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DEVELOPMENT OF THE I-HEKIP INTERVENTION MODEL: TRANSFORMING THE MICRO-ECONOMY THROUGH EMPOWERMENT OF FOOD PROCESSING ENTREPRENEURS IN PULAU PANGKOR, MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

Structural poverty in peripheral communities like Pangkor Island, Perak, remains resistant to conventional aid approaches. This article presents the design, rationale, and conceptual framework of the i-HEKIP intervention model (Icon of the Pangkor Island Islamic Community Economic Collective) through a community-based social action research initiative developed by researchers from the Institute for Poverty Research and Management (InsPeK) and the Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business (FKP), Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK). This model combines three development foundations: the provision of food processing facilities that comply with standards, a phased training program delivered through four structured modules namely Self-Discovery and Potential, Market Awareness and Challenges, Governance and Business Management, and Business Sustainability for building community marketing networks. Using a community-based social action research approach with a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of standard-compliant processing facilities on product quality and market competitiveness to measure the impact of training on entrepreneurs' management and marketing capabilities. Based on the Social Cooperation framework, Economic Empowerment Theory, and the principles of Maqasid Syariah, the i-HEKIP model is designed to transform entrepreneurs from reliance on assistance to sustainable entrepreneurship, in line with the Malaysia MADANI agenda and the objectives of Al-Falah.

Keyword:

Entrepreneur Empowerment; Food Processing; Malaysia MADANI; Maqasid Syariah; Social Innovation

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Introduction

Pangkor Island is a coastal tourist island located in the Manjung district, Perak, on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. This shows the development paradox of being famous as a popular tourist destination, yet most of the local community, especially those dependent on traditional fishing activities and food processing for a living, face structural economic constraints. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, this situation became increasingly critical as traditional sources of income were significantly disrupted, while new economic opportunities in the digital tourism ecosystem are still difficult to access due to the lack of skills and ongoing infrastructure (Mohd Yusof & Mahmud, 2022).

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The main challenge in dealing with small-scale food entrepreneurs on Pangkor Island covers three aspects: operating without processing facilities that meet the food safety standards set under the Food Act 1983; the lack of structured business management training which prevents entrepreneurs from managing cash flow more effectively; and limited business networks and narrow access to market information, which can directly restrict the development of the local community (McCarthy & Flynn, 2022; Smith & Johnson, 2021).

The intervention model of the Islamic Community Economic Cluster Icon of Pangkor Island (i-HEKIP) was developed by researchers from InsPeK and the Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. The support grant needed for this study amounted to RM100,000 from the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia under the MySTIE Framework. The welfare aid scheme program helped in developing a structured social intervention model for comprehensive community capacity building (Kamaruddin & Ali, 2023).

In the context of MADANI Development, emphasizing assessment in sustainability and the i-HEKIP program can show that community development needs to be practiced based on the values of maqasid shariah. The values of maqasid shariah can also protect property and safeguard life to achieve sustainable economic well-being through the concept of Al-falah.
This study aims to focus on the background of the problems for developing the i-HEKIP model. The study explains that describing this conceptual framework can help shape the model from the perspective of social and economic care innovation. It also clarifies that the research method serves as an explanation of the components of the intervention model in analyzing the social and economic impact of targeted community programs.

Literature Review

Social Innovation as a Response to Structural Poverty

The concept of social innovation has rapidly evolved through alternative paradigms to reduce social problems for communities. Technological innovation can provide commercial value creation to improve the collective well-being of communities (Salleh et al., 2025b; Salleh et al., 2025c). According to Kusumastuti, Silalahi et al. (2023), the rural aspect serves as a field for social innovation in integrating sectors within the Development ecosystem.

In the context of Malaysia, social innovation is increasingly being recognized through institutions for the formulation of the Malaysia Social Enterprise Master Plan (2015 to 2018) and the Malaysia Social Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2030 (SEMy2030). This is because a committed approach in the field context becomes a challenge in enhancing the capacity of limited institutions and low social capital (Kamaruddin & Ali, 2023). The i-HEKIP program is able to address research gaps by connecting scientific knowledge with the real development needs of communities.

According to Mohd Yusof and Mahmud (2022), there are obstacles in identifying the main structure for the growth of small food businesses in Malaysia's tourist areas. For example, there is a lack of suitable infrastructure, insufficient technical training, and management. This helps explain why an integrated approach forms the basis of the i-HEKIP model.

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The Care Economy and Women's Empowerment

Dominant among women in rural areas in a critical analysis to understand the contribution of the family micro-entrepreneur sector from an economic perspective. Household economic management dominated by women is not included in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This is because household economic management can form the foundation for more sustainable economic productivity. According to Smith and Johnson (2021), household-based micro businesses pose a problem for intervention programs aimed at boosting economic growth.

The i-HEKIP program is able to integrate food processing values through the provision of centralized food processing facilities and home environments. This is because structural interventions can improve business management to be more professional and systematic. According to Salleh et al. (2026), providing centralized food processing facilities can boost productivity for women entrepreneurs in Malaysia. Nor Azimah and Faridah (2021) claim that a lack of food processing space can affect the development of small food businesses among local women on Pangkor Island.

Halal Certification Compliance and Product Value Addition

Halal certification in food in Malaysia serves as a foundation for Muslim consumers to market products that are high-quality, ethical, and safe. This is because global economic marketing needs to ensure the quality and safety of food from contamination. According to Ab Talib and Muhamad (2023), halal certification acts as a quality signal to boost premium market redemption. Halal certification in food can also open up export opportunities to the global Muslim market, which is valued at more than USD 2.2 trillion per year.

However, small food enterprises in Malaysia frequently encounter multiple barriers to obtaining and maintaining JAKIM halal certification. Saima et al. (2024) identify the principal obstacles as the high cost of certification relative to revenues, difficulties comprehending complex documentation requirements, and a lack of processing facilities that meet Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) standards. The processing facility component of the i-HEKIP model directly addresses these barriers by providing centralised facilities that already meet baseline standards, enabling small-scale entrepreneurs to access halal certification at reduced cost through a shared-resource approach.

Mohd Fauzi et al. (2022), in a study on challenges in Malaysia's halal industry, determined that collaboration between academic institutions, government agencies, and the entrepreneurial community is the most effective model to help small food enterprises meet halal certification requirements in an approach that directly reflects the design of i-HEKIP, which integrates the academic expertise of InsPeK-UMK with institutional support and active community engagement.

Financial Literacy and Context-Based Entrepreneurship Training

Low financial literacy among micro-entrepreneurs in rural areas is widely recognised as a principal impediment to sustainable business growth. Salleh et al (2025a) and Morgan and Long (2020) found a positive and significant relationship between financial literacy levels and superior business decision-making, including more efficient cash flow management and more

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appropriate utilisation of formal financing instruments. According to Salleh et al. (2024), a lack of financial literacy in the context of the Pulau Pangkor community can increase the actual cost of separating personal accounts from business accounts.

According to McCarthy and Flynn (2022), entrepreneurship training programs can enhance the development of technical skills in building a comprehensive entrepreneurial mindset to improve marketing strategies. The entrepreneurship training programs created are able to have a better long-term impact on technical skills. The i-HEKIP design has four modules for increasing entrepreneurial values. For example, module 1 focuses on self-development to improve technical and management competencies with deeper knowledge of pedagogical principles.

Based on the study by Nor Azimah and Faridah (2021), a phased training program tailored to the local socio-cultural context is suggested. This is because it leads to higher usage of knowledge in daily business operations compared to regular programs. The findings focused on the i-HEKIP module in considering the quality of food processing in Pangkor Island among entrepreneurs.

Social Innovation and Community Development: A Theoretical Framework

Kusumastuti et al. (2023) posit that social innovation in the rural context operates through five primary mechanisms: the mobilisation of existing community assets, collective capacity building, the creation of new inter-actor networks, the transformation of existing institutions, and value exchange that prioritises community well-being. The i-HEKIP model operates through all five mechanisms simultaneously, distinguishing it from conventional intervention programmes that typically engage only one or two.

Within the framework of empowerment theory, Shafi, Liu, and Ren (2020) found that micro-enterprises that demonstrated high resilience during crises were those that had undergone a multi-dimensional empowerment process encompassing economic, psychological, social, and institutional dimensions simultaneously. The i-HEKIP program, through its combination of four modules, aims to build all these dimensions of empowerment among participants: self-confidence (Module 1), market access (Module 2), management competence (Module 3), and business resilience (Module 4).

Hasan and Bakar (2022) emphasize that the Maqasid Shariah framework in Islamic economic development is not merely a normative construct but serves as a practical guide for planning interventions that uphold the holistic interests of humanity. In the context of i-HEKIP, the application of hifz al-mal (preservation of wealth) through sustainable entrepreneurship directly contributes to hifz al-nafs (preservation of life) and hifz al-aql (preservation of intellect) through the enhancement of material well-being and continuous knowledge development.

Methodology

Research Approach and Design

This study employs a Community-Based Social Action Research (CBSAR) approach that integrates exploratory fieldwork with small-scale community intervention concurrently. A

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CBSAR approach was selected because the study aims to catalyse meaningful social change within the target community through the active engagement of both researchers and participants in the research process itself rather than solely generating academic knowledge.
The research design employs a mixed-methods framework that combines quantitative and qualitative components in a sequential explanatory design: quantitative data is collected and analyzed first, followed by the collection of qualitative data to explain and enrich the quantitative findings. This approach allows the study to produce a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of intervention processes and their effects, capturing dimensions that cannot be addressed by a single-method approach.

Research Site, Population, and Sampling

The research work was carried out on Pangkor Island, Perak, Malaysia, among small business communities who were involved in the industry of food processing. The site selection of the research was determined by the following main points: (i) presence of traditional food processing industry, which is well integrated into socio-cultural environment of the local community in terms of drying of anchovies, shrimp paste, crackers, and sea foods; (ii) local tourism market opportunities, which can be used by small business entrepreneurs but have not been taken into consideration yet; and (iii) urgent needs of the preliminary researches.

The study population consists of all micro-entrepreneurs involved in processing of food on Pangkor Island. A purposive sampling method was used to determine the study sample based on the following inclusion criteria: (i) involvement in the processing or marketing of local foods; (ii) interest or skills in that particular field; and (iii) readiness to undertake the full period of the program. Fieldwork conducted initially indicates that there will be a sample of 30 individuals, representing active food processors from the program's defined area.

Data Collection Instruments and Methods

Quantitative data will be collected through structured questionnaires conducted before and after the intervention program. There are five main parts in the questionnaire including: (A) Demographic and business information; (B) Financial literacy, evaluated with the scale modified from Morgan and Long (2020); (C) Management and marketing ability; (D) Knowledge about halal certification and food safety standards; and (E) Overall view of the capability of the business. The questionnaire was tested through an expert panel validation and pilot test among 10 respondents.

Qualitative data collection is carried out using three different approaches, which include: (i) in-depth interviews using semi-structured protocols that are focused on experience, perception, and narratives of change for 15 participants who have been purposely selected from the target population; (ii) Focus Group Discussions (FGD), where 8-10 people participate in each discussion, done after completion of each training module in order to measure immediate impacts and pinpoint areas that need to be improved upon; and (iii) structured field observations carried out by two researchers from the research team.

Research Implementation Phases

The study is implemented across three sequential phases over a nine-month period (June 2025 to February 2026).

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Phase One: Community Preparation and Mapping (Months 1–2) includes initial fieldwork for mapping community issues, development and validation of instruments, consultations with key stakeholders including local authorities, religious agencies, and local entrepreneur associations, as well as the implementation of a pilot study.

Phase Two: Intervention and Data Collection (Months 3–4) covers the sequential implementation of a four-module training program, administration of pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, in-depth interviews, modular FGDs, and field observations. The use of centralized processing facilities begins at this phase, with ongoing guidance provided by industry experts invited as facilitators.

Phase Three: Analysis, Evaluation, and Dissemination (Months 5–9) involves quantitative data analysis using SPSS version 28.0 and qualitative data analysis using NVivo version 12 Pro, the preparation of an impact evaluation report, the development of a replicable intervention model, documentation of facility management Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and publication of findings in academic and public policy platforms.

The I-HEKIP Intervention Model Framework

Model Philosophy and Foundational Principles

The i-HEKIP intervention model is constructed upon three mutually reinforcing foundational principles. First is the principle of wholeness which suggests that poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that must be addressed simultaneously across multiple dimensions rather than in isolation. Accordingly, this model does not provide infrastructure or training in isolation but integrates both components with the systematic cultivation of social and economic networks. The second is the principle of agency: the community is not an object of development, but an active subject in its own transformation process. The model is designed to build the internal capabilities of the community rather than creating new forms of dependency. The third is the principle of sustainability: every element of the model is designed with regard to its continuity beyond the institutional support period, ensuring that the changes created are organic and enduring (Kamaruddin & Ali, 2023; Kusumastuti et al., 2023).

The dimensions of *Maqasid Shariah*, which form the philosophical basis of this model, ensure that the economic development achieved is not separated from the objective of comprehensive well-being, which encompasses spiritual, intellectual, social, and material dimensions in a balanced manner. The concept of *Al-Falah*, success in this world and the hereafter, serves as a benchmark for program success that goes beyond quantitative economic indicators (Hasan & Bakar, 2022). Therefore, program success is measured not only through participants' income growth, but also through the strengthening of community relationships, increased self-confidence, and the development of business ethics based on integrity.

Standards-Compliant Processing Facility Component

The provision of centralised food processing facilities meeting established standards constitutes the physical backbone of the i-HEKIP model. These facilities are designed to satisfy the basic requirements of JAKIM halal certification, HACCP food hygiene and safety standards, and registration requirements with the Ministry of Health Malaysia under the Food Act 1983. Equipment for food preparation like small-scale industrial blenders, standard-

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compliant packaging tools, and processing accessories. This can help improve the quality of seafood and local food products in Pangkor Island.

The strategic facilities implemented by i-HEKIP offer advantages compared to owning equipment individually. Micro-entrepreneurs can access high-quality equipment with cost-effective sharing. Their presence creates community meeting spaces for entrepreneurs, making it easier to exchange ideas, collaborate on products, and develop social capital. Group halal certification is important as it helps monitor quality collectively. It also strengthens the collective identity as a comprehensive entrepreneurial community (Ab Talib & Muhamad, 2023).

Centralized facility management run by a trained research team can provide comprehensive project support. Facility management standards can streamline the process for key research outcomes. These standards also help ensure facilities are continuously used by the entrepreneur community (Mohd Yusof & Mahmud, 2022).

Training Modules: Progressive and Contextual Design

Module 1 —Self-Discovery and Potential

The first module in MADANI community entrepreneurship is all about building the foundation of entrepreneurial psychology. This is because developing entrepreneurial psychology can serve as the effectiveness of the next modules. The first module includes personal strength inventory using an asset appreciation approach, setting SMART goals for measuring achievements in the long term, understanding the identity of Islamic entrepreneurship that integrates values of trust, excellence, and social responsibility, and improving basic skills in food processing and packaging according to JAKIM standards. According to Nor Azimah and Faridah (2021), the pedagogical framework combines experiential learning with critical reflection. This can help build a deep understanding and commitment for micro-entrepreneurs on Pangkor Island.

Module 2 — Market Awareness and Challenges

In addition, the second module explained through the i-HEKIP framework introduces the dynamic reality of the market. This is because the content of the second module has incorporated aspects of halal entrepreneurship such as demand analysis across local market segments, basic market research techniques including competitor surveys, cost-plus and value-based pricing strategies, basics of product brand development, and an introduction to digital marketing platforms. Shafi, Liu, and Ren (2020) stated that micro enterprises need to have critical resilience determinants through digital channels to apply micro-entrepreneurial values towards digital.

Module 3 — Business Governance and Management

The application of the third module values for micro-entrepreneurs regarding halal certification addresses the lack of financial literacy and management in previous studies. The content of the third module includes software such as basic accounting principles for micro-enterprises, methods for accurately calculating production costs, cash flow management, industry-related

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certifications, and an introduction to comprehensive micro-financing instruments (McCarthy & Flynn, 2022; Morgan & Long, 2020).

Module 4 — Business Sustainability

So, the final module in the i-HEKIP learning hierarchy is the development of long-term strategic thinking. The module content covers strategic planning for micro-enterprises using digital media platforms for product marketing, business risk management, business channels with customers and the industry, environmental sustainability principles in food processing, and strategies for scalability and replication. According to Hasan and Bakar (2022), Kamaruddin and Ali (2023) stated that integrating Maqasid Shariah elements can enhance business sustainability to meet social responsibilities in fulfilling religious obligations.

Community Marketing Network Component

In addition, the i-HEKIP module has components for systematically developing a community marketing network. The i-HEKIP module implements the development of a collective brand identity for food products in Pangkor Island, setting up distribution networks with hotels, developing online marketing platforms representing the collective of entrepreneurs, and participating in product exhibitions and community markets. According to Smith and Johnson (2021), entrepreneurs in tourist areas have access to structured marketing networks. Therefore, more sustainable income growth can enhance individual operational efficiency through the i-HEKIP module.

Discussion of Projected Social and Economic Impacts

Product Value Addition and Market Access Transformation

Based on contextual analysis and analogous studies, the i-HEKIP model is projected to generate significant transformation in the value-added potential of participants' products. Islam, Ab Talib, and Muhamad (2023) found that food enterprises successfully obtaining JAKIM halal certification were able to access premium distribution channels and command prices averaging 20% to 40% higher than non-certified comparable products. In the context of Pulau Pangkor, where the tourism market comprising middle- to upper-income visitors represents a significant customer segment, the enhancement of product value through standards compliance and halal certification carries considerable economic impact potential.

Mohd Fauzi et al. (2022) similarly found that access to standards-compliant processing facilities enables micro food entrepreneurs to enter formal distribution channels previously inaccessible to them, including supermarkets, hotels, and major e-commerce platforms. This expansion of distribution channels not only increases sales volume but also reduces dependence on single buyers or limited local markets, thereby building more robust business resilience.

Social Empowerment and Community Mindset Transformation

Apart from the economic dimension, the i-HEKIP model is expected to produce equally important social transformation impacts. Based on Kusumastuti et al. (2023) study on social innovation in rural contexts, programs that successfully build community capacity holistically usually lead to mindset changes that keep generating new development initiatives from within

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the community, long after external support ends. In the i-HEKIP context, this process is expected to happen when program participants become mentors to new entrepreneurs in the networks that keep growing organically and when the community starts seeing itself as an active agent in its own local economic development.

The impact on intergenerational social mobility also constitutes a significant dimension warranting consideration. As the household incomes of programme participants improve sustainably, the educational and developmental opportunities available to their children correspondingly increase, breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty that characterises structural deprivation. This dimension aligns with the Maqasid Syariah objective of the preservation of progeny (hifz al-nasl), which emphasises the responsibility to ensure that future generations inherit a more favourable condition than the present one (Hasan & Bakar, 2022).

Implications for Malaysian Social Policy Under the MADANI Framework

The discovery and framework of the i-HEKIP model carry several significant implications for the development of national social policy in the era of Malaysia MADANI. First, this model demonstrates that research institutions can play roles that go beyond conventional teaching and academic publishing, functioning as catalysts for evidence-based and impact-oriented community development. Second, the shared facility model employed by i-HEKIP offers a cost-effective approach with clear replication potential in other peripheral areas across Malaysia, particularly in island and coastal communities with similar socioeconomic profiles (Smith & Johnson, 2021).

Third, the integration of care economy perspectives in program design emphasizes the need for more gender-responsive community development policies that recognize and support women's contributions not only to the formal economy but also to the highly valuable unpaid community support work they perform. Fourth, the action research approach employed in i-HEKIP offers a more responsive and context-based academia-community collaboration model compared to conventional top-down research approaches (Kamaruddin & Ali, 2023; Kusumastuti et al., 2023).

Study Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This study acknowledges several important limitations. First, the geographically bounded scope to Pulau Pangkor constrains the generalisability of findings to communities with differing contexts. Second, the nine-month study duration may be insufficient to measure the long-term impact of behavioural change and business development. Third, the single case study design without a formal control group complicates robust causal inference.

Recommended directions for further research include: (i) longitudinal studies spanning 3–5 years to evaluate the sustainability of programme impacts; (ii) multi-site comparative studies to test the replicability of the model across diverse community contexts; (iii) dedicated studies on the programme’s impact on the well-being of children in participants’ families as a measure of intergenerational social mobility; and (iv) comparative studies on the effectiveness of the shared facility approach versus individual equipment subsidy approaches in enhancing micro food entrepreneur competitiveness.

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Conclusion

This study has explained the i-HEKIP intervention model as a new contribution to the literature on social innovation and community development in the Malaysian context. The development of this model was recognized through the analysis of structural poverty in peripheral communities like Pangkor Island. Conventional temporary welfare assistance approaches lead to even greater dependence on external resources. The intervention approach strategically connects physical infrastructure development, human capital capacity building, and the strengthening of social networks.

The i-HEKIP model concept can unify social innovation theory with the philosophy of Maqasid Shariah to create a more holistic community development approach compared to focusing on just one aspect of intervention. Integrating the normative dimension of Maqasid Shariah can apply economic growth development objectives comprehensively according to the concept of Al-falah. For example, spiritually, socially, intellectually, and materially in a balanced way.
The main strength of the i-HEKIP model lies in its flexible design that emphasizes each component shaped for the entrepreneurial community in Pangkor Island. This model's approach has been supported through community-based action research to provide a deep positive impact compared to conventional intervention programs.

The i-HEKIP model contributes to Malaysia's public policy approach. The i-HEKIP model offers an Action Plan to build an inclusive and sustainable community enterprise ecosystem in line with Malaysia MADANI's vision. The success of this model will be assessed systematically through a strict methodological framework to ensure it inspires broader community development efforts across Malaysia.

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Author Contribution Statement: All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Azwan Abdullah was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, and overall supervision of the study. Muhammad Zulfaris Mohd Salleh, Mohd Hafiz Jamaludin, Derweanna Bah Simpong, Mohd Nazri Zakaria and Rooshihan Merican Abdul Rahim Merican handled data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. Muhammad Shahrim Sehak, Nurul Izyan Mat Daud, Nur Syafiqah A. Samad and Hafizi Mat Salleh contributed to the literature review, drafting, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

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