



## Religious Meaning and Social Motivation in the Practice of Infaq and Sadaqah: A Qualitative Study of Rural Muslim Communities in Suoh Village, West Lampung, Indonesia

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aims to explore the religious meaning and social motivation underlying the practice of sedekah among rural communities in Suoh Village, Liwa, West Lampung, with a particular focus on the subjective interpretations of community members regarding charitable giving. **Methodology:** This research employed a qualitative approach using purposive sampling to select key informants who routinely practiced sedekah. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using an interpretive qualitative framework. **Findings:** The findings reveal that sedekah is perceived as: (1) an act of worship to strengthen spiritual closeness to God, (2) a means of purifying wealth and the heart, and (3) an expression of social solidarity within the community. The primary motivations include religious faith, expectations of spiritual rewards, and empathy toward others. The main challenges identified involve limited transparency in fund management and insufficient public understanding of distinctions among Islamic charitable instruments. The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on the subjective religious meanings and social motivations of rural community members in practicing sedekah, highlighting the role of local values and lived religious experiences in shaping philanthropic behavior. The study recommends the digitalization of financial record-keeping and the development of community-based economic empowerment programs funded through sedekah to enhance social and economic impact.

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## A. Introduction

Infaq and sadaqah are integral components of Islamic teachings that function not only as acts of worship but also as mechanisms for social welfare distribution within Muslim communities. These practices encompass both spiritual and social dimensions, playing a significant role in strengthening social solidarity, reducing economic disparities, and fostering social responsibility at the community level (Suhartono et al., 2024). In Islamic practice, sadaqah carries a broad meaning, as it includes various forms of kindness, both material and non-material, performed as expressions of devotion to God and compassion toward others (Ubabuddin & Nasikhah, 2021).

From a social perspective, the practice of sadaqah is not merely understood as a moral and religious obligation but also as a form of social interaction that reinforces relationships among individuals within the community (Ahmad, 2022). The motivation to engage in sadaqah is generally driven by religious factors, such as faith and the expectation of spiritual rewards, as well as social factors, including empathy, solidarity, and the desire to help others. Previous studies indicate that social environment, religious leadership, and personal experiences can influence community participation in Islamic philanthropic activities (Khasanati et al., 2021). Thus, sadaqah reflects not only individual piety but also a social mechanism that contributes to community cohesion and social welfare.

Although studies on zakat, infaq, and sadaqah are abundant, research that specifically examines the subjective meanings and motivations of rural communities through qualitative approaches remains limited, particularly in local contexts characterized by unique social and cultural dynamics. Most previous research has focused on normative, legal, or institutional aspects of Islamic philanthropy, while studies exploring the lived religious experiences and subjective interpretations of community members regarding the practice of sadaqah in everyday life remain relatively scarce. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the subjective dimensions of rural communities in understanding sadaqah as part of their social and religious lives.

In the local context, the community of Suoh Village, Liwa, West Lampung continues to regard sadaqah as an essential part of daily social and religious practices. Sadaqah is regularly performed in various community activities, such as assisting neighbors in need, supporting religious programs, and strengthening social bonds within the village. However, the meanings and motivations underlying these practices have not been adequately documented in academic research. Consequently, there is a need for studies that examine the lived experiences and subjective interpretations of rural communities in practicing sadaqah within their social environment (Apriliyani & Malik, 2021).

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on examining the religious meanings and social motivations of rural community members in practicing sadaqah from the perspective of their lived experiences in everyday life. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize institutional management, regulatory frameworks, or financial aspects of Islamic philanthropy, this research positions community members as active subjects in interpreting sadaqah as a socio-religious practice embedded in local rural contexts. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of community-based Islamic philanthropy studies and to enrich qualitative approaches in the study of religion and society at the rural level.

Based on the background and research gap described above, this study aims to analyze the subjective religious meanings attributed by rural community members to the practice of sadaqah in their daily lives, identify the primary social and spiritual motivations that encourage community participation in sadaqah activities, examine the social role of sadaqah in strengthening solidarity and social relationships within rural

communities, and formulate practical recommendations for improving the management and utilization of sadaqah to enhance community welfare and social cohesion.

## **B. Methods**

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the religious meanings and social motivations underlying the practice of sadaqah within a rural community context. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation. The in-depth interviews were conducted with two key informants selected using purposive sampling, consisting of a religious leader and a manager of zakat and sadaqah funds within the local community. The selection of these two informants was based on the consideration that they possess substantial knowledge, direct experience, and active involvement in the management and implementation of sadaqah activities, as well as being recognized as trusted figures within the community. Participatory observation was also conducted to obtain contextual insights into the daily practices of sadaqah in the social life of the community (Moleong, 2018).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied source and method triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews and observations to verify consistency across data sources. In addition, member checking was conducted by reconfirming the researcher's interpretations with the informants to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings. These procedures were implemented to enhance the reliability and validity of the qualitative data.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process involved several stages: first, carefully reading and familiarizing with the interview transcripts and observation notes; second, conducting coding to identify significant statements related to the meanings and motivations of sadaqah; third, categorizing the codes into broader themes; and finally, interpreting the emerging themes to explain patterns of religious meaning and social motivation in the practice of sadaqah. This thematic analysis enabled the researcher to systematically identify recurring patterns and generate an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of the informants.

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **1. Results**

#### **Religious Meaning**

This subtheme describes the religious interpretation of sadaqah as a form of spiritual devotion and moral obligation rooted in Islamic teachings. The religious meaning reflects how community members internalize charitable giving as part of their faith and spiritual discipline. In rural contexts, religious practices are often closely integrated with daily life, making sadaqah not only a ritual obligation but also a moral framework guiding personal behavior and social responsibility.

The findings indicate that rural community members perceive sadaqah not merely as a religious obligation but as a spiritual practice that reflects devotion to God and moral responsibility. One of the key informants, Ustadz Maryanto, explained that the community understands sadaqah as a means of purifying wealth and cleansing the heart from negative traits such as greed and selfishness. He emphasized that giving is not solely about material contribution but also about sincerity (*ikhlas*) and spiritual awareness. This perception reflects the strong religious orientation of the community, where sadaqah is considered an integral part of religious life and a pathway to attaining spiritual merit and divine blessings.

#### **Social Meaning**

This subtheme refers to the social interpretation of sadaqah as a mechanism for strengthening interpersonal relationships and fostering collective responsibility within the

community. In rural societies, social cohesion is often maintained through mutual assistance and shared values of solidarity. Sadaqah, therefore, functions as a social instrument that reinforces cooperation, empathy, and communal harmony.

The findings show that sadaqah carries significant social meaning within the community and functions as a mechanism for strengthening social solidarity and mutual support among community members. For example, when a community member experiences hardship or disaster, residents voluntarily collect sadaqah funds to provide assistance. This practice demonstrates that sadaqah is embedded in the social structure of the village and serves as a practical expression of collective responsibility. It reinforces social cohesion, promotes empathy, and fosters a sense of belonging among community members.

### **Internal Motivation**

This subtheme highlights the internal psychological and spiritual factors that encourage individuals to engage in sadaqah activities. Internal motivation originates from personal beliefs, values, and emotional experiences related to religious teachings. These motivations are closely linked to faith, moral awareness, and the desire to achieve spiritual fulfillment. In many cases, internal motivation represents the intrinsic dimension of charitable behavior that persists even without external encouragement.

The study found that internal motivation plays a central role in encouraging community participation in sadaqah activities. Informants reported that personal faith, spiritual awareness, and the expectation of religious rewards are the primary internal drivers behind charitable giving. Community members believe that engaging in sadaqah brings spiritual satisfaction, inner peace, and a sense of fulfillment. Furthermore, individuals often experience emotional happiness and moral satisfaction after helping others, which strengthens their commitment to continue participating in sadaqah practices.

### **External Motivation**

This subtheme explains the external social and institutional factors that influence community participation in sadaqah. External motivation arises from environmental influences, including social norms, religious leadership, community encouragement, and visible social outcomes of charitable activities. In rural communities, the presence of respected leaders and collective social interactions often plays a crucial role in shaping individual behavior and sustaining charitable practices.

According to Bapak Sujarto, who is actively involved in managing village social funds, the role of religious leaders and mosque administrators is particularly important in encouraging routine participation in charitable activities. Religious sermons, community gatherings, and social interactions serve as reminders and motivational tools that strengthen collective engagement in sadaqah practices. In addition, the visible impact of assistance programs motivates community members to continue giving, as they directly observe the positive outcomes of their contributions. This social reinforcement creates a supportive environment that sustains the culture of generosity within the community.

### **Structural Barriers**

This subtheme identifies institutional and organizational challenges that hinder the effectiveness and sustainability of sadaqah practices within the community. Structural barriers are not related to individual willingness but rather to systemic limitations in knowledge, management capacity, and governance mechanisms. Understanding these barriers is essential for designing policies and programs that improve transparency, accountability, and community trust in charitable institutions.

Despite the strong enthusiasm for sadaqah, the findings reveal several structural barriers that limit the effectiveness of its implementation. First, many community members still lack a clear understanding of the distinctions among zakat, infaq, and sadaqah, which leads to confusion regarding the appropriate timing and method of charitable giving. Second, the management of charitable funds remains largely manual and informal, resulting in limited transparency and accountability in fund collection and distribution. This condition reduces public trust and may discourage broader participation in organized sadaqah programs. These structural challenges highlight the need for improved public education and more systematic management practices to enhance the sustainability and impact of community-based charitable activities.

## **2. Discussion**

### **Religious and Social Meaning of Sadaqah**

The findings of this study indicate that rural community members perceive sadaqah not only as a religious obligation but also as a social practice that strengthens interpersonal relationships and community solidarity. This dual meaning reflects the integration of spiritual devotion and social responsibility in everyday life. In the context of Suoh Village, sadaqah functions as a moral and social mechanism that fosters collective responsibility for community welfare. The practice of giving is therefore understood as both an act of worship and a form of social engagement that reinforces mutual trust and cooperation among community members.

These findings are consistent with previous research conducted by Mas 'Amah and Panggiarti (2023), which demonstrates that charitable giving in rural communities serves as a medium for cultivating values such as sincerity, empathy, and mutual cooperation. Similarly, other studies have shown that Islamic philanthropic practices contribute to strengthening social networks and improving social cohesion within local communities. However, while earlier studies primarily emphasized the institutional and normative roles of charitable giving, the present study provides additional insight by highlighting the subjective interpretations of community members regarding the spiritual and social meanings of sadaqah in their daily lives. This perspective enriches the understanding of Islamic philanthropy as a lived social and religious experience rather than merely a formal obligation (Mas 'Amah & Panggiarti, 2023).

### **Motivation for Practicing Sadaqah: Integration of Faith and Empathy**

The results also reveal that community motivation to engage in sadaqah is shaped by a combination of religious belief and social empathy (Mursyid, 2006). Community members are motivated not only by the expectation of spiritual rewards but also by a genuine desire to help others who are experiencing hardship. This finding indicates that religious and social values operate simultaneously in shaping altruistic behavior within rural communities. In Islamic teachings, this motivation can be linked to the concept of tazkiyah (purification of wealth and soul), which emphasizes the spiritual benefits of charitable giving as a means of personal and social transformation.

This finding supports the study by Sofia et al. (2024), which found that religious commitment and social awareness significantly influence individuals' willingness to participate in charitable activities. Their study highlights that empathy functions as an emotional driver that strengthens charitable behavior beyond purely religious obligations. Nevertheless, the present study extends this argument by demonstrating that motivation in rural contexts is strongly influenced by direct social interaction and visible community needs. In other words, the lived social environment plays a crucial role in transforming religious belief into concrete social action (Sofia et al., 2024).

### **Structural Challenges in Sadaqah Management**

Despite the strong commitment to charitable giving, the findings reveal several structural challenges that limit the effectiveness of sadaqah management in rural communities. These challenges include limited public understanding of the distinctions among zakat, infaq, and sadaqah, the continued reliance on manual administrative systems, and insufficient managerial capacity among fund administrators. Such conditions reduce transparency and accountability, which may weaken community trust and participation in organized charitable programs (Sahri & Paramita, 2020).

These findings are in line with previous studies by Sahri and Paramita (2020) and Harini et al. (2023), which identified similar challenges in community-based charitable management, particularly in rural settings where administrative systems remain informal and capacity-building opportunities are limited (Harini et al., 2023). Furthermore, Dan et al. (2024) emphasized that transparent financial management is a critical factor in maintaining public trust in charitable institutions (Dan et al., 2024). However, the present study contributes additional insight by demonstrating how these structural limitations are experienced directly by community members and influence their willingness to participate in charitable activities. This perspective highlights the importance of improving governance practices in grassroots-level philanthropic institutions.

### **Practical Implications and Recommendations**

Based on the findings and discussion above, several practical recommendations can be proposed to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of sadaqah management in rural communities. First, strengthening the role of religious leaders and community figures is essential in enhancing public awareness and participation in charitable activities. Regular educational programs, such as religious gatherings, community meetings, and public campaigns, can help improve understanding of the principles and benefits of sadaqah.

Second, the adoption of simple digital financial management systems is strongly recommended to improve transparency and accountability in fund management. The use of digital tools, such as spreadsheet-based financial records or mobile-based applications, can facilitate accurate documentation, reporting, and monitoring of charitable funds. This approach has been shown to increase public trust and participation in community-based financial programs (Susilawati & Sunarto, 2020).

Third, the allocation of sadaqah funds toward community empowerment programs is necessary to ensure long-term social and economic impact. Rather than focusing solely on short-term assistance, charitable funds can be directed toward income-generating activities, such as small business training, skills development programs, and micro-enterprise support. Such initiatives can enhance community self-reliance and contribute to sustainable rural development (Alfiani & Nasrulloh, 2022).

### **D. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the practice of infaq and sadaqah in Suoh Village is not merely a religious obligation but also a manifestation of social solidarity that strengthens interpersonal relationships and community cohesion. The primary motivations underlying charitable giving include religious faith, the expectation of spiritual rewards, and a sincere desire to assist others in need. Religious leaders and local social institutions play a crucial role in enhancing community awareness and participation in charitable activities. Nevertheless, several challenges remain, particularly limited public understanding of the distinctions among zakat, infaq, and sadaqah, as well as the continued reliance on manual and less transparent financial management systems. Therefore, strategic efforts such as capacity-building programs for fund administrators,

the adoption of digital record-keeping systems, and the implementation of community-based economic empowerment programs are essential to optimize the social and economic benefits of charitable funds. Overall, the findings indicate that infaq and sadaqah generate significant spiritual and social impacts when managed effectively and transparently.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of rural philanthropy studies by highlighting the meaning of Islamic charitable practices as both religious devotion and social capital within village communities. The research enriches the discourse on community-based Islamic philanthropy by demonstrating how local cultural values, religious beliefs, and social relationships interact to shape philanthropic behavior in rural settings. This contribution extends existing literature that often focuses on institutional or urban-based philanthropy by providing empirical evidence from a village-level context.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the number of informants involved in the research was relatively limited, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Second, the study was conducted within a specific local context, namely Suoh Village, whose social, cultural, and religious characteristics may differ from those of other regions. Future research is therefore recommended to involve a larger number of participants and to conduct comparative studies across different rural communities to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic philanthropy practices in diverse socio-cultural settings.

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#### **F. Author Contributions Statement**

All authors contributed substantially to the conception, design, implementation, and completion of this study. The first author was primarily responsible for developing the research framework, conducting fieldwork, collecting and analyzing qualitative data, and drafting the initial version of the manuscript. The second author contributed to refining the research design, providing methodological guidance, validating the analytical process, and critically reviewing and revising the manuscript to enhance its theoretical and academic quality.

Both authors collaboratively interpreted the research findings, discussed the implications of the results, and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication. All authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work and to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the research.

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