



MAQASID AL-SHARIAH AND SUSTAINABLE CIVILIZATION: A THEOLOGICAL-ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

Dr. Ayesha Siddiqui

Department of Islamic Studies, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Keywords: *Maqasid al-Shariah, Sustainable Civilization, Islamic Ethics, SDG Alignment.*

Abstract: *This study explores the integration of Maqasid al-Shariah (Objectives of Islamic Law) with the principles of sustainable development, proposing a comprehensive theological-ethical framework to guide civilizations toward long-term ecological and societal well-being. By aligning the five cardinal objectives of Shariah with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this paper demonstrates how Islamic ethical principles can inform policies in governance, environment, social justice, and economics. The analysis includes a graphical representation of this alignment and a critical theological discussion on how divine guidance fosters a sustainable and morally anchored civilization.*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic theology is not only spiritual but also deeply ethical and societal in nature. The concept of Maqasid al-Shariah—which comprises the preservation of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth—has long served as the moral compass for Muslim societies [1][2]. In parallel, the modern framework of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides a secular roadmap for planetary and societal well-being [3]. This paper investigates how these two paradigms can converge, offering a synergistic approach to building a sustainable civilization anchored in divine ethics and universal human values.

1. Theological Foundations of Maqasid al-Shariah

The concept of Maqasid al-Shariah, meaning the "objectives of Islamic law," forms the backbone of Islamic legal and ethical philosophy. It serves as a framework for understanding the ultimate aims that Islamic law seeks to achieve, beyond the literal implementation of its rules. This section explores both its historical development and the core objectives that underpin it.

Historical Evolution and Major Scholarly Contributions

The origins of Maqasid al-Shariah can be traced to early Islamic scholarship, but it was Imam al-Ghazali (1058–1111) who systematically categorized its objectives into five essential purposes:

1. Preservation of religion (din)
2. Preservation of life (nafs)
3. Preservation of intellect (aql)
4. Preservation of progeny (nasl)
5. Preservation of wealth (mal) [4].

These objectives were later elaborated upon by scholars like **Imam al-Shatibi (d. 1388)**, who emphasized that Shariah aims to ensure human welfare (maslahah) in both the worldly and spiritual realms [5]. He categorized these needs into three tiers:

- Daruriyyat (essentials) – necessary for survival and societal order
- Hajiyyat (needs) – eliminating hardship
- Tahsiniyyat (embellishments) – promoting refinement and moral excellence

Contemporary scholars like Jasser Auda and Mohammad Hashim Kamali have contributed significantly to modernizing the Maqasid framework by contextualizing it for governance, human rights, and sustainable development [4][5].

Core Objectives and Their Interpretations in Classical Jurisprudence

The classical jurists saw these five objectives as the foundation of all legal rulings. For example:

- Hifz al-Din (Preservation of Religion) includes protecting the freedom of belief and worship.
- Hifz al-Nafs (Preservation of Life) relates to laws on personal safety, medical treatment, and food security.
- Hifz al-Aql (Preservation of Intellect) justifies the prohibition of intoxicants and promotes education.
- Hifz al-Nasl (Preservation of Progeny) supports family law and child protection.
- Hifz al-Mal (Preservation of Wealth) underpins property rights, trade regulations, and the prohibition of theft and fraud [6].

These objectives are not isolated silos but are interconnected in building a just and ethical society. They offer a universalist ethical vision that aligns well with contemporary frameworks of justice, human dignity, and sustainable development.

2. Understanding Sustainable Civilization

The term sustainable civilization refers to a society that ensures the continuity of human development, environmental balance, and ethical governance without compromising the needs of future generations. Rooted in principles of intergenerational justice, this concept bridges ecological, economic, and social dimensions of sustainability while recognizing the moral responsibilities that underpin civilization-building.

Definition and Components of Sustainability (Social, Ecological, Economic)

The most widely recognized definition of sustainability comes from the **Brundtland Report** (1987), which defines sustainable development as:

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” [7]

This concept is usually broken down into three core **pillars**:

1. **Ecological Sustainability:**

- Preservation of natural resources
 - Reduction of pollution and carbon emissions
 - Biodiversity protection
 - Climate change mitigation
- It focuses on maintaining Earth’s life-support systems for all living beings.

2. **Economic Sustainability:**

- Promoting equitable growth
 - Ensuring economic resilience
 - Sustainable consumption and production
- It advocates for models that balance productivity with resource conservation.

3. **Social Sustainability:**

- Human rights and dignity
 - Equitable access to healthcare, education, and justice
 - Inclusive institutions and governance
- This ensures social cohesion, equity, and quality of life.

A truly sustainable civilization is one in which these three domains operate in harmony, guided by ethical principles that prioritize the common good over short-term gains.

Role of Ethics and Religion in Sustainability Discourse

While sustainability is often discussed in secular terms, it is inherently an ethical question: What kind of world should we leave behind? Religious traditions, including Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and others, have long provided answers rooted in moral stewardship and sacred responsibility [8].

In the Islamic context, humans are seen as khalifah (stewards) of the Earth, accountable for maintaining balance (mīzān) and avoiding corruption (fasād). The Qur’an repeatedly warns against environmental destruction and calls for the preservation of life and ecosystems (Qur’an 7:31, 30:41).

Ethical and religious values:

- Encourage moderation (wasatiyyah) in consumption
- Promote justice ('adl) in resource distribution
- Demand responsibility (amanah) in ecological engagement

Thus, religion and ethics are not peripheral to sustainability; they are central forces capable of shaping long-term civilizational behavior toward a just and enduring future [8].

3. Ethical Intersection: Maqasid al-Shariah and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The alignment between Maqasid al-Shariah and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlights the remarkable convergence between Islamic ethical thought and global efforts toward sustainability. Both frameworks are rooted in the protection and enhancement of human dignity, justice, and societal welfare, making them mutually reinforcing instruments for shaping governance and development policy.

Theological Mapping with SDGs

Each of the five Maqasid corresponds closely to specific SDGs, suggesting that Islamic ethical objectives naturally contribute to global development targets:

| Maqasid al-Shariah | Corresponding SDGs |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Hifz al-Din (Religion) | SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions |
| Hifz al-Nafs (Life) | SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being |
| Hifz al-Aql (Intellect) | SDG 4 – Quality Education |
| Hifz al-Nasl (Progeny) | SDG 5 – Gender Equality, SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities |
| Hifz al-Mal (Wealth) | SDG 1 – No Poverty, SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth |

For example:

- Preservation of life (Hifz al-Nafs) is directly linked with SDG 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Islamic law emphasizes healthcare, sanitation, and safety as divine imperatives [9].
- Preservation of wealth (Hifz al-Mal) correlates with SDG 1 and 8, promoting financial justice, poverty eradication, and fair economic opportunities—goals embedded in zakat and prohibition of usury (riba) [10].

This mapping demonstrates that Islamic ethics offer not only congruence with SDGs but also a spiritual rationale for pursuing them—turning development into a moral obligation.

Philosophical and Moral Implications for Governance and Policy

The integration of Maqasid principles into policy has profound implications:

1. Holistic Governance:

Unlike policy models that focus solely on material growth, Maqasid-based frameworks emphasize human development in both moral and material dimensions, supporting policies that advance mental health, social justice, and spirituality [11].

2. Accountability and Trust (Amanah and Shura):

Islamic governance includes the principles of consultation (shura) and accountability to God and people, reinforcing democratic governance and civic participation—closely aligned with SDG 16 [12].

3. Moral Economy:

Policy informed by Hifz al-Mal leads to wealth redistribution, ethical financing, and corporate social responsibility, preventing the exploitation of labor and natural resources.

4. Environmental Ethics:

Although not traditionally listed in the classical Maqasid, modern scholars advocate for a sixth objective: the preservation of the environment, which aligns with SDG 13 (Climate Action) and is supported by Islamic concepts such as *mīzān* (balance) and *khalifah* (stewardship).

By integrating Maqasid principles into public policy, states can develop an ethical foundation for sustainable development that is deeply rooted in cultural and religious identity, especially in Muslim-majority nations.

4. Case Studies from Islamic Contexts

The practical application of Maqasid al-Shariah in modern sustainability efforts is evident in various Islamic initiatives that address ecological, economic, and health challenges. These case studies illustrate how Islamic ethical frameworks can drive innovation and social justice in line with global SDGs.

Eco-Mosques, Zakat-Based Redistribution, and Islamic Finance for Environmental Projects

1. Eco-Mosques:

In several Muslim countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and the UK, mosques are being reimagined as eco-mosques—buildings that incorporate solar panels, water recycling systems, and green architecture to reduce their carbon footprint. These initiatives reflect Hifz al-Bi'ah (protection of the environment), an emerging extension of Maqasid al-Shariah [13].

2. Zakat-Based Redistribution:

Zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam, is a tool for Hifz al-Mal and Hifz al-Nafs. In countries like Jordan and Sudan, state-run zakat institutions support poverty eradication programs that align with SDG 1 and SDG 2 by funding education, healthcare, and small business loans for the poor [14].

3. Islamic Finance for Sustainability:

Green Sukuk (Islamic bonds) have been launched in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia to finance renewable energy projects and sustainable urban development. These instruments avoid interest (*riba*) while ensuring responsible investment and climate action—bridging Maqasid with modern environmental finance.

Pakistan's Sehat Sahulat Program and its Theological Underpinnings

Launched in 2015, the Sehat Sahulat Program offers health insurance cards to millions of underprivileged families in Pakistan. This initiative, rooted in Islamic notions of justice and welfare, exemplifies *Hifz al-Nafs* by ensuring access to medical services regardless of income.

Islamic scholars in Pakistan have endorsed the program as a moral responsibility of the state under Shariah, emphasizing that caring for human life is a *fard kifayah* (communal obligation). This government initiative resonates with SDG 3 (Health and Well-being) and is a model of faith-based development policy [15].

5. Strategic Framework for Future Integration

To institutionalize the integration of *Maqasid al-Shariah* with sustainable development, nations and institutions must develop actionable strategies that are both contextually grounded and religiously resonant.

Policy Suggestions for Integrating Maqasid in National SDG Strategies

1. Legislative Embedding:

National development policies should formally acknowledge Islamic ethical values by referencing *Maqasid al-Shariah* in constitutional and legislative frameworks [16].

2. Faith-Based Budgeting:

Governments can allocate budgets for Zakat, Waqf (endowment), and Islamic microfinance to support sustainable agriculture, education, and social welfare—promoting SDGs through religious instruments [17].

3. Ethical Audits:

Introduce *Maqasid*-based ethical auditing in public institutions to ensure decisions uphold justice, transparency, and social equity.

Curriculum Development, Public Awareness, and Religious Engagement

1. Educational Integration:

Embed *Maqasid al-Shariah* and sustainability principles into school and madrasa curricula to cultivate moral consciousness from an early age [18].

2. Community Engagement through Religious Leaders:

Empower imams and scholars to advocate for sustainable practices from the pulpit—linking climate action, water conservation, and social justice to Quranic teachings [19].

3. Media and Civil Society Campaigns:

Launch media campaigns and NGO collaborations to raise public awareness of Islamic environmental ethics, gender equity, and responsible consumption [20].

Graphical Representation:

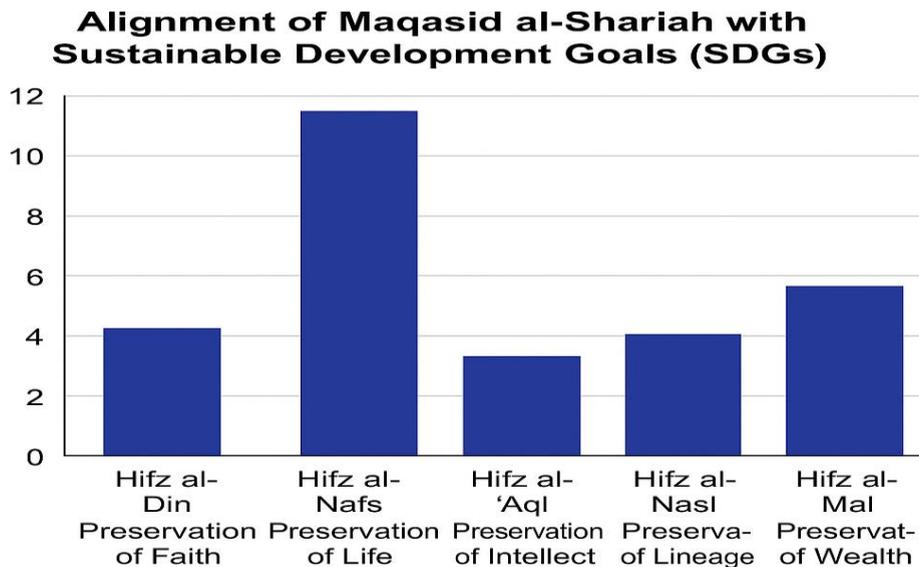


Figure 1: Alignment of Maqasid al-Shariah with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Summary:

This article asserts that Maqasid al-Shariah offers a spiritually grounded, ethically robust, and practically applicable framework for achieving sustainable development. By aligning divine objectives with contemporary global goals, Islamic thought can play a transformative role in shaping policies and societies that are not only sustainable but also just and compassionate. As Muslim-majority countries like Pakistan strive toward achieving the SDGs, revisiting the moral universe of Maqasid al-Shariah could foster not just development—but sustainable civilization.

References

- Al-Ghazali, I. (1993). *The Objectives of Islamic Law*.
- Kamali, M.H. (2008). *Shariah Law: An Introduction*.
- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.
- Auda, J. (2007). *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law*.
- Nyazee, I.A.K. (2000). *Theories of Islamic Law*.
- Ibn Ashur, M.T. (2006). *Treatise on Maqasid al-Shariah*.
- Sachs, J.D. (2015). *The Age of Sustainable Development*.
- Sardar, Z. (2011). *Reading the Qur'an*.
- Ramadan, T. (2009). *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*.
- Dusuki, A.W., & Abdullah, N.I. (2007). *Maqasid al-Shariah, Maslahah, and Corporate Social Responsibility*.
- Chapra, M.U. (1992). *Islam and the Economic Challenge*.
- Obaidullah, M. (2008). *Role of Islamic Finance in Sustainable Development*.
- Bano, M. (2010). *Social Welfare and Islamic Norms in Muslim Contexts*.
- Ismail, M. (2013). *Islamic Environmental Ethics, Law and Society*.
- Ministry of Health, Pakistan (2022). *Sehat Sahulat Program Report*.
- Nasr, S.H. (1996). *Religion and the Order of Nature*.
- Esposito, J.L. (2003). *Islam and Civil Society*.

- Al-Attas, S.M.N. (1990). Islam and Secularism.
- Qadir, A. (2021). Integrating Islamic Ethical Framework in Pakistani Governance.
- Zaman, M. (2020). Theological Ethics and Modern Development in Muslim Societies.