



## **Cultivating the Evolution of Long-Term Muslim Donors in Community Revitalization Work<sup>1</sup>**

### **Case Problem Statement:**

A multi-racial urban Muslim organization (Organization) comprised of Arab, South Asian, Black, and Latino Muslims, has a decades-long track record of providing direct economic, medical, and mental health support to a low-income, majority non-Muslim clientele. It is funded by Muslim and non-Muslim foundations, as well as individual Muslim donors. The Muslim donor base, including Black and immigrant Muslims have historically supported Organization's work and brought it to where it is today, but they are yet to see what their stake in the economic development of a neighborhood is beyond their investment in direct programs and services.

Organization is trying to move this base along, and while it is easier to do so with projects like the Fresh Market that have a food access focus, and some history within the Arab business community, it is more complex to generate support for a project like the transformation of a closed school into the Regenerator. Organization is currently engaging global Muslim charities whose guiding principles might be the objectives of the Shariah - in the preservation of life, religion, intellect, property, and progeny.

### **The Main Actors:**

- Organization

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<sup>1</sup> This case was authored by an alumni fellow of the American Muslim Civic Leadership program. The case study has been anonymized to ensure the confidentiality of the actors.

- Muslim Donor Base
- Other funders
- Non-Muslim community being served

### **The Project:**

‘Happy Green’ is an equitable development neighborhood initiative led by multiple local organizations that aims to build resilient ecosystems that will bridge the health and wealth gap for residents. This comprehensive initiative is founded on a history of collaboration that has coalesced around a shared vision of resident-led community development. Located at a famous intersection in the heart of an urban center, ‘Happy Green’ will introduce three catalytic developments.

1. **The Fresh Market:** a cooperative-inspired fresh produce market and headquarters for Organization’s Corner Store Campaign.
2. **The Regenerator:** an innovative repurposing of a former City Public School as a hub for housing, healthcare, and jobs for returning citizens and high-risk youth, and green enterprise.
3. **‘Green’ Village:** a mixed-use development with 20 mixed-income rental units, a Business Incubator, and well-known Italian restaurant.

Additionally, ‘Happy Green’ will launch two accompanying strategies for broader revitalization:

- 1) a housing vision to rehab 350 vacant properties in surrounding blocks and
- 2) a targeted transit advocacy agenda to reopen the light Rail Line station and attract transit-oriented development resources.

‘Happy Green’ involves multiple actors including the lead organizations, local community members, government players, foundations, the corporate sector, and Organization’s Muslim donor base (that includes individuals and global Muslim charities/relief organizations).

The project is characteristic of community development but is also so much more. It is an attempt to redress wrongs, call out systemic and structural injustices and call to a different and more just reality, in which our communities have the opportunity to build a just community, which can provide multiple opportunities to repair harm.

### **Opportunities:**

1. Flipping the development paradigm - from one that is led by affluent developers with market interests to one that is led by grassroots community organizations and fueled by the power of local community members.
2. Bringing public attention to the type of criminal disinvestment in the neighborhood that results in closed and vacant schools, and shuttered train stations. Such attention has resulted in successful negotiations with City Public Schools and the Department of Planning & Development for the lead organizations to acquire the school and transform it into the Regenerator, the commitment of the Mayor, and is continuing in the ongoing struggle to acquire public money for the purpose.
3. The philanthropic community realizing a role beyond programs, direct services, and campaigns into the arena of economic development - addressing root causes of the issues that no amount of programming can solve.
4. The Muslim donor base supporting such projects - evolving their understanding of sadaqah into creating a more active public profile as we navigate some of the most tense racial moments of the decade.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Which Shariah objectives (preservation of life, religion, intellect, property, progeny) best connect to Happy Green's goals and how do the identified objectives align with Happy Green's mission and goals?
2. How can the Organization message Happy Green's connection to the objectives of Sharia to increase support among its Muslim donor base?
3. How can Happy Green's approach to this project help expand and evolve the Muslim community's understanding and approach to sadaqah?
4. Happy Green is concerned with advancing racial equity. How does its approach support or impede the move toward racial equity? What are some other ways in which it can be envisioned to support racial equity?