

Islamic values and rural sustainable development

Rural development entails a number of concepts like equity, justice, participation and empowerment. Also, it focuses on the notion of people-centred development. The message of Islam provides a human universal approach of looking at the world, as a domain of peaceful civic culture and a holistic mode of knowing, being and doing.

Celebrating cultural diversity is a key component in Islamic values. Islam teaches that the wisdom and value of the cultural diversity is to develop social learning among cultures (*Le taarafu*). Social responsibility, sharing resources and caring for the community are key basics in Islamic values. The value of productive and useful work and doing well is highly emphasised. The Islamic code of ethics instructs believers to positively contribute to their community regardless of their norms, cultures or religion (Al-Jayyousi, 2001).

The fundamental concept of how Islam sees the world is *tawheed*, which is normally translated as “the unity of God”, but which by extension also signifies the unity of mankind and the unity of people and nature. Within this all-embracing framework of unity, creation is a trust from God, and men and women – who are equal in the face of God whatever their colour or creed – are trustees (*khalifas*) of God. The responsibilities of this trustee-

ship are fulfilled on the basis of two other fundamental Islamic concepts: *ilm* (distributive knowledge) and *adl* (social justice). A sustainable rural community begins with a sustainable unity (*tawheed*) of mind and soul, and of the economy, culture and ecology. Islamic law (*Shari’ah*) is a set of principles, a framework of values, that provide Muslim societies with guidance. In essence, the message of Islam gives a human universal approach of looking at and shaping the world, as a domain of peaceful civic, culture

and a holistic mode of knowing, being and doing.

Islam and rural sustainable development

From an Islamic perspective, the pursuit of happiness and good life (*Hayyat Tayebah in Arabic*) is about adding value to life through good deeds and knowledge as part of the human role in the construction of the universe (*Imarat al Kawn*), doing good to all human beings, helping others, and bringing up good children, and also about living lightly on Earth and enoughness (*Zohd*) and the elimination of waste and over-consumption (*israf*).

Schumacher (1999) states that for genuine economic development to be achieved, the central concept of wisdom is permanence or sustainability. He emphasised an ecological, balanced-growth model and that attention should be given to people, not goods. Sardar (2006) commented that

The three principal policy objectives for sustainable rural development are equity, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. Rural women in Yemen.



Photo: Tarek Abul Hawa

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Western models promote an urban development that undermines communal existence and displaces traditional agriculture.

forms of rural development should be in harmony with ecology and people. Islam urges humans to utilise natural resources and engage in useful production, but without doing harm to people and nature.

Interestingly, Islam teaches that species including plants and wildlife are in a state of prayers (*tasbeeh*). The

one key pitfall of some western models of development is that they undermine communal existence by promoting urban development, increasing insecurity by displacing traditional agriculture, and debt finance.

Al-Jayyousi (2008) argued that Islamic values, local knowledge and practices can be viewed as a model for sustainability and good life (*Hayat Tayebah*). Islam represents cultural economy and cultural authenticity, which means deep respect for beliefs and local knowledge of all people in the community – the very factors which provide richness and meaning to people's lives.

The three principal policy objectives of sustainable rural development include equity, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. These three objectives will be discussed with reference to Islamic values.

Harmony with people and nature

Islam promotes the notion of small-scale and people-centred development. Rural development can be

informed and reformed by Islamic values. Our natural capital (environment, ecosystem services and natural resources) is to be viewed as the infrastructure for rural development. Simply said, if our soil, air and water are polluted, this will impede and constrain rural development. Islam represents the natural state (*fitra*) or the intrinsic state of goodness. The natural state (*fitra*) implies full harmony with nature, people and the built-environment. It also means a full realisation and consciousness of the role of mankind as a trustee and a witness (*khalifa*). Islamic values urge all humans to develop, use and manage natural resources in a sustainable manner.

Humans are viewed as stewards and trustees (*khalifa*) who are responsible for making sure that all resources are used in a sustainable manner. Islam views the potential risks of climate change as a problem of absence of human trusteeship which is referred to as mischief (*fasad*). Islam teaches us that species should be viewed as "communities or nations" similar to humans, it also teaches us that all

harm of any species means that we are disrupting the symphony of life and silencing worshipers. *Ihsan* is a key concept in Islam which is the driver of and fuel for human stewardship, responsibility and excellence. Hence, Islam enlightens the mind to mimic nature in design and in finding eco-solutions that resonate with culture.

The social contract in rural communities

Participation, equity, and empowerment of local people in a community are key elements in rural development. These concepts are valued and encouraged in Islam. Public participation (*Shura*) and reaching consensus through consultation is key to community decision-making. The notion of social justice and equity (*adl*) for all people in a community regardless of their culture or belief system is the cornerstone in Islamic values. Islamic law has devised and formalised specific rules for formulating public policies and making trade-offs between public and private interest. The notion

Photo: Majidi Salameh

of *maslaha* (public interest) may lead to an understanding of sustainability in its broader terms.

Islam offers a social contract for all people living in a community that respects cultural diversity and enhances all useful modes of production that protect the interests of people and nature. This Islamic social contract prohibits ecological degradation (*fasad*) and human and social alienation. The role of *Ummah* as a community of practice is to set standards for ethical codes of conduct and also to create new knowledge based on the public interest.

Talking about development without considering the spiritual side of people is meaningless; development must preserve the essence of our humanity. Among the dynamic principles of social life, Islam has particularly emphasised two – firstly the optimal utilisation of resources that God has endowed to man and his physical environment; and secondly their equitable use and distribution and the promotion of all human relationships on the basis of rights and justice – *adl*.

The cultural economy based on Islamic finance and banking

Culture economies are characterised by establishing niche markets

For further reading:

- Al-Jayyousi, Odeh* (2008). The State of Ecosystems and Progress of Societies. Statistics, Knowledge and Policy. Measuring and fostering the progress of societies. OECD.
- Al-Jayyousi, Odeh. R.* (2001). Islamic principles and Dublin statement, Water Management in Islam. Editors: Faruqi et al. 2001. United Nations University Press, IDRC.
- Schumacher E. F.* (1999). Small is Beautiful as if People Mattered: 25 Years later. Hartly and Marks Publishers.
- Sardar, Ziauddin* (2006). The Future of Muslim Civilization. Mansell, London 1987
- Kneafsey Moya, Brian Ilbery and Tim Jenkins* (2002). Exploring the dimensions of culture economics in rural West Wales. Vol.41, Issue 3, page 296-310.
- Iqbal, Zamir and Abbas Mirachor* (2006). An Introduction to Islamic Finance.
- Di Vanna, Joseph* (2006). Understanding Islamic Banking.

based on locally-embedded skills, resources and knowledge. These types of economy are viewed as a force of rural development (Kneafsey et al., 2002).

Islamic banking and micro-credit can be applied for rural development. Islamic banking is an instrument for the development of a community and pro-poor economic order. Some of the salient features of Islamic banking are:

- a. Islam makes a clear distinction between what is lawful (*Halal*) and what is forbidden (*Haram*) in pursuit of economic activity. Islam forbids all forms of economic activity which are morally or socially injurious. It encourages to invest wealth and not to keep it idle or to squander it.

- b. Islam seeks to reduce the margin of the surplus for the well-being of the community as a whole, to be distributed for the destitute and deprived sections of society through *Zakat*. The Islamic financial system employs the concept of participation in an enterprise, utilising funds at risk on a profit-and-loss-sharing basis. This concept encourages good resource management.

The Islamic financial system can be harnessed as a source of new models of micro-finance

To achieve a harmonious equilibrium in development between agriculture/rural and industrial/urban, each nation must build its development on its own distinctive ecological, social, cultural, and political systems.

Zusammenfassung

Die ländliche Entwicklung beinhaltet Konzepte wie Gleichheit, Gerechtigkeit, Teilhabe und „Empowerment“. Sie stellt ferner den Begriff einer menschenzentrierten Entwicklung in den Mittelpunkt. Der Islam fördert eine humane, universelle Sicht der Welt als ein Platz friedlicher staatsbürgerlicher Kultur und einen holistischen Ansatz jeglichen Wissens, Seins und Tuns. Mit diesem Papier soll die Rolle islamischer Werte bei der Förderung nachhaltiger ländlicher Entwicklung durch die Zusammenarbeit mit verschiedenen Kulturen und Religionen beleuchtet werden. Ferner wird die Umsetzung eines islamisch geprägten Bankwesens im ländlichen Raum

vorgestellt. Das Streben nach Glück und einem guten Leben (*Hayyat Tayebah* in Arabisch) aus einer islamischen Sicht beruht auf der Verinnerlichung von Werten wie soziale Verantwortung, Entwicklung der Gemeinschaft, einem verantwortungsbewussten Leben auf der Erde (*Zohd*) und der Vermeidung von Abfall und Verschwendung (*israf*).

Resumen

El desarrollo rural involucra diversos conceptos como equidad, justicia, participación y extensión de las facultades. Asimismo, se basa en la noción del desarrollo centrado en las personas. El mensaje del Islam proporciona un enfoque humano universal para contemplar

el mundo como un dominio donde impera una cultura cívica pacífica y un modo holístico de saber, ser y hacer. El objetivo de este documento es ilustrar el rol de los valores islámicos en el fomento del desarrollo rural sostenible a través de la colaboración entre diversas culturas y religiones. Además, presenta la aplicación de los conceptos bancarios islámicos en el contexto rural. La búsqueda de la felicidad y la buena vida (*Hayyat Tayebah* en árabe) desde una perspectiva islámica trata de añadir valor a la vida a través de la responsabilidad social, de desarrollar la comunidad, de no dejar una pesada huella en la tierra (*Zohd*) y de eliminar el desperdicio y el consumo excesivo (*israf*).