

## Leveraging Waqf Land for Enhancing Food Security Initiatives: Best Practices and Strategic Recommendations

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### ABSTRACT

Malaysia's growing population of 33.7 million in 2023 highlights the pressing need for robust food security measures. However, the country's reliance on food imports, resulting in RM31 billion trade deficit in 2022, underscores challenges in achieving self-sufficiency. Concurrently, waqf, an Islamic endowment, offers untapped potential for societal benefit. Unfortunately, mismanagement and resource gaps have left many waqf lands idle. This study investigates global best practices to optimize waqf lands for enhancing food security in Malaysia. Using a qualitative approach, the research analyzes legal frameworks, reported cases, interviews, and administrative data. It explores innovative strategies such as legal reforms, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), cash waqf, corporate waqf, and modern agricultural technologies like GIS and precision farming. Aligning with policies like the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, the study provides actionable recommendations for sustainable agriculture and community welfare. The findings aim to guide legal reforms, governance strategies, and innovative practices to ensure a secure, sustainable food supply, leveraging waqf for national benefit.

**Keywords:** Best Practices; Food Security Initiatives; Islamic Economy; Malaysia; Waqf Lands

## INTRODUCTION

Muslim communities' socioeconomic progress has always relied on waqf. Waqf resources, notably land, have traditionally been used to build mosques, schools, and hospitals. In recent years, there has been rising interest in using waqf land as a strategic resource to improve food security, particularly in Muslim-majority countries. Waqf land used for agriculture supports sustainable development and poverty reduction, as well as waqf's principles of permanent communal benefit. Malaysia struggles with agricultural productivity and food self-sufficiency, making food security a major issue. Food imports have made Malaysia economically vulnerable, with the food trade deficit reaching RM34.1 billion by July 2024 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). Waqf land, an Islamic endowment, is underutilized yet might improve food security. Waqf, the giving of assets for public or religious use, has historically helped Muslim communities prosper economically (Kahf, 2003). Due to governance issues like poor administration and lack of transparency, waqf land in Malaysia has yet to contribute to national food security (Abdullah, 2018). To maximize waqf land for food security in Malaysia, this study investigates global successful methods.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic generosity has relied on waqf, which is rooted in Muslim cultures' socioeconomic foundation. Islamic law defines waqf as perpetually committing property or assets to religious or philanthropic causes (Jamal et al., 2022). The original asset is preserved while this property generates community benefits (Cizakca, 1998). Waqf originates from Muhammad's actions in the early Islamic period. According to Cizakca (1998), the Prophet PBUH donated Mukhayriq to the Muslim community, the first waqf. In the Islamic world, monarchs, affluent people, and ordinary citizens established waqf to finance mosques, schools (madrasas), hospitals (maristans), and other public services (Kuran, 2001).

It must be noted that waqf was vital to Islamic economies and communities throughout the Middle Ages. In the Ottoman Empire, waqf organizations funded public infrastructure like roads, bridges, and water systems, according to Cizakca (2000). Waqf property income sustained these projects over time. Since waqf was self-sustaining, it could provide social services even during economic or political upheaval. Waqf has traditionally been used to reduce poverty and inequality in Islamic societies by transferring wealth. Waqf property income funded education, healthcare, and social welfare (Kuran, 2001). Waqf endowments sponsored madrasas and maristans, which provided free education and medical care to the public.

Waqf's sponsorship of education and knowledge is well-known. Waqf-funded madrasas were the main educational institutions in Islamic civilizations and shaped their intellectual and cultural growth (Gaudiosi, 1988). These organizations preserved and transmitted religious, scientific, and philosophical information, fostering medieval Islamic scholarship. In addition to education, waqf helped Islamic civilizations prosper economically. Cizakca (2000) claims that waqf organizations provided important public goods and services that boosted economic activity as quasi-public businesses. Markets and caravansaries promoted trade and commerce, while waqf-funded irrigation schemes increased agricultural production. Waqf's economic benefits extend beyond its direct recipients, helping Islamic societies develop.

Although waqf was crucial to Islamic societies' socio-economic growth, its importance has declined. Waqf declined due to numerous circumstances, including colonialism, which expropriated and secularized waqf properties in many Islamic countries (Kuran,

2011). Western legal and administrative systems weakened waqf assets and institutions. Despite these problems, waqf has been rediscovered due to its ability to address socio-economic issues. Scholars and policymakers are investigating how waqf promotes sustainable development, poverty reduction, and social welfare in Muslim-majority nations (Cizakca, 2011). This newfound interest in waqf has led to new models including cash waqf, corporate waqf, and waqf-based microfinance that leverage waqf assets for economic and social development.

Due to over 690 million people hungry and malnourished, food security is a major global issue (FAO, 2020). Food security means “all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2006). Food security includes availability, accessibility, use, and stability. Interconnected dimensions determine a population's food security (Maxwell & Slater, 2003). Food security in Malaysia requires an appropriate supply, accessibility, nutrition, safety, and stability.

Accordingly, many Muslim-majority countries face food insecurity due to rapid population expansion, urbanization, limited arable land, and climate change. Despite these problems, waqf land remains underutilized, offering a chance to boost national and regional food security. Waqf, an Islamic endowment, has traditionally funded religious and social welfare projects like mosques, schools, and hospitals. However, waqf land's agricultural and food production potential has not been completely realized. Conversely, properly managed and developed waqf land can boost agricultural production and food security in Muslim-majority nations. Underutilized waqf land can be turned into productive agricultural land to increase food supply and reduce imports. Many governments and waqf organizations are developing waqf land for agriculture (Abdullah & Rahman, 2015).

However, legal as well as administrative, and financial issues keep waqf lands underdeveloped or dormant. These include legal fragmentation, conflicting legislation across jurisdictions, and waqf property administration bureaucracy (Mohamad & Ibrahim, 2019). Financial constraints prohibit many waqf entities from investing in agricultural technologies and infrastructure. Waqf land administrators lack food security knowledge and strategy (Cizakca, 1998). Waqf land underuse misses an ethical and sustainable food security solution. With proper methods, waqf land can increase agricultural production, food supply, and Muslim-majority countries' socioeconomic growth. Legal reforms, financial innovation, community engagement, and waqf land utilization project best practices are needed.

Additionally, many pilot programs and case studies have indicated that waqf land can improve food security. Malaysia has improved food production and local livelihoods by developing waqf land for agriculture (Abdullah & Rahman, 2015). These findings are usually localized, and best practices are rarely documented and communicated, making it hard to reproduce and scale similar efforts elsewhere.

According to studies, waqf property can increase food security if managed effectively. Malaysia has successfully used waqf land for commercial crops, animals, and aquaculture (Abdullah & Rahman, 2015). These programs increase food production, local economic stability, and national growth. However, farming on waqf land is tough. The lack of uniform regulation between countries creates legal challenges. Many nations decentralize waqf land administration, with each government or region having its own rules. Large-scale agricultural initiatives are complicated by waqf asset management and development fragmentation (Mohamad & Ibrahim, 2019). Waqf land administration can also be bureaucratic, delaying project completion.

Nevertheless, waqf institutions also struggle to fund infrastructure and technologies to develop waqf land for agriculture. Waqf institutions sometimes lack the funds to make such investments and are reluctant to seek outside finance because of worries about their charitable nature. Some governments have used public-private partnerships and NGOs to mobilize resources and skills to tackle these difficulties. Waqf administrators lack information and a strategic vision of waqf land's agricultural potential. Cizakca (1998) claims that waqf land's historical use for religious and social purposes has hindered its use in agriculture. A lot of waqf land is underutilized or idle, missing out on food security opportunities.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research employs qualitative methods of research, which include content analysis. The content analysis entails reviewing relevant literature on issues pertaining to enhancing Food Security Initiatives in Malaysia and significant time spent on library research. This includes a study on all the primary and secondary materials relating to the research and selected countries for comparative studies. For best practices analysis, the research analyses the law relating to the enhanced Food Security Initiatives through waqf land in Indonesia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Morocco, Bangladesh, and Tunisia.

## RESULTS

Malaysia's population is projected to reach 33.7 million in 2023, with a growth rate of 0.2% per year (Sulaiman et al., 2021). This demographic increase underscores the necessity for robust food security measures, especially as the nation relies significantly on food imports. The food trade imbalance rose from RM25 billion in 2021 to RM31 billion in 2022, highlighting Malaysia's ongoing challenges in achieving self-sufficiency in basic food production (Dino, 2023). Dependence on imports exposes the country to global market fluctuations, creating concerns about food supply chain sustainability amidst climate change and economic instability (Firdaus et al., 2020; Aziz, 2023).

The agricultural sector in Malaysia, despite its importance for food security, suffers from low productivity. Smallholder farmers often rely on traditional farming methods, resulting in inefficiencies in food crop cultivation and a low food self-sufficiency ratio (Dino, 2023). Additionally, climate change poses significant threats to agricultural output, particularly paddy production, which is critical to Malaysia's food security (Firdaus et al., 2020). The interplay of climate change and food production challenges necessitates a reevaluation of agricultural practices to bolster food security (Firdaus et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Malaysia remains heavily dependent on food imports to meet domestic demand. Grains, vegetables, and meat constitute a large portion of these imports, exposing the country to price volatility, global market disruptions, and supply chain challenges that jeopardize food security (Sheng, Shamsudin, & Mohamed, 2010). Arable land scarcity, exacerbated by urbanization, industrialization, and inheritance laws that fragment agricultural land, further undermines food production and efficiency. Environmental challenges like floods, droughts, and rising temperatures also disrupt food production systems, adding to the pressures created by population growth.

The Turkish Directorate General of Foundations updated regulations improved financial management, and made waqf land administration more transparent. These reforms enabled waqf assets to support numerous social and economic development projects, demonstrating how robust governance and legal frameworks can maximize the impact of waqf lands (Cizakca, 2011). Similarly, Al-Rajhi Waqf in Saudi Arabia, one of the largest

and most effective waqf institutions globally, employs Islamic principles, strategic planning, and professional management. This example illustrates how strategic governance sustains and enhances waqf projects (Kahf, 2003).

Innovative waqf land initiatives for food security have also emerged, supported by legal and financial solutions. For instance, Indonesia's Waqf Board (BWI) collaborates with private agribusinesses to transform waqf properties into profitable farms. These partnerships have not only improved food security but have also created jobs and generated income for local communities. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have proven instrumental in mobilizing resources and expertise, ensuring the sustainability and scalability of such projects. Abdullah and Rahman (2015) highlight how PPPs facilitate risk and reward sharing between waqf institutions and private sector partners, making agricultural ventures more viable.

Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation (KAPF) has also utilized PPPs to develop waqf lands for commercial real estate projects. These collaborations have increased waqf income and contributed to national GDP, showcasing the financial and social benefits of partnerships between waqf institutions and private developers (Bakar & Rahman, 2007). Furthermore, Turkey's Directorate General of Foundations (VGM) has successfully implemented cash waqf plans to fund social and economic growth, including food security initiatives. By investing monetary donations in productive ventures, VGM ensures the sustainability of waqf programs, demonstrating the adaptability of cash waqf for land development (Cizakca, 2011).

In Malaysia, Islamic financial institutions have adopted corporate waqf models to fund social development projects. These initiatives generate waqf entities that allocate profits toward agricultural and food security efforts, illustrating how corporate waqf can integrate into modern financial systems for developmental purposes (Magda, 2008). Additionally, the Saudi Islamic Development Bank (IDB) has launched waqf land reclamation projects, emphasizing how these lands can enhance agricultural production and social welfare (Rahman, 2023).

Community involvement has also emerged as a critical factor in successful waqf land use. Local participation in agricultural project design and implementation fosters a sense of ownership and ensures equitable benefits sharing. This approach increases the sustainability of waqf-based agricultural businesses by addressing local needs and conditions (Osman & Rahman, 2014; Sukayat, 2023). For instance, the Moroccan Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs involves local communities in waqf land management, creating agricultural and educational opportunities that directly benefit the populace.

The modification of the Bangladeshi Waqf Ordinance has enhanced community participation in waqf land administration, leading to greater transparency and accountability. The establishment of community-based waqf management committees has helped meet community needs and fostered confidence between waqf institutions and local communities.

Modern farming practices and technology have been instrumental in maximizing the productivity of waqf lands. Precision agriculture, sustainability measures, and advanced water management techniques have significantly increased agricultural profitability. For instance, GIS technology has revolutionized waqf land management. The Selangor Islamic Religious Council (MAIS) employs GIS systems to map, monitor, and manage waqf lands, ensuring accurate land use planning and reducing encroachments. This



approach has improved asset productivity and preserved waqf lands for future generations (Mohamad & Ibrahim, 2019).

Similarly, blockchain technology has emerged as a potential tool to enhance waqf management. Its immutable ledger system ensures transparency and accountability by tracking waqf transactions and managing assets efficiently, while also facilitating the fair distribution of project earnings.

In Tunisia, modern agricultural technology has been deployed on waqf lands to improve productivity and sustainability. The Tunisian Waqf Authority implemented drip irrigation systems and soil sensors, resulting in increased crop yields, better water efficiency, and long-term sustainability of waqf-based agriculture (Magda, 2008). Turkey has adopted innovative practices such as *istibdal* to exchange waqf holdings for more productive lands. Advanced farming techniques and modern energy technologies have been utilized to boost agricultural output and minimize environmental impact (Özbek, 2015; Yeni & Teoman, 2020).

Training programs for waqf administrators have also been identified as a key element for effective waqf land management. These programs focus on strategic land management, modern farming practices, and waqf-compliant business models. Additionally, awareness campaigns have been conducted to educate waqf administrators and the Muslim community about the role of waqf lands in food security and the importance of supporting such initiatives.

The documentation and sharing of best practices have been highlighted as essential for scaling successful waqf land utilization projects. Platforms and networks facilitating knowledge exchange help replicate and adapt effective methods in other regions (Abdullah & Rahman, 2015).

## **DISCUSSION**

Malaysia has implemented various food security policies and practices, such as the Comprehensive National Agro-Food Policy (2011–2020), which aimed to enhance agricultural sustainability and competitiveness (Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry, 2011). This policy promoted food production, agricultural technology, and innovation to reduce reliance on imports. Key strategies included the promotion of sustainable agriculture through high-yield crops, water management, and precision farming practices (Sheng et al., 2010). Farmers were also incentivized to produce rice, a staple crop. Malaysia's participation in ASEAN's Integrated Food Security (AIFS) Framework further reflects its commitment to regional food security cooperation (ASEAN, 2014).

Research into alternative food production methods, such as utilizing waqf land for agriculture, has gained traction as a potential strategy to address food security challenges. Waqf, an Islamic endowment, holds untapped potential for improving food productivity, strengthening local supply chains, and reducing reliance on imports. However, poor governance, lack of transparency, and inadequate human resource management have hindered the optimal use of waqf lands for agricultural purposes (Aziz, 2023). Many waqf plots remain underutilized due to legal, administrative, and financial issues (Mohamad & Ibrahim, 2019).

Successful examples, such as rice farming initiatives on Perlis waqf land, demonstrate the viability of waqf land for enhancing food security while benefiting local communities (Abdullah & Rahman, 2015). These projects provide valuable insights into asset

management and development, showcasing how waqf land can contribute to sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods. The strategic use of waqf land aligns with global efforts to address challenges such as climate change, population growth, and resource depletion while adhering to Islamic principles of charity and sustainability.

To maximize the potential of waqf land in food security, legislative reforms are needed to standardize waqf property regulations and improve land management practices across countries. Such measures could reduce land fragmentation and promote the efficient use of waqf lands for agricultural development (Mohamad & Ibrahim, 2019). By drawing on lessons from previous projects, waqf land management can play a pivotal role in securing food supplies for Muslim-majority nations and contributing to global food security.

The success of waqf land initiatives, as demonstrated by the Turkish Directorate General of Foundations and Al-Rajhi Waqf in Saudi Arabia, underscores the importance of strategic governance, transparency, and professional management. These examples reveal how reforms and effective administration can unlock the potential of waqf lands for social and economic development (Cizacka, 2011; Kahf, 2003). The ability of these institutions to align traditional Islamic principles with modern management practices serves as a model for other waqf organizations seeking to optimize their assets.

The role of innovative financial mechanisms, particularly public-private partnerships (PPPs), has been critical in waqf land development. Successful examples in Indonesia and Kuwait demonstrate how PPPs enable resource and expertise sharing, reducing financial and technological barriers. These collaborative frameworks not only enhance the scalability of waqf projects but also align financial and social goals, providing sustainable solutions for food security (Abdullah & Rahman, 2015; Bakar & Rahman, 2007).

Alternative financing models, such as cash and corporate waqf, further expand the scope of waqf land development. Turkey's VGM and Malaysia's corporate waqf programs show how these models can adapt to contemporary challenges, generating sustainable income streams for waqf-based projects (Cizacka, 2011; Magda, 2008). The Saudi Islamic Development Bank's focus on waqf land reclamation exemplifies the broader potential of waqf lands to address global challenges like food security and rural development (Rahman, 2023).

Community involvement remains a cornerstone of sustainable waqf land use. By integrating local populations into the planning and execution of agricultural projects, waqf institutions can ensure long-term project viability and relevance. This approach not only fosters local ownership and accountability but also aligns waqf initiatives with the specific needs and conditions of the communities they serve (Osman & Rahman, 2014; Sukayat, 2023). The Moroccan experience highlights how participatory governance in waqf land management can deliver multifaceted benefits, including improved food security and educational opportunities.

In conclusion, strategic governance, innovative financing, and community participation are pivotal in maximizing the potential of waqf lands. These elements provide a comprehensive framework for waqf institutions to address pressing issues like food security while promoting sustainable development aligned with Islamic principles.

The modification of the Bangladeshi Waqf Ordinance underscores the value of community involvement in waqf land administration. The introduction of community-based committees has improved transparency and accountability, showcasing how

participatory governance can strengthen the relationship between waqf institutions and local stakeholders. This aligns with broader findings that community engagement ensures the relevance and sustainability of waqf projects.

The integration of modern technologies such as GIS, blockchain, and precision agriculture reflects the evolving approach to waqf land management. The success of GIS in Selangor illustrates how advanced mapping and monitoring systems can optimize land use while safeguarding waqf assets for future generations (Mohamad & Ibrahim, 2019). Blockchain's application to waqf management further demonstrates its potential to enhance governance and build trust among stakeholders by ensuring accountability and equitable distribution of resources.

The Tunisian example highlights the transformative impact of agricultural innovations like drip irrigation and soil sensors. By increasing productivity and resource efficiency, these technologies address both the immediate and long-term challenges of food security and sustainability (Magda, 2008). Turkey's use of *istibdal* and modern energy technologies reinforces the importance of adapting traditional waqf practices to contemporary agricultural needs, providing a replicable model for other regions (Özbek, 2015; Yeni & Teoman, 2020).

The necessity of training programs for waqf administrators is evident from the increasing complexity of managing waqf lands. These programs ensure that administrators are equipped with the knowledge and skills required for strategic land management and the application of modern agricultural techniques. Awareness campaigns further enhance community support for waqf land initiatives, reinforcing their role in addressing food security challenges.

Finally, the emphasis on documenting and sharing best practices reflects the importance of knowledge dissemination in scaling successful waqf projects. Collaborative platforms enable the replication of effective strategies, ensuring that innovations in waqf land management can benefit diverse regions and contexts (Abdullah & Rahman, 2015). This approach fosters a global network of waqf institutions committed to sustainable development and food security.

## **CONCLUSION**

Malaysia's food security issues show its difficulties in providing a steady and sufficient food supply. The government has enacted several initiatives to address these issues, but innovative and sustainable food security strategies are needed. Using waqf land for agriculture may solve these issues. Malaysia can boost food production, cut imports, and improve population well-being by using this underutilized resource. Waqf land management presents difficult legal, administrative, financial, socio-political, and societal issues. These obstacles have limited waqf land's ability to promote socio-economic development and solve food security. Addressing worldwide best practices in waqf land utilization reveals numerous essential measures that have successfully leveraged waqf land for socio-economic development, particularly food security. Successful waqf land management requires public-private partnerships, creative financial models, contemporary technology, community engagement, and strategic governance reforms. Waqf institutions globally may maximize food security and socio-economic development by adopting and implementing these best practices.



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## DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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