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ASSESSMENT OF VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY: AN ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT FACETS OF SUSTAINABILITY FROM ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Muhammad Aqib Ali
Senior Faculty
The Millennium Universal College
email_aqib@yahoo.com
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5781-6906

Usman Khalid
Head of Center/Director of Learning and Development
Teach Globally
usman.khalid@teachglobally.co.uk
ORCID ID: 0009-0001-2956-0584

Abstract

The paper assesses the major dimensions of sustainability by discussing the various facets of sustainability from an Islamic perspective to present a fresh approach regarding the concept and understanding of sustainability as a field of study. The four dimensions of sustainability, including human, social, economic, and environmental sustainability, are discussed in both Islamic and contemporary perspectives. The paper entails a qualitative research approach by taking into consideration the already available literature regarding sustainability and its various dimensions by examining these facets of sustainability in the light of Islamic sources of the Quran and Sunnah (actions and sayings) of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him). The references are drawn from contemporary literature as well as from primary Islamic sources to clarify the sustainability aspects and present a religious perspective on sustainability processes and practices. The religious viewpoint on sustainability is based on the premise that Islam, being a complete code/framework to lead human life, encompasses all matters humans face or may face in their lives till the end of this world, and therefore, Islam also indirectly guides towards different aspects of sustainability to urge and motivate all human being in general and its followers in particular, to lead lives in such a way that warrants a sustainable world for everyone. The Islamic theory, as contained in its two primary sources of the Quran and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), offers direction to ensure a sustainable life and a successful after-life provided the teachings and guidelines of Islam are followed in letter and spirit. There has been very limited research on the facets of sustainability from an Islamic standpoint, and this paper endeavors to address this research gap by elucidating the various dimensions of sustainability in the context of Islamic theory.

Keywords: Dimensions, Economic, Business, Islamic Perspective, Human and Social Sustainability.

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Introduction

The conception of sustainability emerged on the fore in the wake of pressing global issues spanning environment, societies, and economies that transcended national boundaries, urging the world to counter a collective challenge to the planet to address the problems and threats arising from insensitivity, neglect and disregard to earth's natural and artificial resource consumption in an unbridled, uncontrolled and unplanned manner having an adverse impact on the future of earth and humankind (Caradonna, 2022). The concept of sustainability entails that there must be a logical, careful, controlled, and coordinated approach to be adopted in relation to different aspects covering human, social, economic, and environmental processes and practices (Farley and Smith, 2020) to ensure the sustainability of life and resources of the planet to safeguard the interests of present and future generations (Washington, 2015). The topic of sustainability has recently gained much attention from researchers globally, especially in the last two decades, owing to concerns over rampant over-utilization of earth's resources with no regard towards the sustainability aspect impacting the life of future generations.

Sustainability has many connotations, and different scholars have expounded different explanations and elaborations about the concept. The simplest definition labeled to the element of sustainability is to "live well within the limits of nature"; as a matter of fact, sustainability is a global system encompassing all activities and processes aimed at meeting human needs in contexts of economy, environment, and society, without undermining the ability of future generations to fulfill their needs. Sustainability is pertinent to all levels and aspects of human activities and processes, including individual, community, organizational, regional, national, and international levels (Choudhury, 2019). The element of sustainability has assumed greater significance, particularly in the last thirty years, marking greater emphasis on ensuring sustainable processes and practices for the well-being of the planet and the life thereon (Robertson, 2021). The researchers and scholars have elucidated various aspects of sustainability, which are both connected and overlapping to an extent; however, there has not been a consensus of thinkers regarding which facet of sustainability takes precedence over the other in terms of its significance and value to ensure overall sustainability. Despite the debate regarding which facet of sustainability is most critical, all the various dimensions of sustainability have their vitality and significance toward ensuring the overall concept of sustainability.

Rationale of the Study

The concept of sustainability, as discussed in the past, was predominantly argued in the context of environmental challenges and problems. Slowly yet steadily, the scope of sustainability broadened and included other dimensions, including human, social, and economic facets. In the light of past literature, this paper explains all of these dimensions of sustainability. It goes a step further by incorporating the religious standpoint regarding the various dimensions of sustainability. This not only adds value to the study of sustainability but also offers a touch of originality and novelty from the researchers' standpoint.

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Problem Statement

The world is facing a humungous common challenge irrespective of geographical regions, location, borders, demographics, economic scenarios, or cultural and national identities. This challenge is, in fact, the chief cause and the central root of all major environmental problems and crises the world is confronting today, including global warming, natural disasters, impaired global atmosphere, and worsened climatic conditions triggering countless other issues for the humanity that eventually pose a looming threat to the present and future of existing and forthcoming generations who will be living on this planet. The reason behind this challenge being transformed from a problem into a crisis is the tendency to ignore or disregard the importance of ensuring sustainability in the processes and practices for the well-being of the existing world population as well as for the better life and future of prospective generations. By assessing the concept of sustainability and related issues, this study contributes towards a global cause in order to bring into the spotlight a burning issue for all concerned stakeholders to be aware of and be ready for an appropriate course of action for the greater benefit of humanity's present as well as for its future in the longer run.

Research Questions

1. What are the various dimensions of sustainability, how are they perceived and pertinent in the context of impending problems faced by the world, and how are these different aspects of sustainability relevant to addressing global challenges?

2. How the different facets of sustainability may be discussed in the light of the Islamic framework, which is based on primary sources of the Quran and Sunnah (sayings, actions, and traditions of Prophet Muhammad – peace and blessings be upon him) and what are the lessons that may be learned regarding the subject of sustainability from Islamic doctrine?

Research Objectives

The study endeavors to explain different facets of sustainability by assessing various aspects and pertinent issues to provide knowledge and to promote a better understanding of these to invoke action for a better future for humanity.

The paper aims to elucidate and evaluate the dimensions of sustainability from the Islamic lens to provide a different perspective on the study of sustainability as an important global phenomenon.

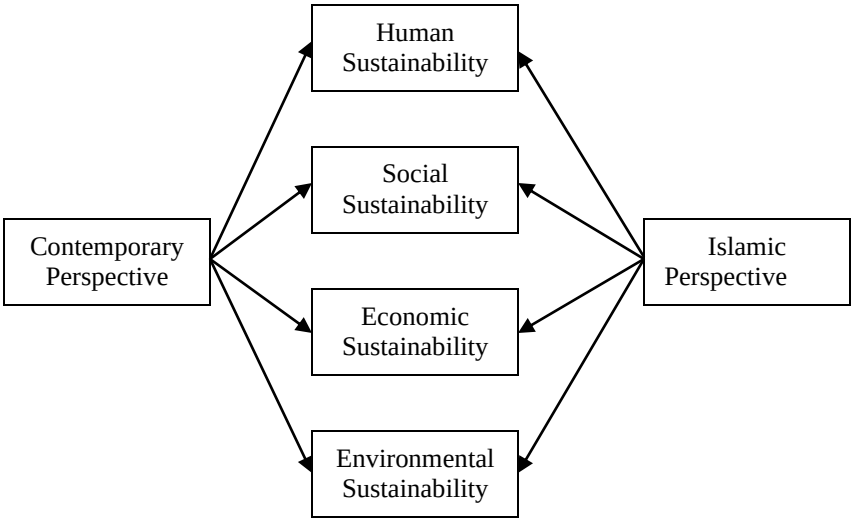
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theoretical and conceptual framework of the study is based on the elucidation of sustainability and its four fundamental dimensions. These dimensions of inutility are discussed from the perspective of contemporary literature. Then, the same facets of sustainability are assessed and evaluated in the light of Islamic theory by elaborating these in the background of Islamic sacred texts as references are drawn from

the two primary sources of Islamic framework, i.e., The Holy Quran and the Hadith (sayings) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The conceptual framework is also illustrated in the figure hereunder to provide a better understanding of the subject matter of sustainability as described in this study.

Subsequent to the explanation of the research framework, now we will review the related literature in the context of contemporary literature, followed by a discussion regarding the various dimensions of sustainability from an Islamic perspective.



Significance of the Study

The paper emphasizes the need to discuss the significance of sustainability from both worldly and religious perspectives in order to offer a comprehensive approach to the study and understanding of sustainability as an important global phenomenon. The paper endeavors to stimulate and instigate the world to ultimately inspire action by infusing religious motivation to persuade the masses to move in a positive direction in terms of sustainability goals for the betterment of humankind. The study strives to provide pertinent information and knowledge to all concerned stakeholders that a promising future can be achieved by understanding and implementing sustainability processes and practices in their lives.

Methodology

The research philosophy for this paper is pinned upon the qualitative research paradigm. The paper entails a qualitative research approach by taking into consideration

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the already available literature regarding sustainability and surveying various pertinent studies relevant to the Islamic standpoint on sustainability and its various dimensions.

The paper elaborates on the four elements of sustainability by examining these facets from an Islamic perspective to present a religious perspective on the theory and knowledge base of sustainability. The research provides a discourse regarding the diverse aspects in the context of Islamic ideology, which is a divine philosophy that guides humanity regarding all aspects of life.

The paper draws references from both contemporary literature as well as from the primary and sacred sources of Islam, including the Holy Quran as well as the books of Hadith, to offer an understanding of the pertinent facets of sustainability to give a holistic discussion of both Islamic and conventional theoretical standpoints.

Literature Review

Various Dimensions of Sustainability

Sustainability is a multifaceted and comprehensive idea that incorporates several dimensions to ensure the long-term survival of humanity and the planet. The paper elucidates the four foundational aspects of sustainability, namely, environmental, human, social, and economic pillars. Each of them plays a role in creating a sustainable world, while their interplay forms a holistic approach to sustainable development. The paper explores each pillar, identifying the differences and similarities, their roles in advancing the goals of sustainable development, and the interdependence in creating a balanced and long-lasting future.

Sustainability in the context of the environment has been researched extensively, but the other dimensions of sustainability, including human, social, and economic facets, are relatively emerging areas of discussion. Among the various dimensions of sustainability, the element of environmental sustainability is the primary aspect that has been the basis of subject matter for sustainability literature over the years. The issue of environmental sustainability focuses on the conservation of natural resources and ecosystems to guarantee they stay in existence for utilization in foreseeable future periods. This is about the efficient utilization and rejuvenation of these resources in order to ensure their benefits for the upcoming generations. Environmental sustainability involves the conservation of these natural resources, combating pollution, and working towards managing the effects of pollution on our planet by paying attention to all aspects aimed at caring for the planet's resources to save them for forthcoming generations. For example, sustainable logging, water management, and waste minimization. Deforestation is one of the most pressing sustainable challenges in contemporary times, and to mitigate this issue, sustainable forestry plays a vital role. The main goal of sustainable forestry is to ensure careful extraction of products like timber and wood, which in turn can prevent forest degradation and even plant new trees (Garrett et al., 2021). Another ancillary issue is to conserve resources by ensuring freshwater resource management, which demands the use of water conservation programs, especially in this changing environment with tremendous demands for water

because of overexpitation and climate change. One of the most pertinent matters with reference to environmental sustainability is the menace of pollution, which is a threat of serious magnitude regarding the conservation of the environment, damaging air, reducing the quality of natural resource reservoirs, and even adversely impacting levels of soil fertility. The emphasis of stakeholders is to work on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and plastic pollution levels and encourage green energy sources to address environmental pollution.

Furthermore, another serious matter that has been triggered by plastic pollution is the extremely adverse impact of pollution on marine life. The oceans are greatly suffering from wastage, toxic spillovers, and dumping of human waste into the waters. Scattered initiatives are being adopted to counter this environmental challenge, but these are somewhat disorganized and need to be coordinated well for greater effectiveness. An important aspect of managing the impact of environmental pollution is switching from fossil fuels to renewable resources such as wind and solar energy that reduce the emission of greenhouse gases and prevent the effects of climate change (Fernandez et al., 2021). Moreover, by recycling plastics and choosing to use products that naturally degrade, the effects of environmental pollution can be further minimized. The critical state of environmental sustainability can be directly evaluated from the alarmingly higher levels of global warming, which is a global challenge that must be addressed urgently to avoid drastically grave climate changes and avert future natural disasters resulting from rising global warming levels. Sustainable practices must be put in place, including diminishing carbon emissions, backing up renewable energy sources, and giving out global policies like the Paris Agreement to deal with the issue of climate change. The Paris Agreement aspires to limit the global average temperature increase to no more than 2 degrees centigrade, with primary focus being given to transition to renewables as well as the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (Amini, 2021). The effective pursuits to ensure a sustainably viable environment require coordinated efforts by all concerned stakeholders, which is only possible by ensuring an integrated approach.

Subsequent to the discussion on environmental sustainability, we will now delve into the other dimension of sustainability, which is human sustainability. This relatively recent idea has been embraced in the domain of sustainability literature. Human sustainability is a concept that emphasizes the quality of human life and the well-being of society, both now and in the future (Dias, 2023). The human dimension of sustainability is an important area that is based on the premise that everything related to this planet, including its environment and resources, can never be studied or understood without duly considering the human element from various points of view. The human element of sustainability considers humans at the heart of all sustainability initiatives. The modern global economy is a human-powered economy that is hinged upon the aspects of human development, empowerment, and inclusion of all (Cantrell et al., 2024). Another way to explain human sustainability is to construe it as a system to maintain and refine the human capital in society by ensuring that all members of the society or community have access to adequate and quality resources, amenities, services, and opportunities in order to enable them to live healthy, fulfilling, and dignified lives, while also making sure that the rights and needs of other living beings and in the longer

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run ensuring the interests of future generations. More specifically, the scope of human sustainability includes wide-ranging aspects such as health, nutrition, education, culture, social justice, human rights, and financial and social inclusion. Human sustainability has two major facets: the objective and the subjective component. The subjective components imply the emotional and psychological aspects that influence human well-being, such as infusing meaning, purpose, happiness, and satisfaction into human lives, among others. In contrast, the objective element is about the material conditions and resources affecting human well-being, such as food, water, health, energy, education, and income (Cantrell et al., 2023). This is pertinent to understand that human sustainability is closely associated with the concept of social sustainability.

Based upon the realm of human sustainability, another interrelated dimension of sustainability is referred to as social sustainability, which refers to the idea that the social needs and well-being of people and communities should be satisfied in a manner that supports long-term stability and resilience. It is about the creation of inclusive and just societies that center on human rights, social justice, and equal opportunities for all. Social sustainability aims to improve the welfare of individuals and communities by promoting equity and inclusiveness and meeting basic needs, including education, healthcare, and housing. Social sustainability is to create equal and open opportunities for people, no matter their gender, race, creed, or social class. This includes ensuring that work environments are diverse, providing equality to education and healthcare, and actively championing the course of social justice. Organizations and companies that emphasize diversity and inclusion initiatives foster environments that support the achievement and happiness of people from all walks of life. Such initiatives promote a fairer distribution of resources and lead to general welfare improvement (Kiradoo, 2022). Affordable housing programs, support for local businesses, and cultural heritage preservation, among other community development initiatives, contribute greatly to social sustainability through the development of strong and cohesive communities as well as the empowerment of individuals (Ramoz, 2022). Besides, it helps the concerned stakeholders, including governments, business firms, and organizations, to help, grow, and support the economic stability of the communities in order to strengthen and promote social unity. Social sustainability also depends on the quality of life, which includes healthcare, education, and other essential services that lead to the general health of the individual. This post is necessary for such undertakings that aim at the improvement of living standards, reduction of inequality, and promotion of social welfare programs. Social sustainability, among other aspects, entails the availability and provision of medical services to all individuals in a society to mitigate health inequalities and ensure that the overall national health is improved along with the general health of individuals (Preker, 2021). The mainstay of social sustainability is to manage the social interactions of individuals to ensure they are functional, positive, and productive. This is possible by ensuring social equality, justice, and fairness in all matters of society, including its organizations, institutions, government, and state issues. The social dimension of sustainability aims at maintaining and promoting social values systems, cultural fabric, standards of morality, goodness, and ethics that transcend generations to warrant sustainable, socially symmetric, and functional societies where individuals may live in harmony and happiness with the same being ensured for their successive generations.

The three facets of stainability, including environmental, human, and social, have been elaborated, and now the final dimension is being elucidated, which is the economic aspect of sustainability. The main goal of economic sustainability is to establish continuous growth in the economic sector in the long run, which does not harm environmental and social welfare. This includes practices of sustainable business, fair trade, and responsible use of resources. Ethical business practices are one of the integral parts of economic sustainability, including corporate social responsibility, ethical sourcing, and transparent supply chains. These practices lead to sustainable economic growth since they seek to balance profit-making with environmental and social concerns.

Nonetheless, when sustainable business practices are not implemented effectively, different social and economic problems emerge. Those businesses and business activities and practices are discouraged and reformed, contributing to environmental destruction. The economic model, which promotes profits at the expense of the environment, is responsible for pollution, depletion of resources, and habitat destruction. For example, industries that release pollutants into the air, water, and soil cause environmental pollution, which threatens ecosystems and human health (UNEP, 2023). Furthermore, deplorable social ills manifested, in addition to environmental degradation, including poverty and water and air pollution, ultimately lead to diseases and death (Moore and Moore, 1990). The economic aspects are the major motives that threaten and endanger global harmony and are the root cause of the friction among countries and states, leading to conflicts, wars, and terrorist activities. Therefore, economic sustainability has a direct impact on the overall sustainability of the planet as it has profound effects on all the human, social, and environmental facets of sustainability.

The economic implications related to the environmental impacts include the debts that are no longer acceptable, especially referring to global debt traps and the dependence of the world economy on organizations like the IMF and World Bank to sustain and manage economic and financial systems. The relationship between economic and environmental aspects of sustainability may be understood with the help of simple case scenarios. For instance, pollution may result in higher healthcare costs, lower productivity in agriculture, and poor tourism attraction, thus affecting economic growth and development. Additionally, unsustainable business practices can also lead to more social inequality, especially in the absence of corporate social responsibility and ethical sourcing practices. Such businesses advocate for profit rather than fair wages and working conditions, which result in the exploitation of labor, poverty, and social injustices. For example, industries that depend on low-cost labor from developing nations typically do not pay reasonable wages or provide safe working conditions, thereby causing exploitation and economic inequality (ILO, 2023). This, in turn, can further deny people access to such fundamental services as health care and education, thus ensuring the vicious cycle of poverty. In addition, firms that do not provide transparency for their whole supply chain contribute to various unethical activities like forced and child labor, which tend to increase social disparities and hinder economic sustainability. Sustainable business practices also help to reduce economic instability (McDonald, 2013).

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Moreover, such inefficient practices cause supply chain disruptions, resulting in production and distribution interruptions and economic instability. If sustainable business practices are not properly executed, these issues will remain and may even grow. Ecosystems will continue to suffer from environmental degradation, which is the major cause of various human health problems, thus slowing economic growth. Social injustice will continue to breed exploitation labor practices and will deny people access to vital resources. Further, legal and financial struggles may lead to instability and, eventually, long-term economic stagnation. For these problems, effective, sustainable business practices are extremely important. This consists of corporate social responsibility programs, ethical sourcing policies, and open supply chains, which maintain the equilibrium between economic gain and ethical and social factors. The chief consequence of a compromised economic sustainability model is the widening of the rich-poor disparity gap.

Moreover, fair trade and ethical markets are essential elements of economic sustainability as they seek to promote fair trading situations and good business practices. The absence of just trade and ethical markets fosters human rights abuses, especially in labor practices. Consumers and production workers in developing countries may be subjected to exploitative conditions, including low wages, unsafe working environments, and long working hours without remedies or protection. Such measures help eliminate poverty, ensure economic sustainability, and protect the interests of workers and producers, particularly in developing nations (ILO, 2023). Nevertheless, if sustainability markets and ethical trade are not well supported, a number of societal and economic challenges can develop (FAO, 2022). For instance, businesses that practice price manipulation, corruption, or monopolistic behaviors can tamper with the markets, making them volatile and reducing chances for fair competition. The poor and social disparity will also affect workers and producers of developing countries, restricting their economic mobility and deprivation of key resources. Market instability might come through unethical business practices and supply chain disruptions, which could lead to economic unpredictability. Added to that, human rights abuses may continue, workers suffer, and society is being undermined. To deal with these problems, all-out actions are necessary. This involves backing up a fair-trade drive, advocating ethical sourcing practices, and guaranteeing market transparency to save workers and producers. Such actions contribute to the economic viability, social justice, and growth of the society. Long-term growth and stability represent economic sustainability as they concentrate on promoting sustained economic development, which is beneficial for all sectors of society without depleting natural resources and not leading to social disparities. It also includes the development of innovative industries, sustainable resource management, and economic policies that guarantee stability. However, if long-term growth and stability are not adequately sought, several economic and societal problems may arise.

Economic volatility is associated with sharp changes in economic performance, such as growth rates, employment levels, and market values. It is often a result of the instability of economic policies and markets as stable in the long run. Economic volatility is harmful to businesses and individuals who see the uncertainty in investments, employment, and income stability. For example, where the economy relies heavily on non-renewable resources or single industries (such as the Oil and Gas

industry), there may be significant fluctuations in GDP and employment based on global commodity prices (World Bank, 2023). This is likely to result in a boom-bust cycle where economic boom periods are succeeded by massive falls that affect the whole economy. In the absence of a focus on sustainable resource management, long-term economic activities can result in serious environmental hazards, depletion of natural resources, loss of biodiversity, and adoption of pollution. All these environmental problems not only affect ecological health but also jeopardize economic growth and sustainability. For instance, overfishing of fisheries leads to a decline in fish stocks, which is not only detrimental to biodiversity but also endangers the livelihoods of fishing industry communities (FAO, 2022).

Likewise, deforestation due to agricultural expansion results in the loss of soil biodiversity and alterations in climate conditions, which in turn affect agricultural productivity and food security. Inclusive economic development leads to reducing social inequality. The policies in the economy, which favor some sectors or groups ignoring others, add to the inequality that causes social tension and the decrease of society's public unity (ILO, 2023). When the issues of long-term growth and permanence are ignored, the results are the rise of economic volatility, environmental degradation, and social inequalities. They also have the potential to weaken national and global actions aimed at the realization of sustainable development goals and lead to wider geopolitical and social instability. In response to these challenges, policies should be formulated to foster the development of diversified, resilient, and sustainable economies, promote sustainable resource management, and ensure even growth. Such policies should be designed to strike a balance between economic growth and the preservation of the environment and social integration for growth to be sustainable and beneficial to all sections of society. The economic aspects of sustainability are, therefore, greatly critical to ensuring the overall sustainability initiative across the globe. The dimensions of sustainability will now be discussed from the lens of Islam to discover an alternative outlook to the understanding of sustainability conceptions and frameworks.

Discussion and Findings

Sustainability, as discussed in the previous section, has been debated as per the past literature in the contemporary context. Now, the discussion will be diverted to the Islamic perspective in order to evaluate how the concept of sustainability and its various dimensions are pertinently found in Islamic theory, which is contained in the Islamic sacred sources of the Quran and the Hadith.

Facets of Sustainability in the Islamic Context

Sustainability is a significant issue in the contemporary world, and enormous challenges are faced in terms of all dimensions of sustainability, including environmental, human, social, and economic contexts (Dresner, 2012). For instance, global warming, climate change triggering natural disasters, social value systems facing erosion, drastic negative and cultural shifts, societal unrest and social deviance, rich-poor disparity, poverty, wars, resources scarcity and wastage, unavailability of clean drinking water, unemployment, diseases and pandemics, polluted environment, and

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dysfunctional ecosystems are all signs that sustainability at all levels must be taken seriously (Purvis et al., 2019). The researchers have adopted different approaches to study the diverse aspects of sustainability, including its philosophy, practices, and processes. In this paper, we will attempt to discuss different dimensions of sustainability from the standpoint of Islamic theory and principles in the light of two cardinal sources of Islamic framework, i.e., The Holy Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The major facets of sustainability are analyzed in the context of Islamic sacred texts and Islamic ideology in this section hereunder. The different connotations of sustainability have been attached in the recent past, including the human, social, and economic dimensions (Grober and Cunningham, 2012). Historically, the theory and subject matter of sustainability only emphasized the environmental aspect. Still, as time passed, other nuances, like relating the human, social, and economic aspects to the scope of sustainability, were included in the domain of sustainability. These four dimensions, i.e., human, social, economic, and environmental, are posited as a cohesive and well-knit unit of study to grasp the concept of sustainability holistically and comprehensively.

The various aspects of sustainability, especially the human, economic, and social can be related to the directly pertinent concept of the five Shariah objectives of the Islamic theoretical framework, which are aimed at the protection of faith, life, wealth, intellect, and lineage of human beings as explicated by Aqib and Hussain (2021) and Malik (2015) in their research. Furthermore, there are numerous references in the sacred books of Islam, including The Holy Quran, as well as several books on Hadith (sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad – PBUH), which provide instructions and rulings in which the human, social, economic and even environmental aspects are discussed from the context of morality, goodness and virtue to persuade the followers of the Islamic doctrine to ensure a state of prosperity and wellbeing not only for themselves but for the collective benefit of whole community and society. The Muslims are, in fact, duty-bound by their religion to ensure the sustenance of these five objectives (Qadir and Zaman, 2019). With reference to the human aspect of sustainability, a single verse from the Holy Quran may suffice for the whole discussion, proving that Islam upholds the highest standards of morality and rationality in all affairs of human life. The verse that directly dictates the importance of the human sustainability element is from the fifth chapter of the Holy Quran, which states as follows:

> **“Whoever kills one person unless it is as a punishment for murder or spreading corruption on earth, it shall be as if he has killed whole of humanity, and whosoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he has saved the life of whole humanity.” (5:32)**

Islam, in its essence, is a religion that teaches the sanctity of life and property by commanding its followers not to transgress upon each other. In a well-known Hadith, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated that “verily your blood, your property, and your honor are sacred and inviolable.” Apart from protecting and safeguarding the lives of human beings, Islam also emphasizes the sustainability of future generations. As stated earlier, one of the Shariah objectives focuses on the protection of progeny and offspring. The greatest reference in this regard is the prohibition of homosexuality and adultery, which warrants a stable family system as well as ensuring a healthy and thriving social

system by enacting the laws and rulings regarding marriage, inheritance, and divorce on one end and afflicting severe punishments for abhorrent crimes like fornication and homosexuality on the other. These principles of Islamic faith, in fact, lay down the foundations of human and social sustainability in the best of its manifestations. Islamic texts, in several instances, enjoin to encourage and promote whatever is good or beneficial and forbid whatever is evil. Another significant Hadith in the context of ensuring social harmony can be considered here in which the Prophet (PBUH) stated that a Muslim is the one who avoids harming Muslims with his tongue and hands. The companions of the Prophet (PBUH) were also role models for the followers of the faith as they showcased the elements of selflessness, love, and care towards others. They were the true manifestation of values of purity, brotherhood, and social justice. All these attributes, as being taught and inspired by the Prophet (PBUH), served as the benchmarks of an ideal society. Prophet (PBUH) reformed the Arab society from a point where they were killing their female babies by burying them alive to elevating the status of women where the Prophet (PBUH) used to stand for her daughter and spread his cloak for her to sit upon, to teach the dignity of women to the society and whole humanity. Islamic teachings are pinned upon values of love, sincerity, and care for the poor and less fortunate individuals in society. These are the best examples and guidelines to ensure ideal societies that not only ensure harmony and well-being of their members to enable them to live peaceful and prosperous lives but, in fact, these Islamic values warrant a strong foundation to pave the way for the bright future of the coming generations.

Social sustainability, among its several facets, emphasizes primarily justice and equity (Vallance, 2011), and this element of justice in all aspects of life and society, as a matter of fact, is the essence of Islamic commandments. The Islamic terminology refers to *Adl*, translated as justice/fairness or equity, as the primary agenda of all Islamic teachings to govern affairs of individual and collective life, whereas the elements of *Masalih* (realizing good or beneficial) and avoiding or eliminating *Mafasid* (evil or corruption) are also the two major aspects of Islamic framework regarding governing the social systems from Islamic standpoint. (Rafi and Farhad, 2021) As for the traditional debate and theory regarding social sustainability, safety, and justice at its core, as discussed, these are, in actuality, different facets of ensuring human rights for all persons within a community (Dempsey et al., 2011). From the Islamic context, even the ones with very basic knowledge about Islam know that the rights have a dichotomy of '*Haqooq Allah'* (rights of the Creator) and '*Haqooq Al Ibaad'* (rights of the creation); he may waive the rights of Allah, but whoever has violated the rights of the creation, nothing will waive these until they are excused or forgiven by those people towards whom these were due. This aspect leads to a strong footing of an ideal social system where everyone is aware of the rights of others around, and the human inclinations and natural tendencies of selfishness and greed are addressed when these Islamic guidelines are embedded into individual and social lives. The actions and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) regarding the upholding of rights of fellow Muslims, non-Muslims, relatives, neighbors, and even animals are all but the best examples that may be considered in the context of ensuring aspects of human and social sustainability. After elaborating on the human and social dimensions of sustainability from an Islamic perspective, let us now ponder upon the remaining two facets, including the economic

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and environmental viewpoints on sustainability. Islamic tenets and principles in true spirit attempt to liberate individuals from the shackles of ignorance and oppression, as evidenced by the several verses of the Quran and numerous sayings of the Prophet (PBUH). For instance, a well-known saying of Prophet PBUH asserted that there should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm, which is a short yet comprehensive guideline to warrant an ideal society where no one is allowed to harm fellow members in any manner including personal, financial, spiritual, social, legal or political aspects.

After the Islamic viewpoint regarding human and social sustainability, the facet of economic sustainability is now discussed. In terms of economic sustainability, Islam orders justice, fair treatment, equity, and generosity in all spheres of economic activities (Aqib, 2012a). This aspect indirectly warrants economic sustainability because when people regard every economic matter with the values forbidden by Islam, it will impact the economy in a pristine manner, ensuring economic stability and sustainability. A very pertinent verse of the Holy Quran is mentioned hereunder to highlight the importance of the economic facet of Islamic ideology:

> **"Do not consume one another's wealth unjustly, nor deliberately bribe authorities in order to devour a portion of others' property, knowing that it is a sin." (2:188)**

Apart from the element of fairness and justice in an economic context, another extremely important element that Islam commands to avoid is the economic menace of *Riba* (interest) on which the whole economic model of the contemporary world persists. The issue of *riba or interest is a serious matter, and the harshest warnings and cautions are issued in* Islamic sacred texts. For reference, one of the several verses regarding *Riba* is mentioned here:

> **"As for those who devour interest, they behave as the one whom Satan has confounded with his touch. Seized in this state, they say: 'Buying and selling is but a kind of interest,' even though Allah has made buying and selling lawful and interest unlawful. Hence, he who receives this admonition from his Lord and then gives up (dealing in interest) may keep his previous gains, and it will be for Allah to judge him. As for those who revert to it, they are the people of the Fire, and in it shall they abide." (2:275)**

The aspect of interest has many adverse implications and negative consequences on the world's economic landscape. The interest per se has the attribute of afflicting *'Zulm'* or injustice to both the parties to the transactions, i.e., the borrower and the lender. The rationale behind the prohibition of interest has many underlying benefits and rationalities, which can only be appreciated if we delve deeper into the philosophy of Islamic economics. Outwardly, the central agenda to avoid interest is to ensure economic equity and justice in society and to facilitate and promote economic activity by discouraging the concentration of wealth, which occurs through the accumulation of financial resources by charging interest on the poor and thus furthering the financial dominance of already the affluent class within the society which creates more disparity

and imbalances economically and socially (Aqib, 2012b). Contrary to conventional economic philosophy, Islamic economic ideology is pinned upon the elements of Zakat and Bait al Maal. Still, unfortunately, in present times, no working or operational Islamic economic model can be observed. When Islamic teaching was implemented in letter and spirit in times of caliphate of the four rightly guided caliphs, there were times, as prophesized by the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), when people used to wander around with *Zakat. Still,* no poor were to be found to receive that Zakat. Islam not only makes *Zakat* an obligatory duty but also urges its followers to give charitable donations to those in need and also give loans to the needy, as stated in the Quran:

> **"Who will lend to Allah a goodly loan which Allah will multiply many times over? It is Allah Who decreases and increases wealth. And to Him, you will all be returned." (2:245)**

The contemporary economic model of the world economy is based on the aspects of interest, banking and financial markets, taxation, and capitalism, and these philosophies have proven their failure and inefficiencies time and again, especially as evidenced by the eruption of last global financial crisis in 2007 (Zaman, 2013). In the background of economic sustainability, Becker and Ostrom (1995) posited two related concepts of substitutability and subtractability that stress the importance of replacing resources where necessary with cheaper, environment-friendly alternatives. In contrast, the concept of subtractability entails partial or complete avoidance or elimination of those elements that may undermine the achievement of economic goals by being inefficient, hazardous, or having an adverse impact on the socio-economic setup and environmental state of society. These two concepts might also be linked to the earlier-mentioned aspects of enjoining good and forbidding harm as per Islamic tenets and ideology. Furthermore, another important aspect that Islam emphasizes and directly contributes to economic sustainability is maintaining a balance in economic and financial matters. This eventually leads to numerous positive outcomes. Additionally, the Islamic principles of generosity, simplicity, economic equity, fairness of business practices, and avoidance of all sorts of malpractices, including deception, fraud, hoarding, artificial price fluctuations, and manipulative market tactics, all play a positive role in ensuring greater economic well-being and contributing towards a longer run economically favorable state of affairs to eventually warrant economic sustainability of the society.

Following the Islamic outlook on the aspects of human, social, and economic sustainability, the environmental aspect is now explained from an Islamic perspective. The best approach to comprehending environmental sustainability from an Islamic standpoint is to construe earth as one of Allah's blessings, which serves as an abode for humankind. As stated in the Quran:

> **"And He created the earth for mankind." (55:10)**

The earth and all its resources are the bounties bestowed upon humans by the Almighty Allah, Who is the Creator of this universe and everything that exists. The primary factor that needs to be understood is that the resources of the earth are sufficient

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to sustain the human race, provided these are utilized as per the commandments and guidelines of the Creator. As evidence of the perfection of this earth is the following verse of the Holy Quran:

> **Verily all things We have created in proportion and measure." (54:49)**

The problems emerge when deviations and transgressions lead to scarcity, mismanagement, and unjust resource distribution. For all these issues, the best course of action is to adhere to the orders and principles of the One who has created the earth and its resources. From the Islamic point of view, the conception of *Khilafa* (vicegerency) is pertinent to discuss here. With reference to the concept of vicegerency, Allah stated in the Holy Quran:

> **"I am setting on Earth a vicegerent (khalīfa)" (2:30)**

The concept of vicegerency entails that all humans are trustees of God on this earth and are accountable and answerable to Him regarding all their actions (Idris, 1990), including their acts involving the utilization of the earth's resources (Qadir and Zaman, 2019). The concept of vicegerency is cardinal in recognizing that earth's resources are in the ownership of the Creator. Humans are only the trustees or agents who are to utilize these as per the commands of the Owner of these resources, leading to a sense of responsibility and sensitivity to the cause of collective welfare of all inhabitants of the planet (Ismaeel and Blaim, 2012). A very beautiful Hadith can be cited here to understand the concept of vicegerency in which the Prophet (PBUH) stated: "The world is sweet and green, and verily Allah is going to install you as vicegerents in it in order to see how you act."

To appreciate the significance of environmental sustainability, we must realize that Allah is the One who created this planet and then furnished the earth with mountains, rivers, water, plants, animals, and all other beings, resulting in a comprehensive ecosystem (Hussainy, 2019). Humans are allowed to benefit from everything that this earth has but are subject to limitations and certain principles. As a general rule, the basic principle in this regard is the element of moderation. Islam discourages the loss of balance on both sides of the quantum or scale. For instance, extravagance is condemnable, and so is stinginess.

> **They are those who spend neither wastefully nor stingily, but moderately (keeping a balance between the two)." 25:67**

Hence, the idea of striking a balance in all life aspects indirectly leads to the fulfillment of a greater objective of sustaining the earth's resources for the greatest benefit of everyone who lives on the planet, including not only humans but also the other creation, i.e., plants, animals, birds, insects, and all other species as Grine et al. (2013) asserted that the aspect of moderation necessitates full commitment of followers of Islamic ideology to guide them to a moderate philosophy and strategy of sustainability while outlawing all thoughts or acts of extremism or exclusion. The role

model for all humans, in general, and Muslims, specifically, is the character and personality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Allah refers to human beings as *'Ashraf al Makhlooqat,'* referred to as the crown of all creation termed *'Ahsane Taqvim'* as also mentioned in the Holy Quran:

"Indeed, We created humans in the best form." (95:4)

In the context of humans as the best of the creation and as being superior to all species, including even the angels, the Creator has certain expectations for them to fulfill as a gratitude for His favors. The way to thank Him is by submission to His will in all aspects of life, and it is the duty of humans towards their Lord to follow His commandments in all matters. The duty to worship and submit to Allah's will is but a form of gratitude towards the Creator who bestowed all the blessings of the earth, including all its resources. These blessings are not to be taken for granted and, therefore, not to be used in a wasteful manner. The Quran asserts:

"Eat of its fruit when it bears fruits, and pay its due on the day of harvest, and do not be extravagant. Surely, Allah does not like the extravagant." (6:141)

There are countless blessings in the shape of various resources granted by the Creator for the dwellers of this earth. One of the greatest resources is water, which is a true manifestation of life as stated in the Holy Quran:

"And We created from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?" (21:30)

The importance of water is also highlighted in several verses and traditions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). At another instance in the Quran, Allah states:

"And Allah has created every living creature from water. Some of them crawl on their bellies, some walk on two legs, and some walk on four. Allah creates whatever He wills. Surely Allah is Most Capable of everything." (24:45)

The water is a great blessing, and resource is also highlighted in these verses:

"Have you considered the water you drink? Is it you who bring it down from the clouds, or is it We Who do so? If We willed, We could make it salty. Will you not then give thanks?" (56:68-70)

With reference to the significance of resource utilization, specifically water consumption, there are several sayings of the Prophet (PBUH). One of the well-known hadiths is regarding the instance when the Prophet (PBUH) advised one of his companions to avoid wastefulness of water during ablution. He said to him not to be extravagant in utilizing water, even if you were on the banks of a flowing river. It was proven that Prophet (PBUH) consumed very moderate amounts of water for cleaning purposes (Ashraf, 2015). Apart from water, the Prophet (PBUH) also stressed the

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importance of other earth's natural resources in his saying and actions. For example, the plantation of trees is considered *'Sadqa-e-Jaariya'* in Islam. According to a Hadith: "There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift." *'Sadqa-e-Jaariya'* is a concept that is strongly related to the goal of sustainability, as this notion motivates people to get involved in ceaseless sustainable practices (Rifat et al., 2020). The greatness of Islam as a religion rather than as a complete code of life is reflected in its teachings, which manifest love and care for all creation and not only human beings. This has a direct implication on sustainability. For reference, as discussed in the verses of the Quran above as well as there are many *'Ahadith'* to comprehend the importance and vitality of ensuring moderation and balance in the utilization of earth's resources, which directly impacts the life of existing and future generations. There are many instances where the Prophet (PBUH) emphasized and advised his companions to show love and care for animals, birds, and even insects. To sum the discussion up regarding the Islamic perspective on sustainability, we must realize that it is underlined with the noble values and moral principles of moderation, trusteeship towards Allah with a purpose to be held accountable, being considerate towards other creation, including not only humans but trees, birds, animals and insects as well, being mindful and answerable towards the fulfillment of others' rights be it your parents, relatives, neighbors or any other fellow being within the society including Muslims and non-Muslims as well. As Qadir and Zaman (2019) posited, the element of sustainability is endogenous to Islam as the preservation of life is among the five basic *Maqasid Al Shariah* (Shariah objectives). These principles and tenets of leading a life that is beneficial and fruitful for not only us but for all other creations around eventually lead to the attainment of sustainability goals in the long run on one end and securing the ultimate reward of well-being and prosperity in the after-life on the other. This aspect transcends the goals of achieving welfare even beyond generations to another eternal world, which serves as the strongest motivation for the followers of the faith to be mindful of the idea and purpose of achieving sustainability in all facets and all aspects.

Conclusion

The paper elucidated the four major dimensions of sustainability, including human, social, economic, and environmental sustainability, and eventually assessed these facets in the light of the Islamic lens. The four aspects of sustainability were analyzed by keeping the Islamic sacred texts from the Holy Quran and traditions of the Prophet (PBUH) in context. The study concluded that Islam, being a complete code/framework to lead a human life, encompasses all matters humans face or may face in their lives till the end of this world, and therefore, Islam also, directly and indirectly, guides toward different aspects of sustainability to urge and motivate its followers to lead lives in such a way that warrants a sustainable world for everyone. The Islamic theory, as contained in its primary sources of the Quran and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), offers direction to ensure a sustainable life and a successful afterlife provided the teachings and guidelines of Islam are followed in letter and spirit. It is pertinent to note that the principles, guidelines, and rulings contained in the Islamic texts of the Quran and Ahadith are not exclusive to Muslims only. Rather, the knowledge and doctrine of Islam are for all humankind,

including past, present, and future generations, so sustainability being a universal issue also can be associated with the Islamic faith based on its feature of a universality of thought and ideology that is applicable to all humans. The need is to realize and appreciate the fact that the knowledge from these sacred Islamic sources is comprehended in the right context and to ensure the application and implementation of these tenets and rulings in our daily lives to guarantee a world that is prosperous and sustainable in its truest form.

Recommendations for Future Research

The paper focuses on the Islamic perspective on the elements and aspects of sustainability, including its various dimensions and fundamental aspects. The study is generally useful for anyone interested in the theory and understanding of sustainability and its related concepts. It is also particularly beneficial for those who wish to comprehend the Islamic viewpoints on various aspects of sustainability as directly linked to the basic Islamic sources of the Quran and Sunnah. As the study is qualitative, future studies may be undertaken with a view to offering a holistic outlook to the theory of sustainability in the Islamic context by devising a mixed research approach involving both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Furthermore, future research may involve a broader set of Islamic sources framework, including the secondary sources of Islam, including *Ijma* (scholarly consensus) and *Qiyas* (analogical deduction) while other supplementary sources including *Maslaha* (public good), *Urf* (customary practices), *Istihsan* (juristic preference), *Istishab* (legal presumption) and Ijtihad (individual reasoning) being deliberated upon to present a different perspective to the study of sustainability in Islamic context. The secondary sources may be construed and discussed in the background of sustainability and its various dimensions in order to provide a rather comprehensive outlook of the idea of sustainability from an Islamic standpoint.

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