

HARNESSING *TA'AWUN* FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT RUMAH MAKAN MKITCHEN

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation and assistance) in youth-led initiatives focusing on employment, empowerment, and entrepreneurship for underprivileged youth at Rumah Makan Mkitchen. The concept of *ta'awun* fosters a culture of care, collaboration, and collective responsibility, aligning with sustainable community development goals. Rumah Makan Mkitchen serves not only as a platform for free food distribution but also as a nurturing ground for skill development, self-reliance, and economic participation among disadvantaged youth. However, while youth leadership and enthusiasm are present, challenges persist in scaling sustainable employment opportunities and transforming empowerment efforts into long-term entrepreneurial ventures. This research investigated the *ta'awun* approaches embedded in youth-led programs with key barriers and opportunities in enhancing employment, empowerment, and entrepreneurship outcomes for underprivileged youth. The study employed a qualitative approach through interviews with Rumah Makan Mkitchen youth volunteers, beneficiaries, and program coordinators. The findings contributed to the design of community-driven, faith-based models for youth development that address economic vulnerability while fostering social cohesion.

Keywords: *Ta'awun*; youth empowerment; Rumah Makan Mkitchen; community development

1. INTRODUCTION

Youth play a critical role in shaping the future of societies, especially in fostering social harmony and addressing socio-economic challenges (Milson, 2024; Stone, 2024; Mazzucato & Ogden, 2025). In response to these challenges, faith-based and community-driven initiatives have emerged as powerful vehicles for transformation (Sorenson & Milbrandt, 2023; Saritoprak & Abu-Raiya, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2025). One such initiative is Rumah Makan Mkitchen, a free food house established with the mission to not only provide daily sustenance to disadvantaged communities but also to serve as a platform for developing youth leadership, employment, and entrepreneurship skills. Incorporating the Islamic value of *ta'awun*—mutual cooperation and collective responsibility—is central to these efforts (Mazlan & Khairuldin, 2018; Mhd. Sarif & Ismail, 2022; Saputra, 2022; Mhd Sarif et al., 2023).

Ta'awun encourages youth to work together for the common good, promoting teamwork, empathy, and continuous support (Djardin, 2024; Iwarjah, 2024; Mhd. Sarif et al., 2024). This value aligns with global calls for community-based solutions in addressing poverty and unemployment while nurturing a peaceful and inclusive society (Zulkifli et al., 2021; Zunaidi et al., 2024; Majeed et al., 2025). These moral values naturally enhance teamwork and continuous mutual support among young people (Na'imah et al., 2023; Muizzuddin et al., 2024; Wahab et al., 2024; Afyah & Yenuri, 2025). Likewise in the educational and youth activism contexts (Stone, 2024; Wahab et al., 2024). This study, therefore, seeks to explore how the spirit of *ta'awun* is harnessed in youth-led employment, empowerment, and entrepreneurship programs at Rumah Makan Mkitchen.

2. METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how the spirit of *ta'awun* was harnessed in youth-led employment, empowerment, and entrepreneurship initiatives at Rumah Makan Mkitchen (Dahlan & Ibrahim, 2021; Harmain et al., 2023). The qualitative approach was appropriate for understanding in-depth experiences, perceptions, and motivations of individuals involved in these community-driven efforts (Eisenhart & Jurow, 2011; Drisko, 2025; Köhler et al., 2025; Tisdell et al., 2025). The research focused on gathering rich, descriptive data through semi-structured personal interviews (Crick, 2021; Flick et al., 2025). The study purposively selected eight participants who were directly involved with Rumah Makan Mkitchen (Dahlan & Ibrahim, 2021; Douglas, 2022; Thomas, 2022; Harmain et al., 2023; Flick et al., 2025). These participants consisted of three youth volunteers (V1, V2, and V3) who had taken leadership roles in implementing employment, empowerment, and entrepreneurship programs; three beneficiaries (B1, B2, and B3) representing underprivileged youth who had received support and participated in the initiatives; and two program coordinators (PC1 and PC2) who oversaw and managed the overall planning and execution of Rumah Makan Mkitchen activities and youth-led programs. To ensure validity and robustness, the interview instrument and protocol were reviewed and validated by six subject matter experts. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data (Fona, 2024; Özden, 2024; Tisdell et al., 2025). To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of responses with participants for verification and validation (Fona, 2024; Özden, 2024; Tisdell et al., 2025). Triangulation was applied by comparing data from the three respondent groups, and reflexive journaling was maintained by the researcher throughout the study to minimize bias and enhance transparency (Dolczweski, 2022; Karatsareas, 2022; Tisdell et al., 2025).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Youth Volunteers

The findings from youth volunteers at Rumah Makan Mkitchen illustrate how *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) is actively practiced through shared responsibilities, collaborative mentoring, and collective participation in tasks such as cooking, packing, marketing, and fundraising. These collaborative efforts reflect the core principles of trust, shared values, and informal networks strengthen bonding social capital and enable youth and community members to work together toward common social goals (Drisko, 2025; Köhler et al., 2025; Iwarjah, 2024). Youth volunteers supporting one another in entrepreneurial ventures like food sales and marketing exemplify how strong social ties fuel sustainable, community-driven initiatives (Mhd. Sarif et al., 2024; Zunaidi et al., 2024). The Rumah Makan Mkitchen provides a safe, low-risk environment for youth to build leadership, business, and interpersonal skills through mentoring and hands-on learning (Tisdell et al., 2025; Mandich et al., 2024). However, challenges such as shyness and low confidence suggest the need for informal and

inclusive learning environments to promote self-efficacy and active participation (Majeed et al., 2025). In *ta'awun*-driven culture, youth leadership, digital literacy, and spiritual motivation—forms the foundation of its sustainable impact and competitive advantage (Mazzucato & Ogden, 2025; Hidayat et al., 2025). Indeed, *ta'awun* supports distributed leadership, social capital flourishes through mutual trust and shared learning, empowerment requires both structural and emotional support, and Rumah Makan Mkitchen's intangible assets are central to its community development model (Milson, 2024; Djidin, 2024).

3.2 Beneficiaries

The experiences of beneficiaries at Rumah Makan Mkitchen reflect how the spirit of *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) through skill-building, emotional support, and social inclusion. These emphasize capacity building through participation, confidence, and skills acquisition, enabling individuals to gradually gain control over their lives (Tisdell et al., 2025; Mandich et al., 2024; Majeed et al., 2025). Nonetheless, challenges such as limited finances, fear, and lack of family support underline the need for continuous mentoring, provision of starter packs, informal learning settings, and parent engagement to sustain empowerment (Milson, 2024; Djidin, 2024; Dahlan & Ibrahim, 2021). The trust-based relationships between volunteers and beneficiaries foster bonding and bridging social capital, creating a supportive environment for economic and social progress (Drisko, 2025; Köhler et al., 2025; Iwarjah, 2024; Mhd. Sarif et al., 2024). Beneficiaries' increased confidence and ability to engage in community-based ventures demonstrate how informal networks strengthen resilience and inclusion (Zunaidi et al., 2024). In *ta'awun*-centered culture, digital skills, and spiritual values contributing to sustainable social transformation (Mazzucato & Ogden, 2025; Hidayat et al., 2025; Harmain et al., 2023).

3.3 Program Coordinators

The perspectives of program coordinators (PC1 and PC2) at Rumah Makan Mkitchen reveal how the platform effectively cultivates *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), leadership, and sustainable youth engagement. The leadership development through peer support, collaborative idea generation, and practical involvement in tasks like managing stalls and online sales—focuses on participation, skill-building, and self-efficacy (Tisdell et al., 2025; Mandich et al., 2024; Majeed et al., 2025). There are also challenges, including volunteer inconsistency, distractions from academic and social obligations, and reduced motivation, suggesting the need for structured mentoring, short workshops, and motivational incentives to maintain engagement (Milson, 2024; Djidin, 2024). However, trust, cooperation, and peer relationships fostered at Rumah Makanb Mkitchen enhance bonding and bridging capital (Drisko, 2025; Köhler et al., 2025; Iwarjah, 2024). A notable example is the formation of a catering business by two volunteers who met through the program, illustrating how social networks can yield sustainable socio-economic outcomes (Zunaidi et al., 2024; Mhd. Sarif et al., 2024) that enabled by Rumah Makan Mkitchen's long-term innovation and impact (Mazzucato & Ogden, 2025; Hidayat et al., 2025; Harmain et al., 2023; Dahlan & Ibrahim, 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Rumah Makan Mkitchen stood as a living embodiment of how the Islamic value of *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) has harnessed youth-led employment, empowerment, and entrepreneurship, particularly for underprivileged youth and single mothers into a high leap. The initiate translated *ta'awun* into structured, action-oriented practices—such as peer mentorship, collaborative learning, and hands-on skills training—where youth volunteers acted as agents of change by sharing their knowledge in areas like cooking, digital marketing, and micro-enterprise

development. Through this process, the youth not only cultivated leadership and entrepreneurial skills for themselves but also uplifted marginalized individuals, fostering dignity, confidence, and self-reliance among participants. Looking ahead, future research could explore the long-term impact of *ta'awun*-driven empowerment program on career growth, family wellbeing, and community development, while also examining how the Rumah Makan Mkitchen model could be adapted across various socio-cultural contexts.

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