

HARNESSING ZAKAT AND WAQF FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON UMMAH-BASED SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL FOOD INSECURITY

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Abstract: *Global food insecurity continues to affect more than 700 million people worldwide, with vulnerable Muslim populations in low-income and conflict-affected regions experiencing a disproportionate burden. This study examines the strategic potential of zakat and waqf—core instruments of Islamic social finance—in mitigating food insecurity and advancing sustainable development. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA framework, the study systematically screened and analysed scholarly publications from 2021 to 2025. Based on clearly defined inclusion criteria (such as empirical studies and zakat- and waqf-based food security initiatives) and exclusion criteria (including non-zakat/waqf studies, duplicate records, and non-English publications), 25 relevant articles were identified from Google Scholar, Emerald, and Springer databases. The findings indicate that zakat, when supported by sound governance, digitalisation, and active stakeholder engagement, demonstrates strong potential in financing food aid, agricultural inputs, nutritional programmes, and sustainable food security initiatives. Evidence from countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia highlights successful implementation models where zakat has contributed to poverty alleviation and hunger reduction. The study concludes with policy-oriented recommendations, particularly for African countries where the application of Islamic social finance remains limited, emphasising the need for institutional integration, transparency, and innovation to enhance the contribution of zakat institutions towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger).*

Keywords: Zakat, Waqf, Food Insecurity, Islamic Social Finance, PRISMA, Systematic Literature Review, SDG 2, Muslim Communities, Poverty Alleviation.

Introduction

Global food insecurity remains one of the most critical humanitarian challenges worldwide, affecting over 735 million people, particularly in conflict-affected and low-income regions (FAO, 2023). Muslim communities in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia are disproportionately exposed to this crisis due to entrenched poverty, fragile food production and distribution systems, and inadequate economic safety nets. Although international humanitarian aid and development assistance have alleviated some immediate needs, such interventions often fall short in addressing structural drivers of food insecurity or delivering sustainable, community-based solutions (IFPRI, 2022). Consequently, there is a growing need to explore alternative approaches rooted in indigenous institutions and ethically grounded financial mechanisms.

Islamic social finance presents a promising framework for addressing food insecurity, particularly through zakat (obligatory almsgiving) and waqf (charitable endowment). Historically, both instruments supported wealth redistribution and public welfare in Islamic societies (Ronaldo et al., 2024). Today, zakat offers short-term food aid, while waqf can fund long-term agricultural and infrastructure development (Listiana et al., 2025). However, their current application is uneven. Many Muslim-majority nations especially in Africa lack the legal, administrative, and digital infrastructure to implement zakat and waqf effectively, unlike Malaysia and Indonesia where they are integrated into national development agendas (IRTI, 2020).

This study addresses a key gap in theoretical understanding and implementation: despite their historical significance, zakat and waqf remain underutilized in food security strategies. The study aims to (1) examine how these instruments are used to reduce food insecurity; and (2) propose a framework to enhance their strategic use. It is guided by three questions: How are zakat and waqf applied in different Muslim contexts? What challenges hinder their institutionalization? And how can these tools support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger)? This research is significant academically and practically. It contributes to the literature on Islamic social finance and development and offers guidance for governments, zakat agencies, NGOs, and financial institutions seeking faith-aligned responses to hunger and poverty. Integrating zakat and waqf into food security efforts can also strengthen social cohesion and position Islamic finance as a complement to conventional aid models.

The motivation of this study is underscored by worsening food insecurity driven by global crises such as climate change, conflict, and pandemics. Zakat and waqf both religiously mandated and socially transformative can mobilize internal resources for public good. Successful implementation in Southeast Asia offers replicable models for regions with underdeveloped Islamic finance systems, such as parts of Africa and the Middle East.

To achieve its aims, this paper is structured as follows. The next section outlines the systematic literature review methodology using the PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021), focusing on studies published between 2021 and 2025. The findings section presents how zakat and waqf have been applied to combat food insecurity, followed by a discussion of challenges, innovations, and policy implications. The paper concludes with practical recommendations to enhance the role of Islamic social finance in addressing hunger, particularly in regions with fragile zakat and waqf institutions.

Methodology

This research employed a Systematic literature review methodology guided by Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach, the research systematically screened and analysed previous literature published between 2021 and 2025 on Google Scholar, Emerald and Springer databases. The search strings for the Boolean search were “Food Security” AND “Zakat OR Waqf”.

This gave a total of 416 records of published articles. As a result, it was necessary to do screening with the PRISMA guidelines. A clearly defined inclusion criteria was peer reviewed articles, English language as language of publication, access to full article, time frame of 2021 - 2025 and studies that explicitly explored the role of Zakat or Waqf on food security.

Literature excluded from the study were duplicated papers, non-English papers, papers published before 2021, and studies whose objectives were not addressing the role of Zakat or Waqf in combating food security. After the removal of 93 papers published before 2021, a total of 323 papers were subjected to title and abstract screening. 219 records were also excluded based on the predefined exclusion criteria. The excluded records were mainly studies that (i) did not clearly highlight the role of Zakat or Waqf in enhancing food security (ii) discussed Zakat and Waqf role in economic development while isolating food security and (iii) No access to the full article. Therefore, 64 relevant articles were assessed for eligibility and 39 records were further excluded primarily because of duplicated articles, the language of publication was not English, not peer reviewed articles and not related to our study’s objective. Finally, studies critically examined to have met the inclusion criteria are 25 relevant articles and are therefore included for this study, particularly in the findings. Figure 1.0 below shows the whole process.

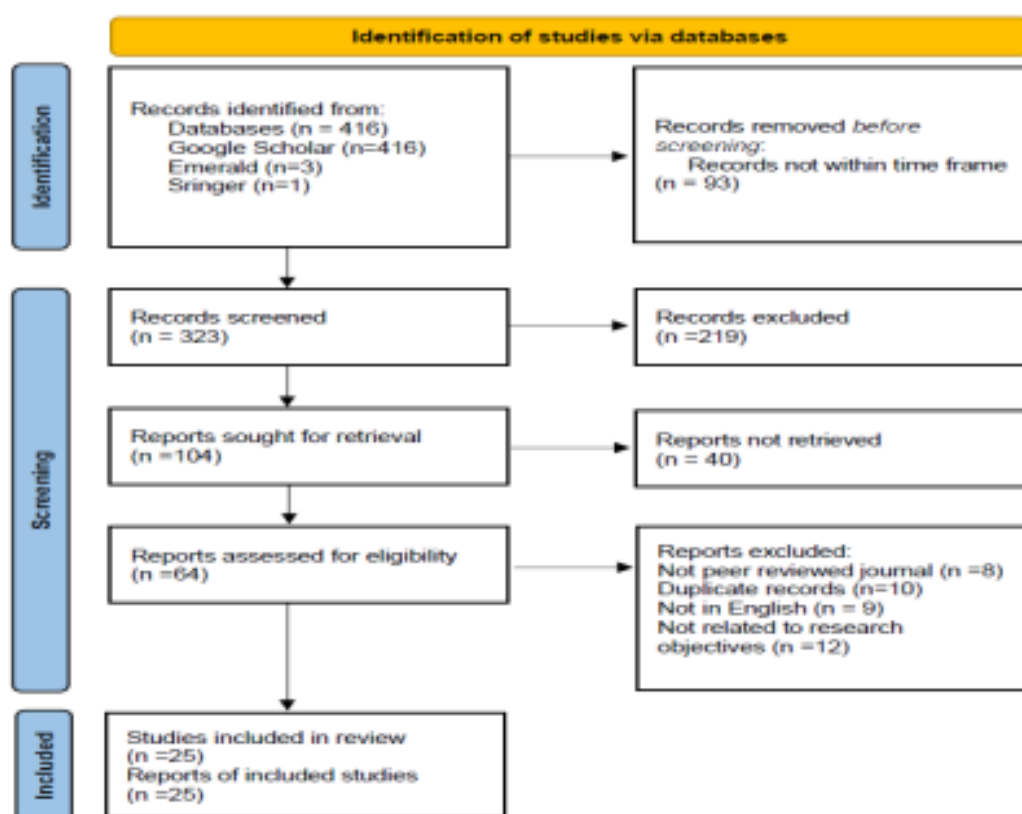


Figure 1: Prisma flow diagram

Source: Compiled by the Authors

Findings and Results

There has been growing attention on zakat and waqf as possible solutions to food insecurity encountered by many parts of the world. The following sections further highlights the critical role of Zakat and Waqf in combating food insecurity;

Role of Zakat in Combating Food Insecurity

Zakat is an obligatory charitable contribution in Islam that every capable Muslim is required to pay. The threshold of Zakat on wealth is 2.5% of the entire wealth and assets of an individual if a year passes over them. Zakat plays an essential role in alleviating poverty and mitigating income inequalities by avoiding the concentration of wealth. A study by Mashema and Haruna (2023) revealed that zakat promotes strong human ties/social cohesion, love, and collaboration, resulting in a stable and healthy society with a low poverty rate.

Similarly, previous studies highlight that zakat alleviates hunger and facilitates access to food by redistributing wealth to enable the poor to meet their basic necessities, including nutrition or food supplies (Dirie et al., 2023; Wahid, 2024). Zakat can be used to fund food initiatives such as food distribution, or sustainable agriculture to combat hunger (Rosyidah et al., 2024). In Malaysia also, zakat organizations have been very active in supporting nutrition aid programs (Wahid, 2024). These organizations fund food aid initiatives to the low-income households often referred to as the B40 income group (Wahid, 2024). Rahmadhani and Rohim (2024) indicate that Zakat could be used not only to provide immediate food aid, but also boost agricultural productivity by financing seeds, fertilizers and agricultural inputs.

The impact of Zakat transcends beyond the provision of instant relief to hunger. Zakat promotes long-term food security (Hossain, 2025; Mohamed & Shafiai, 2021). Hossain (2025) highlights the critical role of Zakat in enhancing food security in Bangladesh through the Salam forward contract. Hossain (2025) proposed this framework to boost food security. The proposed model involves a local Zakat Management Committee (ZMC) that supports impoverished households by establishing a food bank, overseeing the Zakat fund, and selecting beneficiaries. This supports smallholder agricultural development and food security, improving long-term or sustainable food security. Zakat plays an essential role in promoting sustainability within agricultural sectors (Ismail et al., 2023). In Indonesia, for instance, zakat-funded initiatives have been demonstrated to improve environmental results while raising farmer income and productivity and lowering poverty (Wibowo, 2013 as cited in Ismail et al., 2023). The financial aid provided to small-scale farmers through Zakat allows these farmers to make investments in sustainable techniques and guarantee a more reliable and resilient food supply (Ismail et al., 2023). Gumel and Mustapha (2021) also conducted research on the impact of Zakat on food security in Nigeria.

The study discovered that the Zakat intervention of mostly agricultural products significantly improved recipient consumption (food security). The ongoing review underscores the crucial role of Zakat in enhancing food security.

Role of Waqf in Enhancing Food Security

The Islamic endowment system known as Waqf addresses food insecurity on a long-term basis by creating assets that generate revenue for social welfare. Recent studies further emphasize the importance of waqf in developing communal kitchens, farming facilities, and even fortifying food banks. For example, Abd Jalil (2023) found out that waqf can support food security by channelling and using land, cash and other valuable resources for the benefit

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graph TD
    Farmers[Farmers]
    KRW[KT, Rural Agriculture Water Fund]
    PD[Partner dealer]
    WF[Water funds]

    WF -- "1. Mushabih" --> Farmers
    Farmers -- "2. Mushabih" --> KRW
    Farmers -- "3. Farmers approach on inspection and registration" --> KRW
    KRW -- "4. Mushabih (QR Coupon)" --> Farmers
    Farmers -- "5. Equipment, fertilizer, seeds on Mushabih" --> PD
    PD -- "6. Payment to dealer" --> Farmers
    PD -- "7. Invoice" --> KRW
    KRW -- "8. Payment to dealer" --> PD
    KRW -- "9. Farmers pay said plus profit" --> WF
    WF -- "10. Return + Profit" --> WF
  
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Fanani et al. (2024) concludes that Waqf is a living asset that strengthens, sustains, and deepens vulnerable communities while sustaining food systems. Listiana et al. (2021) in their research, “waqf for food security: a critical assessment from existing studies” concluded that Waqf can offer transformative and innovative solutions to food insecurity.

Waqf therefore has the potential to develop into a viable strategy for attaining food security in both the green and blue economies (Listiana 2025). Using waqf may create a sustainable path to food security in both land and resource sectors (Listiana 2025). Keeping idle waqf lands classified as agricultural land could help keep them from being converted to other uses. Cash and mixed forms of religious charitable funds may be used to invest in the real sector, boost food supply and improve the way food is offered (Listiana 2025). Based on the foregoing review, it can be said that waqf, with its long-term asset-based approach, works with zakat to address all parts of food security.

Discussion

This review confirms that zakat and waqf are increasingly recognized as effective tools for addressing food insecurity in Muslim communities. Their success, however, depends on good governance, institutional capacity, innovation, and integration with development frameworks. Key themes include transparent management, digital technology use, cross-sector collaboration, and the need to adapt successful models, especially in underutilized regions like Africa.

Governance is crucial. Malaysia's Pusat Pungutan Zakat (PPZ) runs structured food aid programs backed by strong legal frameworks (Mohamad & Sori, 2023), unlike countries where zakat remains informal and poorly managed. Technology also enhances impact. Indonesia's BAZNAS uses mobile apps and blockchain to simplify donations and track aid distribution (Ramadhan & Hayatullah, 2025), improving transparency and efficiency.

Collaboration across institutions boosts outcomes. In Bangladesh and Sudan, partnerships between zakat agencies and agricultural cooperatives have delivered farming inputs and improved food production (IRTI, 2020). Though underutilized, waqf shows promise in models like Turkey's energy-integrated waqf farming and Nigeria's waqf-funded grain storage (Fa Yusuf et al., 2021).

Challenges persist, especially in Africa. Zakat is often handled privately, bypassing institutions (Weiss, 2020), and waqf faces legal and administrative barriers. Conflict zones also hinder distribution, and many zakat managers lack training in development planning and finance. There is a clear need to reframe zakat and waqf as development tools, not just charity. Zakat can support agriculture and school feeding; waqf can fund agribusiness and infrastructure. Achieving this requires policy reform, digital integration, and community awareness.

In short, zakat and waqf offer great potential to reduce hunger if well-managed and aligned with national development goals. Southeast Asia provides models that other regions, particularly in Africa, can adapt. With better coordination, these instruments can move beyond obligation to become lasting solutions to food insecurity.

Conclusion And Recommendation

Ultimately, this analysis confirms the strong potential of zakat and waqf as long-term solutions to food insecurity, particularly in Muslim communities. When supported by good governance, digital tools, and cross-sector collaboration, these instruments can address both immediate food needs and long-term agricultural development. Models from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey show that institutionalized zakat and innovative waqf programs can reduce hunger and build resilience. Yet, in many Muslim-majority countries especially in Africa, weak legal frameworks, limited public trust, and poor technological capacity hinder their impact.

To fully realize their potential in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), greater integration, transparency, and innovation are needed. This includes legal reform, digitization of zakat and waqf systems, productive use of idle assets, and public education. Capacity-building for zakat managers and South-South cooperation can help scale successful models. We also recommend that countries should adopt the framework model proposed by Abd Jalil (2023) as highlighted in figure 2.0 of our findings above. Finally, future research should assess the long-term impacts of these instruments, explore adaptable governance models, and develop strategies for implementation in fragile and underserved regions.

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