



# THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) AND ISLAM

CONTEXTUALIZING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS  
IN THE NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK OF ISLAMIC TRADITION

**Concept, Research, Content, and Design**

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Contextualizing the Sustainable Development Goals  
in the normative framework of Islamic tradition

January 2022

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# ABOUT THIS STUDY

In 2021, the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) SDGs Support Unit in Balochistan commissioned the University of Balochistan (UoB), under its Letter of Agreement with the university, to study and contextualize the meaning of the Sustainable Development Goals in light of Islamic tradition, especially for teachers and students at *madaris*.

This study is the result of an in-depth literature review, consultations and numerous validation seminars with well-known religious scholars and teachers in Balochistan. The ultimate objective of this study is to include religious scholars and students in the development debate, recalling that they have traditionally not been active participants in development discourse.

The consultations held to inform this study focused on themes wherein the messages of Islamic tradition and the messages of the Sustainable Development Goals overlap. Islamic tradition comprises the Holy Quran, the *Hadith* and *Sunnah* (the practice and sayings attributed to the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (P.B.U.H.)), *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) or *Madhhab* (schools of law), and *Sharia* (Islamic law, or the Code of Life). In order to ensure high quality discussion on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), detailed information on the SDGs was translated into Urdu.

To inform this study, consultations were held with 20 scholars and teachers at *madaris* in the districts of Quetta, Sibi, Ziarat, Pishin, Mastung, Loralai and Killa Saifullah in Balochistan. Twelve of these 20 teachers were invited to participate in a content validation workshop, held on 29 December 2020.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Exploring the nexus between Islamic tradition and the Sustainable Development Goals, while engaging teachers and scholars at *madaris*, opens a new chapter of engaging the excluded part of Balochistan's traditional society in development discourse. This endeavour was only possible thanks to the individuals and groups who directly and indirectly supported and contributed to this undertaking.

I am extremely thankful to all of my team members: who added great value to this study and made it compelling.

I am thankful to team at the Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC), University of Balochistan for supporting us technically and logistically, for extending their support, and for conducting consultation sessions and validation seminars.

We are also grateful to the Balochistan SDGs Support Unit for their technical support and timely input throughout the development of this study, which was highly effective and helpful.

**Dr Barkat Shah Kakar**  
**Lead Consultant**

# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>P.B.U.H.</b>	Peace Be Upon Him
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UoB</b>	University of Balochistan

# NON-ENGLISH TERMS

<i>Adl</i>	Equality
<i>Aya/Ayat</i>	Verse of the Holy Quran
<i>Ehsan</i>	Equity
<i>Fasad</i>	Corruption
<i>Fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence
<i>Hidayah</i>	Guidance
<i>Ijrah</i>	Leasing
<i>Iman</i>	Faith
<i>Khalifah</i>	Vicegerent or deputed guardian
<i>Madaris</i>	Religious schools
<i>Malaika</i>	Angel
<i>Musharakah</i>	Partnership
<i>Nafs</i>	Soul or inner-self
<i>Qana'uat</i>	Contentment
<i>Sharia</i>	Islamic law
<i>Surah</i>	Chapter of the Holy Quran
<i>Sunnah</i>	The life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study analyses and contextualizes the meaning of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in light of Islamic tradition, especially for teachers and students at *madaris* (religious schools) in Balochistan. The central pledge of the SDGs is to **leave no one behind**. This means the inclusion of all people, including those who have been excluded in the past. To provide an opportunity for teachers and students at *madaris* to be part and parcel of development discourse in the province, the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) SDGs Support Unit commissioned this study to highlight the alignment of Islamic tradition with the SDGs.

By contextualizing the SDGs in the framework of Islamic teachings, this study seeks to enhance the core messages of the SDGs and contextualize the SDG agenda in Balochistan. As the study shows, the SDGs are well-aligned with Islamic tradition, especially in terms of issues such as poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance, injustice, inequality, peace, cooperation, the environment and many other development challenges.

Starting a dialogue on the themes of improving human lives and protecting nature through the integrated discourse of sustainable development with religion, and especially with Islamic tradition, educational systems and institutions, offers an opportunity to craft solutions to the complex and multifaceted development challenges in Balochistan.

Normative Islam addresses most of the issues at the heart of the SDGs through ethical, legal and social considerations. As Dr Riffat Hassan, professor of religion and humanities at the University of Louisville, puts it, *“people in most of the Islamic society and countries take religion, ‘Islam’, as a matrix, and they contextualize most of the matters of their lives in the ethical and legal frameworks of Islamic teachings”* (Hassan, 1997).

Analysing the 17 SDGs in the normative framework of Islamic tradition reveals the coherence between religion and the aims of sustainable development – most notably the well-being of humans and all living creatures on earth. Teachers at *madaris* discussed their worldview during the rich interaction enabled by the consultations and the workshop organized to inform this study. This worldview centres on the orthodox triangle of God, man and nature. This is the worldview of their students and disciples (followers in prayers) who attend religious ceremony five times each day. This worldview holds that humans are accountable to Allah the Almighty for their deeds in terms of dealing with other people, interacting with non-human creatures, consuming natural resources and acting on the abilities that Allah has bestowed upon them. This conceptual and ideological framework has proven effective in addressing different issues, ranging from poverty to hunger, socio-economic and gender justice, peace, pluralism, climate action and a clean environment at different levels.



Islamic tradition, in all respects, has a rich ethical and normative narrative of a world free from hunger, poverty, violence, exclusion and prejudice. The Holy Quran speaks of love for people and love for Allah as two sides of the same coin. Islamic descriptions of prayers and *Zakat* (giving to the poor, the needy and the hungry), health and cleanliness, compassion and economic prosperity, peace and justice reveal a comprehensive ethical, judicial, educational and normative approach towards the world.

This study analyses the perspectives of normative Islam, drawing on key Islamic sources of knowledge. As it shows, the elements and aspirations of the SDGs are also central themes in Islam, reflecting the clear parallels between inclusive, sustainable development and Islamic tradition. By building on the rich, common ground between Islamic tradition and the SDGs, development in Balochistan can be made more sustainable and more inclusive.

**CONTEXTUALIZING  
THE SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS IN THE  
NORMATIVE  
FRAMEWORK OF  
ISLAMIC TRADITION**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or Global Goals, are a collection of 17 interlinked goals designed to be a “blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.” In 2015, all Member States of the United Nations (UN) committed to achieving the SDGs by 2030 as part of United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1, *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. This universal global agenda comprises 17 goals, 169 targets and 247 indicators.

The SDGs address a range of pressing issues: poverty; hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; clean and affordable energy; decent work and economic growth; innovation, industry and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life on earth; life below water; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals. **Leaving no one behind** is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

## 17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD



## The nexus between development and religion

The dream of a world free from poverty, hunger, slavery, gender-based and racial discrimination, displacement, and violence is embedded in the collective sub-conscious of humanity. Making the world a place worth living in for all human beings has been the motivation of the United Nations since its inception. However, if one lesson has become clear on the verge of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is that bridging the gaps between rhetoric and reality requires different kinds of partnerships. As Clarke (2011: viii) argues, *“The silo worlds that separated public from private, profit from nonprofit, and business from bureaucrats needs to change and amongst the most important but most challenging partnerships that cry out for action are those that link development and faith institutions.”*

Understanding and relating the worldviews and meta-narrative of religions in terms of human well-being, environmental protection, economic and social justice, equality, learning and education has been a persistent gap in development practices. Studying the values of religious systems and the common ground between them reveals that most religions have a strong tradition of ethical and political commitments to charity, human rights, and the well-being of humans and nature in general.

The study of Islamic tradition (the Quran, the *Hadith*, the *Sunnah*, and *Sharia*) shows that there is a vivid commonality and connection between normative Islam and the Sustainable Development Goals, as discussed below.



### SDG 1. No Poverty

Development discourse recognizes that poverty is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, driven by a lack of growth and the unequal distribution of wealth and natural resources. Unless effective poverty eradication policies and strategies are in place, poverty can lead to mass migration, the depletion of natural resources and rampant, unplanned urbanization. Poverty has both political and social ramifications that cut across generations and societies, irrespective of culture or geographic boundaries (Ashraf and Hassan, 2013). Poverty varies from people to people, culture to culture, and time to time. It persists in both rural areas and urban centres, as well as in the world’s developed and developing economies. While SDG 1 calls for the eradication of *“poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions”*, SDG target 1.1 defines extreme poverty as the number of people *“living on less than US\$1.25 a day.”*

Textual analysis of Islamic tradition shows that poverty is described as a phenomenon wherein individuals or groups are not able to fulfil their basic needs. Thus, poverty generally refers to poor financial conditions at both the individual and collective levels. Islamic tradition presents poverty in two distinct ways. In most cases, it is described as a limiting factor, while on other occasions, it is described as sustaining factor.

As a limiting factor, poverty is presented as a state that can lead Muslims astray. A famous *Hadith* (saying) of the Prophet Muhammad, Peace Be Upon Him (P.B.U.H.), is, “*Poverty can lead to infidelity*” (AbiBakr, 1990: 387). In essence, poverty is regarded as one of the main factors that can socially and spiritually corrupt an individual or group (Kates, Parris and Leiserowitz, 2005).

During the consultations held to inform this study, most Islamic scholars confirmed that several sources of Islamic tradition clearly prohibit the concentration of wealth in general, as well as the use of unfair means to accumulate wealth and resources (Khan, 1994). In addition, on many occasions the Holy Quran describes poverty as an outcome of the ‘lust’ of a few people who do not support those who are less fortunate.

As a ‘sustaining’ factor, Islamic tradition regards poverty as a blessing. It is sometimes framed as a concept to motivate the poor to not become criminals or corrupt because they will be compensated for their distress in the hereafter. It extols the poor and the needy to remain content despite their current privations, and to delay gratification.

Analysing poverty in the normative context of Islamic tradition reveals that various sources of knowledge, principally the Holy Quran and the *Hadith*, address the issue through a pluralistic approach. According to the ethical principles of normative Islam, there are social and political reasons to eradicate hunger and poverty. Islam teaches, prescribes and commands the ‘haves’ to help, empower and support the economic conditions of the ‘have-nots’. The Holy Quran stipulates that it is the responsibility of political elites and society in general to take care of the poor and the hungry by giving part of their wealth to people living at the margins of society.

This is not only an Islamic obligation, but also a reflection of the unity of the Muslim *Ummah* (community). At the same time, as noted above, Islam instructs the poor to live with discipline, modesty and contentment.

To alleviate poverty and ensure intergenerational equity, Islam puts in place several mechanisms, including *Zakat*, *Sadaqah*, *Waqf*, *Ushr* and *Wasiyyah*.<sup>1</sup>

*Zakat* was introduced as an obligatory practice in the ninth year of *Hijrat* (migration), with the socio-economic objectives of helping the poor, circulating wealth and serving the cause of Allah. *Zakat* is an Arabic term that means purification, specifically the purification of one’s wealth by giving a certain portion of this wealth to the poor, the needy and the displaced. The Holy Quran, the most authentic and divine source of guidance (*Hidayah*) for Muslims, clearly describes who is entitled to receive *Zakat*:

“*Zakat is for the poor (faqir) and the needy (miskin) and those employed (amil) to administer and collect it, and the new converts (muallaf), and those in the bondage (riqab) and those in debt (garim) and in the cause of Allah (fisabilillah), and the wayfarer (ibn al-sabil), a duty ordained by Allah, and Allah is the All-knowing, the Wise*” (Al-Quran, 9: 60).

The Holy Quran declares that the value of *Zakat* is equivalent to the five obligatory daily prayers (*Salat*). In total, the Holy Quran calls on Muslims 82 times to fulfil the rights of God through prayer, and the rights of people by paying *Zakat* to those in need.

<sup>1</sup> The meaning of the terms *Zakat* and *Sadaqah* is explained in the body of the text. The term *Waqf* means an endowment made by a Muslim to a religious, educational, or charitable cause. *Ushr* is a form of tax, the funds of which are used for social welfare purposes. *Wasiyyah* refers to Islamic inheritance and shares of inheritance.

*Zakat* simultaneously addresses the concentration of wealth in order to mitigate poverty, while fostering a spirit of unity among Muslims. All sources of Islamic tradition describe the payment of *Zakat* (2.5 percent of a person's wealth) and *Ushr* (10 percent of their wealth) to the poor and the needy. The Holy Quran gives this warning to persons who stop paying *Zakat* to the poor:

*"For, whatever you may spend on others, or whatever you may vow [to spend], verily, God knows it; and those who do wrong [by withholding charity] shall have none to succour them"* (Al-Quran, 2: 71).

*Sadaqah* is another method for addressing poverty in Islam that requires Muslims to assist and offer help to deprived members of society. Thus, *Sadaqah* is a form of charity given by believers in Allah to help their fellow human beings. The Prophet (P.B.U.H.) explains the advantages and benefits of *Sadaqah* and, in many places in the Holy Quran, Allah instructs 'financially capable' persons to give *Sadaqah*:

*"In Surah Ba'qara, Allah says, oh believers, whatever you have been given by God, spend from it"* (Al-Quran, 2: 254).

In the following verse of the Holy Quran, Allah the Almighty instructs Muslims to embody modesty while giving charity (*Zakat* and *Sadaqah*) to persons in need:

*"If you do deeds of charity openly, it is well; but if you bestow it upon the needy in secret, it will be even better for you, and it will atone for some of your bad deeds. And God is aware of all that you do"* (Al-Quran, 2: 272).

This verse of the second chapter (*Surah*) of the Holy Quran explains a comprehensive strategy to support the poor and the needy.

It is important to note that the eradication of poverty without hurting the self-esteem of the poor is an ethical principle in Islam. As such, Islam seeks to eradicate poverty while empowering the poor as equals endowed with human dignity. According to an interpreter of the Holy Quran, Muhammad Asad:

*"Islam envisages and demands a society that provides not only for the spiritual needs of man, but for his bodily and intellectual needs as well. It follows, therefore, that – in order to be truly Islamic – a society (or state) must be so constituted that every individual, man and woman, may enjoy that minimum of material well-being and security without which there can be no human dignity, no real freedom and, in the last resort, no spiritual progress"* (Khan, 2019).

Poverty is addressed as a universal issue in Islam. Spiritually, Islam guarantees eternal rewards on the Day of Judgment for those who support the needy and the poor, whether or not they are related to them by blood. Those who support the poor are rewarded in heaven:

*"Fasting for a limited number of days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] – then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] – a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day]. And whoever volunteers excess – it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew"* (Al-Quran, 2: 184).

In addition to requiring Muslims to pay *Zakat* and *Sadaqah* (charity), Islamic tradition allows the payment or feeding of the poor to mitigate one's own 'ordinary' sins, or for failing to fast during the month of Ramadan.

Persons who miss a single fast day can compensate for this by feeding a certain number of poor persons, or by paying a reasonable amount to the poor.



## SDG 2. No Hunger

Scientific advancements in the fields of agro-technology, genetic engineering and modern tools for cultivating and harvesting crops – moving beyond traditional methods of food production and preservation – have exponentially increased net food production in the world. Yet the harsh reality is that hunger persists, revealing that something is seriously wrong with the way food is produced and distributed, as well as the quality of the food available. Malnutrition and food insecurity are widespread, particularly in the developing world. Hunger is also a direct consequence of natural disasters, such as like floods, drought and earthquakes, as well as man-made disasters, such as wars and conflict.

Islamic tradition describes the political connotations related to hunger and poverty, recognizing that hunger and poverty are interlinked. As both have diverse causes and directly limit human lives, Islamic tradition strives to alleviate both hunger and poverty through political, social, ethical and economic means. The Holy Quran addresses various dimensions of mitigating hunger and providing food to people who have lost their livelihoods or means of food production due to social, political or natural reasons.

These mitigation methods are grounded in ethical principals, individual and collective duties/responsibilities, and the promise of heaven for those who feed the poor, the needy and people at the margins of society. Islamic tradition not only requires that Muslims feed their fellow Muslims. Instead, at several times the Holy Quran, the *Hadith* and other traditions make it clear that a just and peaceful society will be only possible if there is economic and social justice, targeting poverty and hunger as the two determinants that limit the lives of all people on the earth (Atalay, 2012).

One of the main reasons for poverty and hunger that the Holy Quran directly indicates is extravagance, wasting resources in general, and wasting food items in particular. This involves the excessive use of resources by a few people, whose aggressive patterns of consumption and controlling attitudes (towards nature) have taken control of most of the commodities which exist to fulfil the basic needs of ordinary people. The Holy Quran clearly states that Allah does not love corrupt aggressors, including people who waste resources required to fulfil other peoples' needs. In Chapter 17 of the Holy Quran, *Al-Isra*, there is a clear message for people who consume more than they need to:

*“Behold, the squanderers are, indeed, of the ilk of the satans – inasmuch as Satan has indeed proved most ungrateful to his Sustainer” (Al-Quran, 17: 26–27).*

During a workshop held to inform this report, religious scholars discussed this *Aya* (verse) of the Holy Quran. They noted that ‘squandering’ is framed in the context of a person possessing wealth that does not belong only to himself/herself. Instead, this wealth is generated through natural resources, and all the resources beneath the land, on its surface or in the sky are for the collective good of all of the world’s inhabitants created by Allah, including insects and birds.

Thus, a person who consumes beyond his/her needs neglects the instructions of Allah and his Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). The interpreter of this translation, Muhammad Asad, describes such squandering as an utter lack of gratitude for the gift of sustenance bestowed by Allah. As such, squanderers are described as being “of the ilk [lit., “brethren”] of the satans.” This is reinforced by another verse of the Holy Quran:

*“For it is He who has brought into being gardens – [both] the cultivated ones and those growing wild – and the date-palm, and fields bearing multiform produce, and the olive tree, and the pomegranate: [all] resembling one another and yet so different! Eat of their fruit when it comes to fruition and give [unto the poor] their due on harvest day. And do not waste [God’s bounties]: verily, He does not love the wasteful!” (Al-Quran, 6: 141).*

Islamic tradition recognizes that hunger and starvation are the consequences of poverty and can compel persons to commit certain crimes. Islam is a religion which is grounded on the universal values of co-existence, peace and love. As such, it outlines ways of preventing different kinds of evil by helping persons in need. Sharing food is a social responsibility. Anyone who provides food to the needy will be rewarded by Allah and will be supported in their time of need (Shaikh, 2017).

Providing food to the needy, the poor and the hungry is not only an obligation for ordinary Muslims, but is also described as one of the main social responsibilities and religious duties of the true Muslim:

*“And they give food, out of love for Him, to the poor and the orphan and the captive, (saying) We feed you, for Allah’s pleasure only. We desire from you neither reward nor thanks.*

*Surely, we fear from our Lord a stern, distressful day” (Al-Quran, 76: 5–12).*

Islamic tradition promotes the values of generosity (*Sakha*) and prohibits Muslims from falling prey to avaricious (*Bukhal*) attitudes. Several *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) strongly emphasize that a true Muslim must be generous and must never be greedy or avaricious. A number of *Hadith* describe mutual cooperation, social responsibility and empathy as the guiding principles for assisting people who are hungry, displaced, poor or needy in different ways. A famous *Hadith* reported by Ibn Abbas states:

*“The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon Him, said, He is not a believer whose stomach is filled while the neighbour to his side goes hungry” (Al-Sunan al-Kubra, 19049).*



## SDG 3. Good Health and Well-being

Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being at all ages is essential to achieve sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 3, reflects the interconnectedness of health and development.

Good health and well-being are also central in Islamic tradition. The maxim “prevention is better than cure” has been a guiding principle of addressing health-related issues worldwide, including in Islamic tradition.



Normative Islam revolves around a value system in which contentment (*Qana'uat*), patience and abstinence are the three core ethical and spiritual principles which help people to remain physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy.

Good health depends on the availability of clean, good quality food. Islamic tradition strives to address issues of health, hunger and poverty, recognizing how interconnected they are. The Holy Quran clearly states:

*“Eat and drink healthy and be not prodigal”* (Al-Quran, 7: 31).

This verse highlights standards of pure, clean food and drinks, while prohibiting ways of living that waste food or resources. Another verse addresses a further dimension of good health:

*“Forbidden to you (for food) are dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which hath been invoked the name of other than Allah, that which hath been killed by strangling”* (Al-Quran, 5: 3).

Analysis of the practices of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) reveals the use of several remedies and cures to remain healthy. These include being open to new tools and experiments to ensure good health and well-being, practising traditional methods of healing based on folk wisdom, and instructing Muslims to seek ways of attaining good health and well-being. This third dimension involves healing through spirituality and meditation. Chapter 26 of the Holy Quran describes how Allah bestows health and eradicates disease:

*“And when I fall ill, is the One who restores me to health”* (Al-Quran, 26: 80).

The religious scholars consulted for this study indicated that there is considerable confusion about health-seeking behaviours in Balochistan.

This confusion is often fomented by the vested interests of different groups. The scholars emphasized that Islamic tradition considers good health a blessing bestowed by Allah the Almighty on all creates. Those who do not take care of their own health are considered transgressors. The following *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) from the *Sahih Muslim* collection of *Hadith* highlights the significance of good health for humanity:

*“A strong believer is better and dearer to Allah than a weak one and both are good. Adhere to that which is beneficial for you. Keep asking Allah for help and do not refrain from it. If you are afflicted in any way, do not say: If I had taken this or that step, it would have resulted into such and such but say only: Allah so determined and did as He willed. This word opens gates of evil thoughts”* (Sahih Muslim, 6954).

There are several traditions that address the significance of good health and well-being. For instance, as Usamah Bin Sharik reports:

*“I came to Prophet (S.A.W.) and his companions were sitting as if they had birds on their heads. I saluted and sat down. Desert Arabs came from here and there. They asked: Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.) should we make use of medical treatment? He replied: Make use of medical treatment for Allah has not made a disease without appointing a remedy for it except for one disease, namely old age”* (Sunan Abu Dawud, 3855).

Islamic tradition recognizes that **health and hygiene** are interconnected. In most cases, cleanliness is considered the sole means of attaining good health and well-being. In the Holy Quran, Almighty Allah expresses His love for those remain clean (Abdalati, 1993).

The religious scholars consulted for this study confirmed that all Islamic books of jurisprudence start with the book of cleanliness (*Taha'rat*). Several *Hadith* focus on cleanliness (hygiene), including a very famous *Hadith* ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.):

*“Cleanliness is half of faith (Iman)”*  
(Sahih Muslim 223, Book 2, Hadith 1).

Islamic address two distinct, but related, dimensions of cleanliness. *Taha'rat* (which literally means purification) signifies both physical and spiritual cleanliness. It begins with spiritual purification, whereby a Muslim cleans his/her inner self from all kinds of attributes that can damage his/her soul and body. These are described in different chapters and verses as purifying one's ways of thinking and acting, as well as disciplining oneself against attitudes that lead towards cruelty, greed, malice, lust, arrogance and other transgressions that may violate the rights of Allah and the rights of other humans or other beings on earth. In the second chapter of the Holy Quran, Almighty Allah expresses His love for those who consider their inner purification with repentance, and who keep themselves clean:

*“Verily, God loves those who turn unto Him in repentance and He loves those who keep themselves pure”* (Al-Quran, 2: 222).

Thus, Islam's obligatory prayers all begin either with taking a bath or an ablution. If a person does not fulfil the requirements of personal hygiene, he/she is not allowed to present themselves before Allah in prayer.



## SDG 4. Quality Education

Education liberates the intellect, unlocks the imagination and is fundamental for sustainable development. SDG 4 recognizes that education and lifelong learning are key to a prosperous, healthy society. Learning benefits every human being and should be available to all. Similarly, Islamic tradition champions opportunities for learning and education for all human beings, irrespective of their creed, race, gender or geographic location.

Learning, education and seeking knowledge to transform one's life for the benefit of humanity is a core message of the Holy Quran and other sources of Islamic tradition. The very first revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) was *Surah Al-Alaq*, the 96<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Holy Quran, entreating Him to read:

*“Read! for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One, who has taught [man] the use of the pen”* (Al-Quran, 96: 3–4).

This *Surah* states that knowing, learning, acquiring, preserving and applying knowledge with the help of the pen are blessings bestowed by Allah on humanity. It indicates that humans are not only capable of reading and understanding, but also of writing down information for future use. The Holy Quran frequently affirms that humans innately possess the capacity to acquire knowledge and reshape the natural world in accordance with their needs, and that knowledge can make them the true *Khalifah* (vicegerent or deputed guardian) of Allah on earth.

In Chapter 39 of the Holy Quran, Allah the Almighty clearly distinguishes between people who know and those who do not know:

*“Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?”*  
(Al-Quran, 39: 9).

Textual analysis of the Holy Quran and the *Hadith* shows that quality education is highlighted a number of times. Islamic tradition frames education as way of living, directly connected to the moral training of children and adolescents, especially to attain a character grounded in truth, righteousness, love for humanity and peaceful co-existence. The religious scholars consulted for this study explained that Islamic tradition places attitudinal and behavioural training at the centre of pedagogy. Practising the ethical principles of the Holy Quran, as described above, is a core mandate of Islamic tradition. At the same time, Islamic tradition consistently emphasizes the importance of seeking all kinds of beneficial knowledge and education.

According to the Holy Quran, the superiority of humans compared to angels (*Malaika*) is purely due to humans’ (Adam’s) capacity for accumulating knowledge (Al-Quran, 2: 286–288). This is also the case in other sources of Islamic tradition.

Discussions with religious scholars during a series of dialogues and consultative meetings revealed another dimension of this theme. Seeking knowledge and attaining an education is not only the right of Muslim men and women, it is an also their obligation to seek knowledge throughout and at each stage of their lives. They are instructed to travel as far as China, if needs be, in search of knowledge. Mishkat al-Masabih, an authentic source of the *Hadith*, attributes this quote to the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.):

*“The search for knowledge is an equal obligation on every Muslim”* (Mishkat al-Masabih, 218).

The study of Islamic history, particularly the lives of the Caliphs of Islam, shows that learning and teaching are two interlinked obligations for all Muslims. A famous saying by the second Caliph of Islam, Umar ibn Al-Khattab, is reported by Imran ibn Muslim:

*“Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, said, Acquire knowledge and teach people. Learn with dignity and tranquility, humility for those who teach you and humility for those whom you teach. Do not be tyrannical scholars and thus base your knowledge upon your ignorance”* (Shu’ab al-Imān, 1650).

According to the Holy Quran, knowledge is a prerequisite for the creation of a just world in which authentic peace can prevail. The Holy Quran consistently emphasizes the importance of the pursuit of learning, even in the midst of war (Al-Quran, 9: 122).

When they discussed the compatibility of Islamic tradition and the SDGs, the religious scholars consulted for this study pointed to a large body of Islamic knowledge on education. This offers hope for initiating a dialogue process regarding the inclusion of the huge number of adolescents and children enrolled in registered and unregistered religious schools (*madaris*) in Balochistan and other parts of Pakistan. To achieve SDG 4’s targets on quality education, it is vital to bridge the gap between *madaris* and the education delivered by formal public and private schools. These two separate systems came into being in British India as binary opposites. Bridging the gaps between them requires viable interventions informed by evidence-based pilot actions.

Engaging religious institutions, especially *madaris*, will help to enrol millions of young people who are largely at the margins of society, while minimizing the sense of alienation between the two systems.



## SDG 5. Gender Equality

The United Nations has championed gender equality since its foundation, and gender equality became a core part of international human rights law through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. Recognizing the particular suffering that women and children experienced during the Second World War, women's rights became a central target for development, leading to the current focus on the empowerment of women and girls, and equality between all genders, at all levels (Gorman, 2001).

Ending discrimination against women and girls is vital for upholding human rights and securing a sustainable future. Gender equality that empowers women and girls advances economic growth and human development. By contrast, inequality limits freedoms and deprives both women and men of opportunities for achieving their full potential.

Social concerns are a central theme of monotheistic religions, particularly Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), with a focus on helping and empowering persons who are discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity and other factors.

Islamic tradition challenges the marginalized positions of slaves, children and women. During the early life of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) in Mecca, a social movement called *Hilf al-Fudul* sought to counter economic hegemony and female infanticide in the Arabian Peninsula.

During the workshop and consultations held for this study, religious scholars affirmed that Islamic tradition has equal expectations for both men and women in terms of virtues, prayers, laws, conduct, manners and “conscious sensitivities”. In the Holy Quran, Allah the Almighty clarifies the equal spiritual position of men and women (Hassan, 1987). Chapter 4 of the Holy Quran, *An-Nisa*, affirms that Allah expects equal spiritual, mental and physical virtues from both men and women:

*“For men there is reward for what they have earned, (and likewise) for women there is reward for what they have earned and ask Allah of His bounty. Surely, Allah is ever all knower of everything”* (Al-Quran, 4: 32).

As there is an equal demand for high moral character and chastity from both men and women, there will be equal rewards for both genders in this world and the hereafter. Moreover, the Holy Quran recognizes that individual merit is part of *Adl* (equality). The Holy Quran teaches that merit is not determined by lineage, wealth, race, sex, temporal titles or religion, but by righteousness, which consists of both *Iman* (right belief) and just action. It points out that no human being can carry another's burden or attain anything without striving for it (Al-Quran, 53: 38–39).

In essence, the Holy Quran adopts a comprehensive normative position on ensuring women's fundamental human rights, following the ethical principles of equality and equity.

Different commentators on the Holy Quran and the *Hadith* summarize that “*men and women are equal but different*”. For example, according to an analysis of Islamic tradition by Professor Fateh Usman and Professor Riffat Hassan, **Islam considers that women are equal to, but different from, men**. Islamic tradition accords women all of the same rights as men – that is, the rights to an education, the right to engage in business, the right to take part in trade, the right to choose a life partner, and so forth.

According to Quranic teaching, every man and woman has the right to work, whether this work consists of gainful employment or voluntary services. The fruits of a person’s labour belong to them, regardless of whether they are a man or a woman. *Surah An-Nisa* states:

*“Hence, do not covet the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others. Men shall have a benefit from what they earn, and women shall have a benefit from what they earn. Ask, therefore, God [to give you] out of His bounty: behold, God has indeed full knowledge of everything”*  
(Al-Quran, 4: 32).

Studies on the subject confirm that Islam gives equal rights and entitlements to both men and women in all walks of life. Research by Dr Riffat Hassan, Professor of Humanities at Louisville University, addresses the compatibility of Islam and human rights. She uses Quranic text as testimony to prove that both men and women have equal rights in Islam to a good life, expression, protection from defamation, education, freedom, justice, work, privacy, sustenance, developing aesthetic sensibilities and acquiring knowledge (Hassan, 1997).

The study of pre- and post-Islamic society in the Arabian Peninsula reflects a change in women’s social condition and position.

In *Surah Al-Noor*, women are taught to show modesty and reject the social pressure to become show pieces or commodity that give pleasure to men to satisfy their sexual lust. Similarly, women’s rights to inheritance shifted, as women were previously part of inheritance, like commodities, in pre-Islamic Arabia.

The canonical *Hadith* collectors Abu Dawud and Al-Tirmidhi both report that the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) said, “*Verily, women are the twin halves of men*”.

Similarly, the ethical principles of the Holy Quran describe men and women as natural partners who complement each other. Their love, affection and cooperation are the only sources of the continuity of humans on earth. The Holy Quran further states:

*“Believers, men and women, are helpers/supporters/protectors of one another, they enjoin good (all that Islam orders one to do) and forbid (people) from bad (all that Islam has forbidden); they perform prayers and give compulsory charity/zakat and obey Allah and His Messenger f. Allah will have His Mercy on them. Surely Allah is Almighty, All-Wise. Allah has promised believers (men and women) gardens under which rivers flow to dwell therein forever and beautiful mansions in gardens of ‘Adn (Eden Paradise) but the greatest bliss is the Good Pleasure of Allah. That is the supreme success”*  
(Al-Quran, 9: 71–72).

The Holy Quran also states that the foundation of the family is mutual respect and love between a woman and a man:

*“And among God’s signs is this: He created for you mates from amongst yourselves (males [...] for females and vice versa) that you might find tranquility and peace in them.*

*And He has put love and kindness among you. Herein surely are signs for those who reflect” (Al-Quran, 30: 21).*

A number of *Hadith*, as well as *Sunnah*, *Sharia* and *Fiqh* call for women to be treated with kindness, humility, righteousness and love. The study of the *Hadith* reveals an emphasis on gender equality and a consistent quest to ease the chains of patriarchy and uphold the rights of women. Imam Al-Tirmidhi, in his account of the *Hadith*, records that the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) once said:

*“The most complete believer in faith is the best in morals, and the best among you is the best to their wives”*  
(Al-Tirmidhi).

During the last sermon of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.), one of the most authentic sources of the tradition of *Hadith*, He said:

*“Observe your duty to Allah in respect to the women and treat them well”*  
(Al-Tirmidhi).

During the consultative meetings held for this report, one scholar, Qari Ehsanullah from Quetta, discussed an interesting metaphor related to the concept of *Ummah*. He explained that people with power and wealth are supposed to lift up others who live on the margins of society. *Ummah* is derived from the Arabic term *Umm*, which means mother. According to this concept, a Muslim society must act with a mother’s instincts and intellect. In patriarchal societies in which women are marginalized, such as Islamic society, resources should be allocated and greater attention should be paid to women and other marginalized groups.



## SDG 6. Clean Water and Sanitation

A lack of clean water is one of the most pressing challenges in the world. According to the United Nations, almost 785 million people worldwide do not have access to at least basic water services, while 2.2 billion people lack access to clean drinking water. There is growing concern that an estimated 700 million people will be displaced by intense water scarcity (United Nations, 2021).

A lack of clean water causes waterborne diseases and related issues, as does the growing challenge of a lack of sanitation facilities. Half of the global population, or 4.2 billion people, lack safely managed sanitation services (WHO and UNICEF, 2019). Similarly, more than 80 per cent of wastewater flows back into the ecosystem without being treated or reused, causing immense environmental degradation (UNESCO, 2017).

Islamic tradition describes water as the most vital source of life on the earth. The Holy Quran and other sources of Islamic tradition recognize that all of the planet’s inhabitants are alive because water exists, and that water and air are the two factors that perpetuate life on earth. Therefore, conserving water, keeping it clean and making accessible for all is the collective responsibility of all Muslims.

The following verses of the Holy Quran reflect this value system, entreating people to use water with care:



“God has created every animate from water” (Al-Quran, 24: 45).

“It is He who has created man from water” (Al-Quran, 25: 54).

Water is recognized as central to human creation, fertility, cleanliness and remedies:

“It is He who sends down water from the skies; you drink thereof, and thereof [drink] the plants upon which you pasture your beasts; [and] by virtue thereof He causes crops to grow for you, and olive trees, and date-palms, and grapes, and all [other] kinds of fruit: in this, behold, there is a message indeed for people who think!” (Al-Quran, 16: 10–11).

The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) emphasized the importance of cleanliness, as well as providing clean water to all of the creatures of Allah. Building wells and providing clean drinking water is considered the most charitable, spiritual, sacrificial and valuable donation possible. Abu Dawud reports that, when the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) was asked, “Which charity is the best? He replied, [Providing] Water”.

Water conservation is a guiding ethical principle of Islamic tradition. A famous *Hadith* recorded by Al-Tirmidhi states:

“Do not waste water even if performing ablution on the bank of a fast-flowing large river” (Al-Tirmidhi).

Islam condemns extravagance, overconsumption and the hoarding of resources. Muslims are forbidden from tainting their souls with such transgressions. As water is described as a collective resource, persons who waste water are called ‘transgressors’. Every drop of water has a price, and those who have access to water are duty bound to help those who do not have access to water.

As another famous saying by the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) states:

“Pouring what remains from your bucket into the bucket of your brother is charity” (Jami` at-Tirmidhi, 1956).

During the group discussions held to inform this study, Islamic scholars revealed that Islamic tradition does not allow any person, group or state to extract groundwater or other resources without a ‘needs analysis’. Muslim scholars and hermeneutics of Islamic sources of knowledge believe that land, rivers, forests and natural resources are created by Allah the Almighty for the collective benefit of all human beings, irrespective of their creed, colour, race, gender or geographic location.

The scholars consulted also noted that, giving a free hand to the few (capitalists) to extract groundwater is an injustice for all of the people who share this part of the planet. They also agree that extracting water unsustainably, or being extravagant in daily life, will directly affect the quality of life of future generations.



## SDG 7. Affordable and Clean Energy

The current concept of development is inseparable from the production and consumption of energy. Human lives around the world depend on energy extracted from non-renewable sources.

According to the International Environment Agency, over 80 percent of the world's energy is obtained by burning fossil fuels, including petroleum (32.8 percent), coal (27.2 percent) and natural gas (20.9 percent). Reliance on non-renewable energy sources – particularly fossil fuels and hydro-carbon sources – threatens the energy security of future generations, while contributing to climate change and environmental degradation in the present day. This includes the depletion of forests, the destruction of the ozone layer, and the decimation of ecosystems and biodiversity. As a result, it is imperative to increase reliance on alternative, sustainable sources of energy.

SDG 7 seeks to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and clean modern energy for all. This means doubling the global rate of energy efficiency improvements, as well as substantially increasing the percentage of renewable energy sources in the energy mix (Nerini, 2018). The world needs to triple its investments in sustainable energy infrastructure year on year, from roughly US\$400 billion to US\$1.25 trillion by 2030 (United Nations, 2016).

Islamic tradition adopts a clear position on the provision of the basic necessities of life for all people in any political or administrative unit (Klarin, 2018). Under Islamic law, governments cannot levy taxes on the necessities of life, which include energy in the modern world. States are required to make all of the necessities of life available to the public within their means without imposing taxes, which are only meant to be imposed on luxuries.

The highest purpose of *Sharia* is to guide humans to preserve the five fundamental elements of life: *Ad-din* (religion), *An-nafs* (life), *Al-'aql* (the intellect), *An-nasl* (ancestry), and *Andal-mal* (property or wealth). Protecting the environment is part of the Muslim faith, as the second objective of *Sharia* is to protect and promote human life on earth.

As environmental protection is vital for human survival, it is considered imperative in Islam. Other concepts linked to sustainable development include the public interest (*Maslahah*), innovative ways of living (*Ijtihad*), wisdom and justice. Islamic jurisprudence (*Maqasid al-Sharia*) also calls for responsible and innovative means of development, based on the principles of equity. One of the most popular *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) – a core source of guidance (*Hidayah*) for Muslims – states:

*“The earth is green and beautiful, and Allah has appointed you his stewards over it.”*

Another verse of the Holy Quran states that all forms of energy were created by Allah the Almighty and are under His sole control. Allah can make them useful to human beings or can use them to bring about our destruction if He so wills (Al-Quran, 45: 12). The Holy Quran declares that all forms of natural energy and wealth are the collective assets of human beings and all other creatures on earth, as reflected in a famous *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.):

*“Muslims have a common share in three things: grass [pasture], water, and fire [fuel]”* (Musnad Vol. 2, Book 22).

Land is identified as the most sacred collective resource for all humans and other creatures. The sun (solar energy and light) and bodies of water (oceans and rivers) also exist for the benefit of all, so that life on the planet can continue. Several verses of the Holy Quran describe the production of energy from natural resources as one of Allah's greatest blessings:

*“(It is He) who produces fire for you out of the green tree lo and behold! From it you kindle”* (Al-Quran, 36: 80).



Chapter 57 of the Holy Quran, entitled *Al-Hadid* (The Iron), speaks of the developmental and destructive potential of the most abundant metal (iron) on earth. Therefore, building infrastructure to generate affordable, clean energy could be considered an act of righteousness, charity and collective good (*Falah*) which Islamic tradition calls for.

Moreover, as Islamic tradition emphasizes the conservation of the natural world, several *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) highlight the importance of planting trees and warn Muslims not to use any kind of natural resource (water, wood, cloth, grain or food) in ways which lead to scarcity or environmental destruction.

Contemporary Muslim scholars confirm that the Muslim community is required to make the world a clean, beautiful place worth living in – both for humans and all other creatures. They must use their knowledge, skills and wealth – including through *Zakat* and *Sadaqah* – to do so.



## SDG 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth

Decent work, a term coined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1999, involves not just the creation of jobs, but also the creation of jobs of acceptable quality. The ILO's definition of decent work, which is the foremost aspiration of SDG 8, is:

*“Work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.”*

Economic growth means a rise in real gross domestic product (GDP), that is, an increase in national income, national output and total expenditure (WHO, 2015). Economic growth should enable improved living standards and the equitable consumption of goods and services. As a result, economic growth is often seen as the ‘holy grail’ of macroeconomics (Davis, 2002).

Islamic tradition strives to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for everyone living in a society. In a nutshell, Islamic tradition accords great value and dignity to labour. Islamic law contains substantial discourse and a number of principles that rationalize decent labour codes that are grounded in dignity, self-respect and an equitable social position for labourers and craft makers.

The employers-employee relationship is not meant to be the relationship of a master and slave, or of an oppressor and the oppressed. Islam holds that the mistreatment of employees will be judged harshly by Allah, as reflected in the *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.):

*“The owners who mete out evil treatment toward their servants shall find the gateway to Paradise shut in their faces”* (Shabon, 1981: 274).

Islamic tradition does not describe employers as less productive, less intellectual or less pious than employees. Instead, Islam teaches that individuals should use their potential, build their skills, seek knowledge and have the courage to use these assets to transform themselves into dignified, pious persons who are loyal to their *Nafs* (soul, inner-self or self-esteem).

As discussed above with regard to SDG 6, Islam teaches that all natural resources belong to Allah the Almighty, who encourages humans to ‘explore sustenance in the width and breadth of the land’. The sanctity of labour is based on the belief that all of the earth is God’s property, entrusted to humankind for the enjoyment and prosperity of human society (Said, 1972).

Islamic tradition spends significant time discussing labour laws and codes. The context of slavery serves as the absolute baseline for guidelines on the treatment of workers. The master-slave relationship functions as a precursor to the employer-employee dynamic. Islam discourages relations based on forced servitude and the strongly encourages the emancipation of slaves (Fazal, 1994).

Islamic tradition also encourages people to earn a livelihood lawfully and labour in a specific skilled domain. The *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) praise a person who adopts certain professions as the ‘sole friend’ of Allah the Almighty, and emphasize the basic labour rights of timely payment for entrepreneurs and labourers:

*“Pay the workers before his/her sweat is dried”* (Sunan Ibne Maja, 2436).

In another *Hadith* reported by Abdullah bin Masud, the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) says:

*“To earn a clean living is, also, a duty next (only) to the principal duties of Faith”* (Baihaqi).

Islam urges every individual to endeavour to seek a livelihood. The Holy Quran states:

*“Oh you who have believed, when [the adhan] is called for the prayer on the day of Jumu’ah [Friday], then proceed to the remembrance of Allah and leave trade. That is better for you, if you only knew. And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah, and remember Allah often that you may succeed”* (Al-Quran, 69: 9–10).

Islamic tradition adopts a pragmatic position to exploring and expanding the possibilities for earning a dignified livelihood, securing employment and creating spaces for people to express their intellectual and creative potential with a view to advancing economic growth and societal prosperity. It requires both employers and employees to interact on a human level, and not to exploit or cheat each other. This is because all people will be answerable for their deeds, particularly in terms of discharging their responsibilities and rights.

The Holy Quran describes the economy as *Khair* and *Fazal*. This means that Islam does not disapprove of economic growth; however, it strives to expand ‘goodness’ and ‘protection’ for people and other creatures by creating a world in which hunger, poverty, lawlessness and servitude are curbed. Therefore, the Islamic financial system not only focuses on economic interactions and exchange, but also offers guidelines for economic behaviour which is at the centre of the moral economy.

The philosophy of the Islamic financial system is grounded on the principles of equity and justice in light of *Sharia* Law and consensual agreements among parties. Any trade or economic activity must be based on real economic exchange.

This means that the relationship between providers and users of money is based on means of exchange such as leasing (*Ijrah*), partnership (*Musharakah*), profit-sharing (*Mudarabah*), forward sales (*Salam*), and cost-plus financing (*Murabaha*). These basic financial instruments are in line with the ways in which the contemporary market economy functions. Islamic law also prohibits the payment or receipt of any predetermined, guaranteed rate of return, in any form. This interest-free form of economic exchange and economic activity aims to encourage investment that contributes to entrepreneurship and risk-sharing. As the Holy Quran states:

*“Oh you who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against your own selves or your parents and kinsfolk. Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God’s claim takes precedence over [the claims of] either of them. Do not, then, follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice: for if you distort [the truth], behold, God is indeed aware of all that you do”* (Al-Quran, 4: 136).



## SDG 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Functioning and resilient infrastructure is the foundation of every successful community.

SDG 9 is based on the understanding that industries and infrastructure must be upgraded to overcome current and future challenges. To do so, the world needs innovative sustainable technologies, and equal and universal access to information and financial markets. This will bring prosperity, create jobs and foster stable, prosperous societies across the globe.

Islamic law encourages positive thinking about innovation and scientific research. Analysis of Islamic tradition – including the Holy Quran, the *Sunnah*, the *Hadith* and *Fiqh* – affirms that transforming living conditions, from good to better, has always been a consistent motive of Islam. Various incidents during the life of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) reveal that He was supportive, forward-looking and pragmatic in terms of improving the possibilities for dignified livelihoods and sustainable economic growth. These are based on the ethical principles of *Sadaqah* (charitable donations), *Zakat* (obligatory donations of 2.5 percent of a person’s wealth per year) and partnerships (*Mudarabah*) for economic entrepreneurship that foster innovative ways of creating employment and livelihoods at scale (Kamali, 1991).

People have explored alternative means of livelihood, trade and communication throughout history. Islamic tradition explains that Muslims must harness their intellectual and spiritual potential to explore a world that has not yet been unveiled. This quest to uncover the secrets of nature for the collective welfare of humanity is a consistent theme in Islamic tradition, especially in the Holy Quran and the *Hadith*. A verse in Chapter 3 of the Holy Quran states:

*“Verily! In the creation of heavens and earth and in alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding”* (Al-Quran, 3: 190).

These signs, as described by contemporary commentators, are meant to expand and validate people's existing knowledge base and spectrum of skills to transform the world in a just and equitable manner, while upholding the ethical and spiritual principles of not harming any creature or nature.

As discussed above in the sub-section above on SDG 7, Chapter 57 of the Holy Quran, *Al-Hadid* (The Iron) describes the inherent developmental and destructive potential of the most abundant metal (iron) in the world. The Holy Quran states:

*"Indeed, [even aforesaid] did We send forth Our apostles with all evidence of [this] truth; and through them We bestowed revelation from on high, and [thus gave you] a balance [wherewith to weigh right and wrong], so that men might behave with equity; and We bestowed [upon you] from on high [the ability to make use of] iron, in which there is awesome power as well as [a source of] benefits for man: and [all this was given to you] so that God might mark out those who would stand up for him and His Apostle, even though He [Himself] is beyond the reach of :human perception. Verily, God is powerful, almighty!" (Al-Quran, 57: 27).*

Muhammad Asad, a renowned interpreter of the Holy Quran, explains the essence of this verse. Allah has endowed humans with the ability to use the natural resources available on earth. An outstanding symbol of this ability is humans' skill for making tools, which is unique to animated beings. The primary material for all tool-making – and, by extension, for all human technology – is iron, the one metal that is found abundantly on earth, and which can be utilized for beneficial as well as destructive ends.

The 'awesome power' (*Ba's shadid*) of iron manifests itself not merely in the creation of weapons of war. Rather, more subtly, it is manifest in humans' every-growing capacity to develop complicated technology. By its inherent, and almost irresistible, dynamism, this gradually estranges humans from an inner connection with nature. The process of growing mechanization, so evident in our modern life, jeopardizes the very structure of human society. Thus, it contributes to a gradual dissolution of all moral and spiritual perceptions epitomized in the concept of divine guidance.

To warn people of this danger, the Holy Quran stresses, symbolically and metonymically, the potential 'evil' (*Ba's*) of iron if it is put to wrong use. In other words, the danger is that humans may allow their technological ingenuity to run wild, thereby overwhelming their spiritual consciousness and, ultimately, destroying all possibility for individual and social happiness.

The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) encouraged innovation in terms of creating effective tools, developing skills and expanding knowledge. The *Muslim Hadith* collection includes an interesting case reported by Hazrat Anas, *Radhi Allahu 'anhu* (May Allah be pleased with him):

*"Once, Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) heard some voices. He asked about the voices, his companions said that there are some people who are grafting the palms. The Prophet opined that if they leave the palm trees without carrying out the grafting it would be better. But at the time of fertilization when there was less and meagre production, they prophet came to know and then he took addressed his companions and said, you better know the ways of your livelihood, don't take advise from me in the matters you know better, and bring only the matters of creed to me."*

A core principle that can be learned from this case is that seeking knowledge, developing technology and refining or upgrading tools to support livelihoods and other practical matters are not bound by religious instruction. Similarly, Hazrat Ali, the fourth Caliph of Islam, explained that the spiritual world and the material world are the ‘two eyes’ of a Muslim, and stated that:

*“I despise a man who expresses lassitude towards his worldly matters. Because if he is indolent in his worldly matters then he will be definitely show excessive languor towards his religious matters.”*

Verses of the Holy Quran call on Muslims to contemplate the creation of the universe, and everything in it, in great depth. This demonstrates that Islam is in favour of scientific research. The study of Islamic tradition shows that Islam values efforts to make life easier for humanity and other creatures. Great appreciation is shown for the use of scientific knowledge to provide food, shelter, and social and economic protection, especially during the life of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) and His successors. Several *Hadith* refer to efforts to improve people’s lives through collective and individual actions as sustaining blessings (*Baqiyat-al-Salihah*) for a person, group or institution.

In the past, Muslim leaders attached great importance to innovation, education and research. They established research centres, such as *Dar al-Hikmah* (the House of Wisdom) in Baghdad. During the Golden Age of Islam – traditionally dated from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to the 13<sup>th</sup> century – researchers were offered scholarships and science flourished, reflecting Muslim leaders’ interest in research and innovation.



## SDG 10. Reduced Inequalities

SDG 10 focuses on reducing economic disparities by bridging the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Current models of economic development have led to the overwhelming concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, at the expense of the many. In 2016, the research department of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) published a paper which admits that the concentration of wealth is causing inequality to increase, which is simultaneously hampering economic growth. As it argues:

*“The increase in inequality engendered by financial openness and austerity might itself undercut growth, the very thing that the neoliberal agenda is intent on boosting. There is now strong evidence that inequality can significantly lower both the level and the durability of growth”* (Srivastava, 2021).

According to the Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report, the richest 1 percent of the world’s population, who possess more than US\$1 million, own 44 percent of the world’s wealth. Adults who possess less than US\$10,000 make up 56.6 percent of the global population, but own less than 2 percent of global wealth. Individuals with over US\$100,000 in assets make up less than 11 percent of the global population, but own 82.8 percent of global wealth (TRT World, 2020).

Islamic tradition holds that all humans are equal before Allah the Almighty, the Creator of the universe. The disparity between the rich and the poor is regarded as an outcome of certain people's lust and greed, specifically their desire to accumulate wealth that is far greater than the wealth required to meet their immediate and future needs.

As discussed in the sub-sections above on SDGs 1 and 2, Islamic sources of knowledge, especially the Holy Quran, instruct Muslims to pray and pay *Zakat* to the poor. Both of these obligations are described as the sole source of deliverance for Muslims in the hereafter. One of the most recited Chapters of the Holy Quran, *Al-Ma'un*, states:

*"Hast Thou ever considered [the kind of man] who gives the lie to all moral law? Behold, it is this [kind of man] that thrusts the orphan away and feels no urge to feed the needy. Woe, then, unto those praying ones whose hearts from their prayer are remote those who want only to be seen and praised, and, withal, deny all assistance [to their fellow men]" (Al-Quran, 107: 1–7).*

Different commentators have explained the meaning of this Chapter, which promotes feeding the needy, protecting orphans and sharing with people in need to support them to build livelihoods and secure sustenance. Islamic tradition prohibits Muslims from violating the rights of the needy, and requires the wealthy to share their wealth with the poor. Islam also condemns the concentration of wealth, and therefore condemns inequality, especially wealth acquired by unfair means, such as creating artificial shortages.

Another aspect of equality in Islam is based on people's modesty and character. The Holy Quran and the *Hadith* affirm that all humans have the same origin and call on them to be kind to each other and challenge socio-economic disparities.

One verse of the Holy Quran states:

*"Oh mankind! We have created you from male and female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who is pious. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware" (Al-Quran, 49: 13).*

Islam describes poverty and dispossession as the outcomes of political acts. Land, the main source of tangible and intangible wealth, is described as the sole property of Allah the Almighty. Islam discourages people from occupying land in order to accumulate extreme wealth, because this is at odds with the understanding that Allah equally bestows resources for the use of all of the earth's inhabitants. Land, like rain from the sky, air and water, is provided to all creatures alike.

In addition to economic disparities, Islamic tradition also addresses social disparities and discrimination. In the last sermon of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.), He states that an Arabian person is not superior to a non-Arabian person, nor is a non-Arabian person superior to an Arabian person. Similarly, a 'reddish' person is not superior to a 'black' person, nor is a 'black' person superior to a 'reddish' person in any sense, except for piety (Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 24204).

As discussed throughout this study, the Holy Quran is the most authentic source of teaching and guidance in Islamic tradition. It is known as *Fur'qan*, literally the Distinguisher or the Book that separate evil from goodness, light from darkness. The Holy Quran outlines Islam's concern with sustaining the social and political order, and maintaining peace, based on an understanding of cause and effect. Islamic law holds that justice leads to peace, while gaps in justice lead to social or political unrest.



As the Holy Quran states:

*“[It shall be given] to all who attain to faith and in their Sustainer place their trust; and who shun the more heinous sins and abominations; and who, whenever they are moved to anger, readily forgive; and who respond to [the call of] their Sustainer and are constant in prayer; and whose rule [in all matters of common concern] is consultation among themselves; and who spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance; and who, whenever tyranny afflicts them, defend themselves” (Al-Quran, 42: 37–39).*

Social concerns are at the very core of Islam. The social change that occurred with the advent of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula included changes in the position and conditions of women, children, slaves and displaced communities. These groups were empowered and emancipated from previously prevalent social taboos and stereotypes. For instance, women in Mecca and Medina were allowed to carry out trade expeditions, participate in wars and engage in political activism.



## SDG 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities

Urbanization is a key feature of the colonial and post-colonial world. The concentration of human populations in urban centres has altered the natural environment and accelerated the depletion of natural resources.

Poor urban planning leads to a scarcity of clean water, a lack of decent work and livelihood opportunities, limited health and educational facilities, and the absence of public spaces, including playgrounds, parks and artificial lakes. It also increases emissions of greenhouse gases that harm the environment, reducing the quality of life worldwide (Barbier, 2010).

According to UN-Habitat’s report, *Urbanization Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, rural-urban migration is increasing, especially in Asia and Africa. In the next three decades, 93 percent of global migration will occur in developing countries (Clos, 2021). To safeguard the environment and natural resources while providing equitable access to resources and opportunities for urban residents, urbanization needs to be reconceptualized. The world needs sustainable cities that are liveable and affordable. SDG 11 focuses on creating sustainable cities through sustainable housing schemes, by improving the livelihoods available in impoverished areas, and by expanding public transport (Brunn, Hays-Mitchell and Zeigler, 2011).

Analysing the Holy Quran, the *Hadith* and Islamic law can help efforts to rethink the model of modern urbanization, which threatens humanity and the rest of the natural world. Islamic tradition emphasizes the importance of living a simple, low-cost and essentially ‘zero waste’ life. For spiritual purposes, people must live with integrity and in peace. Thus, they should dwell in places where they enjoy peace of mind. They should remember that the world is not the sole possession of humanity alone; instead, it is also shared by all of the creatures created by Allah – now and in the future. This principle of living peacefully with other creatures is enshrined in local traditions in Pakistan. For instance, according to a famous Kashmiri saying, ‘*This world is not left to us as an inheritance by our ancestors, rather it is entrusted to us for the coming generations*’.

According to Islamic tradition, humans do not have authority over the acquisition of land or the construction of cities. The Holy Quran explains that people and states are ‘temporary owners’ of the land, whereas Allah the Almighty is the real and permanent owner of the universe:

*“It is He who has made the earth manageable for you, so traverse through its tracts and enjoy of the sustenance which He furnishes but unto Him is the resurrection”*  
(Al-Quran, 67: 15).

This concept is reinforced by a famous *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). Moreover, human mortality and the immortality of nature are key themes in the Holy Quran and the *Hadith*. Humans are instructed to take care of the property leased to them by Allah during their lives on earth, as they will be asked to account for the resources and blessings bestowed by Allah. Human beings are regarded as the ‘vicegerents’ or ‘deputed guardians’ (*Khalifah*) of God on earth. *Surah An-An’am* (6: 165) in *Surah Yunus* (10: 14) states that the role of humans is that of representatives of Allah on earth.

Islamic tradition revolves around human dignity. Individuals, society and the state are all instructed to show empathy for fellow humans and other creatures as partners on earth. As Islamic tradition discourages the centralization of resources and wealth, the design of cities must take into account the dignity of human lives, the lives of other creatures and the conservation of the environment.

A fundamental principle in Islamic law is that ownership of land should be based on one’s needs. Here, ‘needs’ refer to building on land, residing on land, or cultivating land, particularly uncultivated land that is not owned by another person (Toueir, 2000). According to one *Hadith* attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.),

*“Whoever revitalizes uncultivated land becomes its owner.”*

The legal standing of the cultivator or builder is regulated by the principle of *La darar wa la dirar* (no damage, no harm) (Toueir, 2000). The architectural features of different cities established during the first 500 years of Islamic history embody protocols for sustaining peace, order, cleanliness and social spaces. A famous quote attributed to Hazrat Umar, the second Caliph of Islam, emphasizes the importance of building new cities or towns at a certain distance from one another to reduce excessive urbanization. In this regard, there is a sharp contrast between the cities prescribed by Islamic tradition and the metropolises that emerged during European colonization and in the post-colonial period.



## SDG 12. Responsible Consumption and Production

Overconsumption and uncontrolled production are among the world’s greatest challenges, propagated by current economic models and promoted by the mass media. According to renowned Iranian scholar Dr Ali Shariati, “[modern man] is the one who consumes a lot, consumerism is the other name of modernism”. According to scientific estimates, the global population consumes 80 billion tonnes of material items every year, including everything from fish to livestock, minerals to metals, forests to fossil fuels. A sustainable level of consumption would be about 50 billion tonnes.



This means that humanity is ‘overshooting the mark’ by 60 percent (Hickel, 2018). The challenge of consumerism and throwaway culture has gained traction worldwide, including in Pakistan since the rise of neoliberal economics since the 1980s. Current patterns of production and consumption are responsible for polluting oceans, rivers, groundwater, the air and soil, while decimating ecosystems and biodiversity. Ecologists confirm that the world has experienced five great extinction events in its history. If current trends continue, it will experience a sixth extinction event, and half of the world’s species may disappear by the end of this century (Kolbert, 2021).

According to the Holy Quran, Allah the Almighty created a world of beauty and aesthetic value, and selected humans (Adam) as His *Khalifah* (vicegerent or deputed guardian) on earth. Chapter 2 of the Holy Quran states:

*“Behold your Lord, Your Lord said to the angels: I will create a vicegerent on earth. They said: Will you place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? While we do celebrate your praises and glorify your holy name? He said: I know what you know not”* (Al-Quran, 2: 30).

Humans are referred to as *Ashraf-ul- Makhluqat* (‘set above all creatures’, sometimes interpreted as ‘superior to all creatures’). Islamic scholars interpret this concept in different ways. One interpretation is that humans are responsible for safeguarding nature, protecting all creatures on earth, and not spreading corruption (*Fasad*). This ideological framework considers that the relationship between nature and humans (*Qanun al-Fitrah*) embodies humanity’s vicegerent status on earth, as responsible agents (*Amin*) in the service of Allah (*Ububiyah*)<sup>2</sup> (Gada, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> *Ububiyah* (reliance on Allah) is an element of Islamic management. This comprises the elements of being ‘Confident with Allah’, ‘Trust in Allah’, and being ‘Sincere in Allah’.

It is significant that the word *Khalifah* is derived from the word *Khalafah* (successor), reflecting humanity’s role as protectors of the world. The Holy Quran also requires humans to praise the creation of Allah the Almighty and to never harm His creation:

*“Verily, He does not love those who refuse to acknowledge the truth for among His wonders is this: He sends forth [His messages as He sends forth] the winds that bear glad tidings, so that He might give you a taste of His grace [through life-giving rains], and that ships might sail at His behest, and that you might go about in quest of some of His bounties, and that you might have cause to be grateful”* (Al-Quran, 30: 45–46).

Overproduction and overconsumption are strictly forbidden by the Holy Quran and the *Hadith*. Muslims are required to follow the teachings of Islam in every aspect of their lives, including consumer behaviour. As vicegerents of the world, humans are not free to exploit or consume natural resources beyond their needs. The Holy Quran frequently describes the perfect balance of nature:

*“Verily, all things have we created by measure”* (Al-Quran, 54: 49).

*“Everything to Him is measured”* (Al-Quran, 13: 8).

*“And we have produced therein everything in balance”* (Al-Quran, 55: 7).

The *Hadith* reinforce the emphasis that the Holy Quran places on conserving nature and not using any kind of natural resource without purpose or for the purposes of luxury.

As described above in the sub-section on SDG 2, the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) clearly prohibits the overconsumption of food, water, fire, trees, grass and other resources. Both the Holy Quran and the *Hadith* describe ultra-consumers as ‘squanderers’ and ‘transgressors’ who spread corruption (*Fasad*) and are the ‘brethren of the satans’. The Holy Quran holds humans responsible for all material and spiritual corruption on earth (Haneef, 2002). As Allah the Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

*“Oh men! All your outrageous deeds are bound to fall back upon your own selves! [You care only for] the enjoyment of life in this world: [but remember that] in the end unto Us you must return, whereupon We shall make you truly understand all that you were doing [in life]”* (Al-Quran, 10: 23).

Thus, all humans are accountable to Allah for their actions as guardians of the planet. The Holy Quran contains approximately 200 verses that emphasize the need to protect the creation of Allah the Almighty (Ashtankar, 2016).



## SDG 13. Climate Action

The rise of consumer culture has contributed to the current global climate emergency. As climate change gains pace, natural disasters are more frequent and severe – including floods, drought, earthquakes, land erosion and desertification – provoking widespread displacement and violent conflict in different parts of the world.

The consumption of fossil fuels, the combustion of hydrocarbons and the misuse of non-renewable energy are driving climate change, endangering life on land and life below water. SDG 13 calls for action to combat climate change and its impacts by protecting the planet, curbing pollution, preserving natural ecosystems and biodiversity, and making patterns of consumption, production and economic growth truly sustainable.

Islamic tradition considers life to be an integrated part of nature. Therefore, keeping the environment clean and healthy is the collective responsibility of all Muslims. The environment can only be conserved, and climate change kept at bay, if humans care for nature. To keep life thriving on earth, Islamic sources of knowledge instruct Muslims to live simply. Islam teaches Muslims to be patient, humble and abstinent, especially in terms of the consumption of food, water, cloths, fuel and utensils for daily use. It also considers that sharing these resources with others is an act of great charity and salvation.

At the same time, the Holy Quran and the *Hadith* repeatedly warn Muslims not to allow lust, greed, arrogance or competition to enter their souls. They must remain steadfast, cooperate, give alms, make donations, practise *Ehsan* (literally equity, or giving to people according to their needs), and uphold equality. The ethical principles of Islam seek to ensure a peaceful, sustainable world in which nature flourishes. Muslims are taught to thank Allah the Almighty for their position in the universe, including by showing respect for all creation – from animals, insects and plants, to the land and water. Applying the ethical principles of Islam, Muslims are required to safeguard the environment, for example by planting trees, as well as ensuring their own bodily cleanliness, speaking gently, limiting water consumption and not hunting animals during their breeding seasons.

The following *Surah* of the Holy Quran foresees how humanity reshapes nature to a dangerous extent, endangering the very existence of life on land and life below water:

*“[Since they have become oblivious of God,] corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men’s hands have wrought” (Al-Quran, 30: 41).*

This *Surah* strongly condemns materialistic, frenzied production and consumption which now threatens the world with environmental disasters, including the climate crisis.



## SDG 14. Life Below Water

Overfishing, climate change, pollution and habitat loss have taken a terrible toll on life below water, driving marine species to the brink of extinction, jeopardizing fish stocks and the lives and livelihoods of the hundreds of millions of people who depend on them (Holme, 2018). SDG 14 is grounded on the commitment to protecting the world’s oceans, seas, rivers and other water bodies by eliminating pollution and overfishing, and immediately starting to responsibly manage and protect all marine life.

Islam teaches that soil and water are key metaphors for life. It is mandatory for all Muslims to show respect for Allah’s creation, and to treat the soil, water and all forms of life as sacred.

According to Islamic tradition, the earth and water are necessary for the sustainable life of humans, as well as of other creatures. The Holy Quran clearly states:

*“And the earth He has established for living creatures” (Al-Quran, 55: 10).*

The solid constituents of human bodies, as well as those of all the living animals and plants, are made from the minerals of the earth. As well as being our home, the land has value as an open space:

*“...and God has made the earth a wide expanse, that you may traverse its open ways” (Al-Quran, 71: 19–20).*

The Holy Quran affirms that animals living on the land and below water have the capacity to communicate, and only Allah and blessed humans are capable of understanding their language:

*“Solomon succeeded David. He said: Know, you people, we have been taught the tongue of birds and endowed with all good things. Surely this is the signal favour” (Al-Quran, 27: 16).*

Islamic tradition frequently discusses the importance of preserving water reservoirs, and not polluting rivers or seas. For example, the Holy Quran gives a stern warning to those who pollute water sources:

*“[Since they have become oblivious of God,] corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men’s hands have wrought; and so, He will let them taste [the evil of] some of their doings, so that they might return [to the right path]” (Al-Quran, 30: 41).*

Muslims are required to thank Allah the Almighty for His blessings and ensure the proper use and management of bodies of water, as well as the land. Human inaction, incompetence or wrong actions may allow floods to lay waste to land and infrastructure, and can result in the death of life below water.

Therefore, Islam teaches that it is not only essential to properly use the blessings of Allah – such as fertile soil and waterways – but also to ensure that they are well-managed for the future use of humans and all other creatures. The misuse or mismanagement of natural resources, which are understood to be the blessings of Allah, is a form of ingratitude that damages life on earth and below water. For this reason, Islam forbids Muslims from any form of action or inaction that harms the environment and any form of life, both on land and below water.



## SDG 15. Life on Land

Approximately 20 percent of the earth's vegetated surface has shown persistent declining trends in productivity over the last two decades, mainly due to unsustainable land and water use and management practices. Every year, 13 million hectares of forest are lost that are home to more than 80 percent of all land-based species and which provide livelihoods to 1.6 billion people (UN Environment, 2016). Global populations of mammals, birds, reptiles, fish and amphibians declined by 58 percent between 1970 and 2012, and currently 25 percent of mammal species and 41 percent of amphibians are threatened with extinction.

This catastrophic loss of biodiversity is caused by a range of pressures, from habitat loss due to agricultural expansion, pollution or desertification, to invasive alien species and climate change (UN Environment, 2018). Protecting biodiversity and promoting the sustainable use of ecosystems – the aims of SDG 15 – are key for the survival of all life on earth.

Islamic tradition teaches that Allah the Almighty created land and water so that all created beings can use them for sustenance. For example, fertile soil and rain are to be used to plant crops, vegetables and fruit to feed humans as well as other creatures, such as animals and insects. Mountains were created to make the earth a stable place for humans and other creatures to live in. In the Holy Quran, Allah the Almighty says:

*“Have We not made the earth a vessel to hold the living and the dead? And We have made in it lofty mountains and provided you sweet water to drink”*  
(Al-Quran, 77: 25–27).

Islamic tradition considers life on land and below water to be equally sacred. Anyone who harms any form of life is condemned and regarded as a ‘transgressor’. The Holy Quran states:

*“[...] take not life, which God hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law: thus, doth He command you, that ye may learn wisdom”* (Al-Quran, 6: 151).

The Holy Quran and the *Sunnah* strictly instruct Muslims to show respect for, and protect, all forms of life, and to never harm animals for pleasure or sport:

*“[...] do not take the life God has made sacred, except by right. This is what He commands you to do: perhaps you will use your reason”* (Al-Quran, 6: 151).

The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) was famously kind to all types of animals, speaking out against their oppression and calling them humanity's partners in work.

In one *Hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) reprimands several of his followers for sitting on their camels unnecessarily at the market:

*“Do not treat the backs of your animals as pulpits, for God Most high has made them subject to you only to convey you to a place which you could not otherwise have reached without much difficulty”* (Mishkat al-Masabih, 829).

Islam instructs humans, as the vicegerents of Allah on earth, to understand that their real position is not that of the ‘master of the land’ but rather, the steward and guardian of life on earth. Thus, humans are responsible for taking care of nature and all other creatures. Hazrat Umar reports a famous *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) that endorses this responsibility, which applies equally to social relations as well as to humanity’s relationship with animals:

*“All of you are guardians (in specific context), and all of you will be asked about the (creatures) under your guardianship”* (Sahih Muslim, 1201).

Islam considers all life forms as sacred. The sanctity of human life is accorded a special place, since the first and most basic right of human beings is the right to live. The Holy Quran states:

*“[...] if anyone slew a person – unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land – it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people”* (Al-Quran, 5: 32).

Nevertheless, this does not negate the right to life of all other creatures. In Islamic tradition in general, and specifically in the Holy Quran, humans and non-human animals are distinguished on the basis of *Taqwa* (volition). This reflects the understanding that humanity’s ‘extra potential’ does not make them the masters of the world, but rather guardians who must care for all living organisms on land and below water. Saving any life is one of the highest aims for human beings. Various traditions report the Prophets, their companions and the Holy Saints reaching their zenith for saving the life of an animal. For example, Sahih al-Bukhari shares the following account:

*“While walking a man felt thirsty and went down a well and drank water from it. On coming out of it, he saw a dog panting and eating mud because of excessive thirst. The man said, this (dog) is suffering from the same problem as that of mine. So, he (went down the well) filled his shoe with water, caught hold of it with his teeth and climbed up and watered the dog. Allah thanked him for his (good) deed and forgave him. The people asked, oh Allah’s Messenger! Is there a reward for us in serving animals? He (S.A.W.) replied, Yes, there is a reward for serving any animate”* (Sahih Al-Bukhari, 2363).

The Holy Quran also makes it clear that animals possess many human and divine qualities, such as the ability to receive divine revelation, to praise God and to have souls (*Nafs*). There are also several *Hadith* in which animals are seen praying and speaking to Imams. Some Islamic scholars state that animals will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment along with humans (The Human Society of United States, 2020). The Holy Quran describes several accounts of animals, and six Chapters of the Holy Quran are titled with the names of animals and insects.

These include the Cow (*Surah 2*), Cattle (*Surah 6*), the Bee (*Surah 16*), the Ant (*Surah 28*), the Spider (*Surah 29*) and the Elephant (*Surah 105*).

Islam also instructs government authorities to be aware of future issues and prepare accordingly, such as by establishing disaster management entities to avoid the loss of precious lives – both human and non-human. Islam regards such actions as a form of charity.



## SDG 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Compassion and a strong moral compass are essential to every sustainable society. Yet, persecution, injustice and abuse remain rampant worldwide, tearing at the very fabric of civilization. Therefore, the foremost aims of SDG 16 are to promote strong institutions, global standards of justice, and a commitment to peace everywhere.

Islamic tradition strongly establishes the nexus of peace and justice, recognizing that without justice, there can be no peace. The epistemological root of the word Islam is *Salam*, which means peace. Islam requires Muslims to maintain justice and establish strong institution to ensure the application of just practices. Muslims promise to always obey Allah the Almighty and seek His protection. In the Holy Quran, Allah clearly instructs Muslims to be 'just' to others, regardless of their faith, sex or status (Murata and Chittick, 1994). Islamic law also includes teachings and guidelines on the protection of other religions.

Respecting institutions of peace and justice is a common theme in Islamic tradition. All Muslims are instructed to remain steadfast in respecting and supporting institutions that dispense justice, and which maintain peace and security. Truth and righteousness are the two main pillars of Islamic tradition. As the Holy Quran states:

*“Oh you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice as witnesses to Allah even though it is against yourselves or your parents or your kin, be rich or poor, Allah is Better Protector to both (than you), so do not follow lusts (of your hearts), lest you may avoid justice and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily, Allah is ever well acquainted with what you do”*  
(Al-Quran, 4: 135).

Islam also teaches that justice must be maintained in family matters. Parents must refrain from committing unjust actions against their children. Amir reports a story in this regard:

*“He heard An-Nu`man bin Bashir on the pulpit saying: My father gave me a gift but `Amra bint Rawaha (my mother) said that she would not agree to it unless he made Allah’s Messenger (S.A.W.) as a witness to it. So, my father went to Allah’s Messenger (S.A.W.) and said: I have given a gift to my son from `Amra bint Rawaha but she ordered me to make you witness to it, oh Allah’s Messenger (S.A.W.). Allah’s Messenger (S.A.W.) asked: Have you given (the like of it) to every one of your sons? He replied in the negative. Allah’s Messenger (S.A.W.) said, be afraid of Allah and be just to your children. My father then returned and took back his gift”* (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2587).



Islam strictly forbids violence, especially killing innocent people. According to Islamic teachings, killing one innocent human being is tantamount to killing all of humanity. Conversely, saving one life is equivalent to saving all of humanity. The Holy Quran states:

*“We decreed to the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person - unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land - it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind” (Al-Quran, 5: 32).*

Therefore, the creation of strong institutions is mandatory to uphold the rule of law, to act promptly against injustice, dishonesty and insurgency, and to improve people’s lives both socially and economically. Creating viable institutional mechanisms for peace, justice and socio-economic growth is a key responsibility of leaders, governors and planners. Justice is the central theme of Islamic jurisprudence, and is regarded as one of the main pillars for sustaining social, economic and moral integrity.



## SDG 17. Partnerships for the Goals


The world is home more than 7 billion people. Divisions between them are the cause of alienation, deprivation, insecurity and terror in different parts of the world. To build a better world, partnerships are essential. Therefore, partnerships for sustainable development are the focus of SDG 17.

Islam, as a religion of peace, integrity and cohesion, strongly emphasizes the importance of viable partnerships at the family, societal, state and international levels. Like other religions, Islamic teachings emphasize collective goodness. It is the responsibility of all individuals to remain steadfast and undertake acts of goodness, while avoiding deeds that can harm individuals, groups, society or nature. Thus, Islam requires Muslims to help others, be kind, perform good deeds and eradicate harmful practices. The Holy Quran states:

*“Help one another in acts of piety and righteousness. And do not assist each other in acts of sinfulness and transgression. And be aware of Allah. Verily, Allah is severe in punishment” (Al-Quran, 5: 2).*

Islam believes in establishing good relationships worldwide, and instructs people not only to create, but also to maintain, a peaceful environment for all. While Islam permits debate, informed by wisdom and keeping in view Islamic teachings, it clearly affirms that solutions should be found through non-violent means.

# **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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# CONCLUSION

This study's exploration of the nexus between Islamic tradition and the Sustainable Development Goals is significant, as it sheds light on the links that exist between Islam and aspirations for inclusive, sustainable development that leaves no one behind. This study was informed by consultations with religious scholars, particularly teachers at *madaris* (religious schools), who shared their views on Islamic tradition and its compatibility with the SDGs. Their inputs during consultations and a workshop, as well as a thorough literature review, are cause for optimism about the common ground between the normative framework of Islamic tradition and the SDGs.

The paradigm of the SDGs consists of the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. This set of 17 goals imagines a future just 15 years away that will be rid of poverty and hunger, and safe from the worst effects of climate change. These are goals for a better and more peaceful world, that recognize the equal value of all lives, that pledge to leave no one behind, and that strive to protect the planet and all of its inhabitants. 'Five P's' – people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership – are critical to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 goals. All of these elements and aspirations are also central themes in Islam, reflecting the clear parallels between the SDGs and Islamic tradition.

The worldview of Islamic tradition is based on the paradigm of humans, nature and God. This conventional triangle holds humans accountable to Allah for their deeds in the natural world. Humans are Allah's vicegerent (*Khalifah*) and most dignified creature (*Ashraf-ul-Makhluqat*).

Therefore, humans are responsible for being kind, compassionate, peaceful and steadfast in deeds that benefit humanity and nature. As this study shows, all sources of Islamic tradition (the Holy Quran, the *Hadith*, the *Sunnah*, *Fiqh* and *Sharia*) are entirely consistent with the sustainable development agenda. Both aim to benefit humans, life on land, life below water, and the planet. The Holy Quran equates the protection of the environment and the dignity to human life with the protection of religion (*Al-Nahl*: 90, *Al-Zumar*: 10, *Al-A'raf*: 56), and the protection of life (*Al-Maidah*: 32, *Al-Nisa*: 29) (Dariah, 2019). Scholars and researchers conclude that Islam plays a fundamental role in the lives of Muslims (Hassan, 1997). As Dr. Riffat Hassan puts it:

*“people in most of the Islamic society and countries take religion, ‘Islam’, as a matrix, and they contextualize most of the matters of their lives in the ethical and legal frameworks of Islamic teachings”* (Hassan, 1997).

People use the lens of religion to contextualize their lives. Establishing synergies between the SDGs and Islamic tradition will make sustainable development more inclusive and sustainable in Pakistan in general, and in Balochistan specifically. The disconnect between religious sensibilities and development practices is reflected in high dropout rates from education, refusals of polio vaccines, disregard for COVID-19 protocols, and dependence on traditional birth attendants rather than skilled health workers. This study demonstrates that this disconnect can, and must, be bridged by drawing on the common ground between Islamic tradition and the SDGs.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

This study finds that religious scholars and teachers in *madaris*, who work with traditional society in Balochistan, are ready to engage in a dialogue process on the issues addressed by the SDGs. To move forward, this study recommends:

- Designing a programme to actively connect the huge number of teachers and students at *madaris* and mosques with the development paradigm. This will enrich the development process and the institutions that work in these circles, using a linear approach.
- Developing specific studies on Islam and the SDGs related to each of the three aspects of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. Exclusive studies on each of these three areas with regard to Islamic tradition will be a useful scholastic effort that can inform civil society in general, and the religious community in particular. Special reports or publications about the compatibility of Islamic tradition with specific SDGs would also be highly effective.
- Translating all the reports or other publications produced into Urdu and, preferably, local languages.
- Supporting teachers at *madaris* to develop concise presentations and written scripts on specific SDGs. During the workshop with teachers at *madaris*, most individuals indicated an interest in such presentations. This could help UNDP to forge viable partnerships with teachers at *madaris* in order to raise public awareness of all 17 SDGs, ranging from SDG 1 (No Poverty) to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

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