



International Community Service: Ramadan Gift Program for Empowering Single Mothers in Malaysia

Abdurrauf¹, Muhammad Syahriramadhan² Alfi Alfarizhi Hidayat³
^{1,2,3} Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang abdurraufbks@gmail.com

2025 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution - ShareAlike 4.0 International License - (CC-BY-SA) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30983/dedikasia.v5i1.9400>

ARTICLE INFO

Submit : May 22nd, 2025

Revised : Jun 03rd, 2025


Accepted : Jun 30th, 2025

Keywords:

Community Service, Single Mother, KKM International, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Single mothers in Malaysia face several vulnerabilities, such as economic instability (informal sector jobs, uncertain income) and the burden of single parenting. In response to this, the community service program "Ramadhan Gift for Single Mothers" was carried out by international students of KKM UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang in Kampung Sentosa Jaya, Paroi, Malaysia, with the following objectives: (1) to distribute essential aid to 20 registered single mothers; (2) to foster warm social-emotional interactions; and (3) to strengthen solidarity and cultural diplomacy between Indonesia and Malaysia through the Ramadhan moment. The implementation method used Participatory Action Research (PAR), involving participatory collaboration with local community leaders. Data collection was done through participatory observation, structured/semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The results showed a very positive response: the beneficiaries felt materially and psychosocially supported, while community leaders appreciated the strengthening of bilateral relations. The program successfully created an impact by improving social relations, cross-cultural empathy, and a positive image of Indonesia. For sustainability, it is recommended to transform the program into an empowerment approach (skills training, business mentoring), expand networks with local/government institutions, develop memorandums of understanding for long-term partnerships, and implement a structured monitoring-evaluation system along with cultural communication training for volunteers.

International License (CC-BY-SA)
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)
 <http://dx.doi.org/10.30983/dedikasia.v5i1.9400>

This is an open access article under the CC-BY-SA license



Introduction

Single mothers are one of the vulnerable groups in society who face various social and economic challenges, including in Malaysia. Their role as head of the family and caregiver of children requires them to live in complex and limited conditions. The absence of a life partner not only means the absence of economic support, but also the loss of an emotional and social companion who is very important in living a household life. This makes single mothers more vulnerable to poverty, limited access to health services and children's education (Aw & Sabri, 2021), and an increase in domestic workload that often causes physical fatigue and prolonged psychological stress.



Many of these single mothers work in the informal sector with uncertain incomes, without adequate social security (Nor, 2022). In some cases, they also experience social discrimination because of their status, which further narrows their space for movement in community life (Mulia, 2017). The double burden they carry is often not balanced by an adequate social protection system (Hashim et al., 2015), either from the government or the surrounding environment. In this context, the presence of empowerment programs and social assistance is not just a form of temporary generosity, but is a real need that can help them survive and rebuild their life's empowerment.

Thus, synergy from various parties, including higher education institutions, is needed to take an active role in helping this vulnerable group. Community service activities targeting single mothers are one of the relevant and impactful strategies, especially if carried out in religious moments such as the month of Ramadan, which is culturally and spiritually full of values of social concern, compassion, and giving.

The month of Ramadan is the right moment to rekindle the spirit of sharing and caring for others (Shalihin et al., 2020). In Islamic tradition, Ramadan is not only a month that is synonymous with increasing spiritual worship such as fasting, prayer, and reciting the Qur'an, but is also seen as a social month that is full of values of solidarity and concern for less fortunate groups (Shalihin & Sholihin, 2022). Sharing activities such as alms, zakat, and distributing food for breaking the fast are highly recommended practices (Dzakirah et al., 2025), because they are considered capable of strengthening social cohesion in society. This momentum is a strategic opportunity to reach vulnerable groups such as single mothers, not only through providing assistance, but with an inclusive, humanistic, and empathetic approach (Shalihin et al., 2024), so that the assistance provided is not only symbolic, but really has an impact on their lives.

In this context, community service is no longer limited to local activities around the campus or the student's hometown, but has developed into a form of global contribution within the framework of cross-country cooperation. In the era of globalization and mobility of higher education, students are required to have global awareness, cross-cultural skills, and social sensitivity to international issues. Cross-country community service is a very effective contextual learning medium (Bringle & Hatcher, 2023), where students not only implement the theories learned in college, but also experience firsthand the social and cultural dynamics of society in other countries. This enriches their experience in terms of cross-cultural communication, tolerance, social adaptation, and collaborative skills in solving complex social problems (Deardorff, 2006).

Moreover, cross-country community service can be seen as a form of grassroots social and cultural diplomacy (people-to-people diplomacy). Students, as representatives of the nation and culture, bring positive values that reflect the spirit of cooperation, mutual assistance, and brotherhood across nations. This is very important especially for related countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia which have overlapping histories, cultures, and languages. Cross-border activities like



this have the potential to strengthen the relationships that have been built so far, while fostering a sense of mutual understanding and solidarity among the young generations of the two countries.

Within this framework, International Student Work Lecture (KKM) students of the Faculty of Islamic Education and Teaching, State Islamic University (UIN) Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang implemented the “*Ramadan Gifts for Single Mothers*” program in Kampung Sentosa Jaya, Paroi, Malaysia. This program not only aims to distribute basic food assistance to single mothers in need, but also to create warm social interactions, strengthen intercultural empathy, and strengthen family ties between Indonesian students and Malaysian society. Through intensive dialogue, collaboration, and fieldwork, this activity becomes a learning space rich in social, educational, and humanitarian values.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a participatory case study method (Yin, 2017). This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the implementation process and social impact of international community service activities carried out by UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang Student Work Lecture (KKM) students in Kampung Sentosa Jaya, Paroi, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. This activity is not only observed from the technical aspect of aid distribution, but also analyzed from the perspective of social and cultural relations between nations.

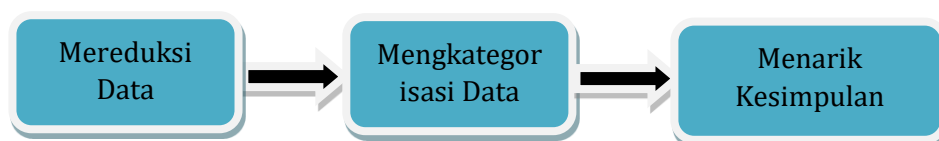
The location of this activity is in Sentosa Jaya Village, Paroi, Negeri Sembilan, which is home to a number of single mothers and Muslim communities who are active during the month of Ramadan. The activity was carried out on March 8, 2025 as part of the KKM International program. The subjects in this activity included 20 single mothers as the main beneficiaries, local community leaders such as the Paroi Hamlet Head, Village Head, mosque and surau administrators, and KKM student participants who were directly involved in implementing the program.

method used in this activity is Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Cornish et al., 2023). This method emphasizes the active participation of the community and students in every stage of the activity, with an orientation towards reflective and solution-oriented actions towards social problems faced by the target community. In the context of this program, PAR is implemented through several stages including problem identification and participatory planning, action implementation, joint observation and reflection, and evaluation and recommendations for sustainability.

Data collection techniques are carried out in several ways. First, participant observation which allows students to be directly involved in each stage of the activity (Spradley, 1980), starting from planning, implementation to evaluation. Second, structured and semi-structured interviews (Brinkman & Kvale, nd) were conducted with single mothers, community leaders, and activity participants to explore their perceptions and impressions of the activities carried out. Third, documentation in the form of photos, videos, and field notes were used to strengthen the narrative and descriptive validity.

The collected data were then analyzed qualitatively using analysis techniques that began with reducing the data to filter relevant information, then categorizing the data into main themes such as planning, activity implementation, community response and evaluation. The categorized data were systematically arranged in the form of narrative descriptions. The final stage of the analysis was drawing conclusions based on patterns and findings that emerged from the field, in order to answer research questions and evaluate the success of this community service activity as a whole (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Figure 1. Data Analysis Pattern



Results & Discussion

1. Problem Identification and Program Planning

The Ramadan Gifts for Single Mothers program began with a careful analysis of the needs of the Sentosa Jaya Village community, Paroi, Malaysia, especially single mothers who are a vulnerable group. Student participants of the UIN Malang International KKM held several initial meetings with community leaders to formulate the vision and mission of this activity, ensuring that the program to be implemented runs smoothly and is on target.

To ensure that this activity is effective and on target, the team conducted informal interviews and discussions with local community leaders, in this case represented by the head of the An-Nur prayer room. This process aims to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by single mothers in the area. In addition, it is important to obtain accurate data on the number of single mothers who are eligible to receive assistance so that distribution can be carried out fairly. Data on aid recipients was obtained directly from the head of the An-Nur prayer room who is more familiar with the social conditions of the Sentosa Jaya village community.

In the logistics planning stage, students completely hand it over to the local community. Because in this case the community understands more about the daily needs of single mothers in Kamoung Sentosa Jaya. The needs that will be donated to single mothers include various basic necessities such as rice, cooking oil, bread, flour, and several cakes as a preparation for welcoming Eid al-Fitr. In this case, students actually do not let go completely. Several logistical needs are also assisted by students in the preparation process. Like bubur lambuk which will also be distributed to single mothers, students together with the community prepare this dish together.

In addition to procuring basic materials, logistics planning also includes dividing roles between team members to ensure the event runs smoothly. Each team member is given a task that suits their respective abilities and expertise, such as coordinating with the community, organizing

distribution, and documenting activities. Students also prepare transportation to ensure that aid reaches the recipients on time and safely. All of these preparations are carried out with intensive coordination, both between UIN Malang students and community leaders in Kampung Sentosa Jaya, so that the program can run successfully and provide maximum benefits to the recipients. With careful planning and good collaboration between students and the local community, the *Ramadan Gifts for Single Mothers* activity is expected to achieve broader social and humanitarian goals, as well as create a mutually beneficial relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia.

Figure 2. Discussion on Program Planning with Figures



2. Program Implementation

Ramadan Gift for Single Mothers activity was officially held on Saturday, March 8, 2025, at Surau An-Nur, Kampung Sentosa Jaya, Paroi, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. This location was chosen because it is the center of worship and social activities for the local community, making it strategic for reaching beneficiaries. The activity took place from 10:00 to 11:00 local time, starting with an opening ceremony as a form of respect and appreciation for the role of the local community in supporting this cross-country service activity.

The opening ceremony was solemn and full of warmth. Community figures such as Mr. Ahmad Shahir bin Shapie (Penghulu Dusun Paroi), Dr. Noor Azam bin Abd Aziz (manager of At-Taqwa Mosque Paroi), Mr. Aswan Md Diah (Head of Kampung Sentosa Jaya), and Mr. Haji Abdullah bin Othman (manager of Surau An-Nur) were present as guests of honor. Their presence reflected the great support of the local community for the initiative of the students of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. In their remarks, the figures not only appreciated the activities carried out, but also emphasized the importance of close cooperation between Malaysia and Indonesia in strengthening social and cultural solidarity.

After the opening ceremony, the event continued with the main session, namely the handover of Ramadan packages to single mothers who had been previously registered. The handover was carried out directly by KKM International students as a form of personal interaction and respect for the beneficiaries. Each package contained basic necessities such as rice, cooking oil, granulated sugar, wheat flour, instant noodles, and other basic necessities relevant to daily needs. The students

distributed the aid *door to door* to the homes of each beneficiary. The handover took place in an orderly and emotional manner, because many recipients expressed their gratitude and emotion for the aid received ahead of the holy month of Ramadan.

Figure 3. Photo with the Sentosa Jaya Village Community



Figure 4. Distribution of Aid to Beneficiaries



3. Response and Impact on Society

Ramadhan Gift Program for Single Mothers received a very positive response from the Sentosa Jaya Village community, especially the single mothers as beneficiaries. The presence of UIN Malang International KKM students was not only seen as a momentary charity activity, but also as a form of sincere concern that touched the emotional and social side of the community. The recipients of the gifts expressed their gratitude and were touched because they felt cared for, appreciated, and did not feel alone in living a life full of challenges, especially during the holy month of Ramadan which usually becomes a burden in terms of household economics.

Local community leaders also showed high appreciation. They saw that this activity was able to build a bridge of solidarity between nations, strengthen relations between Malaysian citizens and Indonesian students, and strengthen the values of mutual cooperation and togetherness that are the foundation of a multicultural society. This activity was considered successful in instilling positive values, especially to the younger generation, both from the side of the giver and the beneficiary.

The resulting social impact is not only temporary, but also has a long-term effect in strengthening cross-country social networks. Single mothers feel more confident and feel cared for by their surroundings, thus encouraging their spirit to continue struggling to support their families. On the other hand, students gain field experience that enriches social insight, empathy, and intercultural communication skills.

Furthermore, this activity also contributes to the positive image of Indonesia in the eyes of the Malaysian people. Inter-community relations built through this kind of social touch are one form of effective cultural diplomacy, because they involve direct interaction and touch on basic human needs, namely attention and solidarity. Therefore, this program is worthy of being developed and



replicated in the future as part of an international community service strategy based on humanity and culture.

4. Evaluation and Recommendations

The implementation of the Ramadhan Gifts for Empowering Single Mothers program generally showed positive results. The active participation of students and the warm welcome from the community, especially single mothers in Kampung Sentosa Jaya, showed that this program was able to provide significant emotional and social impacts. In addition to being a form of material assistance, this activity became a means of friendship and encouragement for mothers who often face economic difficulties and the burden of caring for themselves. The presence of students as agents of change also provided a new color in social interactions in the local community.

However, several obstacles also emerged during the implementation of the program. One of the challenges faced was limited time and resources, which resulted in less than optimal data collection and distribution of aid. Not all single mothers were fully recorded, so it is possible that some parties in need have not received aid. In addition, budget limitations meant that the number of aid packages provided could not reach all targets. On the other hand, differences in cultural and social backgrounds between Indonesian students and Malaysian society also required adjustments to communication to remain effective and sensitive to the local context.

Based on the evaluation, several recommendations were made to ensure the sustainability and development of the program in the future. First, the program has great potential to be expanded by involving more partners, such as local social institutions, local governments, and educational institutions, so that its impact can reach a wider audience. Second, the program's approach should not only be charitable, but also transformative, for example through skills training, home business assistance, or household financial management classes for single mothers, so that they can increase their independence in a sustainable manner.

Third, strengthening international cooperation is an important key. Collaboration between Indonesian students and the Malaysian community that has been established in this activity can be developed into a long-term partnership, for example through a memorandum of understanding between educational institutions or regular cross-country community service. Finally, a periodic monitoring and evaluation system is important to implement so that the success of the program is not only measured quantitatively, but also qualitatively, especially regarding its impact on the welfare of single mothers and the development of students' character as caring and globally-minded individuals.

Conclusion

The implementation of the "Ramadan Gifts for Single Mothers" program in Kampung Sentosa Jaya, Paroi, Malaysia proves that cross-country community service can contribute significantly to strengthening humanitarian values, social solidarity, and international diplomacy. This activity not only provides material assistance, but also moral and psychosocial support for single mothers who are vulnerable groups. Through the *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) approach, KKM International



students succeeded in working together and building meaningful emotional relationships with the local community, as well as increasing cross-cultural understanding in the context of diversity. This program is proof that students can play a strategic role in building sustainable *people-to-people connections* as part of their academic and humanitarian contributions. Therefore, similar programs are highly recommended to be continued and replicated in other regions, both domestically and abroad.

Bibliography

- Aw, E. C.-X., & Sabri, M. F. (2021). Single mothers' subjective well-being: empirical evidence from Malaysia. *Health Care for Women International*, 42(4–6), 756–777.
- Bingle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (2023). International service learning. In *International service learning* (pp. 3–28). Routledge.
- Brinkman, S., & Kvale, S. (n.d.). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2014. SAGE Publication Inc, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Cornish, F., Breton, N., Moreno-Tabarez, U., Delgado, J., Rua, M., de-Graft Aikins, A., & Hodgetts, D. (2023). Participatory action research. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers*, 3(1), 34.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241–266.
- Dzakirah, H., Fadilah, N., Falah, H., Lisa, L., & Wismanto, W. (2025). Fasting during Ramadan Sharpens Empathy and Social Solidarity. *Akhlaq: Journal of Islamic Religious Education and Philosophy*, 2(1), 134–142.
- Hashim, I. H. M., Azmawati, A. A., & Endut, N. (2015). Stress, roles and responsibilities of single mothers in Malaysia. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 18, 3003.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. sage.
- Mulia, D. S. (2017). Survival strategies of single mothers among indigenous ethnics in rural areas: Case study in Kota Belud, Sabah. *Jurnal Kinabalu*.
- Nor, Z. M. (2022). Precarious employment amongst low income single mothers in Malaysia: The implications on family wellbeing. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 339, 6009.
- Shalihin, N., Azwar, W., Yusuf, M., & Hulwati, H. (2024). Ramadan Tradition and Social Piety Reproduction in Indonesia. *Jurnal Penelitian*, 84–100.
- Shalihin, N., Firdaus, F., Yulia, Y., & Wardi, U. (2020). Ramadan and strengthening of the social capital of Indonesian Muslim communities. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 76(3).
- Shalihin, N., & Sholihin, M. (2022). Ramadan: the month of fasting for muslim and social cohesion—mapping the unexplored effect. *Heliyon*, 8(10).
- Spradley, J. (1980). *Participant Observation*. Holt, Rineart and WinSton, Inc. New York.
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage publications.