

THE UNDERLYING ROLE OF WAQF LAND IN STRENGTHENING DISASTER PREPAREDNESS IN MALAYSIA: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract: Malaysia is increasingly challenged by climate-related disasters, from recurring floods to landslides and growing urban vulnerabilities. National efforts in disaster preparedness continue to expand, yet the strategic use of waqf land, an Islamic endowment asset with deep social roots remains underutilized within disaster risk reduction (DRR) planning. This paper explores this issue through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 137 publications retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and MyJurnal using keywords such as waqf, Islamic endowment, disaster risk reduction, resilience, and climate adaptation. Thematic analysis was employed to synthesize insights across governance, financing, land use, and resilience dimensions. The review identifies four key challenges shaping the role of waqf land in resilience building: governance fragmentation that creates administrative inefficiencies; underutilization of idle waqf land despite pressing national needs; financial constraints linked to over-reliance on state allocations and donations; and socio-economic opportunities where waqf land can be repurposed for community resilience and climate adaptation. Five interlinked strategic directions are highlighted: (i) navigating policy and governance, (ii) optimizing land use, (iii) reinforcing socioeconomic resilience, (iv) advancing innovative financial mechanisms, and (v) aligning with DRR and climate adaptation (NORAD). The contribution of this paper is firstly to provides policymakers, State Islamic Religious Councils (MAIN), JAWHAR, and NADMA and it offers scholars and practitioners new insights into the integration of Islamic social finance with resilience planning. By reframing waqf land as a living instrument of resilience, this paper positions it as both a policy lever and a culturally grounded pathway to strengthen Malaysia's disaster management ecosystem.

Keywords: Waqf Land, Waqf Development, Risk Management, Disaster Risk Reduction, Urban Planning, Urban Development

Introduction

Waqf land, a form of Islamic endowment, has long been a vital asset in supporting public welfare and infrastructure development. Historically, waqf land has been used to establish mosques, schools, hospitals, and housing for vulnerable communities, ensuring long-term benefits for society (Mokhtar & Ibrahim, 2022). However, despite its significant social and economic contributions, waqf land remains underutilized in disaster risk preparedness and resilience planning (Salleh & Razali, 2020). With the increasing frequency of floods, landslides, and extreme weather events in Malaysia, there is a growing need to integrate all available land resources, including waqf land, into national disaster risk management strategies (Fauzi & Jahidi, 2022). International frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the importance of inclusive and proactive disaster preparedness (UNDRR, 2020). However, waqf land development in Malaysia has yet to be systematically aligned with these initiatives, resulting in missed opportunities to strengthen urban resilience and disaster mitigation efforts (Mohamad & Kader, 2024).

Islamic teachings emphasize the role of waqf in long-term social welfare and sustainability. The Quran encourages charitable giving, stating: *"By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you give freely of that which you love"* (Ali-Imran: 92). Similarly, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) described waqf as a form of continuous charity (*sadaqah jariyah*), which provides everlasting benefits to society. Historically, waqf has been used to establish sustainable community assets, including shelters, water resources, and agricultural land (Salleh et al., 2022). One notable example is Umar Al-Khattab's waqf in *Khaiber*, where the Prophet advised him to dedicate its income to public benefit while restricting its sale or inheritance (Salbiah & Mansor, 2009). This demonstrates that waqf land can be strategically utilized to support long-term community resilience, including disaster risk reduction.

Despite these potentials, research on waqf land has been largely concentrated on governance, legal frameworks, and socioeconomic development, while its role in disaster preparedness remains fragmented and underexplored. To date, only a limited number of studies explicitly examine the intersection between waqf land and disaster risk reduction in Malaysia, and even fewer attempt to consolidate these insights into a comprehensive framework. Therefore, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is justified as it allows the integration of dispersed knowledge, identification of research gaps, and development of strategic directions to optimize waqf land for resilience building.

Literature Review

Definition of Waqf Land

Waqf land is a form of Islamic endowment in which property ownership is permanently preserved (*habs*) while its benefits are continuously directed towards charitable and social purposes. The practice originated during the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), beginning with the dedication of land for Quba' Mosque and later reinforced by donations such as Mukhairiq's orchards and Sayyidina Umar Al-Khattab's waqf in Khaibar, which established the principle that waqf assets cannot be sold, gifted, or inherited but must serve communal welfare (Salbiah & Mansor, 2009; Sahih Muslim, Vol. 4). In Malaysia, waqf administration is placed under the authority of State Islamic Religious Councils (MAIN) as sole trustees, a jurisdiction that continues today (Hassan et al., 2018).

The management and administration of waqf land rests with the State Islamic Religious Councils (MAIN), supported at the federal level by the Department of Waqf, Zakat, and Hajj (JAWHAR). Despite this structured governance, reports indicate that about 16% of waqf land equivalent to more than 3,000 plots remain idle and undeveloped (Azmi et al., 2022). These underutilized lands represent not only economic stagnation but also a loss of opportunity to address pressing national issues, particularly disaster preparedness. Historically, waqf served communities directly, funding schools, mosques, and welfare initiatives through simple and transparent mechanisms. In contrast, the modern institutional system, while more centralized, has created challenges of legal inconsistencies, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and lack of sustainable financing, resulting in public doubts over the effectiveness of waqf donors (Romli et al., 2025).

Waqf Role in Disaster Management

Several studies have linked abandoned waqf land to governance gaps. Ahmad & Muhamed, (2011) and Azmi, Hanif & Mahamood, (2022) note that traditional waqf practices in Malaysia lacked formal documentation, resulting in disputes among heirs and long-term underutilization. Ramli et al., (2023) emphasize that weak management and absence of integrated development mechanisms exacerbate the persistence of idle waqf land. Comparative experiences from Egypt demonstrate that centralized governance, where waqf assets are administered by a dedicated Ministry of Waqf, ensures more consistent development outcomes, including investment in commercial and social infrastructure (Othman, 2018). This contrast highlights the structural challenges of Malaysia's decentralized waqf governance system.

Recent scholarship also advocates for integrating waqf into contemporary development and resilience frameworks. Abdullah (2018) and Romli et al., (2025) argue that waqf can play a significant role in poverty alleviation and disaster preparedness through innovative financial instruments such as cash waqf and waqf-linked sukuk. Moreover, Omar et al. (2019) specifically point to the potential of waqf land for multipurpose community facilities, such as evacuation centers and green infrastructure, thereby linking waqf land use to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate adaptation agendas.

Limitation in Waqf Management

Governance fragmentation was identified as a major barrier. MAINs operate under separate state enactments, resulting in inconsistent management practices, weak documentation, and disputes that delay development (Ahmad & Muhamed, 2011; Azmi, Hanif & Mahamood, 2022; Ramli et al., 2023). Malaysia's decentralized model has created inefficiencies that perpetuate abandoned waqf land (Othman, 2018). Second, the issue of idle and non-strategic lands was persistent. JAWHAR (2023) reported that 16% of waqf land (2,415 hectares) remains unused, limiting its contribution to socio-economic and disaster preparedness functions. MAIN has attempted to address this by using *al-istibdal*, exchanging unproductive land for more strategic plots to unlock development potential (Mohamed Noor & Ismail, 2016). Many waqf projects depend on state allocations or donations, insufficient for large-scale development (Mahamood, 2007; Mustaffa & Muda, 2014). However, innovative mechanisms such as corporate partnerships (e.g., Johor Corporation's Waqf An-Nur) and waqf-based financing models show promise in enhancing resource mobilization (Abdul Shakor Baharom, 2013).

Methodology

This study applies a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) protocol to examine peer-reviewed articles, policy reports, and grey literature on waqf governance, land development, and disaster management in Malaysia. Following the guidelines of Kitchenham (2004) and Mohamed Shaffril, Samsuddin, and Abu Samah (2021), the review was conducted in five structured phases (Table 1).

Table 1: Phases of the Systematic Literature Review

Phase	Actions Taken
Phase 1: Development & Validation	Defined focus on waqf land and disaster preparedness; aligned with SLR best practices
Phase 2: Formulation of Research Questions	Main question: <i>What are the elements and factors for optimizing waqf land for disaster risk preparedness in Malaysia?</i>
Phase 3: Literature & Identification	Databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and MyJurnal. Keywords: “ <i>waqf</i> ”, “ <i>Islamic endowment</i> ”, “ <i>waqf land</i> ”, “ <i>disaster risk reduction</i> ”, “ <i>resilience</i> ”, “ <i>climate adaptation</i> ”. Initial search: 137 records
Phase 4: Screening	Inclusion: articles in English, focus on waqf land, governance, resilience, or DRR. Exclusion: non-English, outside scope, or land context. After screening titles/abstracts, 100 records excluded
Phase 5: Data Extraction	37 papers were identified as relevant for this study. Applied thematic analysis to identify governance, financing, land use, and resilience dimensions

By employing the SLR approach, this study narrows its scope specifically to the role of waqf land in disaster preparedness, ensuring that findings are both focused and evidence-based. This methodology strengthens the academic contribution by providing a systematic, faith-informed perspective that can guide policymakers, practitioners, and scholars in integrating waqf into Malaysia’s disaster management ecosystem.

Findings

Table 2 presents a strategic roadmap that directly addresses the identified barriers through targeted actions and practical implementations, closely aligned with the interlinked strategic directions of this study (NORAD).

Table 2: Strategic Roadmap for Leveraging Waqf Land in Disaster Preparedness

Barriers	Strategic Action	Example Implementation
Fragmented governance across states; inconsistent waqf land documentation and development policies (Ahmad & Muhamed, 2011).	Navigate Policy & Governance (N) – Strengthen coordination between MAIN, JAWHAR, and NADMA; establish semi-centralized oversight. (Omar, Mohd, & Rahman, 2019; Mokhtar & Ibrahim, 2022)	- National Waqf- DRR Council under Prime Minister’s Department to integrate disaster preparedness into waqf policies. - Develop a uniform digital registry of waqf lands to improve transparency and reduce disputes.

Idle and non-strategic lands remain underutilized; 16% of plots idle (JAWHAR, 2023).	Optimize Land Use (O) – Rezone and repurpose idle waqf plots for DRR and community resilience. (Fauzi & Jahidi, 2022; Romli et al., 2025; Mohamed Noor & Ismail, 2016; Ramli et al., 2023)	• Transform selected idle waqf plots into multipurpose evacuation centres and flood retention parks. • Apply <i>al-istibdal</i> to swap non-strategic lands for plots closer to urban centres.
Weak socioeconomic safety nets; disaster recovery often slow (Abdullah, 2018).	Reinforce Socioeconomic Resilience (R) – Channel waqf revenues into disaster funds and recovery initiatives. (Mahamood, 2007; Bahari & Mat Hassan, 2017; Planning Malaysia, 2021)	• Establish a Waqf Disaster Relief Fund using income from productive waqf projects (agriculture, rental housing). • Provide micro-insurance schemes for vulnerable households funded by waqf revenues.
Chronic funding shortages; overreliance on state allocations and donations (Mahamood, 2007).	Advance Innovative Financial Mechanisms (A) – Expand financing through cash waqf, sukuk, and corporate partnerships. (Abdul Shakor Baharom, 2013; IGI Global, 2021)	• Launch a Waqf-linked Sukuk for Disaster Resilience, raising funds for resilient housing and flood barriers. • Scale up Corporate Waqf models (e.g., Johor Corporation's Waqf An-Nur) for nationwide replication.
Limited integration of waqf with climate adaptation and DRR frameworks (Omar et al., 2019).	Align with DRR & Climate Adaptation (D) – Mainstream waqf into Malaysia's DRR and SDG commitments. (Cizakça, 2000; Othman, 2018; Hasan, Hassan, & Rashid, 2018; Mohamad & Kader, 2024; Omar, Mohd, & Rahman, 2019)	• Include waqf land development in National Climate Adaptation Plans. • Position waqf initiatives within Malaysia's Sendai Framework monitoring as faith-based resilience contributions.

(Source: Author)

Discussion

Out of the 37 articles reviewed, this study applied the NORAD acronyms as the analytical lens to examine the role of waqf land in disaster preparedness. The framework was selected because it systematically connects barriers, strategies, and implementation pathways across five interrelated domains: Navigation of governance (N), Optimization of land use (O), Resource mobilization (R), Alternative financing (A), and Disaster integration (D). These domains emerged as recurrent themes in the literature and were refined through synthesis to respond

directly to the study's objectives of aligning waqf development with Malaysia's disaster risk reduction (DRR) agenda. Such initiatives would not only optimize land use but also restore public trust in waqf as a socially relevant institution (Omar et al., 2019; Abdullah, 2018; Mat Hassan et al., 2019).

Navigating Policy and Governance for Integrated Disaster Management

A key point of discussion lies in navigating policy and governance. Current waqf management in Malaysia is decentralized across State Islamic Religious Councils (MAIN), resulting in administrative inconsistencies and stalled development. This fragmentation limits the ability to scale waqf land for disaster-related functions. Lessons from Egypt, where a centralized Ministry of Waqf oversees asset development, demonstrate that unified governance can accelerate waqf's role in socioeconomic and resilience building (Othman, 2018). Therefore, aligning waqf administration with NADMA's disaster frameworks, and creating a semi-centralized coordination platform, would significantly enhance governance integration.

Optimizing Waqf Land Use for Climate Resilience

The second strategic direction is optimizing land use, particularly for disaster resilience. Idle waqf land can be transformed into multipurpose assets such as community evacuation centers, green buffer zones for flood mitigation, or food security hubs in hazard-prone regions (Omar et al., 2019). This reframes waqf land from an underperforming asset into a strategic reserve, directly contributing to climate adaptation and resilience. Mechanisms such as al-istibdal, which exchange non-strategic land for more viable plots, could accelerate this optimization process while maintaining shariah compliance (Mohamed Noor & Ismail, 2016).

Reinforcing Socioeconomic Resilience through Waqf Revenues

Equally critical is reinforcing socioeconomic resilience. Waqf has historically alleviated poverty and provided welfare, but its revenues can now be strategically redirected to disaster funds, livelihood recovery, and insurance schemes for vulnerable households. This builds resilience from the ground up, reducing long-term dependency on external aid and ensuring communities recover more quickly after disasters (Abdullah, 2018). Integrating disaster-related endowments within productive waqf projects such as agriculture or renewable energy could create sustainable funding streams while preserving social legitimacy.

Advancing Innovative Financial Mechanisms for Preparedness

In parallel, advancing innovative financial mechanisms is essential to overcome chronic funding limitations. The reliance on state allocations and donations has proven insufficient (Mahamood, 2007). Emerging models such as cash waqf, sukuk-linked waqf, and corporate waqf partnerships offer scalable solutions. Johor Corporation's corporate waqf practices exemplify how public-private partnerships can unlock value from idle land while channelling revenues into social and resilience projects (Abdul Shakor Baharom, 2013). Replicating such models nationally could create a dedicated waqf-based financial ecosystem for disaster preparedness.

Aligning Waqf Land with DRR and Climate Adaptation Agendas

Finally, aligning waqf land with DRR and climate adaptation strategies situates waqf within global and national agendas. Embedding waqf initiatives into Malaysia's Sendai Framework commitments and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would elevate its role from a faith-based mechanism to a recognized policy instrument. Faith-informed governance not only

enhances legitimacy among Muslim communities but also strengthens bottom-up participation in climate resilience efforts (Ar Rahman, 2009).

Disaster Preparedness and Prevention

Despite its historical significance as a tool for socioeconomic development, waqf land remains underutilized, with approximately 16% of plots idle due to governance fragmentation, lack of financial mechanisms, and poor strategic planning (JAWHAR, 2023). Yet, the integration of waqf land into Malaysia's disaster risk reduction (DRR) agenda is not only feasible but also highly strategic, given its perpetual and communal nature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, waqf land represents an underexplored yet highly strategic resource for Malaysia's disaster preparedness landscape. Moving forward, collaboration will be the key. State Islamic Religious Councils (MAIN), JAWHAR, NADMA, and private partners must work hand in hand to unlock the true potential of waqf. If these efforts succeed, waqf land can help shift Malaysia's disaster preparedness away from a reactive approach toward one that is proactive, sustainable, and deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual values of its people. Based on study findings, though historically of waqf land that underutilized, holds untapped potential as a strategic asset for disaster preparedness in Malaysia. By applying the NORAD framework, the research linked policy reform, land-use optimization, resource mobilization, alternative financing, and disaster integration into a coherent roadmap that aligns directly with the study's objectives. While limited to insights from 37 selected journals, this approach offers a foundational step for future scholars to refine and expand the framework across broader contexts. Despite these limitations, the paper contributes original value by introducing a structured method to reframe idle waqf plots as resilience assets, thereby strengthening both academic understanding and practical policymaking in disaster risk reduction.

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