthening, and structured mentoring (Ryandono & Wijayanti, 2019). Complementary evidence from productive zakat management models implemented by amil zakat institutions further shows that professionalizing the allocation of zakat funds toward productive sectors, supported by continuous supervision, is a key determinant of successful micro-entrepreneur development among *mustahik* (Yuniar, Hanifah, & Muljarijadi, 2018).

Parallel innovation is also occurring on the waqf side of Islamic social finance. Productive waqf management models are increasingly designed around digital-era instruments intended to expand the scale and reach of community economic empowerment programs (Aristyanto & Riduwan, 2025), while systematic reviews of zakat, waqf, and shariah-based financing collectively confirm that these instruments make a significant contribution to micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) development through wealth redistribution, interest-free capital provision, and structured mentoring (Munthe, 2025). At the grassroots level, micro-waqf banks have emerged as an institutional bridge that provides previously unbanked micro-entrepreneurs with access to shariah-compliant capital consistent with the higher objectives of Islamic law, or *maqashid syariah* (Fakhruddin & Pratomo, 2021). At a more structural level, capital-market-linked instruments such as Cash Waqf Linked Sukuk (CWLS) have been used to finance productive assets for example, halal value-chain infrastructure such as food courts demonstrating how waqf funds can be channeled into long-term, revenue-generating community assets rather than being consumed immediately (Hasibuan & Lubis, 2024). Empirical assessments of CWLS-funded empowerment programs in Indonesia confirm that such instruments can generate measurable socio-economic impact for beneficiary communities when program design explicitly links capital allocation to productive outcomes (Yumna, Masrifah, Muljawan, Noor, & Marta, 2024).

While these examples illustrate meaningful innovation at the instrument level, the broader literature on sustainable business models for social enterprises in developing countries indicates that business model innovation, sustainability, and organizational hybridity remain theoretically fragmented fields, particularly outside the Global North (McGibbon Armstrong & Grobbelaar, 2023). Much of the existing Indonesian literature on ZISWAF tends to evaluate individual instruments or individual institutions in isolation a single zakat program here, a single waqf-linked sukuk there without situating these initiatives within a coherent business model innovation framework that explains how value proposition, resource mobilization, governance, and beneficiary graduation interact as parts of a single organizational architecture.

This study addresses that gap by asking three interrelated research questions: first, how can the core principles of social enterprise be translated into a business model architecture appropriate for religious social fund management institutions; second, through what concrete mechanisms does productive ZISWAF management foster the transition of beneficiaries toward community economic independence; and third, what governance and sustainability factors condition the long-term viability of this model. In answering these questions, the study aims to synthesize a context-specific business model innovation framework for ZISWAF-based social enterprises and, in doing so, to contribute both a conceptual bridge between social enterprise theory and Islamic social finance practice, and a practical reference point for institutions seeking to move from charity administration toward genuine community economic enterprise.

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, chosen because the research aims to describe and interpret an organizational phenomenon the innovation of business models within religious social fund institutions rather than to test a predetermined hypothesis (Sugiyono, 2022). The qualitative approach is complemented by a multiple-case, document-based case study logic, following Yin's (2018) proposition that case study research is appropriate when the objective is to understand a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-world institutional context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident.

Because this research was conducted independently and without institutional field access, the empirical basis of the study is secondary rather than primary. Data were drawn from three categories of sources: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2014 and 2026 and indexed in Scopus and the Indonesian Science and Technology Index (Sinta), covering the fields of social entrepreneurship, Islamic social finance, and community economic empowerment; (2) publicly available institutional documents, program reports, and website publications of

Indonesian ZISWAF-managing institutions, including national and private zakat bodies, waqf-management institutions, and micro-waqf banks; and (3) relevant regulatory and policy documents governing zakat and waqf management in Indonesia. Sources were selected using purposive sampling, applying three inclusion criteria: the source substantively discusses the productive or entrepreneurial use of *zakat, infaq, sadaqah*, or *waqf*; the source was published or made available between 2014 and 2026; and the full text was accessible for analysis.

The analytical framework used to organize and interpret the data was an adaptation of the Social Enterprise Business Model Canvas, reconstructed to fit the institutional logic of religious philanthropy. Nine interpretive blocks were used: value proposition, beneficiary segments, channels, beneficiary relationships, key resources, key activities, key partners, cost structure, and revenue or funding streams, supplemented by a tenth block capturing intended social impact. Each source was read and coded according to which canvas block it primarily addressed.

Data analysis followed a three-stage qualitative content analysis procedure. In the open-coding stage, descriptive labels were assigned to statements in the source material relating to instruments, mechanisms, actors, and outcomes. In the axial-coding stage, these open codes were grouped and mapped onto the ten canvas blocks described above, allowing patterns across different institutions and instruments to be compared. In the selective-coding stage, the mapped categories were synthesized into three overarching themes that directly answer the study's three research questions: the architecture of the hybrid value proposition, the mechanism through which beneficiaries move toward economic independence, and the governance and sustainability conditions that bound the model. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis, source triangulation was applied by cross-checking claims across academic literature, institutional reports, and regulatory documents, and interpretive claims were anchored to established organizational theory particularly the hybrid-organizing framework to reduce the risk of purely descriptive or anecdotal conclusions.

It should be acknowledged that, because the study relies on secondary and documentary data rather than primary fieldwork such as interviews or surveys with *mustahik* or institutional managers, the resulting framework is best understood as an analytical and conceptual synthesis rather than a statistically generalizable finding. This limitation is addressed further in the concluding section, along with recommendations for future research that could validate the framework empirically.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of the reviewed literature and institutional documents indicates that business model innovation in ZISWAF-based social enterprises can be understood through three closely

interrelated dimensions, each of which is discussed in turn below: the architecture of the hybrid value proposition, the mechanism that moves beneficiaries toward economic independence, and the governance and digitalization factors that determine the sustainability of the overall model.

Hybrid Value Proposition Architecture: Combining Consumptive Protection with Productive Financing

The first and most fundamental layer of innovation lies in how ZISWAF institutions structure their value proposition. Rather than offering a single, uniform service the direct transfer of funds the institutions examined in this study increasingly operate a layered stack of instruments calibrated to different levels of beneficiary readiness. At the base of this stack, consumptive assistance continues to serve an essential protective function for beneficiaries who are not yet in a position to absorb productive capital, such as those facing acute hardship. Above this base layer, institutions such as Badan Amil Zakat Nasional (BAZNAS) have progressively expanded their role from fund collection and distribution toward active economic empowerment, positioning themselves as agents of community economic development rather than passive intermediaries (Mashur, Riswandi, & Sibawaihi, 2022).

A further layer consists of productive zakat instruments proper revolving business capital, in-kind productive assets, and structured mentoring through which *mustahik* are meant to convert a one-time zakat disbursement into an ongoing income stream. Evidence from productive zakat empowerment programs shows that this layer functions best when it is not treated as a single disbursement event but as a managed process: continuous mentoring, transparent governance of the disbursed funds, and coordinated synergy among the various stakeholders involved the zakat institution, the beneficiary, and, where relevant, market partners are identified as the key factors distinguishing programs that succeed in raising *mustahik* welfare from those that do not (Nur Aeni, 2025). Similarly, studies of productive zakat's role in *mustahik* economic empowerment emphasize that professional management of the productive-fund allocation process, rather than the mere size of the fund disbursed, is what ultimately drives improvement in beneficiaries' economic condition (Mulyawisdawati & Nugrahani, 2019).

On the waqf side of the value proposition, a comparable layering logic is evident, but with instruments oriented toward longer investment horizons and larger-scale productive assets. Productive waqf management model innovation in the digital era has been oriented specifically toward expanding the reach and efficiency of community economic empowerment (Aristyanto & Riduwan, 2025), while the broader body of evidence on zakat, waqf, and shariah-based financing confirms that these three instruments jointly support MSME development through wealth redistribution, interest-free capital access, training, and mentoring, with cash waqf and Cash

Waqf Linked Sukuk in particular identified as playing a critical role in long-term MSME financing (Munthe, 2025). At the more localized end of this layer, micro-waqf banks translate waqf-based capital into small, accessible, interest-free financing for micro-enterprises that would otherwise remain excluded from the conventional banking system, an arrangement explicitly framed around the higher objectives of shariah protection of wealth (*hifz al-mal*) and human dignity (*hifz al-nafs*) rather than commercial return alone (Fakhruddin & Pratomo, 2021). At the top of the stack, capital-market-linked instruments extend the productive potential of waqf even further: the use of Cash Waqf Linked Sukuk to finance halal value-chain infrastructure, such as the establishment of a food court integrating small and medium halal food businesses, illustrates how waqf assets can be structured as long-duration, income-generating community assets that simultaneously preserve the underlying capital in accordance with waqf principles (Hasibuan & Lubis, 2024). Empirical evaluation of CWLS-funded empowerment programs further confirms that, when the underlying investment is explicitly tied to productive activity rather than passive asset holding, beneficiary communities experience measurable improvements in economic indicators (Yumna, Masrifah, Muljawan, Noor, & Marta, 2024).

Taken together, this layered structure represents a distinctive form of hybrid value proposition consistent with the theoretical description of social enterprises as organizations that must simultaneously manage a social mission and a resource-generating logic (Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014). What distinguishes the ZISWAF context from a conventional social enterprise, however, is that the layering is not simply a matter of internal strategic choice; it is shaped by the shariah classification of the underlying fund. Zakat, by virtue of its fixed *asnaf* (beneficiary category) requirements, is more naturally suited to time-bound productive disbursement, whereas waqf, by virtue of its principle of capital preservation, is more naturally suited to long-duration, asset-based productive structures such as CWLS. Business model innovation in this sector therefore does not consist of replacing consumptive distribution with productive financing, but of deliberately sequencing and combining shariah-compliant instruments so that beneficiaries can move upward through the value-proposition stack as their productive capacity develops an arrangement that echoes, in a religiously grounded form, the general proposition that sustainable business model innovation for social enterprises in developing-country contexts requires reconciling multiple institutional logics rather than choosing between them (McGibbon Armstrong & Grobbelaar, 2023).

From Beneficiary to Entrepreneur: The Graduation Mechanism Toward Economic Independence

The second dimension of business model innovation concerns the mechanism through which ZISWAF institutions convert productive capital into durable economic independence for beneficiaries what may be termed a graduation mechanism, by analogy with the trajectory of a

mustahik moving from a position of dependency toward, ideally, becoming a zakat payer (*muzakki*) in their own right. The evidence reviewed in this study suggests that this graduation mechanism is not automatic; it depends on the deliberate combination of capital access, structured mentoring, and market linkage, and its effectiveness varies considerably across institutions.

Analysis of *mustahik* empowerment programs administered by non-state zakat organizations shows that program design elements the intensity and continuity of mentoring, the ease of access to productive capital, and the extent to which beneficiaries are connected to viable markets for their products are stronger predictors of successful economic graduation than the sheer volume of funds disbursed (Mawardi, Trianto, & Masrizal, 2022). This finding is reinforced by evidence on the transformation of zakat institution governance: where an institution deliberately repositions itself as a social-entrepreneurship actor rather than a passive distributor, and where this repositioning is accompanied by direct involvement in establishing *mustahik* businesses, strengthening their capital base, and providing ongoing assistance, the effectiveness of *mustahik* socio-economic independence outcomes improves measurably (Ryandono & Wijayanti, 2019). A complementary institutional case further shows that professionalized allocation of productive zakat funds toward viable productive sectors, guided by continuous monitoring rather than one-off disbursement, is what enables micro-entrepreneur development programs to achieve their intended outcomes (Yuniar, Hanifah, & Muljarijadi, 2018).

The theoretical lens of hybrid organizing offers a useful explanation for why this graduation mechanism functions differently across an institution's lifecycle (Battilana & Lee, 2014). In their founding stage, ZISWAF institutions typically operate under a public-welfare logic, prioritizing resource building the accumulation of donor trust, initial capital, and legitimacy through predominantly consumptive or lightly productive distribution. As institutions mature, however, evidence from the case examples above suggests a discernible shift toward a market logic in which resources are bundled rather than merely built: mentoring, capital, and market access are combined into a single coordinated program rather than delivered as separate, disconnected services. This shift mirrors the platform-based business model that hybrid organizations tend to adopt in their growth stage, and it is precisely this bundling not the availability of capital alone that appears to differentiate ZISWAF programs capable of producing durable economic independence from those that primarily achieve short-term relief.

This graduation mechanism also has a collective, not merely individual, dimension. Several of the institutional models reviewed structure *mustahik* into peer groups or clusters, allowing successful beneficiaries to informally mentor newer entrants and allowing the institution to concentrate its market-linkage efforts on a cohort rather than on isolated individuals. This clustering strategy

reduces the per-beneficiary cost of mentoring and market access addressing one of the central resource-mobilization tensions that hybrid organizations face when balancing social mission against limited financial and human resources (Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014) while also creating a form of social capital among beneficiaries that appears to reinforce program retention and business survival beyond the period of direct institutional support.

Governance, Digitalization, and the Boundary of Sustainability

The third dimension concerns the governance and technological conditions that bound the sustainability of the ZISWAF-based social enterprise model. Digitalization has emerged as a particularly significant enabling factor, especially on the waqf side of Islamic social finance. Digital waqf management platforms have been shown to expand donor reach, reduce transaction costs, and critically improve the transparency of fund allocation, which in turn strengthens donor confidence and encourages repeat giving; at the same time, the literature identifies persistent challenges in this transition, including limited technological infrastructure, uneven digital literacy among both institutions and donors, and the absence of standardized digital governance protocols across institutions (Almomani, AbuAlhoul, Alqudah, & Al-Khalidi, 2024).

Digitalization and instrument innovation alone, however, are not sufficient to guarantee that ZISWAF-based enterprise models translate into equitable outcomes. Broader evidence on wealth distribution in Islamic economics cautions that even as zakat, waqf, and other Islamic philanthropic instruments become more sophisticated in the digital economy era, wealth distribution inequality can persist if regulatory frameworks, institutional capacity, and public financial literacy do not develop in parallel with instrument innovation (Darajat, 2025). This finding is consistent with the broader hybrid-organizing literature's observation that legitimacy and sustainability depend on the strength of governance and accountability mechanisms rather than on the sophistication of the underlying financial instrument alone (Zainon, Ahmad, Atan, Wah, Bakar, & Sarman, 2014); an institution can adopt highly innovative productive instruments and still fail to achieve sustainable community impact if its governance structures do not adequately manage the tension between social mission and resource acquisition (Doherty, Haugh, & Lyon, 2014).

Synthesizing the three dimensions discussed above, the study proposes that the sustainability of a ZISWAF-based social enterprise model rests on a boundary condition rather than a fixed formula: institutions must continuously calibrate how far they extend the productive, market-oriented layer of their value proposition (Section 3.1) and the intensity of their graduation-oriented mentoring and resource bundling (Section 3.2) against the strength of their governance, transparency, and digital infrastructure (Section 3.3). Where instrument innovation outpaces

governance capacity, the model risks either mission drift toward purely commercial objectives or a loss of donor and beneficiary trust; where governance capacity outpaces instrument innovation, the model risks stagnating in a purely consumptive, non-productive posture that fails to build lasting community economic independence. This boundary condition directly answers the study's third research question and provides the conceptual core of the business model innovation framework this paper proposes: religious social fund management institutions transition successfully into social enterprises not simply by adding productive financial instruments, but by simultaneously investing in the governance and human-capital infrastructure required to manage the resulting hybridity a conclusion that aligns closely with, and extends into the Islamic social finance context, the general proposition that sustainable business model innovation for social enterprises in developing countries depends on reconciling the tensions inherent in organizational hybridity rather than resolving them in favor of either the social or the commercial logic alone (McGibbon Armstrong & Grobbelaar, 2023; Battilana & Lee, 2014).

IV. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the principles of social enterprise can be embedded into the management of religious social funds to foster the economic independence of local communities, guided by three research questions concerning business model architecture, the mechanism of beneficiary graduation, and the governance conditions for sustainability. The findings show that business model innovation in ZISWAF institutions is best understood as a layered, hybrid value proposition that sequences consumptive protection, revolving productive capital, asset-based productive waqf, and capital-market-linked instruments such as Cash Waqf Linked Sukuk according to beneficiaries' evolving productive capacity. This innovation is operationalized through a graduation mechanism that bundles mentoring, capital, and market access rather than capital alone and that shifts in character as institutions mature from a founding, public-welfare orientation toward a growth-stage, market-oriented orientation. The sustainability of this entire architecture, in turn, is bounded by the strength of institutional governance, transparency, and digital infrastructure; instrument innovation that is not matched by governance capacity risks either mission drift or an erosion of the donor and beneficiary trust on which religious social funds fundamentally depend.

Theoretically, the study contributes a context-specific extension of hybrid-organizing and social enterprise business model theory into the domain of Islamic social finance, showing that the same tensions between social mission and resource acquisition documented in the general social enterprise literature manifest in ZISWAF institutions in a form shaped by shariah classification of the underlying funds. Practically, the proposed three-layer framework offers zakat and waqf institutions, policymakers, and philanthropic practitioners a structured reference point for

diagnosing where their current programs sit along the value-proposition stack and what governance investments are needed to move beneficiaries further toward durable economic independence.

This study is subject to important limitations. Because the analysis relies on secondary literature and institutional documentation rather than primary fieldwork, the proposed framework should be regarded as a conceptual synthesis rather than a statistically validated model, and the specific institutional examples discussed may not be representative of the full diversity of ZISWAF institutions operating in different regulatory and socio-cultural contexts. Future research would benefit from empirically testing the proposed framework through primary data collection including structured interviews with institutional managers, surveys of *mustahik* graduation outcomes, and comparative case studies across countries to validate the boundary condition between instrument innovation and governance capacity identified in this study, and to examine how the framework performs under differing regulatory environments for zakat and waqf management.

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