A regional ethics-based sustainable development model for the West Asia-North Africa region

Laylla Rkiouak, Research fellow, WANA institute
(corresponding author)
lrkiouak@gmail.com
Majlis el Hassan, Amman, Jordan

Abstract
This study proposes that viable transition to sustainable development requires a new, ethically-centered, sustainable development model. Moreover, the development of a model inspired by Islamic values may be one means of responding to the ethical gap within the sustainable development discourse in the West Asia-North Africa region (WANA). The globalised sustainable development model leading towards a pre-determined direction towards each global agenda, needs to be reviewed to include regional ethical values for its effective implementation. Elaborating and including Islamic principles within such a model for the WANA region will facilitate more responsive programming and hence sustainable transition.

Introduction
Since Alhazen’s (Abu Ali Hasan Ibn Al-Haitham) development of scientific methodology in the 11th century, science has made tremendous progress (Kheirandish, 2009). Achievements ranging from the discovery of particle-wave duality to the steam engine have increased the socio-economic wellbeing of many generation and provided the industrial comfort of exosomatic instruments. However, even in the midst of the 21st century many scientific questions remain unanswered. While physicists are still looking for a unified theory to combine the quantum mechanics and the general theory of relativity (Hawking, A Brief History of Time), the most pressing contemporary challenge — one that relates to our own survival — is understanding (and adapting to) the consequences of our interaction with the biogeochemical cycles of planet earth.

The global environmental and science community has long-advocated for major changes in policy and human behaviour to stop and reverse the impact of humans on the environment and biodiversity. They have called for a better understanding of the origins of anthropogenic (human-induced) impacts and a transition to a more sustainable system while maintaining or increasing societal wellbeing.

The solution presented to these challenges is ‘sustainable development’. Sustainable development is an interdisciplinary concept that considers the environmental, social and economic dimensions of a system, facilitating a holistic approach to contemporary challenges. There are, however, important limitations inherent in the sustainable development model. Chief among these is that economics has come to dominate approaches to sustainable development, brought on by the influence of modern capitalism.

1 Sala et al., “Global Biodiversity Scenarios for the Year 2100.”
This paper critiques the sustainable development concept and tries to tackle these limitations by defining a new model specific to the West Asia-North Africa region. It is argued that the forces likely to mobilise citizens of the region and leverage the required political commitment might be found in the Islamic tradition. It concludes that maqasid al Shari’ah (the objectives of Islamic Law) provides a platform for a new definition of sustainable development in the WANA region.

Re-conceptualising sustainable development

The idea of a sustainable development model connected to religious values stands somewhat in opposition to the current model, which reflects a separation of religious ideology and public policy making. The sustainable development discourse has, however, acknowledged that the three pillars of sustainable development need to be completed by an ethical dimension at the level of people’s value. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 added a short paragraph 6 to its Programme of Action: “We acknowledge the importance of ethics for sustainable development and, therefore, emphasize the need to consider ethics in the implementation of Agenda 21.”

In the West Asia-North African context, ethics, shared values, morality, and religion are interconnected and largely indistinguishable. Islam is a comprehensive way of life, “concerned with individual rights, practices and rules, but also with issues often associated with the state and governance.” It comprises a wide range of rules, covering both the private and public spheres, ranging from hygiene and dietary norms, prayer and fasting, to financial administration practices, and civil and criminal law.

Moreover, there is strong uptake potential for Islamic environmentalism in the WANA region. Some scholars suggest that violations of environmental ethics by Muslims results from a gap between theories and practice — a gap that could be fulfilled by policymakers and Islamic scholars giving a practical shape to the Islamic environmental discourse through appropriate legislation. Muhammed Iqbal opines that the modern world stands in need of biological renewal; moreover, that religion can ethically prepare modern man to over come the burden of its responsibility. Moreover, some suggest that the Qur’an and Sunna comprise all of the necessary elements to develop and construct environmental ethics. An Islamic sustainable development model could be incorporated into the work of the many Islamic environmental movements including Islamic eco-

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2 Ironically, in Max Weber’s view, the Protestant ethic provided the methodological and rational platform for capitalism to take hold. Modernity and capitalism then limited the scope of moral obligation through rigorous set of rules to be followed.

3 UN, 2002).
4 Islam sets out to order personal and social behaviour in detail on the basis of Qur’an and Sunna (Black, The West and Islam). Islam does not only decide on matter of belief but also on all aspects of a believer’s life and death, everything a Muslim does is subject to the rules of his religion, Mohamad, The Challenge.

5 Reference to annalis’s work
6 Sardar, Touch of Midas.
7 Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam.
philosophies, Islamic environmental law, green jihadi activism, halal eco-certified foods, Islamic eco-villages, Islamic local currencies, 'green' sheikhs and scholars. In summary, an Islamic sustainable development model — one that is regionally and ethically focused — offers a much-desired alternate narrative to the profit-dominated 3Ps model and hence from Western capitalism. As such, it represents a platform with the potential to galvanise the commitment and political will necessary to see the fundamental changes needed for sustainable development to take hold.

Islamic sustainable development models in the making

The idea of approaching sustainable development from an Islamic perspective is not entirely new. In 2002, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) developed the Islamic Declaration of Sustainable Development. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) presented this model to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 at the RIO+20. Like the 3Ps model, the Declaration’s principal weakness is how it is influenced by the capitalist development framework. By elevating economic growth as the means by which to close the gap between Islamic and developed countries, the model ignores the unsustainable and environmentally destructive actions through which such growth is facilitated.

A more effective attempt was made by Dr Odeh al Jayyousi in his 2002 book: Islam and Sustainable Development. His scholarship highlights the cultural and spiritual gap in the conventional/Western sustainable development model. However, while the book presents a comprehensive Islamic worldview on sustainable development, it lacks the metrics required for successful application and monitoring within the policy sphere.

An Islamic basis for a sustainable development model: Maqasid al-Shari’a

The two fundamental sources of Islamic law are the Qura’n and the Sunna. The process for deriving law from fundamental texts is called ijtihaad; ijtihaad is the process by which the texts can be applied in changing circumstances, including contemporary issues. In order for ijtihaad to be valid, it must comply with the true goals or objectives of Shari’a (maqasid al-Shari’a).

Maqasid al-Shari’a is an important science that defines the divine wisdom, purposes and intents behind the rulings upon which Shari’a is based such as justice, human dignity, freedom, generosity, facilitation and social cooperation. Scholars have identified different objectives of Shari’a, but the principle objective is generally considered to be maslaha (social welfare). In practice this means that when jurists interpret the fundamental sources they cannot interpret it in a way that is inconsistent with broader social welfare or what is in the best interests of society. As shown in the diagrams below,

10 ISESCO is an international organization specializing in the fields of education, science, culture and communication, established to develop an educational system inspired by the Holy Qur’an and the Sunna. It is financially supported by the Saudi Arabian government. Arab countries clearly dominate this platform, although membership includes a total of fifty Muslim (majority) states, including Iran and Indonesia. It is closely allied to the International Islamic Fiqh Academy. This suggests active participation of religious scholars.
11 Al-Jayyousi, Islam and Sustainable Development.
12 Auda, Maqasid Al-Shariiah; Auda, Maqasid Al-Shariiah as Philosophy of Islamic Law.
13 Numerous renowned scholars have extensively worked on Maqasid al-Shari’a (among them are Abd al-Malik al-Juwayni, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Najm al-Din al-Tusi, al-Tahir ibn Ashur and Yusuf al-Qaradawi).
maslaha has been divided into three sub-categories: necessities, needs and luxuries; and necessities into the sub-categories of preservations of faith, life, wealth, intellect and lineage (posterity).\textsuperscript{14}

The objective of the Shari’a is to promote the welfare of human beings, which lies in safeguarding their faith, their life, their intellect, their posterity, and their wealth. Whatever ensures the safeguard of these five fundamentals serves public interest and is desirable.\textsuperscript{15}

These categories have evolved over time in response to changing conditions and challenges. Ibn Ashur\textsuperscript{16} presented a new understanding of maqasid al-Shari’a by reconceptualising each necessity in contemporary terminology: ‘Preservation of lineage’ evolved into ‘the preservation of the family system’ and ‘protection of true belief’ evolved

\textsuperscript{14} Auda, Maqasid Al-Shariah; Auda, Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law; Mohammad Hashim Kamali, “Maqasid Al Shari’ah – Made Simple”; Ashur, Ibn Ashur; Attia, Towards Realization of the Higher Intents of Islamic Law; “Maqasid Al-Shari’ah in Islamic Finance.”

\textsuperscript{15} Al-Ghazali

\textsuperscript{16} Ashur, Ibn Ashur.
into ‘freedom of beliefs’. He also introduced the concepts of freedom, rights, and
equality as *maqasid al-Shari’a* in their own right. Yusuf al-Qaradawi has included the concepts of human dignity and rights as fundamental objectives of *Shari’a*.  

These extensions of *maqasid al-Shari’a* demonstrate that there is space for Islamic reform to respond to contemporary global issues. According to Jasser Auda, the development of *maqasid al-Shari’a* is an opportunity for Islamic law to address the challenges facing Muslim societies by presenting an intellectual Islamic methodology for reform. Arguably, environmental degradation presents the most pressing challenge of the 21st century, and as such, should be included as part of the *maqasid al-Shari’a* (as this is *maslaha* — i.e. the best interests of society). In short, an Islamic sustainable development model based on *maqasid al-shari’a* represents an efficient response to poor environmental governance from within the Islamic sphere.

### A new Islamic model of sustainable development

Based on the above understanding of *maqasid al-Sharia’a*, and in response to the deficits outlined above, a new model of sustainable development is proposed centred around the notion of human dignity and based on five pillars that uphold dignity: justice (*’adl*), human stewardship of natural resources, intellectual knowledge and education (*’ilm*), social welfare (*maslaha*) and wealth and economic activities (*Iqtisad*).

#### Table 1: Redefining sustainable development through *Maqasid al-Shari’a*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Islamic sustainable development conception</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What to sustain?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Why?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Objects of concern</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Methodology</strong></td>
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#### Table 2: Pillars of the Islamic sustainable development model

<table>
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<th>Pillars to sustain human dignity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social, individual, economic and environmental Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural resources and ecosystem services</td>
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<td>Social Welfare</td>
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<td>Wealth and economic development</td>
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<td>Knowledge and education</td>
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### 1. Human dignity

The dignity of the human person is not only a right in and of itself, but a central tenet of Islam and fundamental to Arab identity. Islam’s acknowledgement of human dignity also constitutes the basis of fundamental rights in international law. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in its preamble: ‘recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’.

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17. Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law*.
18. An Islamic expert on Maqasid el Shari’a
19. Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law*.
20. Dignity also constitutes the basis of fundamental rights in international law. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in its preamble: ‘recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’.
finds its origins in the liberty that Allah accords to men.

We have bestowed dignity on the children of Adam.\(^{21}\)

The Qur’an states that human beings were created “in the best of moulds”;\(^{22}\) they are born free and granted intellect. This enables them to make reasoned choices and maintain a higher position with respect to all other creatures.\(^{23}\) This explains why even the unborn enjoy the right to life, and the dead have the right not to be mutilated and to be buried decently and quickly.\(^{24}\) Since human beings are free, they should not be coerced nor should life be unnecessarily regimented so as to deprive liberty.\(^{25}\) It is on this basis that both the Qur’an and the Sunna prohibit persecution, aggression, and violation of human dignity. Instead, personal growth is encouraged, through piety and righteousness.\(^{26}\)

2. Justice

In Islam, justice is a right, responsibility (a duty towards God), and a supreme virtue.\(^{27,28}\) Islam also recognises the importance of equality before the law, without discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, religion or status.

“And among those We created, is a community which guides by truth and thereby establishes justice”.\(^{29}\)

O you who believe! Be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for God’s sake, even though it be against your own selves, your parents, or your near relatives, and whether it be against rich or poor.\(^{30}\)

God commands (the doing of) justice and fairness […] and forbids indecencies and injustice.\(^{31}\)

3. Intellectual knowledge and education

The importance of education in Islam is highlighted in the first verse of the Qur’an:

Proclaim! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created- Created man, out of a clot of congealed blood: Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful,- He Who taught the pen, - Taught man that which he knew not.\(^{32}\)

Scholars such as Al-Ghazali\(^{33}\) have proposed education models that highlight development as an integral part of learning, leading ultimately to knowledge of God.

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\(^{21}\) (Qur’an 17:70).

\(^{22}\) Q95:4.

\(^{23}\) Ibid 52.

\(^{24}\) Baderin (n 18) 52.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) Ibid.

\(^{27}\) Ibrahim (n 3) 34.

\(^{28}\) The prime objective of Islam is to establish justice on earth: “Indeed, Allah orders justice”, Q16:90.

\(^{29}\) Q7:181.

\(^{30}\) Q4:135.

\(^{31}\) Q19:90.

\(^{32}\) Q66 :1-5

4. Maslaha
As discussed above, *maslaha* relates to the principle of social welfare; that decisions should be, and decision-makers should act, in the best interests of society. With respect to sustainable development, *maslaha* can be closely related to the protection of the vulnerable, another key principle in Islam. Islam demands proper civic behaviour, compassion for others, and the protection of specific groups such as children, women and the elderly:

O Men! Here I have been assigned the job of being a ruler over you while I am not the best among you. If I do well in my job, help me. If I do wrong, readdress me. […] The weak shall be strong in my eyes until I restore them to their lost rights, and the strong shall be weak in my eye until I have restored the rights of the weak from them.

5. Human stewardship of natural resources
The message of Islam is directly drawn from the principle of oneness (that everything originates from one source). Islam sees the universe as an interlocking matrix of abiotic and biotic systems in which every entity has a specific role forming a coherent and united whole.

To Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth, all obey His will. And it is He who originates creation.

Nature not only supports the physical dimension of human needs, but also spiritual dimensions.

Assuredly the creation of the heavens and the earth is a greater (matter) than the creation of men: Yet most men understand not.

Given this mutually constituting relationship between man and nature, the Qur’an and hadith outline various principles on environmental ethics and natural resource protection. Islam recognizes the collective role of humankind as stewards of the earth:

If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift for him.

Some scholars view this guardianship role as a barometer of success with respect to the preservation of natural capital and the fulfilment of Muslims’ responsibilities towards God:

And it is He who has made you successors (khala’ifa) upon the Earth and
has raised some of you above others in degrees (of rank) that He may try you through what He has given you. Indeed your Lord is swift in Penalty; but in deed, He is Forgiving and Merciful.\textsuperscript{45}

Nasr highlights the sacredness of nature into which God’s presence is permeable\textsuperscript{46}. The \textit{Qur’an} notes that with the extinction of species, groups of worshippers are silenced:

Have you not seen that unto Allah glorifies whosoever is in the heavens and the earth, and the birds with wings outspread (in their flight)? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise. And Allah is aware of what they do.\textsuperscript{47}

The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein, glorify Him and there is not a thing but glorifies His praise. But you understand not their glorification. Truly, He is Ever Forbearing, Oft-Forgiving.\textsuperscript{48}

Finally, Islam emphasises the need for maintaining balance. The \textit{Qur’an} states that everything is created in proportion and measure. For a human society to be complete, balance between material and spiritual value is essential. Islam teaches moderation in all matters, with the loss of balance leading to corruption:

Eat and drink from the provision of Allah, and do not commit abuse on the Earth, spreading corruption.\textsuperscript{49}

Corruption has appeared in the land and sea, because of what the hands of men have earned, that God may give them a taste of some of their deeds, in order that they may find their way back.\textsuperscript{50}

However, to keep this balance former knowledge on production and consumption patterns limitations is needed.

\section*{6. Wealth and economic activities}

Al-Ghazali identifies three goals of economic activities: the achievement of self-sufficiency for one’s survival, provision for the wellbeing of one’s family and provision to assist those in economic need.\textsuperscript{51} The \textit{Qur’an}, hadith, \textit{Sunna} and the Sharia set out an elaborate framework for business relations. Within this framework, business is understood socially useful, morally justified and religiously encouraged economic activity, provided that Islamic guidelines are adhered to. Al-Ghazali has enumerates six guidelines on marketplace benevolence: (i) no excessive profit, (ii) be lenient to the poor and strict to the rich, (iii) be gentle and flexible, (iv) promptly repay debt and give the possibility of debt cancelation, and (v) extend credit to the poor without expectations of repayment. Particularly relevant to the sustainable development model is the vehicle through which Islam’s sensitivity to the poor and the need for the wealthy to contribute to their welfare, finds tangibility: zakat.

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{45} (\textit{Qur’an} 6:165).
\item \textsuperscript{46} Nasr, “Islam and the Environmental Crisis.”
\item \textsuperscript{47} (\textit{Qur’an} 17:41)
\item \textsuperscript{48} (\textit{Qur’an} 17:44)
\item \textsuperscript{49} (\textit{Qur’an} 2:60)
\item \textsuperscript{50} (\textit{Qur’an} 30:41)
\item \textsuperscript{51} Islahi and Ghazanfar, “Economic Thought of Al-Ghazali.”
\end{enumerate}
Zakat expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy and for those employed to collect [zakat] and for bringing hearts together [for Islam] and for freeing captives [or slaves] and for those in debt and for the cause of Allah and for the [stranded] traveller – an obligation [imposed] by God.

Model implementation

Defining an efficient and responsible path of sustainability is a sine qua non for resolving the challenges confronting West Asia-North Africa. Lifting the region out of dysfunctional and entrenched patterns of environmental governance will be neither easy nor fast. A long-term strategy for incremental, phased development is required. Specific quantitative and qualitative indicators for the parameters considered in the model need to be defined and evaluated. And a monitoring system needs to be developed, possibly through the creation of a monitoring centre, or a system that links research and development centres around the region.

The states of the West Asia-North Africa region need to make a commitment to and craft a strategy for sustainable development. A decision-making framework needs to be set in place that understands environmental transition as part of the Maqasid al-Shari‘ah. Through this strategy, governments must take responsibility for resolving key sustainable development deficits, including equality of opportunity, equity in the distribution of public goods and services, information availability and transparency, access to justice, accountability, and constituency responsiveness. Such change must take place against a vision for building a critical number of regionally integrated states that place human dignity at the core of the development process.

The role of citizens in the sustainable development model cannot be understated. To date, resources and programming have focused on national policies rather than the role that communities and local leaders can play in natural resources management. End-users need to be engaged in more effective ways, through education (on rights and responsibilities) and empowerment (the space and tools to craft innovative solutions to their own problems). Experience suggests that higher community control over the policies and management of scarce resources results in more effective and sustainable use patterns, and may build resilience. This must to be coupled with identifying and engaging local thought leaders (such as Imams) and change makers (such as youth leaders), to promote changes in attitudes and use patterns, and advocate for the integration of quality and equality of access in broader environmental goals.

Conclusion

This paper reviewed the definition of sustainable development and developed an Islamic sustainable development model for the West Asia - North Africa region based on the objectives of Islamic law. This Islamic sustainable development model is centred on human dignity with five different pillars: first is justice, the second is the stewardship role on natural resources and ecosystems services, the third pillar c
consists of the importance of intellect knowledge and education, the fourth is wealth and economic development and finally the fifth is social welfare. In addition, spirituality would be the soil providing the nutrients and water
available for a healthy growth. The sun, the infinite flow of energy would be the essence of Allah himself. Knowledge is a pillar in itself to highlight the importance of it to revise and revisit the other four pillars. For this framework to be effective, the importance of monitoring and control is crucial. In this regard, specific indicators for the quantitative and qualitative measurement of the parameters considered in the framework need to be defined and evaluated for the WANA region.
Figure 7: Sustainable livelihood framework for policies, institutions and processes to fulfil the objectives of Islamic Law (Maqasid al-Shari'ah)
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