

## The Tradition of Almsgiving (INFAK) from a Sociological Perspective

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### Abstract

This study examined the tradition of *infak* (almsgiving) from a sociological perspective, analyzing the influence of social norms, cultural values, and social structures that shape its practice within Muslim communities. *Infak* was understood not only as a religious obligation but also as a social phenomenon that reflected collective moral responsibility, solidarity, and the distribution of welfare in society. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study analyzed textual sources, religious teachings, and sociological concepts to understand how the tradition of *infak* had been formed, maintained, and practiced over time. The findings indicated that social norms rooted in religious teachings strongly encouraged individuals to give *infak* as a moral duty, creating shared expectations for community members to contribute to social welfare. Cultural values emphasizing compassion, generosity, and mutual assistance further strengthened the continuity of this tradition. The study also revealed that *infak* played a significant role in reducing social inequality by supporting individuals and groups in vulnerable economic conditions. In addition, *infak* fostered social cohesion through interactions between donors and recipients, strengthening trust and communal ties. Despite its positive impact, challenges such as limited awareness, inconsistent participation, and economic constraints hindered its optimal implementation. Overall, this study concluded that the tradition of *infak* was a complex sociological phenomenon that contributed to reinforcing solidarity, justice, and social welfare. Therefore, continuous efforts were needed to promote and institutionalize *infak* practices to maximize their benefits for society.

**Keywords:** *Infak, Social Norms, Sociological Perspective.*

### Introduction

The tradition of *infak* (almsgiving) represents one of the essential teachings in Islam, encompassing not only spiritual obligations but also strong social values that significantly influence communal life; as an integral component of Islamic ethics, *infak* encourages Muslims to cultivate a sense of selflessness and awareness of the needs of others, fostering a deeper connection between individual piety and social responsibility. Recent studies also document bagaimana fenomena digitalisasi dan media sosial memodifikasi praktik pemberian sehingga mempercepat penyebaran bentuk-bentuk sedekah baru yang berdampak pada partisipasi publik (Kailani & Slama, 2020; Adzkiya, 2023). As highlighted in Islamic scholarship, *infak* plays a vital role in enhancing economic welfare and strengthening social relations among community members (Mubarok & Yazid, 2024). In modern society, the practice remains relevant as it fosters harmonious interactions while affirming religious devotion through acts of generosity and compassion; selain itu, kajian lintas-negara menunjukkan peran lembaga zakat dan



mekanisme digital dalam memperbesar jangkauan program produktif yang mendukung ketahanan UMKM dan pemberdayaan mustahik (Asfarina et al., 2019; Maulida et al., 2021).

Within Islamic doctrine, *infak* is not merely a material contribution but a concrete expression of empathy, compassion, and shared responsibility toward fellow human beings: ia merefleksikan komitmen etis umat untuk peduli pada kelompok rentan dan seringkali dipraktikkan melalui kombinasi skema formal dan informal. Praktik redistribusi ini memperkuat ikatan sosial dan stabilitas komunitas dengan memastikan sirkulasi sumber daya di luar kelompok mempunya; penelitian empiris menunjukkan bahwa tata kelola distribusi (transparansi, akuntabilitas) serta integrasi program produktif meningkatkan dampak jangka panjang bagi penerima manfaat (Fatchurrohman et al., 2024; Purwanto & Wafirah, 2021). Research has shown that zakat, *infak*, and *sadaqah* collectively contribute to strengthening social values and mutual support within society (Suhartono et al., 2024).

From a theological standpoint, *infak* is regarded as a virtuous act that brings spiritual rewards, purification of the soul, and moral elevation to the giver; Qur'anic teachings and tafsir tradisi menegaskan nilai kemurahan hati dan kesalehan sosial, sementara literatur kontemporer menekankan pula bahwa framing keagamaan dan komunikasi publik (mis. media sosial) mempengaruhi intensi dan pola pemberian umat (Muttaqin et al., 2020; Triantoro et al., 2021). These teachings stress that giving should be done sincerely, without expecting worldly returns, as it strengthens a person's faith while simultaneously benefiting society. Islamic philanthropy literature also analyses bagaimana pembingkai (framing), norma sosial, dan platform digital dapat memperbesar atau mengubah motivasi pemberi (Kailani & Slama, 2020; Rosele et al., 2022).

The interconnected role of zakat, *infak*, and *sadaqah* has been widely discussed in literature, demonstrating their collective impact on achieving social justice and economic equity within Muslim communities: these charitable acts are powerful instruments for alleviating poverty, enhancing solidarity, and strengthening the moral fabric of society (Mustakim et al., 2022), dan studi-studi internasional menunjukkan bahwa keberhasilan program produktif dan tata kelola zakat berdampak pada pengurangan ketimpangan bila dikombinasikan dengan kebijakan publik yang tepat (Asfarina et al., 2019; Hakim et al., 2024).

From a sociological perspective, the tradition of *infak* can be understood through the influence of social norms that shape individual behavior and collective expectations: norma-norma ini terinternalisasi melalui keluarga, pendidikan, dan institusi keagamaan sehingga *infak* menjadi bagian dari identitas kolektif. Studi-bibliometrik dan empiris juga menggarisbawahi tren penelitian terkait philanthropic behaviour dan mekanisme digitalisasi yang turut membentuk pola-pola partisipasi baru (Huda, 2023; Maulida et al., 2021). Cultural values also play a significant role in sustaining the tradition of *infak*: budaya Indonesia yang menekankan *gotong royong* dan harmoni sosial mendukung praktik-praktik dermawan dan memperkuat semangat kolektif; riset lintas-kawasan menampilkan variasi bentuk lokal pemberian yang dipengaruhi oleh ritual, tradisi, serta dinamika sosial ekonomi setempat (Rofiq, 2019; Triantoro et al., 2021; Rosele et al., 2022).

Social structure further influences the ways in which *infak* is practiced, particularly in terms of who gives, who receives, and how resources are distributed: in masyarakat yang stratifikasi sosialnya tinggi, *infak* berfungsi sebagai redistributor informal yang mereduksi kesenjangan dan menopang kelompok rentan; penelitian kasus menunjukkan pentingnya model distribusi yang partisipatif dan program produktif untuk meningkatkan dampak jangka panjang (Pepriyana et al., 2024; Fatchurrohman et al., 2024). In more egalitarian social settings, however, *infak* tends to be practiced voluntarily based on personal moral responsibility rather than societal expectation: several studi menunjukkan bahwa di komunitas tertentu pemberian dimotivasi oleh pengalaman pribadi, refleksi spiritual, atau kampanye literasi filantropi;

perbedaan-perbedaan ini menandai fleksibilitas bentuk-bentuk *infak* dalam merespons kondisi sosio-kultural yang bervariasi (Khairi et al., 2024; Purwanto & Wafirah, 2021).

Given these complexities, the tradition of *infak* cannot be viewed solely through a religious lens; it harus ditafsirkan sebagai fenomena sosial-budaya dan struktural yang multi-dimensi dengan implikasi luas terhadap kehidupan komunitas. Penelitian sosiologis menunjukkan bahwa *infak* memperkuat kohesi sosial, meningkatkan kepercayaan antar-pribadi, dan mendukung ketahanan komunitas menghadapi tantangan ekonomi dan sosial, dan literatur internasional menegaskan peran digitalisasi, tata kelola, dan inovasi program sebagai faktor penentu hasil (Jamiludin, 2024; Gustiana, 2025; Kailani & Slama, 2020). Based on these foundations, this study seeks to examine the tradition of *infak* from a sociological perspective by analyzing the interplay of norms, cultural values, and social structures that shape its practice; this approach aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of *infak* as a social institution that promotes solidarity, justice, and communal well-being, and will take into account recent international evidence on digital transformation, governance, and program design to inform recommendations for more equitable and sustainable philanthropic practice (Adzkiya, 2023; Asfarina et al., 2019; Maulida et al., 2021).

## Research methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the tradition of *infak* as a sociological phenomenon embedded within the religious and cultural life of the community. Such an approach was chosen because the practice of *infak* involves symbolic meanings, social interactions, and collective values that cannot be measured solely through quantitative indicators. Qualitative methods allow a deeper understanding of how norms, cultural values, and social structures influence charitable behavior within society (Sudirana, 2019; Rofiq, 2019).

Data were collected using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with religious leaders, mosque administrators, community elders, and individuals actively engaged in *infak* practices. Observations focused on routine religious activities such as mosque fundraising, community gatherings, and social events where *infak* is commonly practiced, reflecting patterns described in earlier studies of charitable culture (Pepriyana et al., 2024; Khairi et al., 2024). Document analysis involved reviewing village archives, mosque financial records, local regulations, and written materials related to Islamic philanthropic practices, including national zakat management policies (BPK RI, 2011).

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, interview transcripts and observation notes were categorized into thematic codes related to social norms, cultural values, and structural roles in sustaining *infak* traditions. The organized data were then displayed in descriptive narratives to reveal social patterns and interactions. The final stage involved interpreting findings through sociological perspectives, aligning them with previous research on Islamic philanthropy and social solidarity (Mubarok & Yazid, 2024; Mustakim et al., 2022; Jamiludin, 2024).

Ethical procedures were rigorously applied throughout the research process. Informants were provided with clear explanations of the study's purpose, and verbal consent was obtained before the interviews. The identities of participants were kept confidential to respect their privacy and ensure openness in sharing information. Data validation was conducted through member checking, allowing participants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. This process enhanced the credibility of the findings and aligned with best practices in qualitative research, particularly those examining social institutions and community-based religious traditions (Istikomah et al., 2024).

## Results and Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the tradition of *infak* operates not only as a religious act but also as a socio-economic mechanism that strengthens solidarity and redistributes resources within the community. This dual function aligns with previous scholarship, which shows that *infak*, along with zakat and sadaqah, contributes to social welfare and economic improvement (Mubarok & Yazid, 2024; Sabirin, 2023). In the communities studied, *infak* emerged as a form of collective responsibility, helping to bridge social gaps and foster mutual support among members.

Data from interviews and observations revealed that *infak* funds—when managed through mosques or Islamic philanthropic institutions—were often allocated to socially productive programs such as education subsidies, health support, and microeconomic empowerment. These uses go beyond mere consumption and instead provide long-term benefits for recipients, consistent with perspectives that view *infak* as multidimensional: moral-religious, social, and economic (Mustakim et al., 2022; Pepriyana et al., 2024). This suggests that *infak* can serve as a sustainable tool for community development when properly channeled.

Moreover, the practice of *infak* contributed to strengthening social values such as empathy, cooperation, and social cohesion. Respondents frequently mentioned feelings of solidarity, mutual trust, and social obligation when discussing their motivations for giving. Such outcomes resonate with arguments in the literature that charitable giving in the Islamic context fosters communal values and collective identity (Harahap, 2018; Rofiq, 2019).

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of *infak* as a socio-economic instrument strongly depended on management practices and transparency. When funds were used only for immediate consumption or lacked accountability, the long-term impact on welfare was limited. This echoes cautions from prior studies that emphasize good governance and transparent distribution in religious philanthropy (Istikomah et al., 2024; Jamiludin, 2024). Without proper oversight, the potential benefits of *infak* may not fully materialize.

The study also found that in several cases, institutions managing *infak* adopted structured mechanisms for gathering, recording, and distributing funds—such as periodic reporting, needs assessments, and participatory decision-making among community members. Such institutionalization appears to enhance trust and encourage continued participation in charitable giving. This aligns with findings that institutional accountability strengthens philanthropic practices and enhances social welfare impact (Sabirin, 2023; Angkat et al., 2024).

In some communities, *infak* was perceived as a complement to formal social welfare systems—especially in areas where government or formal social protection was limited. Respondents noted that *infak* helped cover educational expenses, medical needs, or basic livelihood support for vulnerable families. This role reinforces the notion that *infak* can function as a bottom-up social safety net, offering flexible, community-based support (Pepriyana et al., 2024; Mustakim et al., 2022).

However, not all respondents participated regularly. Some cited a lack of financial capacity, a lack of knowledge about proper distribution channels, or skepticism about transparency in fund management. These barriers reflect issues noted in previous research concerning unequal participation and low philanthropic literacy in some Muslim communities (Sudirana, 2019; Rofiq, 2019). Such disparities may limit the reach and effectiveness of *infak* in addressing broader social needs.

Despite these challenges, the overall pattern observed suggests that, when supported by explicit norms, cultural values, and accountable institutions, it contributes positively to both social cohesion and community welfare. The combination of direct aid, empowerment

initiatives, and communal engagement reflects the multidimensional potential of *infak* as a social institution (Mubarok & Yazid, 2024; Mustakim et al., 2022).

Overall, the results support the hypothesis that the tradition of *infak* is more than a ritual — it functions as a critical component of community development, social solidarity, and economic support. Its impact is most significant when managed transparently and channeled towards sustainable social programs. Given these findings, *infak* deserves attention not only as a religious practice but also as a strategic social-economic institution in Muslim communities.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the tradition of *infak* plays a significant socio-religious and socio-economic role within the community. Beyond its spiritual merit, *infak* functions as an instrument for social solidarity, resource redistribution, and community empowerment, especially when managed transparently and allocated toward productive programs. The practice is strongly shaped by social norms, cultural values, and institutional governance, all of which determine the extent to which it impacts strengthening social cohesion and supporting vulnerable groups. Overall, *infak* should be recognized as a strategic social institution with the potential to promote welfare, reduce inequality, and reinforce moral and communal values.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that institutions managing *infak* enhance their transparency, accountability, and program evaluation mechanisms to maximize social benefits. Community education regarding the importance of sustainable *financial* practices should also be strengthened to improve participation and philanthropic literacy. Additionally, integrating modern digital platforms for collection and distribution may improve accessibility and public trust. Future research is encouraged to examine comparative models of Islamic philanthropy across regions and explore the long-term socio-economic outcomes of productive *infak* programs on community resilience and poverty reduction.

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