



HAKI Community Organization's founder and director, Mohamed Salim Bahamadi, loads donated food into his car for delivery.

Food Security & Ramadan

Many Civic Life Staff have been working at the Emergency Coordination Center through our State of Emergency, including assisting with the City's food insecurity project. As part of this effort, [HAKI Community Organization](#) worked with the Emergency Coordination Center and Portland Fire & Rescue to collect and deliver food to local families for Ramadan.

Portland's HAKI Organization and Center was created in 2018 to be a resource of education, advocacy, and empowerment. In the spirit of a welcoming smile,

open heart, and helping hand, the HAKI Center is home of support, camaraderie, and multi-cultural acceptance. We interviewed HAKI's founder and director, Mohamed Salim Bahamadi.

Civic Life: Why did you choose to create HAKI Community Organization?

Mohamed Bahamadi: My Mom is Indian, my Dad is Arab from Yemen. I am from Kenya, and I came to America in September 2012 with my wife and three boys (we now have six children, aged 1 year old to 12 years). At that time, I sought a lot of help from other organizations, and I noticed that my community, Swahili speaking people, were being left behind because we were not represented. I decided to start a nonprofit, so I could employ people and see that people get the help they need.

Civic Life: How has your community been impacted by COVID-19?

Bahamadi: Some are staying at home with this pandemic, and some people are going to work. Either way, it's not enough, because we also have families back home that we help: \$20, \$50, whatever we have, we share with them.

If you go out in Kenya [during the pandemic], people will get beaten up. And so they have to stay home, and are not able to work. We are sharing more with our families back in Africa, and that has impacted us. Seniors here are also afraid to go out. They call, and I take from my own pocket to help.

Civic Life: Ramadan has begun, and you have collected food. What is happening?

Bahamadi: We fast from sunrise to sunset. Right now, that is 16 hours. Sixteen hours of fasting for 30 days. When you break your fast, you have a specific craving. Not just rice, but Basmati rice. Not just meat, but lamb curry. That is important. During Ramadan, it is a must to break your fast with dates. It gives you a little boost of nutrients your body needs after a long day of fasting. Coffee to wake us up, then dates, then prayer, and then sharing with food and talk.

We have always been helping each other. If we have two bags of flour, you share with others. But now, when everyone is locked away, we must ask outside our communities for assistance. Now everyone is in the same situation.

Civic Life: What do you expect to happen this Ramadan that may be different

from previous years?

Bahamadi: It's very hard. We do meetings with video calls, but many people still have analog phones. They are just calling each other.

Fasting doesn't mean avoiding food. It is also about avoiding bad words, bad deeds. If you speak in an inappropriate way, you have broken your fast. You have to stretch your hand and share, and then they will share with you. If you see something on the road, remove it so that others don't trip. Ramadan is to remind us to be good, to be thankful, to do our prayers. Why fast for food? It helps remind us that others do not have food, and makes us understand poor people and people who don't have food, how they feel. It's a reminder to turn around and help people.

Civic Life: How can people support you in your efforts?

Bahamadi: I need help with funding. Nothing can be done without funding. And please spread the word about what we do. [HAKI Community Organization](#) is a new organization, and so we need help with social media to spread the word about what we are doing and to invite people. I am talking with Oregon Food Bank to start a food pantry. I work as a bus driver for Neighborhood House, that is how I sustain myself.

If you, or someone you know, needs help accessing food assistance programs, please call (503) 823-4000. Multnomah County also has information available on their [211 website](#) or by calling 2-1-1 or (866) 698-6155.

