

Building an Educational Philanthropy Ecosystem: BAZNAS' Contribution Model in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Education is the main foundation for the development of civilization. However, until now, access to quality education and proper educational infrastructure is still a serious challenge in Indonesia. In the midst of this situation, zakat institutions are present as socio-religious actors that not only distribute funds charitatively, but also begin to play a more strategic and sustainable role. This study analyzes BAZNAS' innovative model in building an educational philanthropic ecosystem in Indonesia through three integrated strategies: infrastructure facilitation (Madrasah Fit to Learn program), educational assistance (BAZNAS Scholar School and BAZNAS Santri Scholarship), and institutional collaboration (partnership between universities and religious institutions). With the framework of Carol Weiss's Theory of Change, this study shows the transformation of zakat from charitable distribution to an instrument of sustainable development. Qualitative analysis of the BAZNAS program reveals a systemic approach that combines physical infrastructure improvement, human resource capacity development, and institutional networks to create long-term educational impacts. The findings of the study confirm the transformative potential of zakat in overcoming educational gaps while maintaining Islamic philanthropic values.

Keywords: Zakat, Philanthropic Ecosystem, BAZNAS, Education Development, Theory of Change

INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation for the development of civilization. However, until now, access to quality education and proper educational infrastructure remains a serious challenge in Indonesia (BPS, 2023; World Bank, 2021; ADB, 2020; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015; Suryadarma et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2022). Data from the Central Statistics Agency (*Badan Pusat Statistik*, BPS) shows that Indonesia's gross participation rate (*angka partisipasi kasar*, APK) in higher education still lags behind compared to neighboring countries in the ASEAN region. This indicates that most young Indonesians, especially from underprivileged families, have not been able to continue their education to the undergraduate level, let alone postgraduate. In addition, many elementary and secondary schools in the *3T* (*tertinggal, terdepan, dan terluar* — disadvantaged, frontier, outermost) areas still face limited physical facilities, ranging from inadequate classrooms to poor

sanitation (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; Rosser, 2018; Afriani & Suryadi, 2021; Churiyah et al., 2020; Marwan et al., 2022; Nurhadi et al., 2017).

In the midst of this situation, *zakat* institutions are emerging as *socio-religious* actors that not only distribute funds charitably, but also begin to play a more strategic and sustainable role (Lubis et al., 2021; Abdullah & Suhaib, 2019; Johari et al., 2015; Fathoni et al., 2022; Azman et al., 2020; Mustaghfiroh et al., 2023). The paradigm shift from a charity-based to a development-oriented approach positions *zakat* not just as a tool for temporary aid, but as social capital capable of driving structural change in the field of education. The growing number of higher education scholarship programs, scientific research grants, and the renovation and construction of thousands of schools carried out by various *zakat* institutions in Indonesia reflect a new direction in contemporary Islamic philanthropic practices (Kahf, 2014; Zuhdi et al., 2022; Hudaefi & Beik, 2020; Hasanah & Nurhidayati, 2019; Ascarya et al., 2021; Lubis et al., 2022).

The involvement of *zakat* institutions in financing education and improving school infrastructure signals the emergence of a more systematic educational philanthropic ecosystem (Widiastuti et al., 2020; Mahmud et al., 2021; Nasution et al., 2018; Huda et al., 2021; Azwar et al., 2019; Nurzaman, 2016). This ecosystem involves relationships among funders, managing institutions, educational institutions, and beneficiaries within a unified collaborative framework. In this context, *zakat* serves as a redistributive instrument capable of bridging educational inequality while strengthening human resource capacity (Nugroho et al., 2020; Bakri et al., 2021; BAZNAS, 2022; Fauzia, 2020; Lubis & Sihombing, 2021; Saad & Farouk, 2019).

The use of *zakat* funds in the education sector at BAZNAS is allocated for the construction of educational facilities and infrastructure that support character development and competency enhancement in an integrated manner (Hassan et al., 2020; Zuhdi et al., 2023; Kamri et al., 2021; Prabowo et al., 2022; Aisyah & Prasetyo, 2023; Rahman & Shofwan, 2022). This program spans primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels and aims to have a broad, positive impact on both society and the state. Development priorities are focused on areas populated by low-income or minority Muslim communities (BAZNAS, 2023; Azizah et al., 2020; Zakiyah et al., 2019; Mardhatillah & Indriani, 2021; Masyita, 2019; Alim et al., 2021).

In particular, this study aims to explore and analyze how *zakat* institutions—in this case, the National *Amil Zakat* Agency (BAZNAS)—contribute to the formation of an educational philanthropic ecosystem. By understanding the contribution model of *zakat* institutions in building this ecosystem, the research is expected to offer a meaningful contribution to the pursuit of educational equity and sustainable development in Indonesia.

The distribution of *zakat* for education is practiced by many institutions. For example, research by Ayu Amelia (2024) explains that LAZ OPSEZI Jambi provides *zakat* based on the specific needs of students who

apply for assistance. Further, research by Fauzi Irsyad (2024), which examined the *zakat* distribution strategy in education and entrepreneurship at *LAZISMU* Medan City, showed that *zakat* is allocated for educational cost assistance at both secondary and university levels. However, this assistance is distributed only once per individual and without any formal agreement or performance contract with the educational institution. Moreover, there are no performance targets or sanctions applied to the scholarship recipients. Both studies demonstrate that *zakat* is limited to temporary, charitable assistance.

This study offers a new perspective by shifting the focus of *zakat*'s role from a charity-based paradigm to a sustainable development approach in the education sector. While previous studies have primarily emphasized the function of *zakat* distribution as educational aid, this study investigates how *zakat* institutions—specifically *BAZNAS*—actively build a systemic and collaborative educational philanthropic ecosystem. The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on ecosystem-building, an approach that is still rarely explored in the context of Islamic philanthropy in education, particularly in Indonesia. As such, this study contributes to the academic discourse on the innovative role of *zakat* in human resource development and educational justice.

METHOD

This article employs an analytical descriptive qualitative research method with the aim of obtaining a more comprehensive picture of the *BAZNAS* contribution model in building a philanthropic ecosystem in the education sector. Qualitative methods are dynamic and open to adaptation, allowing for modification, expansion, and refinement throughout the analysis process (Thomsom, 2016). The data analyzed is derived from documentation obtained through official publications on the institution's website, which are then interpreted within a new conceptual framework. The data analysis technique used is *content analysis*, wherein the information gathered from documentation sources is examined in depth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Carol Weiss (1995) offers the Theory of Change (ToC), an evaluation framework that traces the causal relationship between social interventions and expected impacts. Weiss emphasized the importance of logical mapping from inputs, activities, outputs, to outcomes to uncover how and why a program can create change. In the context of *BAZNAS* educational philanthropy, the ToC helps explain the transformation flow from infrastructure development (input), individual capacity building (medium outcomes), to the creation of a sustainable ecosystem (long-term impact).

In the findings of this study, Weiss's version of ToC application can be seen in three interrelated layers of *BAZNAS* contribution. Infrastructure facilitation forms a physical foundation (short-term outcome), educational

assistance develops beneficiary capacity (intermediate outcome), while institutional collaboration strengthens systemic support structures (long-term outcomes). This pattern is consistent with Weiss's principle that sustainable social change requires incremental, mutually reinforcing interventions, with each stage serving as a prerequisite for the next stage in the impact chain.

Facilitation of Educational Infrastructure

In the Indonesian context, many educational institutions, especially private madrassas in areas with lower middle economies, still face serious problems related to the lack of proper physical facilities. It is not uncommon for the classrooms used to be semi-permanent, severely damaged, or do not have adequate sanitation facilities, which directly impact the quality of the teaching and learning process.

In response to this problem, the National Amil Zakat Agency (BAZNAS) together with the Ministry of Religion launched the Madrasah Fit to Learn (MLB) program in 2024. This program explicitly places zakat as a strategic instrument to support the improvement and procurement of basic educational infrastructure in private ibtidaiah madrasahs. In the initial stage, MLB targeted 1,000 madrassas with funding of Rp25 million each, which was used to renovate classrooms, repair roofs, floors, walls, and build toilets and basic sanitation facilities.

BAZNAS implements the initial stage of the Theory of Change through educational infrastructure facilitation programs such as Madrasah Layak Belajar. This intervention focuses on providing physical basics in the form of classroom renovation, sanitation improvement, and the provision of adequate learning facilities in disadvantaged madrasahs. Within the framework of the ToC, this step is a critical input that creates a short-term outcome in the form of a conducive learning environment. The logic of the change built is: "With the availability of proper infrastructure (input), the comfort and safety of the teaching and learning process (short-term outcomes) will be realized.

What makes MLB important in the context of the educational philanthropic ecosystem is its stimulating and participatory approach. Zakat assistance is not given in the form of turnkey projects, but as funds that encourage local community self-management. This strengthens the community's sense of ownership of their educational institutions, as well as builds the institutional capacity of madrasahs in budget governance and reporting. In addition, with the direct involvement of the Ministry of Religion and collaboration with religious community organizations such as the Islamic Ummah Association (PUI), MLB shows institutional synergy between state actors and Islamic philanthropy in building empowered education.

In the framework of ecosystem development, MLB marks the shift of zakat from a momentary aid instrument to a means of long-term development. Infrastructure improvements not only increase the comfort and safety of learning, but also improve the image and competitiveness of madrasahs as

educational institutions. Thus, this program is not just a renovation activity, but part of an effort to build an educational environment in an ecosystem that is dignified, sustainable, and able to support the social mobility of the young generation of Muslims.

Primary and Secondary Education Assistance

In the educational philanthropic ecosystem, assistance at the primary and secondary levels is a strategic intervention because it determines the foundation of literacy, numeracy, and character formation of students. The challenge of access and quality of education at this level is still a structural problem, especially for children from poor families who face financial, geographical, and socio-cultural barriers. This is where zakat plays a vital redistributive role—not just covering the need for education costs, but encouraging broader social transformation.

One of the tangible forms of zakat contribution in elementary-secondary education assistance is the establishment of the BAZNAS Scholar School (SCB), a dormitory-based secondary education institution. A zakat-based flagship school that integrates the national curriculum with Islamic values, character strengthening, and technology-based learning and research. This school is intended for students from mustahik families who have high academic potential. SCB is a miniature of the development-oriented approach in zakat management, where zakat funds are not only used to support, but to form a superior generation who can get out of the cycle of poverty in a sustainable manner.

In addition, BAZNAS distributes zakat for the BAZNAS Santri Scholarship program, which also shows how zakat can encourage educational transformation in the pesantren environment. This scholarship targets outstanding students from underprivileged circles who are studying at traditional and modern Islamic boarding schools. The support provided is in the form of education fees for preparation for university entrance selection which is also accompanied by skill improvement. This program also strengthens the position of pesantren as a religious and social educational institution, which bridges them to access higher education.

At this stage, BAZNAS simultaneously builds individual capacity through educational assistance such as the BAZNAS Scholar School (dormitory-based) and the Santri Scholarship in the form of self-management by the Islamic boarding school. This program transforms short-term outcomes (a supportive learning environment) into intermediate outcomes in the form of improving student competencies. The ToC mechanism is that when the learning environment is adequate and students receive integrated assistance (input), their literacy, character, and skills (intermediate outcomes) will develop.

Based on BPS 2023 data, the Gross Participation Rate (APK) in Indonesian Higher Education is only 31.45%, quite lagging behind when

compared to Malaysia's Higher Education APK which reached 43% and Singapore which reached 91.09%. This means that out of 100 people of college age (19-23 years old), there were only 31 people who attended college that year. In addition, students who pursue secondary education at Islamic boarding schools tend to have smaller opportunities to continue their education to a higher level such as college, due to limited access to information and resources, resulting in a gap in opportunities.

In a broader context, primary and secondary education assistance through programs such as SCB and Santri Scholarships not only answers the problem of inequality in access to education, but is also able to affirm zakat as a strategic pillar in human resource development.

Collaboration Across Educational and Religious Institutions

The philanthropic ecosystem in the education sector cannot run optimally without close collaboration between zakat institutions and educational and religious institutions. In this context, BAZNAS plays a central role as a strategic liaison that bridges the interests of the ummah, the academic world, and Islamic values in one big vision: creating superior human resources with integrity and high competitiveness. This collaboration is realized through various zakat-based scholarship programs that are not only individual, but also systemic and institutional

One of the flagship programs is the BAZNAS Scholar Scholarship (BCB), which involves collaboration with hundreds of partner universities throughout Indonesia, including public campuses, private campuses, and international campuses. This scholarship not only provides tuition assistance for students from mustahik families, but is also designed as an integrated self-development program. Scholarship recipients are fostered through character development programs, leadership training, and strengthening the values of volunteerism and Islam. Through BCB, BAZNAS strengthens synergy with campuses as the main actor in producing a generation of community leaders who have a spirit of social benefit.

On the other hand, BAZNAS also shows its alignment in strengthening academic research by launching the BAZNAS Research Scholarship, which targets postgraduate students (S2 and S3) from various disciplines who write theses or dissertations on the theme of zakat, waqf, Islamic economics, and philanthropic issues of the ummah. This scholarship not only supports the birth of new academic-based knowledge, but also strengthens the *knowledge ecosystem* in zakat management. This collaboration collaborates with the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) in providing research scholarships for researchers to conduct research related to zakat management, in order to advance zakat governance in Indonesia. This scholarship is intended for various levels, both those who are undergoing undergraduate (S-1), master's (S-2), doctoral (S-3) and group research.

More than that, the collaborative spirit is also manifested in the BAZNAS Philanthropy Scholarship, which is given through collaboration with two of the best PTKIN in Indonesia, namely UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta and UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. This scholarship is intended for philanthropists in zakat institutions, both BAZNAS and LAZNAS (National Amil Zakat Institute)

BAZNAS also synergizes with cross-institutions in building an educational philanthropic ecosystem. In 2007, the National Amil Zakat Agency (BAZNAS) has developed the Thousand Ulama Cadre Program (KSU) as part of the strategy to strengthen religious resources through postgraduate education support. This program is designed to produce scholars who are professional, have deep scientific capacity, and are able to respond to socio-religious dynamics in a contextual manner. In its implementation, BAZNAS builds collaboration with various parties to ensure the sustainability and expansion of the program's scope. Prior to establishing formal cooperation with the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in 2017, the KSU program was organized through a partnership with the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Council (DDII). The collaboration was then strengthened in 2020 by involving the Zakat Management Unit (UPZ) of Bank Permata Syariah as a funding partner, as well as marking the expansion of the network in the religious education philanthropy ecosystem. KSU is a concrete representation of how zakat can be used as a strategic instrument to build sustainable religious leadership through a cross-institutional approach.

At this stage, BAZNAS involves systemic collaboration with universities (e.g., BAZNAS Scholar Scholarship with UIN) and religious institutions (e.g., Ulama Regeneration with MUI). In the ToC, this is a long-term outcome where individual capacity is catalyzed by institutional synergy to create a self-sustaining ecosystem. The logic of the change is that if quality human resources are integrated with the institutional network (input), a regenerative cycle (long-term outcome) will be born in the form of alumni who contribute back to the system.

Within the framework of the philanthropic ecosystem, collaboration between BAZNAS and educational and religious institutions creates a support system that is interconnected and strengthens each other. This ecosystem consists of various actors—such as zakat managers, campuses, Islamic boarding schools, religious institutions, and beneficiaries—who work in one collaborative network. Through programs such as the BAZNAS Scholar Scholarship, Research Scholarship, and the Regeneration of a Thousand Scholars, BAZNAS not only distributes tuition assistance, but also encourages the development of scientific capacity, leadership, and Islamic values. Educational institutions play a role in providing academic space, while religious institutions provide normative legitimacy and direction of coaching, making these programs more than just social assistance—but strategic investments for the future of the people.

The system built through this collaboration is sustainable because it does not stop at the process of providing assistance, but encourages the creation of a regenerative cycle in human resource development. Beneficiaries are not only the object of zakat distribution, but are also fostered to become changemakers who will later contribute back to the ecosystem—both as academics, scholars, social activists, and philanthropic managers. Thus, zakat becomes a strategic instrument to build the empowerment of the people structurally and in the long term. This approach represents a contemporary Islamic philanthropic model that moves from a charitable pattern to an inclusive and systemic approach to development.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that *zakat* plays a strategic role in forming an inclusive and sustainable educational philanthropic ecosystem. Through infrastructure facilitation, primary and secondary education assistance, and institutional collaboration, *BAZNAS* has developed a more systemic and transformative *zakat* contribution model. This approach marks the evolution of *zakat* from a traditional distribution function into a long-term development instrument that supports social justice and the capacity building of human resources.

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