

Albukhary Foundation As A Role Model In Implementing Islamic Social Responsibility

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INTRODUCTION

Despite Syed Mokhtar Albukhary being the richest Malay businessman in Malaysia today, his past experience of poverty gave him the understanding for the hardship of the poor and the needy people in the society. Due to his passion to help others, he established Albukhary Foundation in 1996. The foundation translates the founder's gratitude to Allah S.W.T for all the blessings and fortune that he has. Albukhary Foundation has expanded overtime with expansion of Albukhary global business empire. Today, although the foundation is based in Malaysia, its initiatives and projects are in almost 50 countries spanning across five continents. With the goal of building a better world through several social welfare, education and cultural projects, the foundation has spent more than RM1.6 Billion. For over 20 years since its inception, the foundation has improved the life of the poor and the needy across the globe. According to the founder, his foundation is not based on the western concept of corporate social responsibility; but it is an Islamic social responsibility which is purely based on *Taqwa* and *Ehsan* values. This is a practical example that can be emulated by other Muslim businesses and companies.

As the gap between rich and the poor widen in many societies, adoption of such foundation practices by Muslim companies and businesses based on the Islamic social responsibility could help improve on the social welfare of the people. If other companies are doing similar activities, the gap will be reduced and societies will be more sustainable. Such practice should be appreciated and taught to students and entrepreneurs in order to make them think on how they can improve on the welfare of others. To the researchers' best of knowledge, there is hardly any previous case studies of companies that implement the concept of Islamic social responsibility. For that reason, the researchers believe that such practice will make a better future for individuals, companies, and government. When companies' owners practicing such concept by helping others for *Rabbani* (divine) reason, it will make them happy (as they are doing it

sincerely for the sake of Allah which will result in getting reward in the Hereafter) and the society will live with harmony regardless of the economic inequality. In addition, when needy individuals get more financial support from companies (by practicing the Islamic social responsibility), it is expected to be appreciated by the government as it supports its efforts to help its citizens. Therefore, this case is aimed to explore such practice through a practical example (via Albukhary Foundation as a role model) in implementing the concept of Islamic social responsibility.

ALBUKHARY FOUNDATION FLAGSHIP PROGRAMS:

Albukhary Foundation was established in March 1996 as a charity body which helped the poor, supported the development of Islamic art and culture as well as promoting understanding between civilizations. Among the main objectives, Albukhary Foundation is encouraging the Islamic brotherhood. The foundation comprises of two parts. One part, the exercise of charity works while the other part manages the distribution of funds from every company in which the founder has interest in. There are eight programs that run in Albukhary Foundation which are (1) Albukhary Scholarship Program, (2) Albukhary Tuition Program, (3) Hajj Pilgrimage Program, (4) Khidmat Van Jenazah Albukhary Care, (5) Rohingya Education Center, (6) The Read Program, (7) Turkey Albukhary Culture and Language Camp 2016 and (8) Language & Management Trainee. Details about the said programs are presented next.

1. ALBUKHARY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Progressive leadership development in some Muslim countries is bottlenecked by the lack of quality tertiary education and the deteriorating state of poverty that some of the Muslim communities in those countries wallow in. It is against this backdrop that Albukhary Foundation, in 2005, with a mission to attenuate these challenges, setup a scholarship program that provides brilliant high school students with qualitative tertiary education that equips them with the necessary skills to become responsible future leaders who will contribute towards the betterment of their respective countries. This program has given students scholarships to study at Albukhary International University (AiU), located in Alor Setar/Kedah-Malaysia, or in other universities (mainly government and private universities in Malaysia). This scholarship program has

benefitted more than 800 students from fifty countries, spanning countries in the far east of Africa to countries in the Asian continent. These trained international students constitute 70 percent of the beneficiaries of the Foundation's scholarship program while the rest are comprised of Malaysians. Furthermore, 90 percent of the total beneficiaries are Muslims and the rest are non-Muslims.

To reflect the concept of Islamic social responsibility, the foundation, via this program, tries its best to contribute to socio-economic development of the society, i.e. especially poor societies. Producing highly qualified (with ethical values) helps improving the overall well-being of a society. In addition, the foundation's sponsored students are encouraged to do community services, during their time of study, with the hope that, after graduation, they will continue do community services (in any capacity they can) and give back to their society without always asking for return. This will enhance and increase the bond of brotherhood and sisterhood among all society members. This program looks at volunteerism and leadership as two sides of the same coin. Because of that, voluntary service is embodied as part of the leadership trait that should be achieved through this program.

This program is one example of the founder's noble initiatives to help those who cannot afford to pay for tuition fee. Embarking on the educational emancipation, especially Muslims who lack the financial means, is a noble objective that resonates with the Islamic ethics, which consequently influences the corporate social responsibility of a Foundation like Albukhary. Islamic scholars have consistently emphasized that Islam is a religion that holds knowledge to a very high degree primarily because of two reasons: (i) Allah commanded the prophet to read, thus implicitly instructing he and his nation to engage in all manifestations of "read", and (ii) one of the *Maqasid Shari'ah* (objectives of the Islamic law) is *Hifdh-al-'Aql* (preservation of the intellect) which requires the act of learning or seeking knowledge to fulfill it. It is evident that the essence of the tertiary scholarship program of Albukhary Foundation is to facilitate the learning and educational requirements of the two aforementioned religious obligations for individuals incapable of affording them. This is buttressed by various prophetic narrations in which the prophet enjoined or recommended assistance to the poor. Examples are: "Spend on others and I (Allah) will spend on you" (Bukhari and Muslim). "The one who looks after and

works for widow and for a poor person, is like a warrior fighting for Allah's cause or like a person who fasts during the day and prays all night." (Bukhari).

2. ALBUKHARY TUITION PROGRAM

With similar objective, to the previous program, in tackling educational challenges for underprivileged individuals, this program is focusing on Malaysian school students. It was initiated to avoid future social problems that may face those who are not doing well in school. The declining number of secondary school students, from poor rural backgrounds, passing their final year examinations, has initiated a collaboration with the Ministry of Education to form the Albukhary Tuition Program. Specifically designed to accommodate students described as 'underachievers' or 'borderline' in the English, Mathematics and Science subjects, the tuition program aims to particularly educate, motivate and tap into students full potential through remedial classes held daily after school.

The exponential success seen through the years 2001 to 2009 has led to a rapid network of 500 tuition centers that educates and benefits over 80,000 students spanning across the country. This program can be seen as a translation of the command of the Prophet Muhammed to his followers in achieving *Ehsan* (compassion and perfection). He said: "Allah loves if any of you is given a task, he/she does it in the most excellent way" (Tabarani,901; Al-Siyouti, 5232). Similarly, Al-Quran asks Muslims to perform their duties in their best capacity as the Quranic verse reads: "Allah commands you to follow *A'del* (justice), *Ehsan* (compassion and perfection), and help/give your relatives" (Al-Quran, 16:90). To reflect the foundation's value of *Ehsan* (compassion and perfection), this program is not only to provide students with the basics in the said courses but aims to achieve the highest level of understanding among targeted students for these subjects. As a result, the collaboration looks for a comprehensive approach to providing the best possible outcomes. The comprehensive structure of the tuition program, has repeatedly ensured results in the national examination are well above the national average with students achieving distinctions and credits becoming the norm. Most gratifyingly, was the students whom once faced exponential uncertainty, now have the capabilities and eligibility to attend colleges, universities and increased career opportunities.

3. HAJJ PILGRIMAGE PROGRAM

Launched in 1996, the Hajj Pilgrimage program is among the earliest initiatives of Albukhary Foundation. It collaborated with Pilgrims Fund Board of Malaysia, the Prime Minister's Department, Muslim Welfare Organization of Malaysia and Orang Asli Affair Department, with the mission to sponsor underprivileged Muslims to perform the religious pilgrimage to Makkah in Saudi Arabia. As of 2015, 897 of them have benefited from this program.

This program reflects the *Taqawa* (piety) value that looks for the hereafter reward only. It shows the Islamic motivation of the foundation in helping the Muslim society. Unlike the foundation other programs, this program has no worldly motivation as performing Hajj is to fulfill a purely religious duty, i.e. the fifth pillar of Islam. It is arguable that performing Hajj is compulsory only for those who have the financial ability, and therefore, the foundation does not have to help underprivileged Malaysian Muslims to perform Hajj (but better to give them the basic needs for their daily expenses). On the other hand, helping a Muslim to perform *Wajib* (compulsory), such as performing hajj, is better than helping him/her to perform *Mustahab* (encouraged), such as seeking perfection in the education system (Al-Qaradawi, 1998). To many Muslims, performing Hajj is like a dream comes true. The feelings of happiness and gratitude can be clearly seen by number of Muslims who were sponsored by the foundation.

4. KHIDMAT VAN JENAZAH ALBUKHARY CARE

The launch of the first stage started in Kedah state as a scheme of funeral van services for Malaysians who are in need (whether they live in urban and rural areas) and especially for those who are unable to afford the cost. This scheme is available for both young and old citizens. Such scheme was necessary as this kind of services are costly. This scheme targeted those who have migrated to the state, federal or capital city for better economic opportunity and have since taken up residence. It also emphasized on underprivileged urban areas with large focus of local migrants largely in state capital. It meant to fulfill the request of the dead people to be sent back to their hometown throughout Peninsular Malaysia.

This program reflects the *Taqawa* (piety) and also *Ta'awun* (helping each other) value that not only looks for the hereafter but also for the present life as it eases the financial burden on the dead person's family. Helping the underprivileged Muslims, who had salary below RM 1,500, has helped them to ease their affairs in the current life for the preparation of the hereafter. In addition, Allah ordered His servants who believe that mutual help and cooperation, with the condition must be on the basis of truth and piety, and do not allow them to help one another and cooperate in matters of illegal and violation as the Quranic verse reads: "And help one another in the (working) righteousness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and transgression" (Al-Quran, 5:2).

5. ROHINGYA EDUCATION CENTRE

Rohingya Education Centre (REC) was established in 2010 in Pulau Pinang with a total of 115 students followed by the second branch in Selangor by 2012 with a total of 500 students and the third branch is in Kuantan, Pahang with a total of 120 enrolled students as of May 2015. REC is a collaboration that includes the foundation, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Future Global Network (FGN). The main purpose of the program is to provide education to children displaced Rohingya Muslims and those who live around Pahang. Their status as children of refugees who migrated from oppression and cruelty in their own country caused them to be without any valid travel documents to enable them to enroll and study in government-aided schools in Malaysia. REC goal is to alleviate poverty through education by providing quality, basic education to the targeted group. REC started as a platform for the foundation to deliver basic education for the children especially in the refugee community. Rohingya children have good potential in education for their upcoming future because they are encourage to excel in the studies and continue their education at the local institutions. This program helped the children to restore their rights, dignity and religion.

This centre reflects the Islamic values of *Ehsan* (compassion) and *Ikram* (respect). The Quran asks Muslims to give all kind of needed support to individuals who are known to be vulnerable, i.e. women, orphans, children, refugees and the needy regardless of their faith or religion. Allah S.W.T says: "All those who are in dire straits, particularly children, should be treated compassionately both in word and deed" (Al-Quran, 2:83). Education for refugee children is

recognized as a universal human right but not all refugees have access to formal education. The absence of education among refugee children became a handicap for them as they grow up. It inhibits their opportunity to better life style, creating a possible second generation of an illiterate and unskilled community.

6. THE READ PROGRAM

In order to encourage reading habit in the society, there is a need to start from the beginning especially during adolescent. Albukhary Foundation has introduced the Read Program with the aim of becoming a successful national program. In the first stage, this program held concurrently in three regions situated in Kedah, Pahang and Malacca as initial projects. The program focused on the primary school students' with ages between 7 and 11 years old and it is held once a week. There are two sessions in a year with 12 classes for each cycle. It comprises four stages for the whole program, they are Alphabet Level, Words Level, Paragraph Level and Storytelling Level. Read Program is a nationwide kick start to encourage reading habits among Malaysian students in their primary school with the goals to enhance their English proficiency by improving their ability to read in English, understand the materials as a whole, and increase the confidence level to communicate in the English language. Read Alor Star and Muadzam Shah, Pahang have effectively accomplished their initial project objectives, whereas Read Malacca is still in progress as an on-going project. With the accomplishment of two initial programs, 74% of 38 participants from Alor Star and 78% of 38 participants from Muadzam Shah, Pahang successfully moved to the next level. The Read Program involved with the staffs and the volunteers, through the foundation, as mentors for the students who participate with this program. The mentor engaged with the participants by facilitating and guiding them throughout the learning process. First, the mentor will read out which will be followed with reading together with the students, and lastly the participants will read out loud in groups (each group consists of five participants).

The program is a translation of the Islamic principles of seeking knowledge (through reading) and *A'del* (justice) and equality. The program emphasized on acquiring knowledge, wisdom and skills which are important for every person to carry out his/her duties. The Quran treats knowledge as a mean to reach *Iman* (faith) for all Muslims, males and females, to becoming true

believers. This is demonstrated in the Quranic verses “Read In the name of your Lord who has created (all that exists). He has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous. Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not.” (Al Quran, 96:1-5). By providing this program, the foundation managed to achieve *A'del* and equality by making everyone in the society able to read and seek knowledge. This will result in achieving social and economic development, for the wellbeing of the community, as well as to ensure social harmony, freedom and human rights.

7. Turkey Albukhary Culture and Language Camp 2016

Turkey Albukhary Culture and Language Camp 2016 (TALC Camp 2016) was initiated and sponsored personally by the founder to strengthen the existing good relationship between Malaysia and Turkey. TALC2016 was a short course hosted at Albukhary International University in Alor Star/Kedah which emphasized on English Language proficiency. The foundation welcomed 204 talented and prudently selected Turkish students whom had displayed either great academic achievements or through certified recommendations. Many of them are seen as future leaders of Turkey through their involvement in activities at their respective institutions both inside and outside the classroom. The course consisted of an intensive Academic English Course of 30 hours per week in form of classes which was accompanied by an extra program on cultural exchange between Malaysia and Turkey. The course was designed to accommodate four separate competency levels such as elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper intermediate. The English language content for each level was designed to provide structured and progressive development in all skills, namely reading, listening, writing and speaking. To develop greater fluency and accuracy in the productive skills of speaking and writing, IELTS framework syllabus was adopted with the inclusion of specific tasks throughout the course relating to topics on the culture similarities and differences between Malaysia and Turkey. Weekly individual and group presentations were linked to their weekend activities. This enabled them to relate their vocabularies to real life experiences, consequently enhanced their confidence.

Islamically, this course can be seen as a form of *Ehsan* (compassion and perfection). Indeed, Allah commands justice, good conduct (*Ehsan*), and giving to relatives, (and He) forbids immorality, bad conduct, and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded (Al-Quran, 16: 90). Astonished knowledge contributions were given by teachers, staff and volunteers involved in the course. They provided information about Malaysia and at the same time learned about Turkish customs. Curiosity and an adventurous attitude witnessed participating in events and community engagement events that enabled them to really know the Malaysian culture. In addition, the course showed a practical example of the concept of brotherhood in Islam as people (regardless of their differences such as color, language, culture, and country) should practice such value. Allah S.W.T says: “Hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. Remember the favor of Allah upon you, when you were enemies and he brought your hearts together and you became brothers by his favor” (Al-Quran. 3:103). The interaction between the students and the volunteers of the course represented the brotherhood behavior in Islam as a comprehensive concept that is based upon good character with others. The concept of brotherhood is really applied in this program where Muslims from two countries are collaborating in one program to enclose the solidarity between two nations. The concept of brotherhood requires Muslim to be nice, passionate, and kind (which reflects the *Ehsan* concept) to other fellow Muslim in facing financial or any social difficulties. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “you won’t be considered a believer until you love for your brother as for what you love for yourself” (Bukhary and Muslim).

8. LANGUAGE & MANAGEMENT TRAINEE PROGRAM (LAMT)

The LAMT program was jointly sponsored by three main parties: TÜRGEV, Albukhary Foundation and MENTAL HR Consultancy. LAMT was an international skills enhancement program that emphasized on English language proficiency and career readiness. The program was further combined with professional skills in business management, talent development and application of information technology at the workplace in order to boost employability. The program was held in Albukhary International University, Kedah, Malaysia.

Achieving *Ehsan* (compassion and perfection) through this program is very clear as it provided the participants with necessary skills (rather than giving donations in form of money) and then

offered them jobs. It helped them to be productive in their society. Allah S.W.T prescribed *Ehsan* in everything Muslims should do. He says: “Nay, whoever submits his whole self to Allah and is a doer of *Ehsan* good he will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.” (Al-Quran, 2:112). The sponsorship covered all expenses such as fees for project management training, human resources training, and executive assistant training, return flight and ground transportation, accommodation, meals, medical and personal accident insurance and external examination fee. It helped the successful candidates in achieving the objective of the program without worrying about any financial burden.

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of Islamic social responsibility, in light of Al-Quran and Hadith, suggests that there seems to be congruence between the ideals of social responsibility and justice and business transactions in Islam that has a resonance with prevailing notions of corporate social responsibility (CSR). This perspective on social justice and responsibility lays the foundation for the study of Islamic understandings and practice of corporate social responsibility whereas the concept of CSR in western understanding differ from the Islamic understanding which beyond the quest to maximize corporate profits, corporate organizations play a crucial role in solving society's problems.

The concept of brotherhood and social justice give rise to social responsibility and makes Muslims responsible to each other. The main objective of Islamic social responsibility is to promote social justice (*A'del*) which results in attainment of *Al-Falah* (success in this life and in Hereafter). The concept of brotherhood substantiates that Muslim to be considerate, compassion, and kind (*Ehsan*) to other fellow brother in facing financial difficulty. The founder is a practical example of implementing good Islamic corporate social responsibility. Though he is one of the richest Malaysian entrepreneurs, he lived in a deprived childhood. The house that he lived did not have a bed, table or chair. Experiencing that kind of difficulty gave him additional motivation in helping others with the hope of “making a difference” in people's life. The founder said: “My mother taught us that we do not have anything until we gave him with a vengeance, hoping it will make other people's lives for the better”. He also said: “The lesson for me is that

we must always remember our roots, where we came from, and humble when blessed with good luck. If not, we may fall". This is in addition to his Islamic motivation in making all programs for the sake of Allah S.W.T regardless of people's expectations or rewards. In summary, the objective of Islamic social responsibility is to achieve happiness and success in this world and Hereafter (i.e. *Al-Falah*). Islam enjoins the removal of hardship so as to improve the standards of living of the community.

Because of his believe that wealth should be shared with others, the founder made several projects. One of the largest projects is the construction of comprehensive complex (with cost of RM400 million) in Kedah which was completed in late 2004. The complex contains mosque, cemetery, medical center, hotel, mall, international Islamic school, a university, community center, orphanages, and special academy for the elderly and higher education center. Among the major projects completed is the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur (worth RM100 million). The four story museum is the first museum in the Asia Pacific region that displays of Islamic artwork. Moreover, through his foundation, 12 mosques were built in Malaysia. Another example, and in 2000, he donated a total of RM7.75 million to the Oxford Center for Islamic Studies, which is a famous center of Islamic learning in the world. The foundation also assisted the Institute of Educational Development (IED) in the project of establishing the Institute of Medicine, Science and Technology of Asia (AIMST) in Sungai Petani, Kedah. In addition, the foundation often hosted dialogue of civilizations to promote tolerance and understanding between people of various religions and beliefs. Although the foundation emphasizes on charity projects for Muslims, it contributed to projects run by non-Muslims as well. For example, the foundation contributed RM one million for the Langkawi Project, a project initiated by Malaysian Chinese leaders to raise funds to carry out educational projects in rural areas and also provide scholarships to needy students, mainly Chinese non-Muslims.