

# MPRA

Munich Personal RePEc Archive

## **Sustainable development from an Islamic Perspective: meaning implications and policy concerns**

Hasan, Zubair

International Islamic University of Malaysia

2006

Online at <http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/2784/>

MPRA Paper No. 2784, posted 07. November 2007 / 02:44

## **Sustainable Development from an Islamic Perspective: Meaning, Implications, and Policy Concerns**

ZUBAIR HASAN

*Professor of Islamic Economics and Finance  
International Islamic University of Malaysia, Malaysia  
[zubair@iiu.edu.my](mailto:zubair@iiu.edu.my)-web://[www.staff.iiu.edu.my/zubair](http://www.staff.iiu.edu.my/zubair)*

**ABSTRACT.** This paper examines the debate on the meaning of sustainable development and the policy implications of different approaches from an Islamic perspective. It integrates mainstream and Islamic positions on the subject and argues that to whatever definition of sustainable development one might subscribe, eventually, each ends in an environmental concern. This paper attempts to show that the continuous increase in output of goods and services worldwide imposes a trade off between material prosperity on the one hand and pollution poisoning of human beings on the other. It engages in the intensifying debate about how the benefits of the former and the negative impact of the latter could be more evenly distributed. The paper takes inspiration from the *maqasid* (objectives) of the Shari'ah and verses of the holy Qur'an that indicate a way out of this impasse. It holds that the worldview differences of secularism and Islam are the basic reason of divergence between their approaches to development. It argues that the Islamic approach is more agreeable to environmental protection and concludes that issues surrounding sustainable development have moral, ethical, social, and political complexities and that economics or economists alone cannot resolve the problem.

### **1. Introduction**

Economic development and the factors that promoted it have been the prime concern of economics from its very inception. However, development acquired the status of a formal discipline essentially after the Second World War for a variety of reasons<sup>(1)</sup> though there still remains an air of ambiguity around the concept and its objectives. The recent attachment of the condition of sustainability has only added to the fuzzy character of the notion.

---

1. The main reasons were the stupendous reconstruction requirements of the war-devastated economies, and the poverty eradication demands of the people in a large number of countries that had won their political freedom from the colonial rule after the War. Thus, the talk of planning for economic development became the order of the day mostly after the year 1945.

Achieving of full employment, stability, and equity in distribution were though formally recognized as goals of economic development, growth in GNP invariably occupied center stage. It was believed that growth would take care of employment and promote stability at the same time. The conflict between growth and distribution was alone considered substantive. The issue *was* vital for the developing countries where distributive inequalities were indeed acute. However, without growth nothing but poverty alone could be distributed more evenly. The hope was that the distribution process would make growth in income eventually *trickle down* to the lower rungs of society, and the upcoming industrial centers would *spill* growing prosperity far and wide with the passage of time.

The single-minded pursuit of growth did produce results. The GNP per capita of the developing countries grew at an average rate of 3.4% per annum during 1950-75. This was faster than either the developed or developing nations had grown in any comparative period prior to 1950 (Meier 1986, 5). Indeed, the total output of the world during the later half of the twentieth century far exceeded what humanity could produce during the entire period of its existence before the War (Hasan 1995, 62). However, the expected trickle down did not take place: the gulf between the rich and the poor widened both within and among nations. Likewise, the centers of growth did not radiate prosperity around: they became the whirlpools of affluence sucking in men and material from all around, leaving the far flung areas in deep deprivation. In addition, fast development brought in a frightful degradation of the environment including ozone depletion, melting of ice-caps, global warming, rising sea levels, deforestation, and specie extinction. In sum, rapid growth was characterized with aggravating poverty and inequalities topped with awesome environmental deterioration.

A review of the concept of development was needed. Growth of course could not be ignored, but it did lose its pride of place among the objectives of development (Haque 1971). Ideas like quality of life, the upward movement of the entire social order, eradication of poverty, reduction of inequalities, removal of regional imbalances and above all environmental concerns all invaded the notion of development. The result was addition of the word ‘sustainable’ to development even though infirmities of the notion increased.

What is meant by ‘sustainable development’ and what are the policy implications of the concept is the question this paper attempts to look at from an Islamic perspective. There hardly are any writings dealing with the subject from that angle. Whatever little is available mostly discusses what Islam says about environmental care, not with the concept of sustainable development per se<sup>(2)</sup>. Probably, the present paper is the first to attempt an integration of the various mainstream versions of *sustainable development* with Islamic positions. Environmental concerns touched upon in Islamic economics are just part of these versions.

---

2. See for example **Llewellyn** (1984), **Akhtar** (1996), and **Khalid** (2002). All three are valuable contributions to Islamic economics on environment but their coverage and thrust is much different from the present exercise. This paper avoids going over the ground they have already covered; it seeks to advance the argument from where they left.

One need not shy away from accepting that Islam does not deal with development issues as they are being spelled out today: the issues simply did not exist when Islam made its advent on the scene. To do otherwise may involve the risk of being apologetic or stretchy in argument. But the statement does not negate the fact that *Shari'ah* contains many unmistakable, even if generic, warnings that the world is likely to be overwhelmed by the development problems of the sort it is now facing if men do not resist selfishness, greed and rapacious exploitation of natural resources. On a more important side, the way of life Islam prescribes offers ample possibilities of extracting a whole blue print of instructions which, if put into operation, would not only help resolve current problems but may usher in positive improvement in the situation. *Maqasid-al-Shari'ah* – the objectives of the Islamic law – we shall see, provide the broad framework for such a blue print.

The following Section 2 of the paper takes a hurried look at the growth and equity orientation of sustainable development discussed in the literature and their ambiguities. In Section 3 we shall pay attention to the environmental view of sustainability. In Section 4 are discussed some of the policy concerns that underlie the concept and the difficulties in enforcing action they demand. Section 5 contains a few concluding remarks.

## 2. Versions of Sustainable Development

It is well to begin with the statement that there is yet no agreed definition of sustainable development. For, it is an emerging concept attempting to assimilate the dynamism of a process of change that cannot ignore local concerns, needs, and interests. Being relatively new, it *evolves* as we learn to grasp its wider implications for different aspects of our lives. The key question here is: what it is that we want to sustain. One comes across three broad answers to the question in the literature. Sustainability implies:

1. Maintaining the long-run rate of economic growth.
2. Achieving inter-generational equity in the use of the natural resources.
3. Restricting as far as possible the increase in pollution for maintaining the present quality of environment.

The three views are interrelated but policy prescriptions change depending on one's predilections. We seek to clarify these interpretations, policy consequences that follow in each case and their mutual linkages not only in a secular dispensation but possibly from an Islamic viewpoint as well.

The first view centering on growth derives its inspiration from the classical steady state long run development model<sup>(3)</sup> Repetto (1986), for example, defined sustainable development as the one that aims at managing all natural, human and financial resources of a country for increasing its *wealth* and welfare over the long-run. Following a similar line, Pearce *et. al.*, (1990) assume development as a vector -- a list of elements -- that society seeks to maximize. In an Islamic dispensation the fulfillment of basic needs of all members of the community is a social imperative (Hasan 1997): the elements of the vector will doubtless include, in addition to growth, the improvement in health and nutrition, accommodation facilities, medical care, educational attainment, and increase in basic freedoms. Thus seen, sustainable development is a situation where the specified vector must increase over time without hitting the limits. In this formulation GNP growth remains in the forefront as other elements of the vector essentially depend on this variable, *albeit* they would in turn influence it as well.

This approach has several difficulties. The concept of development implies an *infinite* time horizon. But decision-making operates on specified time scales. Planning for achieving pre-fixed targets may be difficult. In a dynamic socio-economic scenario over the long run, the elements of the vector may undergo sharp changes in their range and quality destroying inter-temporal comparability. Again, the concept is silent on the direction of change in the vector. The rate of change may be assumed to remain positive for each time segment -- *strong* sustainability. Alternatively, only the overall trend may be conceived as remaining positive -- *weak* sustainability<sup>(4)</sup>. Most writers prefer to work with a weak version of sustainability. In their scheme of things, the present value of development benefits is positive and can be maximized. Such maximization is consistent with the extinction of resources. However, it is not compatible with the long-run maximization process that concept (1) implies.

3. Figure (1) below is self explanatory and highlights the classical view of *limits to growth*. See, Pearce *et. al.*, (1990, 7). Here,  $w$   $w''$  is the wage bill as total net product grows over time. It has a constant slope as in the classical model the increase in population does not allow wage rate to rise above the subsistence level. Total net product rises at a diminishing rate because of resource (land) scarcity. The gap between profit and wage bill, therefore, diminishes until the two become equal at point S. The stationary state has arrived. No more expansion of the economy is feasible. This model seems to have inspired writings like *Limits to Growth* and *Limits to Growth and beyond*; this time the scarcity being of *environmental* resources.

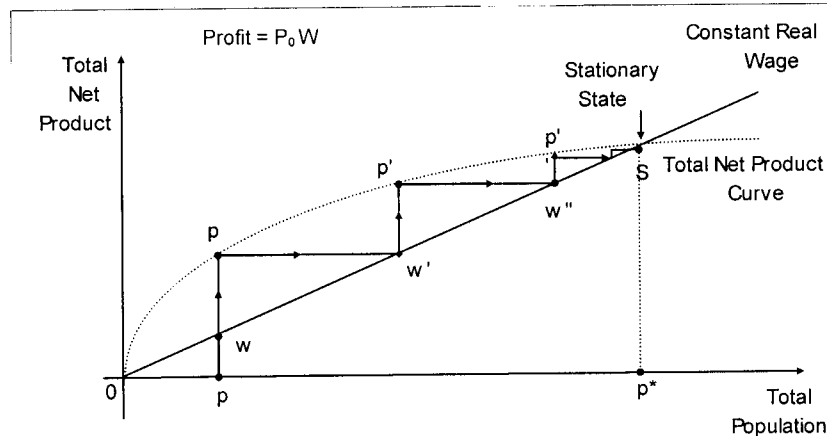


Fig (1). Classical model of stationary state.

4. For a discussion on strong and weak sustainability, see also Turner *et. al.*, (1964), pp. 55-6.

The World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 presented the definition of sustainable development focusing on inter-generational equity i.e. concept (2). In its view, such development is that as meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.<sup>(5)</sup> It implies more than conservation of resources. A healthy economy is just as essential for satisfying our non-material (spiritual) needs as the material ones. It must aim at preserving the natural foundations of life and calls for a fair distribution of goods and opportunities. Performance efficiency and an effective organization for the use of natural resources are needed. It also gives thought to a certain degree of social solidarity. In sum, the Commission relates sustainable development to three domains: economy, environment, and society in equal measure. The relationships between the three domains are depicted in figure (2) below reproduced from the Commission's Report.

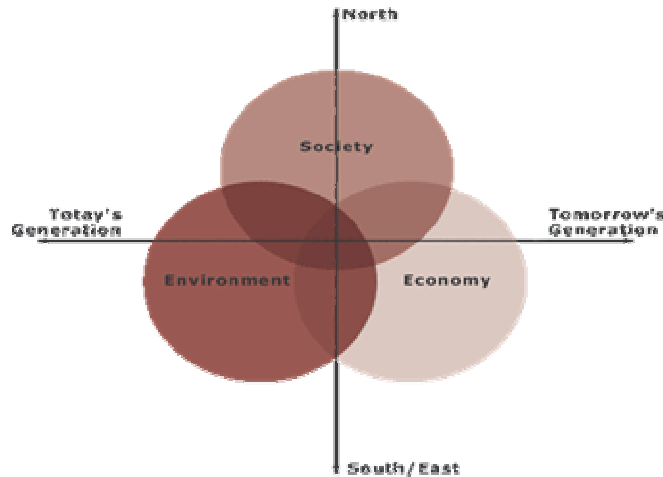


Fig. (2). The economy, society, and environment interactions

The Commission's view of sustainable development is now generally regarded as standard. It has in particular found support in India.<sup>(6)</sup> It does mark an improvement over the first version in that there is a discernable shift of emphasis from growth towards social justice. The definition must also be welcome from an Islamic angle to the extent that it seeks a balance between economy, society, and environment, and puts the satisfaction of the spiritual or non-material needs of people on the same footing as of material needs for measuring economic performance.<sup>(7)</sup>

5. According to the Commission, sustainable development is one that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" Clearly the definition carries an air of indefiniteness around it: measurement criteria are missing.

6. 'Sustainable Development Networking Program' website maintained by the Ministry of Environment and Forests of the Government of India, New Delhi and funded by the World Bank under the EMCBTAP.

7. The Commission's version of sustainable development neatly accommodates the pursuit of wealth to enable Muslims protect their faith, progeny, property and honor. It prompts them to promote spirituality, fulfill basic needs, achieve distributive justice, and take care of the environment with freedom to operate within their own reference frame. Moreover, the definition implies endorsement of the universality of Islamic values and objectives of the *Shari'ah*.

Finally, there is the perception of sustainable development as an effort to forge a compromise between the growing demands for economic growth on the one hand and for environmental protection on the other. This approach is narrower but more realistic than those discussed earlier. It, in fact, is the foothold of all shades of environmentalism that has become so vocal in recent years. The credit for its formulation goes to the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It was spelled out in its Agenda 21 blue print for sustainable development for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The definition seeks to limit the rate of growth to a level that would allow it to continue without aggravating the resource position, if environment is maintained as it is. It focuses on recycling of resources, their renewal where possible, and their conservation if non-renewable. This view too has difficulties but these are, in fact, such as are applicable to any notion of sustainable development.

The three notions of sustainable development discussed above are closely linked. For example, a sustainable rate of growth implies that the pace of development should be slower than it presently is. This obviously would help conserve resources, lower pollution and improve distribution. Emphasis on temporal equity would demand a more even spread of resources, prosperity, and environmental damage over time. The notion implies putting the brakes on consumerism and expanding credit card culture i.e. borrowing from the future to spend now.<sup>(8)</sup> Again, focus on environmental sustenance would eventually help in conservation of resources and may improve also the intergenerational distribution of incomes.

Interestingly, the approach of the Commission is largely in consonance with the *maqasid* or objectives of the *Shari'ah*. Islam is a universal religion and addresses the entire mankind not the believers alone. It is, therefore, no surprise that men irrespective of faith do often think along Islamic lines. The main objectives of the Islamic law put broadly are “to promote the well-being of *all* mankind which lies in safeguarding their faith (*din*), their human self (*nafs*), their intellect (*aql*), their posterity (*nasl*) and their wealth (*maal*)”.<sup>(9)</sup> They entail wisdom, mercy, and justice. Muslims, like others, must be strong both materially, and morally to achieve these objectives. Rapid economic growth with priority for the fulfillment of basic needs and avoidance of wasteful expenditure are imperative to help move in that direction.

Safeguarding of intellect implies that the community is able to resist pollutive cultural influences from alien sources and must stick to what remains still relevant in their heritage. It has to pay special attention to educational attainments, research and critical evaluations. *The insistence of Shari'ah on preservation of the progeny is intended for ensuring inter-generational equity in the distribution of wealth and prosperity, conservation of resources, and sustenance of the environment, all links of one chain.* For example, Prophet (PBUH) prohibited cutting trees around Madinah, Umar (RA) refused distributing conquered lands in Iraq among the soldiers for the sake of future needs of the *Ummah*.

---

8. See Spink: Abstract, p.1. **Repetto** (1986) also endorses this view.

9. Al-Ghazali as quoted in **Chapra** (2000, 118).

Moderation and balance in worldly pursuits that the verses of the Qur'an repeatedly emphasize are intended to support this basic Islamic concept of sustainable development. We shall have occasion to present such verses later in the discussion. The achievement of the *maqasid* (goals) calls for dynamic interaction between socio-economic processes and environmental priorities. If Muslim countries could produce even a replica of such interaction and its benefits, it may be possible to send a positive message to humanity that such a framework is imperative to produce an equitable economy, a better society and a world that is worth living for present and future generation.

The Islamic ingredients of sustainability are more than what the Commission bargained for in its Report mentioned above. Its deliberations do not go far enough and are not free of weaknesses. In the first place, there is little agreement on the objective criteria to test if development is indeed progressing on a sustainable pace, let alone for knowing the needs of future generations on a comparable basis. The time dimension of the concept remains unspecified. It seems more rhetoric than offering a workable plan of action.

### 3. Policy Concerns

Our discussion of some of the variants of sustainability shows that the concept of development seems to have kicked up more haze than light. Development by nature is a value loaded term and implies the achievement of stated economic and social objectives at a perceived pace. Sustainability on the other hand connotes the ability of development to continue over time indefinitely. Thus seen, sustainable development is a constrained process of dynamic change for social betterment. The common element underpinning the indicated approaches to such development is conservation of resources and maintenance, if not reduction, of pollution levels.

The debate on sustainable development thus centers on the concern about the deteriorating environmental quality. The deterioration continues unabated also in the Muslim world even as Islam preaches moderation in consumption, exhorts to avoid wasteful use of natural resources, reminds people of delicate proportions in the universe and enjoins on mankind to maintain the natural balance. It warned that greed will tempt mankind to disturb the proportions and tilt the balance. The following verses of the Qur'an bear ample testimony on the point.<sup>(10)</sup> They support the *maqasid* and their implications for sustainable development as discussed earlier.

- 6: 3 – It is He Who created the heavens and the earth In true (proportions). (See also n. 896 p. 313)
- 30:41– Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the need) that hands of men have earned. (See also n. 3557 p.1019)
- 39: 5 – He created the heaven and the earth in true (proportions). (See also n.4247 p.1181)
- 54:49 –Verily, all things have We created in proportion and measure. (See also n.5163 p.1394)

---

10. The translation of the verses given below in support of the stated Islamic position is reproduced from the *Holy Qur'an Text, Translation and Commentary* by **Abdullah Yusuf Ali** (New Revised Edition 1409A.H./1989A.C.), Amanah Corp. USA.



- 67:3 – He Who created the seven heavens one above another; No want of proportion will thou see in the Creation of Allah) Most Gracious. So turn thy vision again. Seest thou any flaw? (P. 1498).
- 67:4 – Again turn thy vision a second time (thy) vision will come back to thee dull and discomfited, in a state worn out.

Here, a clarification may not be out of place. It is sometimes argued that the Islamic concern for the environment follows automatically from the general principle: 'Receive no injury inflict no injury'. Some others supporting the contention claim that there are hundreds of verses in the Qur'an relevant to avoid causing injury to the natural and environmental resources (Hassan and Cajee 2002). This seems stretchy, if not irrelevant. The tradition was intended presumably more to regulate relations between man and man rather than between them and the environment.

The environmentalists continue to express dismay on the decadent health of the planet. They lament about the diminishing biodiversity, global warming, depleting fish stock, shrinking supplies of unsullied fresh drinking water, the plundering of virgin tropical forests, and air pollution reducing agricultural yields and affecting human health. It is estimated that there are as many as 30 million different species of living organisms in the world today. They constitute a vast and important source of *genetic* information that could be useful for the development of medicines, natural pesticides, resistant varieties of plants and animals. Human activities have taken a heavy toll on biodiversity pushing up the rate of specie extinction. Estuarine water pollution reduces fish regeneration. The conservation of habitats and specie preservation pose another resource problem. Examples can be multiplied *ad infinitum*.

The issues mentioned head a long list of concerns that environmentalists demand should urgently be addressed. To voice this sort of disappointment every year on the Earth Day has become a regular ritual. Achievements of the remedial measures undertaken, though impressive in some cases, cannot undo the fact that year after year the world moves from a bad to a worse environmental situation. The basic question then is: why enough is not being done at least to freeze the situation, if not effect improvement? The answer to the question is difficult as it has many facets known and unknown. Let us have a broad look at things.

In developing countries a large part of total economic activity still relies on the extraction and utilization of natural resource like minerals, forests, marine life, the under ground petroleum, and water. With large and increasing parts of population steeped in poverty, they cannot slow down exploitation of resources, existing and potential, they have. Even for developed countries it may not be possible to ignore the importance of such resources, energy in particular. Of these, conservation of non-renewable resources poses serious problems having *inter-temporal* and *spatial* dimensions: it involves difficult trade off between the present and the future well-being of mankind.

It may be noted that the dividing line between natural and environmental resources is hazy in most cases. Many resource extinction activities e.g. timber cutting and strip mining have direct repercussions on environmental quality. Likewise, environmental

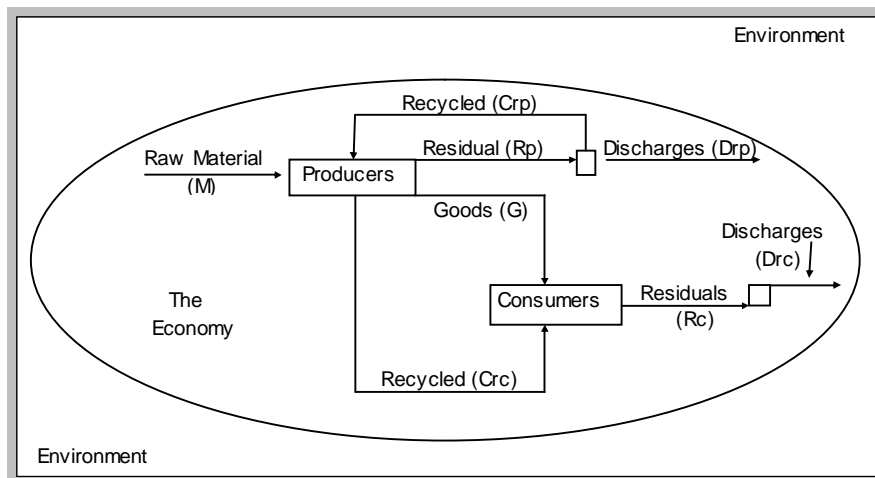
pollution in many instances hastens the resource extinction. This sort of interactions between the pollution and extinction has led to much thought towards natural resource preservation: a policy combining the concern for both maintaining at a manageable pace. Sustainability on the other hand connotes the ability of development to continue over time indefinitely. Thus seen, sustainable development is a constrained process of dynamic change for social betterment. The common element underpinning the indicated approaches to such development is conservation of resources and abatement, if not rolling back pollution.

From physics, we get the law of conservation of matter requiring ultimately the equality of the two flows: (a) the flow of raw materials including energy extracted from the environment and (b) the residuals from the economic processes discharged back into the environment. Figure 3 presents a simple diagram that depicts the *fundamental balance* between these flows. It employs the following symbols to accomplish the job.

- M = Raw Material including energy taken from the environment
- G = Goods produced
- Rp = Residuals coming out from the production process
- Crp = Residuals from the production process recycled.
- Crc = Residuals coming from consumption process recycled.
- Drp = Net waste from the process of production discharged into environment
- Drc = Net waste from consumption process discharged into environment.

The *fundamental balance* in nature is stated by the following equation

$$M = Drp + Drc \quad (1)$$



**Fig. (3). Economic activity, recycling and pollution discharge.**

From the viewpoint of physical sciences, the equation refers to a long run position. One must, however, note that for reducing the mass of the residuals discharged into the environment, it is imperative to reduce the quantity of raw materials  $M$  taken in from the natural system or contain somehow the discharge of residuals ( $Crp + Crc$ ) into the environment or both.<sup>(11)</sup> Notice that the argument only testifies to the Islamic wisdom of requiring moderation and balance in the use of natural resources. Equation (2) depicts this requirement.

$$Drp + Drc = M = G + Rp - (Crp + Crc) \quad (2)$$

The message of the equation is that to promote sustainable development, one has several alternatives or a combination of them: reduce  $G$ ; reduce  $Rp$  or increase ( $Crp + Crc$ ). Reduction in  $G$  is difficult for reasons stated earlier. Rather it is likely to increase even on a faster pace. Reduction in  $Rp$  or increase in ( $Crp + Crc$ ) are feasible propositions. Even so, their combined impact is not likely to cover up the environmental degradation brought about by increase in  $G$ . From a practical viewpoint, then, abatement of pollution alone is the way out and the world is occupied with the idea since long. But the difficulty is that human action is keeping  $Drp + Drc > M$  and the gap is ever on the increase. The problem is relevant to any version of sustainable development we have discussed above.

Fixing of Standards, imposition of pollution charges, sale of pollution permits, grant of subsidy incentives, business mergers, cultural education, grant of private property rights in environmental goods – the famous Coasian theorem -- and the like have long been in the arsenal of economists and practitioners.<sup>(12)</sup> However, the desired success is still not in sight. The measures did slow the worsening of the situation but could not prove effective in rolling back the overall pollution for a variety of reasons. A few of them are worth mentioning.

The issue of property rights in environmental goods remains unsettled even at the theoretical plane: do individuals have or should have these rights or the societal entity? If the two have to share these rights, when shall they do so and how? Again, in many cases it is not possible to pinpoint the sources of a particular pollution affecting air, water, or land. Even if the sources were satisfactorily identified, the contribution of each source to total pollution is difficult to determine. Furthermore, there is the problem of estimating the cost of the damage caused, identify the sufferers, and ascertain the damage each suffered for grant of compensation. And, what shall be the criteria or form the compensation would take is the question that has yet to be answered. Decisions on issues of the sort do usually involve a measure of arbitrariness, and thus tend to raise grave concerns about justice and injustice. Added to these problems are the difficulties of putting policies into operation. Here, adequacy of laws and efficiency in executing them are the questions.

---

11. We may look more closely at the various options available for the purpose from equation (2) and seek judicial remedy for abatement of environmental harms. There are, for example, Acts to safeguard people through controlling quality of air and water. In an instructive judgment the Supreme Court of India recently directed two international soft drink giants to label their products with a warning that the contents may have traces of pesticides in them.

12. Text books on environmental economic invariably discuss these measures e.g. see **Field and Field**, 2002.

Islamic economists some time raise what they consider a more fundamental issue: why the world is characterized with glaring inequalities in the distribution of wealth and incomes within and among nations which all agree is the prime source of galloping pollution? In the year 2000, for example, the per capita income of the 'global man' was over US \$ 5000 per annum<sup>(13)</sup> that was enough for a comfortable living for people of the 'globe village' if only distributed more equitably. But the story was much different: Widening income and opportunity disparities put immense pressure on world resources, give rise to wars, armed conflicts, corruption and mounting environmental degradation. The following Table 1 highlights the fact that the gap between the per capita income of the rich and poor countries is on the rise:, and the ratio tends to remain constant at 1:23.

**TABLE 1. Per capita income data for selected years in US \$.**

Countries \ Years	1990	1995	2001
Developing Countries (a)	840	1090	1160
Developed Countries (b)	19590	24930	26510
Gap (b) – (a)	18750	23840	25350

Source: Compiled from World Development Indicators 2003, p.4

This analysis is substantially correct and mainstream economists indeed support it. The difficulty arises when Islamic economists see the institution of interest as the main source of trouble, and find the magic cure of all evil in its abolition. To me, it is too simplistic a claim and has not so far been convincingly proved on a scientific basis. In an argument for sustainability of the environment abolition of interest albeit relevant cannot be the lone focal point. Let us now go back to our main argument

Most of the countries in the world have enacted laws for the protection of the environment, and have established an appropriate agency, authority, or department to oversee their implementation both at the federal and local levels. The main objective of the enactments has been to ensure the protection of environment against both public and private actions that fail to take account of costs or harms inflicted on the environment. Usually an environment protection agency, the EPA, at the apex monitor and analyze the environmental situation, conduct research, and work closely with the state and local governments to devise pollution control policies. The basic purpose of such authorities is to advice governmental organs to consider the effects of their decisions on the environment. Local laws also reflect the same concerns and allow adversely affected property owners seek a good like medicines, food articles and so on free of cost.

The laws relating to environment have been in existence for long in relation to land which term in economics sums up natural resources or M in our equations. Anthropologists too have traditionally viewed land i.e. its technical transformation, and legal appropriation as a resource in an *ecological* setting. Muslim history is replete with instructions prohibiting the cutting of trees even in enemy territory during war. There were instructions to plant one if one had a seed even if dying, desist from urinating in

13. These calculations are based on the data provided in **World Development Report** 2002, Table 1, p. 233.

water bodies-running or still – and not go hunting animals just for fun Muslim architecture has eminently been environment friendly as the majestic buildings of the past testify; landscaping studies have only recently begun to introduce a more dominant environmental and cultural perspective. Today legal framework is being broadened with a sort of idealistic approach. However, laws covering issues concerning place and space are considered merely expressive and ultimately poetic. There are laments that too much emphasis on the subjective concern obscures the more fundamental and meaningful sense in which land is used and appropriated: land may admittedly have some subjective, ideological import but it essentially exists as a practical resource. Thus, attitudes toward land, in the widest sense of the term, are rather dialectic, combining elements of myth and legal title.<sup>(14)</sup>

We find that in most countries the legal framework is not deficient. In many cases a formidable array of laws relating to control of pollution of air, water, and land is available. The essential problem is the non-compliance of laws by the people. Stronger enforcement programs both at the state and Federal level are needed. A crucial source of difficulty is the separation of responsibility from authority: while mostly the center must be maintaining the environmental quality, the enforcement of various laws is a state responsibility. An improvement is possible through state-center partnership in the enforcement. This can make states recognize national standards and limits. Setting up of Sustainability issues are, thus, complex at the local and national levels from a policy viewpoint. In addition to difficulties mentioned above, there seems to be a lack of *political will* to enforce laws, and take action. The predators, polluters, and extractors are often well-organized groups and share the spoils with their political and administrative patrons. The linkages are all the more vivid and rampant in the developing countries.

The regional and global issues are more complicated. There are ticklish problems of sharing water of rivers flowing through more than one country, for example, that of the Ganges, Danube, Nile, Euphrates or the Indus and its tributaries. The intricacies involved are not easy to resolve without international negotiations and sharing of costs as World Bank, for example, successfully managed between India and Pakistan for sharing the Indus valley waters. However, such negotiations could not be multiplied primarily because of wanting political will of the parties involved. There are dying lakes and seas for which no body cares. Ozone depletion and global warming are on the increase, the oncoming catastrophe stares humanity in the face. A number of international agreements have been signed over the years for rolling back the emission of harmful gases for example into the atmosphere but targets could hardly be achieved. national compliance service centers, involving partnerships with trade associations, improvements in the incentives schemes, and a national effort to develop new measures of compliance may prove beneficial. The necessary conditions for successful cooperation are a mutual agreement between the center and the states on enforcement approaches and allocation of responsibilities plus accurate reporting on environmental data.

---

14. See **Spink** (2003, 2). Even in Islamic economics the position on property ownership, of land especially, is not very clear. For a brief discussion see **Hasan** (1998, 25, n. 67, and n. 68).

National interests clash with global requirements. A recent example is of the most powerful country of the world the USA declining to ratify the Kyoto protocol of 1997 on the plea that it was against their national interests and that some developing countries including India stay out. Now 141 countries of the world even those who earlier had reservations have already ratified and put into operation this protocol meant for reducing the emission of greenhouse gases but the US whose share in such pollution is 34% has not. In the international arena nothing can help except realization of common danger, discipline and sacrifice for common good. Free riding can hardly be condoned.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

It comes about that the concept of sustainable development is complex, and murky. It lends itself to several interpretations: it is still in the process of evolution. However, an evaluation of different approaches to the concept leads to the same destination: what lies behind various interpretations is eventually one concern – how to sustain the *environment* indefinitely? The question is serious because increase in production is a circumstantial compulsion. Today some five hundred odd multinational corporations from the developed countries produce and control bulk of the industrial output of the world. The population of these countries was less than 16% of the globe in 2001 but they consumed almost 80% of the goods and services all nations produced that year (Table 2). While one-third of the people in the developing countries are not able to spend even dollar a day, Christmas parties for dogs were being organized in the West last year!

Evidently, the poor countries are in need of utilizing more of their resources internally. The relative proportion of scarce resources the developed countries can use in the near future must therefore shrink. This has already started: rising prices of oil, steel, and other crucial minerals are the first straws in the air. And, the law of diminishing returns does apply to the discovery of new resources, at least in the short-run. *Globalization* now sweeping the world serves in part as an instrument intended to ensure unabated flow of resources remaining available to the developed countries. Hegemony, sanctions, arm twisting, wars, and regime change are all being used to force open the doors in a vulnerable world. Interestingly, a cultural dimension has also been added to the new liberalization recipe to cloak economic intent (Hasan 2003).

**TABLE 2. Distribution of world population and GDP between countries (Population in millions, GDP in trillion US \$).**

Years	Developed Countries		Developing Countries	
	Population	GDP	Population	GDP
1980	1058	7,575	3,316	3,193
% of world	24.19	70.35	75.81	29.65
1990	1138	17,663	4,146	4,152
% of world	21.54	80.96	78.46	19.03
2001	958	24,838	5,172	6,238
% of world	15.63	79.95	84.37	20.04
Average	1051	16,692	4,211	4,524
% of world	20.45	77.08	79.68	22.92

Compiled from world Development Report 1992, T.1 and T. 12 and World Development Indicators 2003. Population Figures for 1980 are estimates.

In sum, the global output must grow to remove poverty and maintain living standards; and so must pollution. The trade off then is between the cake and the poison as both grow. The difficulty is that developed countries do not want to see their present share of the cake shrink but are not willing at the same time to compensate the poor for suffering from their (developed countries) share of the poison. The situation is all the more aggravated by the acquisitive nature of man and the rising wave of consumerism. Instead of preservation and restraint we are borrowing from the future to consume now via the credit card culture. In a word, we are jeopardizing the future of our children let alone leaving them in at least the same position as ours.

The difficulties of formulating appropriate policies and implementing them effectively are there but they pale into insignificance if we turn to attitudinal plight of the modern age. Indeed, it is here that one finds the superiority of the Islamic dispensation over the mainstream economic paradigm. An important ingredient of the Western worldview that conditioned modern economic thinking is the idea of naturalism emanating from Newtonian physics, and Darwinian Theory of man coming into being through an evolutionary process that grants only the survival of the fittest. Inspired by these and other scientific works, the group of intellectuals in Europe famed as the Vienna Circle published a position paper in 1929: the *Scientific Worldview*.<sup>(15)</sup> The paper provided impetus to notions like individualism, naturalism, and liberalization and entrenched it firmly in mainstream economic theory and policy. Now it walks in the new garb: globalization.

To the cause of sustainable development, these ideas and policy positions did more harm than good. They made human beings care free of environment. It was believed that nature is incorruptible by what humans may choose to do on the planet Earth: there are natural laws that would maintain balance between the consequences of human activity and the environment: the self-cleansing process of the environment would make an *automatic* adjustment to men's deeds. In contrast, Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, saw the creation of man as a distinct act of God: man did not *evolve* from a lower into higher specie -- a notion the *Scientific Worldview* condoned. Man was molded as superior to all other creation and was handed over the running of the affairs of earth as the vice-regent and co-worker of God. *Shari'ah* alone provides the *natural law* for the mankind to regulate social behavior.<sup>(16)</sup> In a comparative vein, this regulation demands spiritual growth not material, contentment not greed, patience not haste, moderation not maximization, balance not tilt, cooperation not competition and spread of equity not corruption in His land.

Thus seen, sustainable development essentially poses a moral, ethical, social and political issue. Economists or economics alone cannot resolve it.

#### References

- Akhtar, M.R.** (1996) Towards an Islamic Approach for Environmental Balance, *Islamic Economic Studies*, 3(2): 57-77
- Ansari, M.I.** (1994) Perspectives on Sustainable Development, *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 11(3): 394-402.

---

15. On comparison and contrast of the two worldviews -- Scientific and Islamic, see **Hasan** (1998, 8-10).

16. See **Hasan** (1998, 22).

- Chapra, M. Umer** (2000) *The Future of Economics: An Islamic Perspective*, The Islamic Foundation, UK.
- Field, Barry C. and Field, Martha K.** (2002) *Environmental Economics – An Introduction*, McGraw-Hill, Kuala Lumpur.
- Gutes, M.C.** (1996) The Concept of Weak Sustainability, *Ecological Economics*, **17**: 147-156.
- Haque, Mahboobul** (1971) *Employment and Income Distribution in 1970s – A New Perspective*, Pakistan Economic and Social Review.
- Hasan, Zubair** (1995) Review of M. U. Chapra's 'Islam and Economic Development' *IJUM Journal of Islamic Economics*, **4**(1 and 2): 61-70.
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1997) Fulfillment of Basic Needs: Concept Measurement and Muslim Countries' Performance, *IJUM Journal of Economics and Management Sciences*, **5**(2): 1-38.
- \_\_\_\_\_, (1998) *Islamization of Knowledge in Economics: Issues and Agenda*, *IJUM Journal of Economics and Management (Special Issue)*, **6**(2): 1-40.
- \_\_\_\_\_, (2003) Globalization, Development, and Muslims, *International Journal of Muslim Unity*, IIMU International Islamic University of Malaysia, **1.1**, pp. 41-57.
- Hassan, A. and Cajee, Z.A.** (2002) *Islam, Muslims, and Sustainable Development: The Message from Johannesburg*, *IMASE Web site: [www.webstar.co.uk/~imase/Old/index.php?fcontent=article9&content=yes](http://www.webstar.co.uk/~imase/Old/index.php?fcontent=article9&content=yes)*
- Khalid, F.M.** (2002) *Islam and the Environment, Social and Economic Dimensions of Global Environmental Change*, John Wiley and Sons, Ltd. UK.
- Liewellyn, O.A.** (1984) Islamic Jurisprudence and Environmental Planning, *Journal of Research in Islamic Economics*, **1**(2): 25-49.
- Meier, Gerald M.** (ed.) (1985) *Leading Issues in Economic Development*, (Fourth Edition) Oxford, Delhi.
- Pearce et al.** (1990) *Sustainable Development: Economics and Environment in the Third World*, Edward Edgar, Aldershot.
- Pearce, David W. and Turner, R. Kerry** (1990) *Economics of Natural Resources and the Environment*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Singapore.
- Repetto, Robert** (1986) *Skimming the Water: Rent Seeking and the Performance of Public Irrigation Systems*. World Resources Institute, Washington DC, United States
- Turner, R. Kerry, Pearce, David and Bateman, Ian** (1994) *Environmental Economics – An Elementary Introduction*, Harvester Wheatsheaf Singapore.
- Wieczorek-zeul, Heidemarie** (2002) *Important Impulses for Sustainable Development – A German Government Point-of-View*. In WEnt, pp.18-19, downloaded from website: [www.inwent.org/E+Z/1997-2002/de602-7.htm](http://www.inwent.org/E+Z/1997-2002/de602-7.htm)
- World Bank** *World Development Indicators 2003*, New York, Oxford University press.
- World Bank** *World Development Report, 2002*. New York, Oxford University press.



## التنمية المستدامة من منظور إسلامي:

### المفهوم والنتائج

زبير حسن

أستاذ الاقتصاد الإسلامي والمال

الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية - ماليزيا

**المستخلص:** يتناول الباحث الجدل القائم حول معنى التنمية المستدامة ومدلولات ذلك على السياسة المتعلقة بالتنمية من وجهة نظر إسلامية، وذلك من خلال مزج المواقف التقليدية والإسلامية، ويصل إلى أنه مهما يكن التعريف المستخدم للتنمية المستدامة فإن الهاجس البيئي يظل طاغيا على نتائج المناقشات. ويحاول الباحث تدعيم المقولة بأن الزيادة المطردة في إنتاج السلع والخدمات في العالم ينتج عنها ضرورة الاختيار بين الرفاهية المادية وتعرض البشر للتلوث البيئي، بل إن الباحث ينغمس أكثر في الجدل المتنامي حول ما إذا كان من الممكن تحقيق توزيع متساوي بين الفوائد الايجابية من الرفاهية المادية والتأثيرات السلبية للتلوث البيئي.

يستند الباحث إلى مقاصد الشريعة والآيات القرآنية لحل هذه المعضلة، حيث إن جوهر الخلاف بين العلمانية والإسلام يقف خلف تعارض الموقفين من التنمية. ومن هذا المنطلق فإن موقف الإسلام يبدو أكثر قربا من حماية البيئة. ويخلص الباحث إلى أن تعقيدات القضايا المتعلقة بالتنمية المستدامة، الأخلاقية والاجتماعية والسياسية، أكبر من أن يفلح الاقتصاديون بمفردهم في حلها.