

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### THE ISLAMIC NARRATIVE OF BASIC HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS OF UNDP

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**Muhammad Omer Rafique, Dr. Muhammad Akram Hureri, Dr. Hafiz Atif Iqbal, Qurat Ul Ayn, Dr. Khushbakhat Alia, Muhammad Abdullah. The Islamic Narrative Of Basic Human Development Indicators Of Undp -- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 20(2), 805-813. ISSN 1567-214x**

**Keywords: Human Development, Spirituality, Undp, Development Indicators, Islamic Development.**

#### ABSTRACT

The individual and collective ambitions of all Muslims should be aligned with the utmost guidance given to them in the form of the Quran and Sunnah. It is significant for Muslims to learn and apply the Islamic perspective on the three most important development indicators stated by the United Nations Human Development in its Report 1990 and detailed in the recent SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). These are Health, literacy, and a better

standard of living. The study aims to highlight the Islamic narrative on these three aspects of life as an indicator of development. The method of the present study is a qualitative grounded theory. For this purpose, data was gathered from the study population which consisted of the Quran and authentic Ahadith. The study concluded that Human Development is one of the core targets of Islam. It establishes a system of worship that advances them towards real development which not only comprises the three indicators (longevity, knowledge, and decent living) but ads and advocates for one more essential ingredient, which is spirituality and strength of a human soul, to form a revolutionary human in this world and in the hereafter.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Humans are the most precious thing created by Allah SWT. In fact, all the other creatures are to serve this honorable creature. It is stated by Allah SWT in Quran: He is the one who created all things on earth for you. (*Al Quran 02: 29*)

So, he is the groom and the special guest of this universe. All things are here to serve humans, not the human for developing things. We consume our lives in developing things, not ourselves, which caused the importance of things and matter to go beyond the importance of humans themselves. Even the value of a human is judged through the belongings he owns. It means that the gauge to measure human value is mortal. While Allah, the creator of this great creation, announces that a valuable human is one who develops characteristics in himself and identified the characteristics in his book.

### ***Research Problem:***

There are forty-nine United Nations member Muslim nations. The Muslim and Non-Muslim members all agree on the development of humankind through the development of health, education, and a better standard of living. The question for Muslims is “Do Islam also considers these to be indicators of human or is describes any unique aspect of human to be improved to consider them as developed human?”

### ***Research Question:***

Does Islam also consider these to be indicators of humans or is describes any unique aspect of humans to be improved to consider them as developed humans?

### ***Research Objective:***

To highlight the point of view of the Quran and Sunnah on longevity, knowledge, and decent living as indicators of human development and find any added unique aspect of humans to be developed according to Islam.

***Method:***

The method of the present study is a qualitative grounded theory. Data was gathered from the study population which consisted of the Quran and authentic Ahadith to highlight the point of view of the Quran and Sunnah on longevity, knowledge, and decent living as indicators of human development.

***Meaning of Development:***

There is an everlasting debate on what actually, the development is. This is literally one of the reasons for the unjustified opinions of some Western scholars regarding Islam and development. However, linguistically it is defined in Cambridge English Dictionary as: “(GROWTH) or the process in which someone or something grows or changes and becomes more advanced.” The business dictionary states: “An extension of the theoretical or practical aspects of a concept, design, discovery, or invention or the process of economic and social transformation that is based on complex cultural and environmental factors and their interactions.” All in all, it is a process of advancement and progress through any means. What is the destination of this progress, remains an undecided issue. Now let us have a look at the perspective of Islam on development.

***Islam and Development:***

Islam is the religion of development. The core purpose of Islam is to uplift the human from being a worldly creatures to a resident of the heavens and beyond. The life of Rasulullah (PBUH) throws light on this point. As a result of the Islamic revolution, the people of the Arabic peninsula, who were the first addressee of Islamic content and embracers of Islam, gained a multi-fold development in all aspects of life. They had a solid governance infrastructure and a very high gross domestic growth so much so that the nations accepted their lifestyles and became symbols of development. This development includes the worldly one as well as the prosperity in the hereafter. Allah narrates the supplication of Muslims in the Quran: (*Al Quran 02: 201*)

So, here Allah SWT teaches us how to ask for development and discusses worldly development prior to the upcoming one in Akhirah. But some Western writers propagated this misperception that Islam is against development. It does not allow the followers to prosper and flourish. It is based on feudalism and confines the Muslims in a cage. Those who strongly support this dictum include Weber, Parkinson, and Sutcliffe. (Parkinson, 1967, Weber, 1976; Sutcliffe, 1975). Weber defends that the feudalistic Islamic religion provides a minute appreciation for individual initiative, scientific analysis, and intellectual courage (*Weber, 1976*).

Mujahid (1982) writes: “For a long time, most Western observers had regarded Islam simply as an "obstacle to change", with a decreasing relevance to the political and social order, but the current phenomenal Islamic resurgence has jolted them out of this misperception into recognizing that: "The history of Islam in the modern period reflects the continued interaction of

the Islamic tradition with the forces of change". The rather facile presupposition that increased modernization would undermine religious tradition while fostering the process of secularization, as it happened in the West, has also been contradicted by recent events in the Muslim World. In several Muslim countries (e.g., Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, and Malaysia): "It is the young university-educated Muslims who are using their newly acquired knowledge and skills to develop Islamic responses to political and social problems and to organize movements to implement them".

Discouragingly, there are some Muslim leaders who did not think that Islam and development can go side by side. One of them is Mustafa Kamal Atatürk of Turkey, Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, and Benjadid of Algeria are examples of Muslim rulers who acquired secularism as the only way to development and modernization (*Esposito, 2000*).

After agreeing to the point that Islam does not hinder development, instead, it appreciates the individual and cumulative progress of Muslims in this world, we move towards the Human Development Indicators (HDIs) to understand the Islamic perspective of development.

#### ***Human Development Indicators:***

UNHDP issued its first report in 1990 which highlighted the truth that we cannot measure Human development in monetary terms only. There are several other aspects of development to be considered. The report introduces the development as: "Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. The most critical of these wide-ranging choices are to live a long and healthy life, to be educated, and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights, and personal self-respect."

It should be borne in mind that the relationship between economic growth and human progress is not simple. GNP growth with a reasonably equitable distribution of income is generally the right way to real human development. But if the distribution of income is unequal and if social expenditures are low like in the case of Pakistan and Nigeria or distributed unevenly as in the case of Brazil, human development would lack much, despite high GNP growth. The same is the case of using income for crucial purposes. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, where the per capita income was \$6,200 which was higher than in many other countries, life expectancy was only 64 years and the adult literacy rate is an estimated 55% only in 1990.

So, the report focuses on economic growth as not the right measure of development, but three indicators should be dealt with to find a real development level. These are:

- Health,
- Literacy
- and a better standard of living.

In fact, the 17 SDGs (sustainable development goals) approved by United Nations, at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 are a detail of these three core points. So, we take only these three as main points and find out the answer to the question: Does Islam considers these three as an indicator of human development?

### *Health*

Islam considers health as one of the precious gifts of God. Prophet PBUH said: Two gifts that many people are deceived in are our health and leisure. (*Bukhari, 1422H*).

It means that much can be achieved through these two valuable premiums, but most people do not. In another, Hadith declares a healthy body is better than a weak body. “A strong Momin is better than a weak Momin, but both are good” (*Hanbal, 2001*). It is because a healthy body can worship more and help others more than a weak body. There is one supplication narrated by Ibn e Abbas, which clarifies the Human Development Indicators and what are desirables to a Muslim. Ekrimah narrated that when Ibn e Abbas used to drink Zamzam, he used to say: O Allah I ask you for beneficial knowledge and enough provision and health against every illness. (*Dar Qatni, 2004*)

It is narrated by Umme Dardaa RA from his husband that Prophet PBUH said that Allah SWT has created both the illness and the medicines and fixed a remedy for each illness. So, get treatment but do not use Haram as medicine. (*Dawood S.A., n.d.*). In this verse, He ordered to take medicine after illness and announces that Allah has created a remedy for every illness, then it is on the researchers to find out the connection of remedy to the illness. The longevity of life is a fascinating aspect. In Islam, a long but disciplined life is better than a short meaningless life. Even the Prophet PBUH asked for the longevity of life to live the month of Ramadan, to earn in the period of mercy Allah SWT. (*Ummal K., 1981*).

In another Hadith, Prophet SWT told the secret of longevity of life and increment in provision. Anas bin Malick reported that he heard Prophet PBUH saying: Who like his provision to be increased and his life to be continued he should ally with his relatives. (*Bukhari, 1422H*). All these quotes emphasize a single point that health and longevity of life are not only desirable in Islam, but it is also a prominent indicator of Islamic development. Due to this, Muslim scientists contributed a lot in evolving the medical sciences which constructed a road map for the western scientists to follow. Islamic tradition has divided diseases into four kinds: spiritual, functional, structural, and superficial. Spiritual diseases, such as schizophrenia, are very severe. Imbalances of temperament are called functional diseases. Structural diseases change the size, form, or number of organs (*Khan, 1986*).

Muslim scientists related the practice of religion to health and said it is helpful. For example, offering prayers five times influences reducing psychological stress and keeping life structured and disciplined. The gathering for prayers also provides a chance to express motivations, hopes, and personal

needs. (*Al Gesir, 1961*). One wonders how Western scholars were mis-led to the conclusion that Islam is a hindrance to development, while Islam emphasizes one of the main indicators of development.

### ***Literacy:***

In Islam, knowledge is life. It is the most significant indicator in measuring the development of humans. A developed human cannot be illiterate. The importance of education cannot be overemphasized in Islam. It gave a complete system of education.

This system was headed by the principal teacher Prophet PBUH himself. He taught the Sahaba like a father (*Al-Humaidi, 1996*), who were the initial students of his academy and mentored them to become the leaders of the whole world. The registration process was to utter the words of Kalima Shadah and accept Allah as the one and only God. Although there was no attendance register the Prophet PBUH used to ask about the missing student (*Bukhari, 1422H*). The classes were held daily, and weekly public lectures were also held on Fridays. Although ladies used to attend these classes in complete Hijab (*Hajjaj M.B., n.d.*) A separate class was conducted for them on Monday (*Bukhari, 1422H*). A special class for high-level students was also held after Isha daily in a separate classroom which was his own house (*Al-Baghwi, 1983*). Other lectures were not confined to the classroom (Mosque) but, at times, he used to teach them in the journeys and meadows (*Hanbal, 2001*). If a mistake was made by any student, especially in the implementation of the teachings, he was disciplined with several measures including an impression of anger and that was enough for the brilliant students to correct themselves (*Hanbal, 2001*).

An ongoing process of consultation was available, anyone could consult with the merciful teacher at any time, and if someone found it difficult, he could consult any other student. Even female students used to consult him through the wives of Prophet PBUH who were also his students (*Al-Baghwi, 1983*). After completing the graduation process the students were deployed as mentors and teachers to other regions to educate the other societies. Muaaz bin Jabal, who scored the highest marks in the subject of Fiqh of Halal and Haram, was sent to San'aa Yemen (*Hanbal, 2001*). It was considered a liability for graduated or high-level students to educate the freshers. This is just a glimpse of the education system established by the Prophet PBUH which enabled the students to bring a tangible revolution in the world within some decades. All the above information is based on the authentic narrations of Prophet PBUH.

### ***A decent standard of living:***

This word was used by the UNHDP report in 1990 and many of the 2015 SDGs (sustainable development goals) are derived or linked with this indicator, such as poverty elimination, zero hunger, clean water and sanitation, decent and economic growth, better life under the water and on the land industry, innovation and infrastructure, etc. (*UNHDP, 2015*). Islam uses a compact word for all these necessities: RIZQ. Khalifa (2001) said that the word 'rizq'

means whatever is beneficial and it also means bestowal by Allah SWT. The word 'rizq' is used to indicate the meanings of 'Godly sustenance', 'Divine bestowal', 'Godly provision', and 'heavenly gifts' (Azaddin et. Al., 2001). Allah says, "God is the Provider, the Lord of Power, the Ever Mighty." (Al Quran 51:58)

The al-Ghazali (1987) describes that the Name of Allah, The Provider (Al-Razzaq), is "the one who has created provision and He has conveyed that provision. And He has created the means whereby the beneficiary may enjoy and benefit from these blessings."

So, Razzaq is the one who nourishes us, and generally, that which one wears or uses is called Rizq. The Prophet PBUH said, "If you were to rely on Allah as He should be relied on, He would provide for you as He provides for the birds. They go out in the morning hungry and return in the evening full." (Hanbal, 2001). In general, the one who provides and the one who eases the process of reaching us is Razzaq. In a broader sense, Rizq consists of everything whether material or social that is required to live easily in this world. Man is a social being and needs to collect wealth, purchase property, make a family, keep friendships, practice influence, and adore fame and a good reputation in public. All these are permissible if a person lives within his means and has earned these through his hard work and Allah's blessings. A good spouse and children are part of Rizq. If they are on the right path together it becomes difficult for Satan to misguide them and take them astray from the righteous way. Thus, Rizq comprises of all the said indicators, and Muslims are ordered by Allah to seek their Rizq through all Halal means and improve the standard of living through science and technology. We are commanded to strive to obtain our rizq as Allah (ﷻ) says: Then disperse in the land and seek Allah (ﷻ)'s bounty." (Al-Quran 62: 10)

So, Islam requires Muslims to procure the needs of life like food, clothing, shelter, and related goods and services through Halal means. This is how he can develop himself in this world.

#### ***A fourth important indicator of Human development:***

Any human cannot be considered developed unless he fulfills the command of his creator because a human does not mean a mere body made up of flesh and bones, it also comprises a soul which is more important for humans than his blood. In a developed human that soul should be strong enough to stop him from practicing anything forbidden by his Lord. This spiritual power is a mandatory requirement for a developed human according to Allah: Indeed, successful is the one who purified himself (Al Quran 87: 14)

Chapra (2008) proposed Ibn e Khaldun's theory that development does not depend on one single factor, instead the development or advancement of any society is denoted by the interdependency of moral, social, political, demographic, institutional, economic, and historical elements. This theory is dynamic in nature, and thus there is no ceteris paribus hypothesis because all

the variables are varying time with one variable working as the real trigger mechanism, which is faith.

If a person is very healthy or has all the medical treatment available to him and he also holds a master's degree in a prevalent subject and earns a handy income, he is fulfilling the three indicators for human development, but the most important one is missing. That is the spiritual capability. This ability can be translated to Imaan or Tazkiyyah (purification of the soul). This seed produces the other fruits of Tawakkul, Sabar (patience) Shukr (gratitude), Taqwah (piety), compassion, empathy, and Qana'h (contentment), etc. Allah also connects the two indicators of development: Taqwa and the provision of Rizq in the following verse: "And whoever fears Allah – He will make a way out for him. And will provide for him from where he does not expect." (*Al Quran 65: 2-3*)

It can be argued these are the result of education and knowledge. So, there is no need to add the indicator. The answer to the myth is, the education or literacy we take into account is studying in schools and universities and completing the degree programs. This does not involve or produce spiritual capability. Every now and then we experience that the educated or literate people are involved in crimes and crossing the limits set by their Lord, although the education system described and practiced by Prophet PBUH was enough to produce these qualities but not ours. Therefore, it is necessary to understand that a developed human needs to excel in this field also, otherwise, he may be considered developed apparently in this short life but can never succeed in the hereafter. Based on the Islamic worldview, self-actualization is an ongoing and dynamic process. It requires a continuous effort by man to realize his natural duties and destination as a servant and a vicegerent (Khalifa) of Allah on earth. The level of development is highly based on the implementation of Allah's commands in society. This kind of positive relationship between religion and development is declared by the Holy Quran: "If the people of the towns had but believed and feared Allah, We should indeed have opened out to them (all kinds of) blessing from heaven and earth; but they rejected (the truth), and we brought them to book to their misdeeds." (*Al Quran 07: 96*).

### CONCLUSION:

- Islam is not an obstacle in the way of development of Muslim society rather it urges the followers to develop themselves. Although the concept of development is broader than the development theory of Western scholars, that is why they were in a misconception about Islam and development.
- Islam accepts the three indicators of human development, health, education, and a better standard of living. There are clear text proofs from the Quran and Sunnah highlighting these indicators' importance.
- Human Development is not limited to these points. According to Islam, it requires the purification of the soul and emotions to develop the human from inside and out. Therefore, more hard work is required in this aspect of life for comprehensive development.



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