



## Constraints in Achieving Urban Environmental Sustainability in the Muslim Country, Pakistan: An Islamic Perspective

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**Abstract**— Throughout history, cities have never been free of problems, whether built, social and environmental. However, some have been more successful than others in creating environments conducive to the cohabitation of a diverse population. Solving the problems of the developing world is a massive challenge as they are focus of development in industrial and social sectors. As a result, people are being confronted with juxtaposition of the international and regional, modern and traditional, industrial and technological etc. Unfortunately, the developing world comprising mainly of Muslim countries is threatened by environmental degeneration and social stratification. Islamic Republic of Pakistan is no exception and is in the limelight due to war against terrorism. The major cities are badly suffering from haphazard urban sprawl, environmental degeneration, energy crises etc. In the absence of long term policies, short term solutions are preferred over long term solutions making conditions more chaotic. It is high time to set things in the right direction by taking revolutionary measures in all institutions. Islam provides a comprehensive framework for the social and physical well being of mankind. Sadly, most of us are not aware of this rich legacy of environmental consciousness ultimately leading to sustainable development in Islam. The argument is made that sustainable environment: social and built, cannot be achieved in Pakistan or any other developing country unless the thinking patterns are changed substantially. As the entire focus of sustainability is on ethics so the objective of this study is to rediscover and refresh the teachings on ethics in the light of Quran and Shariah. The author being an architect felt inclined to highlight prevailing urban environmental conditions in the major cities of Pakistan to initiate a discourse at the national level to formulate future policies. The data used in this paper has been derived from the revealed and worldly published documents as well as electronic media.

**Keywords**— Developing World, Urban degeneration, sustainability, Islam, Quran, Shariah.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

“Our survival the way Almighty Allah has ordained is possible only if we follow the principles of Al-Quran”, Khan, M. S. 2005 [1].

The term “Sustainable development” entered into common vocabulary with the heightened awareness in the late 1980s. Though the term is widely used in reference to ecological sustainability but concept and aspects included in it may potentially be physical, cultural, social, political and doubtless many more. There is no consensus as to what the term means and has many definitions in consequence. The dictionary suggests different meanings such as “to keep up the strength, spirits or determination of”, “to suffer”, “to hold up” and “to keep in existence over a long period” [2]. In some cases, it is used simply to mean that the long term result of some action or set of actions is consistent with the desired solutions.

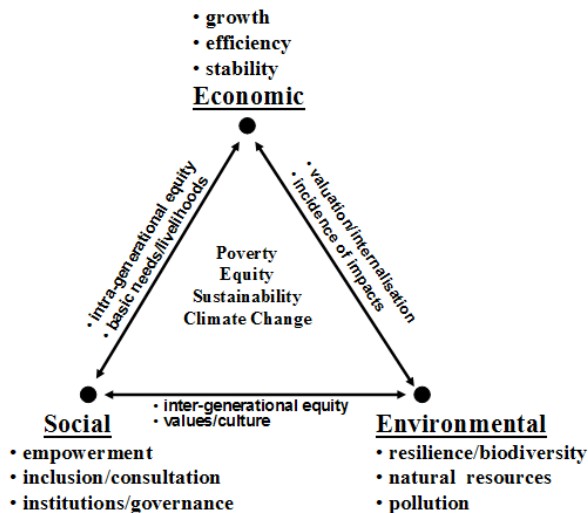
Brundtland Report “Our Common Future” in 1987 based on the findings of World Commission on Environment and Development (1983) gave the first clear definition as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Its three crucial dimensions: economic development, social equity and

the preservation of the environment needs to be integrated and reconciled within a holistic and balanced sustainable development framework [3] [Figure 1]. According to the British government, sustainable development aims to guarantee a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. This cannot be achieved by meeting four goals at the same time: progress of all people by recognising their needs, protecting the environment, careful use of natural resources and maintaining healthy economic growth and employment [4].

### 2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

The term environmentalism was coined in the west during 20<sup>th</sup> century as an aftermath of Industrial revolution but was revealed to the prophet of Islam, Muhammad (peace be upon him) 1400 years ago. Islam is not a religion; it represents an entire sense of community and a guidance framework for actions in all spheres of life [5]. The Quran (last divine book after Torah and Bible) Shariah (Islamic rules & ethical principles) are the primary sources of Islamic teachings. Quran says: “...and verily, you (O Muhammad) are indeed guiding (mankind) to the straight path” [6].

In order to understand Islam's response to sustainable development, we need to appreciate that Allah has created the universe and everything in it according to a perfect balance which we are required to obey and promote.



**Fig. 1: Sustainable development triangle – key elements and interconnections (corners, sides, center).** (Source: Munasinghe, M., retrieved from [http://www.eoearth.org/article/Economic,\\_social,\\_and\\_environmental\\_elements\\_of\\_development](http://www.eoearth.org/article/Economic,_social,_and_environmental_elements_of_development))

“And the Heaven He has raised high, and He has set up the balance. In order that you may not transgress (due) balance, and observe the weight with equity and do not make the balance deficient” [7].

There are over 500 verses in the *Quran* giving us guidance on matters relating to the environment and how to deal with it and there are numerous examples from the Prophet's Muhammad's life and his sayings, which provide a model for justice and equity [8]. The *Quran* explains that mankind holds a privileged position among God's creations on earth and is chosen as *khalifa*, "Vicegerent" and carries the responsibility of caring for God's earthly creations [9]. Qur'an repeatedly warns believers against arrogance and acknowledges that mankind is not the only community to live on the earth:

“There is not an animal in the earth, nor a flying creature flying on two wings, but they are peoples like unto you” [10]

Man is reminded through *Quranic* revelations not to waste any resource and the most remarkable point in this regard is that we shall be called to account on the Day of Judgement for how we used all the favours Allah had given us in this life:

“O Children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters.” [11]

Shortly, Holy *Quran* is not a collection of dogmas, but a complete code of conduct for mankind for all times to come. It draws attention on practically everything in the Nature [12]. The creator of universe talks about the creation of man, sun, moon, earth, mountains, oceans, clouds, birds, animals, day and night, rise and fall of nations and cities, historical events and mythical wonders.

The idea that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

was a pioneer and strong proponent of environmentalism may seem an exaggeration in the west but many accounts of his life and deeds reflect that he had a profound respect for fauna and flora, as well as an almost visceral connection to the four elements, earth, water, fire and air. Chatles (2003) ranks him as a pioneer in the domain of conservation, sustainable development and resource management, one who constantly sought to maintain a harmonious balance between man and nature [13]. He mentions that:

“...his environmental philosophy is first of all holistic: it assumes a fundamental link and interdependency between all natural elements and bases its teachings on the premise that if man abuses or exhausts one element, the natural world as a whole will suffer direct consequences.”

He further describes that the Prophet believed in sharing of the earth's resources and earth had rights, just as the trees and wildlife living on it. He was also a strong proponent of the sustainable use and cultivation of land and water, proper treatment of animals, plants and birds, and the equal rights of users. He says:

“All creatures of Allah are His family; and he is the most beloved of Allah who loveth best his creatures” [14]

The Prophet not only encouraged the sustainable use of fertile lands, he also told his followers of the benefits of making unused land productive: planting a tree, sowing a seed and irrigating dry land were all regarded as charitable deeds. Certain passages of the *hadith* (sayings/anecdotes of Muhammad) can be relevant in creating awareness and resolving contemporary environmental issues. For example, of reforestation and land reclamation, the prophet has said:

“Whoever brings dead land to life, that is, cultivates wasteland, for him is a reward therein.” [15]

“Whoever plants a tree and diligently looks after it until it matures and bears fruit is rewarded.” [16]

“There is none amongst the believers who plants a tree, or sows a seed, and then a bird, or a person, or an animal eats thereof, but it is regarded as having given a charitable gift for which there is great recompense.” [17]

In order to protect land, forests and wildlife, Muhammad (peace be upon him) created inviolable zones known as *hima* and *haram*, in which resources were to be left untouched. Both are still in use today: *hima* applies particularly to wildlife and forestry and usually designates an area of land where grazing and woodcutting are restricted, or where certain animal species are protected *haram* areas are often drawn up around wells and water sources to protect the groundwater table from over-pumping [18]. The six principles highlighted by *Shariah* for a value society; social cohesion (*Ummah*), responsibility (*Faradh*), empowerment (*Shura*), equilibrium (*Al'adl wal ihsan*), endowment (*Al-Waqf*) and almsgiving (*Zakat*) are in fact the main indicators of sustainable development agenda of

sustainable development [19]. Sadly, most of us are not aware of this rich legacy of environmental consciousness and socio-economic justice in Islam and how these relate to our contemporary issues.

“Islamic Declaration on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002” is the first comprehensive document highlighting Islamic perspective on sustainable development on the world forum. One of the organizations instrumental in the preparation of the document was the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO). ISESCO held jointly with the OIC a number of activities in this regard: a conference of governmental experts of the Islamic countries on sustainable development in Tunis (March 2001), the First Preparatory Meeting of the Environment Ministers of the Muslim World in Rabat (January, 2002) and the First Islamic Conference for Ministers of the Environment in Jeddah (June, 2002). The Declaration was presented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in Aug. 2002. It proclaimed that “the sustainable development begins with an application of human rights and then extends to answering the rights of other creations”. The Muslim World was supportive of the regional and international efforts exerted to promote the standard of life of all human beings of all aspects: social, economic, cultural, environmental, and health [20].

*“Committed to the Islamic approach built on promotion of man’s dignity and achievement of his lieutenancy mission on earth through good deeds that conduce to sustainable development, foster social solidarity, raise the care to orphans and the have-nots, induce edification of civilization without any plundering or dilapidation and affirm the organic relationship between man and the earth in terms of existence and development”.*

The “Article 3” and “Article 4” focus on environment from an Islamic perspective and human right to environment respectively [21]:

*The environment is a gift donated to man by Allah. Therefore, individuals and communities are, all, duty-bound to take care of it and promote all its natural resources, including air, climate, water, seas, flora and fauna, and refrain from any act likely to cause pollution or damage the eco-system or disturb the balance thereto.*

*“The right to education and to a decent life shall be recognized as well as the right to a sound, hygienic environment. The State and the society shall secure these rights to enable the individual to fully enjoy his humanness and contribute to the sustainable development of his community. Women shall also be recognized as full partners in the sustainable development action”.*

The “Article 5” focuses on the major constraints of sustainable development: Poverty, Debts, Wars, armed conflicts and foreign occupation, overpopulation, particularly in cities of developing countries and the deterioration of living conditions in shanty towns and absence of modern technologies and technical expertise necessary for the implementation of sustainable

development programs and plans etc.

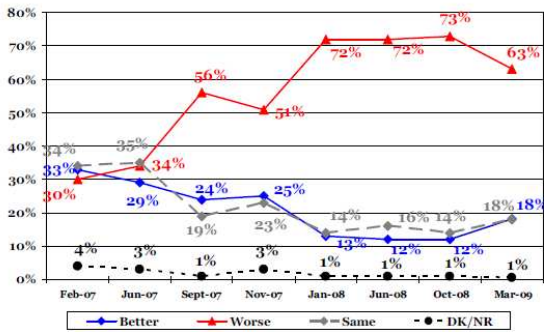
### 3. URBAN SCENARIO OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan, the first Islamic nuclear state, had been colonized by imperial power before it became an independent state in 1947. The country has the second largest Muslim population in the world after Indonesia and the Muslims comprise 96% of the total population. Currently, Pakistan is in the limelight being an American ally in war on terrorism. Due to growing global anxiety over control of oil resources in Central Asia, conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kashmir, Pakistan is thrust upon with superpower politics, foreign aid, influx of Afghan refugees, Internally Displaced People (IDP) etc. The country is suffering from social injustice, corruption, ineffective policies, environmental degradation, mismanagement of resources etc. and being threatened by socio-political upheaval. Another challenge is the intolerance towards the diversity of views which continues to pull urban Pakistan in different directions. The schism is getting wider between religious clerics, enlightened moderation and traditionally determined social structures. Except for the affluent class, common individual is striving for their basic needs for survival. The historical Long March on March 15, 2009 was the national public protest against many ills predominantly social injustice which was telecasted world over. The country is on the brink of facing energy crisis ahead which is not just due to deficiencies in natural or human resources but due to lack of long term planning. Global Quality of Living City -2007 ranked Pakistan as one of the lowest scoring destinations in term of Personal safety with its three largest cities Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore at 213, 203 and 192 respectively [22]. Public Opinion Survey conducted in March 2009 by the International Republican Institute (IRI) reflects people response to economic situation, security conditions, religious extremism and future direction [Figure 2]. The randomly selected sample consists of 3,500 adult men and women from 216 rural and 134 urban locations in 51 districts in all four provinces of Pakistan. The data was collected through in home, in person interview from a National representative sample of adult residents (18 years and above) of Pakistan [23].

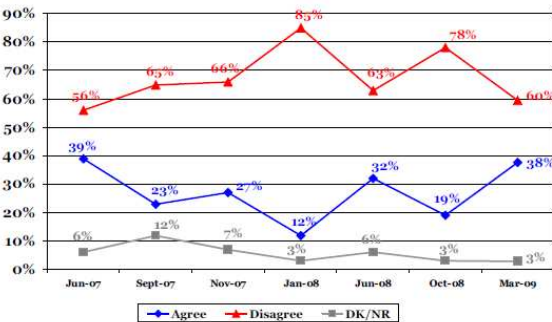
A brief outlook of the urban scenario of Pakistan with approximately 33% of population residing in a reflective of chaotic conditions [24]:

- Pakistani society as a whole is suffering from mismanagement of natural and man-made resources. The politicians are attuned to manage national affair in a state of crises alone.
- Pakistani elite have hardly any concern for the public welfare. They would like to live in air-conditioned homes, drive in air-conditioned cars, work in an air conditioned offices and shop in air conditioned malls. Whereas, public is badly suffering from energy crisis: power breakdown, shortage of gas.

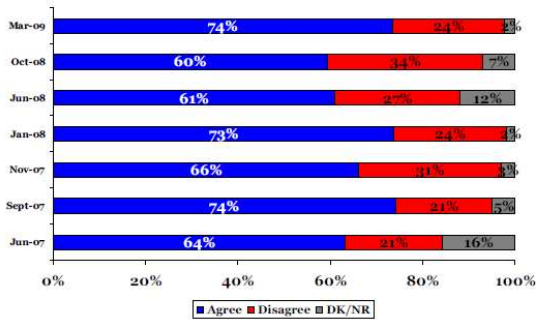
IRI In the past year, has your personal economic situation improved, worsened or stayed the same?



IRI Agree or Disagree? I feel more secure this year than I did last year



IRI Agree or Disagree? Religious extremism is a serious problem in Pakistan.



IRI Do you think that Pakistan is heading in the right direction or in the wrong direction?

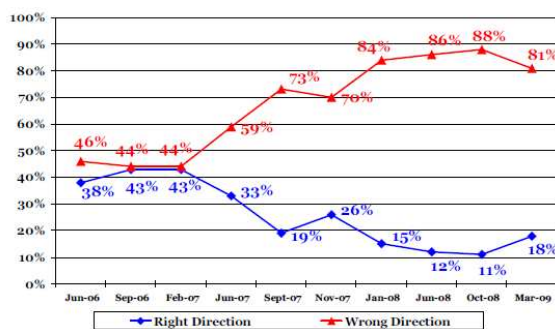


Figure 2: Public Opinion Survey of Pakistan by IRI

- In Pakistan, there has always been a wide gap what is preached and what is practiced. On the architectural scene, words such as regionalism, balance between man and nature etc. have become catchphrases with unfortunately no concrete results. The influence of regionalism is not even reflected in the works of architects who frequently comment and write on the subject. For many architects the principal concern is how to satisfy client's wishes; building form devoid of any social reference is the ultimate criteria. With very few exceptions, the architects are serving the interests of a very small affluent segment of the population who are devoid of the harsh realities of the society.
- Due to inadequate zoning regulations and even less implementation of these regulations, the existing infrastructure and support services are under enormous stress. Building after building simply appears with no discernable sense of purpose, direction or vision. This build –as much as you-policy has also caused a rampant increase in the urban land prices making it impossible for other developers to build within the permissible limits, and still be able to market their projects.
- The building by-laws are kept deliberately vague or ill defined so that they can be interpreted on a case-to-case basis depending on the relationship of the builder/architect to the authority concerned. Master Plans are degenerated /misused by both politicians and citizens. Individual benefits play more dominant roles than social benefits, in the determination of growth/developing directions of the cities. There are usually very little or no control exercised during execution, even if the physical construction has little relevance to the approved proposal.
- The prevalent market economy with no political directions is ensuring the architectural patterns are based on maximizing return on investment to a relatively small group, usually at the expense of the community at large.

Haider (2006) outlines the challenges in the largest cities of Pakistan regarding urban degeneration. He points out that the infrastructure deficit is the most obvious telltale of urban decay in Pakistan. Some indicators would help understand the scope of the problem [25].

*Streets are littered with waste, drains are overflowing with sewage, low-lying communities are inundated after rainfall, traffic congestion is ubiquitous, and the violent crime in urban centers is on the rise...Less than 1 % of wastewater is treated in streams, ravines, and rivers have turned into sewers. The metropolitan governments recover fewer than 50% of the solid waste generated in cities. The rest is left on the streets. Even the waste that is collected is mostly dumped in open fields or is incinerated. The dumped waste pollutes the ground water and the incinerated waste creates air pollution...The poor economic growth, specifically the*

*low rate of employment growth for the youth, lack of entrepreneurship, and the collapse of civilian institutions are some of the more inherent causes of urban decay in Pakistan.*

Lahore, one of the historical cities of Pakistan and is legendary for its historical buildings, and reminds us of the beautiful and wonderful history of the subcontinent. According to a UN report, Lahore is expected to be placed in world's mega cities category by 2025. It is a sprawling metropolis of seven million people and one of the thirty largest cities in the world. The relentless spread of this urban sprawl has resulted in severe pressure on the urban land and infrastructure of the city. At the time of creation of Pakistan, it was of the cleanest city, where all the facilities were available to the residents. K.K.Aziz, one of the senior historians writes [26]:

*From the 1920s onwards, perhaps even earlier, Lahore was the most highly cultured city of north India...A glorious physical setting for this pulsating intellectual activity was provided by the Lahore that the British built between 1860 and 1935. Impressive edifices adorned the landscape... The queen of all roads, the Mall, was bordered by tall trees and wide footpaths, and boasted a glittering array of expensive shops. The Race Course and the Lawrence Gardens were the lungs of the city. No high rise buildings existed. With no encroachments the roads looked wider...The skyline was soothing. Nature's green was the dominating color of the city. Breathing was easy, and so was enjoying life.*

Over the years the quality of life has gone down for the majority of citizens: drinking polluted water, breathing polluted air and eating polluted food. The flora and fauna is at risk. According to study conducted in 1992 only 101 bird species from the parks of Lahore were recorded which has reduced to just 85 including the resident and migratory ones. Land mafia is on the rampage in the provincial metropolis, traffic situation is alarming. Almost every main road is jammed due to the shortage of mass-transport system. Private car ownership creates enormous capacity problems. Over the last three and a half years, 35 illegal housing schemes have been launched in the city and after looting billions of rupees from thousands of people, sponsors of these schemes have simply vanished in the air. Provincial housing Department and Lahore Development Authority though declared these schemes illegal have failed to take any appropriate action. The authority has failed to evolve policies and programs relating to the improvement of housing schemes, industrial development, traffic, transpiration, health, education, water supply, sewerage, drainage and solid waste disposal. Khan writes [27]:

*“The Lahore Development Authority is fast becoming a white elephant in the eyes of Punjab Government. It is all due to rampant mismanagement, growing financial inefficiencies, inordinate delay in the implementation of commercialization policy, strengthening racket between LDA's employees and land grabber mafia”.*

The conditions in other major cities of Pakistan are no more different. This is mainly for the reason that the

right decisions have not been taken at the right time. To address the issue, the Ministry of Environment in coloration with the Ministry of Education decided to include chapters on environment awareness in school curriculum from class 1 and to initiate teachers' training program [28]. But so far, no concrete steps have taken to address the issue at a gross scale. In the midst of all the chaos, some development works are being carried, posh buildings are being constructed but a small section of society is the beneficiary. To measure the quality of life one should not look at the skyscrapers, the shopping promenades, parks and boulevards but to look at the quality of life of the people living over there. Undoubtedly, life for the majority of urban population has gone miserable, chaotic and complex.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Sustainability is holistic in nature as an infringement of one principle can often have repercussions on other activities. For example, it is impossible to consider poverty alleviation or pollution without addressing fundamental social, economic and political disparities leading to these miseries. The above cited urban condition of Pakistan reveals that human rights are not being protected and the breach between rich and poor is getting wider. Poverty, one of the major constraints to sustainable development, is on the rise and Pakistan is ranked 142 on the Human Development Index, compared to India 118 and Uganda 146 [29]. In addition, country is being threatened by religious extremism, suicide attacks, hunger, polluted water, air pollution, energy crises, shortage of affordable housing, etc which are the major constraints to sustainable development as pointed out by the “Islamic Declaration on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002” mentioned earlier. The question now arises can we talk of sustainable development without meeting the prerequisites and the immediate answer is certainly not.

The author is convinced that the factors surrounding sustainable development have ethical, social, and political complexities and that architects/planners alone cannot resolve the issue. The value system of a society as stressed by Islam is the ultimate grounding for the call to sustainability. The basic principles of sustainable development: equity, social democracy, concern for future generations, regard for human dignity are value based and environmental consciousness is born when such values are adopted and become an intrinsic part of our mental and physical makeup of daily life. It is pointless adopting this policy for political expediency and correctness while disregarding Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) life's model of simplicity, peace, humility, brotherhood, contentment and modesty in our personal and social lives.

Long run development is not possible without protecting the rights of the vulnerable groups and the participation of the entire population in the development process. It is high time to mobilize the general public through seminars, educational programs, electronic and print media highlighting role of ethical values in the sustainable development we can religiously and

culturally identify with, and genuinely believe in. Above all what is needed more than anything is to bring change in our thinking individually and collectively to become instrumental to move in the right direction. The country created on the name of Islam should act as a role model for the other developing countries to follow. Let us take the lead in lightening the candle by brightening the forgotten legacy of Islam.

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