

AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of further generations to meet their own needs. According to Islamic teachings, everything on earth was created for the service of human beings. Hence, Islam allows the consumption of the natural environment but forbids unnecessary destruction and endeavors to balance environmental protection with social and economic development. This paper will discuss sustainable development in the light of Islam with special reference to the challenges facing Pakistan.

Key words: Sustainable, Social, Economic, Environment, Development, Ecology.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

On 25th September 2015, the 193 countries of the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda for Sustainable Development. This Agenda has 92 paragraphs, 51 outlines, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and associated to it 169 targets and 232 indicators.¹

Sustainable development is a way for people to use resources without the resources running out. Further, Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This requires meeting the basic needs of all peoples and extending to them the opportunity to fulfil their

¹. See the UNO website under 'sustainable development'.

aspirations for a better future. Sustainable Development can be measured in social, economic and environmental terms.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRESS

Environmental progress relies on efforts to counteract global warming. We should use the sun and minerals such as coal for energy, that is, solar and wind energy. Green parks should be established for recreation and for better environment and the forests should not be lost.

SOCIAL PROGRESS

Social progress means to treat the community with kindness by encouraging them to think because thinking is essential for their wellbeing. People should become aware of their resources and the importance of not cutting down the trees. Poverty must be eradicated from the face of the earth and better living standards must be achieved.

ECONOMIC PROGRESS

Economic progress means to benefit from trade. People should be encouraged to make efforts in order to improve the quality of their life.

List of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

1. Poverty eradication
2. Extermination of hunger
3. Care of health
4. Education for all
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Clean energy
8. Decent work and living standards
9. Industry leading to innovative infrastructure

10. Reduction of social and economic inequality
11. Sustainable cities and community welfare
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Action against global warming
14. Life in the rivers and oceans
15. Care of the earth
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
17. Partnership to achieve common goals

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND ISLAM

The environment encompasses natural resources like soil, flora, fauna, water, air, light that are necessary for living organisms. Islam teaches that these resources have been created by Allah with a purpose.²

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا بَاطِلًا ذَلِكَ ظَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا قَوْلًا لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنَ النَّارِ

The purpose is to provide sustenance for human life on earth.³ Human interaction with the environment could take the shape of social and economic activities for the development of a better environment, which, in turn, could provide the opportunity for improved social and economic activities such as housing, commerce, industry, tourism, transportation and recreation. Obviously, this approach will differ from the conventional approach to sustainability where the environment is only considered to be an aspect of sustainability and is not regarded as the key issue.

Islam gives human beings the responsibility to preserve and protect the environment. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) left a noble example of being eco-friendly and going green in his life. He spent time in eco-friendly efforts to help humanity, caring for other creatures of God and preserving the earth by planting trees and protecting the environment. The Prophet

². Qur'an, 38:27

³. Qur'an, 2:60

(PBUH) exhorted his companion to plant trees saying, "Whosoever plants a tree and diligently looks after it until it matures and bears fruits is rewarded". Planting a tree is a *sadaqa jariya* in Islam for the poor and a rich alike.

انس بن مالك قال : قال رسول الله ﷺ ان قامت على احدكم القيامة و في يده فسيلة فليغرسها⁴

If the hour (the Day of Judgment) is about to happen and one of you is holding a plant, let him take an advantage of even one second before the final hour to plant it.

He further said:

قال رسول الله ﷺ : لا يغرس مسلم غرساً فيا كل منه انسان اودابة او طائر الا كان له صدقة⁵

If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, this will be regarded as a gift from him.

In another Hadith, the Prophet said:

ان رسول الله ﷺ مرّ لعبد و هو يتوضأ فقال: ما هذا السرف، فقال : افى الوضو اسراف ، قال: نعم ، "وان كنت على نهرجار"⁶

One day the Prophet (PBUH) passed by Saad b.abi Waqas, while he was performing *wudu* and the Prophet (PBUH) said, 'Saad what is this wastage?' Saad said, 'Is there wastage in *wudu* as well?' The Prophet said, 'Yes, even if you are at a flowing river.'

It is very important for a Muslim to respect the sacredness of the environment. The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Beware of the three acts that

4. ابن حنبل، احمد بن محمد، ابو عبدالله، مسند، مؤسسه الرساله، 1421 هـ (رقم الحديث: 12999) ()

5. ايضاً (رقم الحديث: 12999) ()

6. ابن ماجه ، محمد بن يزيد القزوينى ، سنن ، باب ماجاء فى القصد فى الوضوء ، دار احياء الكتب العربيه، س ن ، (رقم .
الحديث: 425) ()

cause you to be cursed. First, relieving yourself in shaded places; second, in a walkway and thirdly, in a watering place.”⁷

Similarly, the prophet (PBUH) gave paramount importance to street clean-ups when he said, “Removing harmful things from the road is an act of charity.”⁸

RIGHTS OF ANIMALS IN ISLAM

The Prophet (PBUH) and his companions taught us how to protect the rights of animals. Islam teaches that we should treat animals with kindness and love because these can be considered as similar to human community. “There is not a moving creature on earth, not a bird that flies with its two wings but are communities like you. We have neglected nothing in the Quran; then unto your Lord they all shall be gathered.”⁹

رأ رسول الله ﷺ حماراً هو اسوم الوجهه فانكره ذلك¹⁰

Once the Prophet (PBUH) saw a donkey hot-branded on the muzzle and said, “May Allah curse the person who marked this animal.”

Abu Masood said, “The Prophet (PBUH) saw a colony of ants which we have burned. He asked, “Who is responsible for this act?” We answered, “We are.” The Prophet (PBUH) replied, “No one is allowed to punish with fire except Allah who made it.”¹¹

In another hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) said:

عن نافع عن عبد الله ان رسول الله ﷺ قال: عذبت امرأة في هرة سجنها حتى ماتت فدخلت فيها النار....¹²

بخارى ، محمد بن اسماعيل، الجامع ، الصحيح ، باب اماطة الااذى، دار بيروت، 1422 هـ ، ج 3 ، ص 133 .

8. ibid.

9. Qur’an, 6:38

10. (مسلم بن حجاج ، صحيح مسلم ، دار احياء التراث العربى ، بيروت،(رقم الحديث:2118)

11. (ابو داؤد ، سليمان بن اشعث، سنن ، امكته العصريه ، بيروت ، س ن (رقم الحديث:5266)

12. (مسلم بن حجاج، صحيح مسلم ، باب تحريم قتل الهرة ، دار احياء التراث العربى (رقم الحديث: 2242)

A woman was chastised and thrown into hell because she starved a cat to death. The woman had given neither the cat neither water nor food. Moreover, the cat was not given the freedom to feed herself with little animals like mice.

In another hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) said:

ان رجلاً رأى كلباً يا كل الثرى، من العطش فاخذ الرجل خفه، فجعل يعرف له به حتى ارواه فشكر الله، فادخله الجنة¹³

A man was thirsty and he came across a well so he went down to quench his thirst. When he came up from the well, he saw a dog licking the mud. He thought that the dog must be suffering from thirst as he had so he went down again into the well and brought back some water in his shoe. Allah accepted this act and forgave him his sins.

Islam shares the religious heritage of Judaism and Christianity but early Islam existed in a specific environmental context because Islam arose amongst the Arab Bedouin. These people were nomads and herders from ancient times and they showed great awareness of their environment by respecting the forces of nature. The stark environment of the Arabian desert fostered an attitude of submission to God among the Arab Bedouin.

In Islam, the Qur'an and the Hadith, which are the main sources of environmental ethos, have found expression in Islamic law. The importance of ecology in Islam is evident from the fact that one-eighth of the Qur'an exhorts Muslims to meditate on nature.

Khalid (1996:20) notes that humans are the friends of the earth, not its masters.¹⁴

بخارى ، محمد بن اسماعيل ، الجامع الصحيح ، باب الماء ، دار طوق النجاة ، بيروت، 1422 هـ (رقم الحديث: 173)

¹⁴. Khalid, F. (1996), "Guardians of the Natural Order," *Our Planet*, 8 (2), pp. 18-25.

Some hadith note that cruelty to animals and wanton defacement of nature is forbidden and warrants divine punishment. Kindness shown to animals, however, bestows God's reward. The matter explained in a hadith of the Prophet (PBUH)

من قتل عصفوراً عبثاً¹⁵

Al-Sharid, one of the first companions, provides the following narration from the Prophet (PBUH): "If you kill a sparrow knowingly, it will hasten to God on the Day of Judgment and say: O Lord! So and so killed me for play and not for use!"

Muslim jurists derived a series of injunctions dealing with management and ownership of pastures, land, fuel, wood and water.¹⁶ This includes establishment of conservation zones (*Hima*) and wildlife sanctuaries (*Haram*). *Hima* and *Haram* are considered protected zones for the maintenance of biodiversity and were sanctuaries with its flora and fauna receiving special protection.¹⁷ In such places industrial development, habitation and extensive grazing are not allowed. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) established such zones as public property or common lands managed and protected by public authority for the conservation of natural resources.

WATER WASTAGE

Based on the Prophet's ruling, water wastage was disapproved of and a limited amount of water was allocated to each person in order to ensure the preservation of moisture in the soil needed by crops in the Arabian

15. احمد بن حنبل ، مسند ، حديث الثريد بن سويد الثقفي ، مؤسسة الرسالة، 1421 هـ (رقم الحديث: 19470)

16. Hameed, S. E. (1993), "Seeing the Environment through Islamic Eyes: Application of Shariah to Natural Resources," JOAEA, 6 (2), pp. 145-164.

17. Chelhold, J. (1971), *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (3rd Edition), Leiden: Brill.

Peninsula.¹⁸ The beliefs, traditions and values of Islam provide an effective and comprehensive solution to the current environmental challenges faced by the human race. Islam has a tradition of highlighting the importance of environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources. According to Islamic law, the basic elements of nature, namely, land, water, fire, forest and light belong to all living things not just to human beings. The holy Qur'an and the Sunnah are a guiding light to promote sustainable development in every country throughout the world. Allah commands human beings to avoid doing mischief and wasting resources as these acts cause the degradation of the environment. Human beings may exploit natural resources on the condition that their actions will not destroy the environment. The Holy Qur'an makes many references to ecology and contains some important principles for environmental conservation.

CONCEPT OF TRUSTEESHIP

Caliphs or vicegerents should take every necessary step to ensure that property entrusted to them is passed on to the next generation in as pure a form as possible. According to Islam, each person is a custodian of nature and must live in harmony with other creatures. Allah dislikes corruption of all kinds including environmental corruption that includes industrial pollution, environmental damage and reckless exploitation and mismanagement of natural resources. The Qur'an says that:

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا لَكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ¹⁹

Allah loves not those who do mischief. Moreover, do no mischief on the earth after it has been set in order. This will be best for you, if you have faith.

¹⁸. Wilkinson, J.C. (1990), "Muslim Land and Water Law," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 1, pp. 54-72.

¹⁹. Qur'an, 7:85

The Prophet (PBUH) said, “Whosoever brings dead land to life, for him is a reward in it, and whatever creature seeking food eats of it shall be reckoned as charity from him.”²⁰ In the Sharia law, there is responsibility placed on upstream farms to be considerate of downstream users. The farmer who utilizes water upstream must release some of it for the benefit of those downstream. The Qur’an says:

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ²¹

Eat and drink but waste not by excess; he loves not the excessive.

Water plays an important socio-religious function by cleaning the body and clothes of impurities so that human beings can be purified. Muslims are allowed to pray only after cleaning themselves with pure water. Furthermore, worship must take place in a clean area. No one is allowed to bathe in unmoving water. The Prophet (PBUH) said. “Don’t waste water, even by a flowing stream.”²² Trees should not be cut down, even at a time of war. The plantation of trees is encouraged even when one is close to death, as mentioned above.

MUSLIMS AND ECOLOGY

The protection, conservation and development of the environment and natural resources is a religious duty to which every Muslim should be committed. Do good even as God has done good to you and do not go after corruption in any form on earth for God does not like corruptors. Islam provides detailed ethical principles on the environment. We also need to explore what western and eastern Muslim thinkers have written on Islam and the environment. The three founding ideas of Islam’s ecological ethics are *Tawhid*, *Khilafah* and *Akhirah*. The cornerstone of *Tawhid* is that

ابن حنبل، احمد بن محمد ، مسند ، مؤسسة الرسالة ، 1421 هـ (رقم الحديث: 12999) .

²¹. Qur’an, 7:31

²². See above note 7

Allah created the universe and that all that exists reflects unity in diversity.²³ According to Muslim scholars, the universe is governed and regulated by the principles of unity, balance and harmony that characterize the interactive and unifying principle of *Tawhid*. The Quran (14: 19-20; 46: 3; 15: 85-86) repeatedly mentions that the universe is characterized by proportion, harmony and beauty. According to Islam, God intended the universe to remain in balance. Nature provides a source of inspiration and guidance for understanding the divine action in creation.²⁴

The second concept is *Khilafah*. The Qur'an declares that human beings are the vicegerents of the earth. Furthermore, human beings should refrain from harming the environment.²⁵ The importance of ecology in Islam is affirmed by the fact that one-eighth of the Qur'an exhorts Muslims to reflect on nature. Sociologists like Ali Shariati contend that the notion of stewardship should include its spiritual dimension.²⁶ Similarly, Khalid notes that human beings are the friends of the Earth, not its masters.²⁷

The third concept of Islamic environmental ethics is *Akhirah*, which means human beings are accountable in the hereafter for their actions. Zaide notes that no generation has the right to pollute the earth in a way that depletes its resources and degrades its biological systems.²⁸ Some scholars are of the view that human beings enjoy special privileges on earth while others maintain that all creatures have equal rights on earth.²⁹

²³ Chittick, W. (1986), "God surrounds all things: an Islamic perspective on the environment" *The World and Islam*, 1 (6), pp. 671 - 678.

²⁴ Faruqi, I. R. (1980), *Islam and culture*, Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Bela Islam, Malaysia

²⁵ Qur'an, 2: 30; Q, 7: 56.

²⁶ Shariati, A. (1979), *On the Sociology of Islam*, Hamid Algar (trans.), Berkeley: Mizan.

²⁷ See footnote 14.

²⁸ Weeramantry, C. G. (1998), *Islamic Jurisprudence: and International Perspective*, New York: St. Martin.

²⁹ Timm, R. E. (1993), "The Ecological Fallout of Islamic Creation Theology" in M.E. Tucker and J. A. Grim (eds.), *Worldview and Ecology*, pp. 83-95.

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND ISLAM

Human beings consist of males and females, tribes and nations and were created to get to know each other. However, Islam recognizes that the best among them are those who recognize and acknowledge their Creator.³⁰ This is the underlying principle of the Islamic social construct that also connects human being with the environment. According to the Caliph Umar, by bestowing upon them such benefits and authority, the Lord honored human beings above all other creatures. Beginning with the principles of *fiqh al-ibadah*, a Muslim obeys family institutions according to the regulations of *fiqh al-munakahat* and is eventually subject to the human economic interactions according to *fiqh al-muamlat*.

Pursuant to these individual, family and communal aspects, Islam prescribes punishment for wrongdoings according to *fiqh al-janayat*.³¹ In essence, this is how Islam educates its followers spiritually and in practice. In Islam, Muslims are guided by five pillars. The relationship between man and God as well as between man and nature can be illustrated by the two different modes, that is, the nurturing mode and the interventionist mode. Instead of performing his role as the steward of nature, human beings have manipulated the world and consumed nature without considering religious values. For this reason, they will be held responsible and accountable to God.³²

Nurturing	Interventionist
God	God
Nature	Humans
Human	Nature

³⁰. Qur'an, 49:13

³¹. Saniotis, A., "Muslims and Ecology," *Contemporary Islam*, 6 (2) July 2012, University of Adelaide, Australia.

³². *ibid.*

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY IN ISLAM

Islam promotes development and growth both socially and economically and considers poverty close to disbelief. Islam provides effective means of socio-economic improvement via endowment and alms-giving. Islam is concerned about wealth distribution. All economic dealings and transactions among people happen in the environment called “city”, which is created by human planning and building. The city environment does not only provide raw materials but also facilitates economic activities, such as shelters, parks, factories, managers and laborers. Excessive use of natural resources may cause ozone depletion and the melting of ice caps, global warming, the rising of sea level and deforestation. Meanwhile, the social impact can be seen in terms of reduction of the quality of life and social inequality. Now, the intricacy and the significance of these three elements namely the environment, the society and the economy is undeniable. Viewed from the angle of sustainability, economic development is the process of utilizing natural resources for human well-being. Man is responsible to manage the earth.³³

FORMULATION OF GOALS FOR ACTION

Despite the fact that currently around 1 billion people still live on less than \$ 1.25 a day, significant progress has made in tackling poverty. More than 800 million people do not have enough food to eat. Extreme events and climate change is causing widespread damage to natural systems. In several countries, women’s rights are still not fully respected. Many women still die in childbirth. To solve these issues, we need to achieve environmental sustainability and human well-being. Economic growth based on fossil fuel, unsustainable consumption, income inequality, unchecked urbanization, deforestation and climate change remain barriers to ensuring sustainable development for all.

³³. Qur’an, 33:72

Sustainable development goals (SDGs) provide a coherent, holistic, comprehensive and balanced framework to incorporate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development with recognition of the direct linkages between human well-being, economic development and care for the environment.

CHALLENGES FOR PAKISTAN

Since the Government of Pakistan has signed up to SDGs, it can be asked to provide the equivalent of US \$ 1.25 per person a day. SDGs can also be used to push for a consensus on ways to measure “poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.” Pakistan is expected to put an end to hunger and to ensure access for all, especially for the poor and vulnerable, to nutritious and sufficient food. By signing the SDGs, the government has committed itself to ending all forms of malnutrition.

Goal 8 empowers governments to break free from the shackles of aid and propels nation states to make greater progress in trade, growth, jobs and in safe guarding the dignity of individuals, communities and nations. It also encourages the private sector and businesses to join hands with governments and the international community to promote sustainable development.

Goal 9 aims to build resilient infrastructure to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and to foster innovation. This goal recognizes that sustainable human development cannot take place without economic growth particularly in manufacturing.

The aim to reduce socio-economic inequality by 2030 underscores the need for policies to achieve and sustain income growth for the bottom half of the population at a rate higher than the national average. In the country as a whole, 48% of rural households are landless and the highest incident of landlessness is in Sindh with 62%.

Goal 13 specifically calls for urgent action to combat the impact of climate change. About 45 of the 169 targets related to this goal highlight the need to tackle climate change and its impact on food production, water, energy and economic development. Climate change and its adverse impact undermines the ability to achieve vision 2025-Pakistan. The adverse impact of climate occurs through increased floods, prolonged droughts, changing temperatures and extreme weather events, heat waves, glacial melting and changing monsoon patterns.

In Pakistan, SDGs have received mixed reviews. Skeptics argue that if the country could not achieve the MDGs with their 40 indicators, realizing the Sustainable Development Goals with their 169 indicators is not realistic. Furthermore, financing these 17 goals is a major issue for a developing country like Pakistan. Lack of coordination, disjunction between different departments and the lack of capacity of state institutions are all serious issues.

However, there are those who are optimistic that the SDGs are achievable. The Government has taken many measures to advance the process such as the Pakistan poverty alleviation fund (PPAF), Prime Minister's Youth Program, Business Loan Scheme, interest free loan scheme, skilled development program, free lap top scheme, an agriculture package, soft loans, new technology, Private Public Partnership in education, enrollment of school children, and more recently, the *Ihsas* Program.

Scholars and academics need to sit together with the Government. Civil society think tanks and development partners must join hands to make the program work. Ordinary people as well as farmers and youth need greater awareness of the important issues. The growth of the economy must become more inclusive. The vision to achieve these goals must be shared

with all concerned so that sustainable development can become a reality for the people of Pakistan.³⁴

PAKISTAN'S COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

There has been sufficient political ownership of SDGs in Pakistan. This was clearly reflected in October 2015, when the country became one of the first in the world to incorporate the SDGs as part of its own "National Development Goals". In February 2016, the National Assembly unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The speaker of the National Assembly established a parliamentary task force at the federal level to oversee and facilitate legislation related to SDGs together with a SDGs Secretariat.

While vision 2025 lists some SDGs as especially relevant to Pakistan, the process of prioritizing SDGs is on-going, particularly at the provincial level where much of the Pakistan's development funding is allocated and spent. With the support of the UN, Pakistan is now taking steps to localize SDGs. To date, this has included commitments to impressive cost sharing. The Government's resolve to achieve SDGs is also apparent in its growing emphasis on strengthen data systems in line with the data imperatives highlighted in Agenda 2030 and in the goals themselves. This recognition of the centrality of data is important as Pakistan requires concerted efforts and investment to establish credible guidelines for SDGs while enacting evidence based polices to achieve their targets.

CONCLUSION

Islam possesses strong environmental principles. The environment, society and the economy should not be seen as separate entities in relation to the

³⁴. Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (website: www.issi.org.pk).

concept of sustainability but rather as interconnected. Human beings are part of the beauty and order of nature. Hence, there is naturally a strong relationship between human beings and the environment. According to Islam, human beings have been appointed as trustees of the earth and of the social and economic relations established within society. Hence, human beings will be held responsible for this trust on the Day of Judgment. It is clear that there is a close relationship between religion and the sustainability of the environment. In fact, environmental sustainability can be understood only in terms of the relationship between nature and human beings, who must not exploit the environment but develop friendly relations with it. The idea that human beings are, in some sense, superior to nature is no longer acceptable. ■