

Virtue Driven Sustainable Development from the Perspective of the Risale-i Nur

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Abstract

This article is about the sustainable development from the perspective of the Risale-i Nur. It tries to explore the goals of sustainable development (S.D.) as presented in the thought of Imam Nursi. The paper focuses on the concept of (S.D.) in Islam by explaining the relation between Allah (SWT) and the creation, the relation between human and human. The paper, also, sheds light on the importance of the attributes of Allah in formulating the shape of (S.D.)

Keywords: Islam, Risale-i Nur, Virtue

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الفضيلة مدفوعة التنمية المستدامة من منظور رسائل النور

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المستخلص

تتعلق هذه المقالة بما يسمى بالتنمية المستدامة من خلال وجهة نظر رسائل النور، وتحاول أن تكتشف أهداف التنمية المستدامة كما برزت من خلال فكر الإمام النورسي. تركز المقالة على مفهوم التنمية المستدامة في الإسلام من خلال شرح العلاقة بين الله سبحانه وتعالى وبين الخلق، وتوضيح علاقة الإنسان بأخيه الإنسان. تلقى الورقة الضوء، أيضاً، على أهمية أسماء الله الحسنى ودورها في تشكيل صورة التنمية المستدامة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإسلام، رسائل النور، الفضيلة

Introduction

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

And the earth We have spread wide; and how well have We ordered it. (51:48)

Have you ever wonder, what is happening to the world and yet almost everywhere in the globe, sustainable development is the focus? Are we concerned with climate change and the unpredictable weather? Are we aware of the possible impact of deforestation besides economical reason? Do we care on the plight of our brothers and sisters in Palestine, Syria, Yemen and Uighur, Rohingya? Thus, who should be blamed with the damage done to our planet earth? Do these questions manage to catch our attention and are we among those who contribute harm to our planet? What can we, as Muslims, do to save the planet especially for our future generation? What is the stand of Islam in the sustainable development agenda?

Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development

According to Bruntland Report (1987) published by the United Nation, sustainability is defined as *meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs*. The focus of sustainability are economic, environmental, and social or alternatively refer as people, planet and profits. The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and its 17 sustainable development goals (SDG) become the focus of global plan of world leaders. Among the SDGs are no poverty (SDG1), zero hunger (SDG2), quality education (SDG4), affordable and clean energy (SDG7) and so on (UNDP, 2015).

However, how do we implement the SDG in a Muslim country? This paper will present the Islamic perspective or worldview on sustainable development and highlight the essentials of Kalimah Bismillah in achieving the agenda with some thoughts from Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur. Needless to mention, sustainability is very much in line within the Islamic principles treated within the framework of the Qur'anic teachings and sunnah of the Prophet to maintain the well-being of the society, economy and environment which was also highlighted by Abdul Rahman et al. (2018). The focus is not merely on the physical development of sustainability such as economic, environmental, and social but also human spiritual is primarily significant and important.

The Islamic Worldview on Sustainability

In Islam, the three entities of sustainability i.e. people, planet and prosperity, must be scrutinized from three angles: the relationship of Allah with His creation, human and human, human and environment. In the modern days, the only relationship that is being considered is human and human, human and environment but ironically, we ignore the Creator, even though He is the Protector of the world. The key aspects of these tri-relations are adab or manners in which the discussion in this paper will be based or sometimes known as virtue ethics that is embedded in Islam. There is adab to our Creator, adab to our fellow human beings and adab to the environment. Adab indicates respect, good mannerism towards Allah, other human being and environment, putting things in the right context and place where the Creator is the key to these relationships which is the stance taken in this paper.

The first revelation to Prophet Muhammad SAW, was *اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ*. It is a command from Allah to read in the name of Allah Who creates us. It is a powerful command that becomes a very important and powerful milestone in Islam. According to Said Nursi in Risale-i Nur, reading in the name of Allah means either reading al-Quran (Kalam Allah), reading the universe or Ayatul Kauniyah to reflect on Allah's wisdom of creation and reading from the teaching of our prophets (Sunnah). The purpose of reading is to seek the reflection of Allah's Beautiful Names (Al-Asmau'l-Husna) in His creation, to know Allah and to get closer to Allah as mentioned in the last verse of surah Al-Alaq, *وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ* (and to prostrate and get closer to Allah). This verse is a strong reminder for us to begin action with the name of Allah and remain submissive to Allah. This paper will highlight the importance of kalimah Bismillah (*بِسْمِ اللَّهِ*) and why it is essential in executing sustainable development initiatives.

In the part of Risale-i Nur titled as The Short Words (2016), Bediuzzaman Said Nursi explained the First Word,

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ. In the name of Allah, is the beginning of all goodness – thus beginning do we too begin to [explain] it. O my own lower self! Know that this blessed utterance is the symbol of Islam. It is also the invocation of every single thing in existence, expressed through the languages of the states of those things. بِسْمِ اللَّهِ. In the name of Allah, has an immense power that is never exhausted and a grace that will never pass away.

There are five important messages here which are (i) every goodness must begin in the Name of Allah, *بِسْمِ اللَّهِ* (ii) kalimah *بِسْمِ اللَّهِ* is the symbol of Islam (iii) kalimah *بِسْمِ*

اللَّهِ is the invocation of every single thing in existence (iv) kalimah بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ has an infinite immense power and (v) kalimah بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ continuous grace and blessings from Allah.

In the Quran, all the chapter begins with kalimah بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ except for at-Taubah. There are verses with kalimah بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ such as the first verse of Al-Fatihah, chapter Hud verse 41 and chapter 27 verse 30. Rasulullah SAW also mentioned that

كل أمر ذي بال لا يبدأ فيه ببسم الله الرحمن الرحيم فهو أقطع

which means: *Any important work that does not begin with Bismillah is devoid of Barakah* (Ar-Rahawi). Rasulullah SAW also taught us to recite بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ among others before eating, drinking, taking ablution or any good deeds.

This practice signifies a Muslim in his actions. It indicates that the purpose of those actions is to please Allah because it is done in the Name of Allah. As Bediuzzaman Said Nursi also mentioned that all things implicitly say بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ including trees, seeds, mountains, animals in own their languages particular to them. With the name of Allah seeds become a plant that grows into trees with diverse type of fruits. Roots of trees are able to pierce hard rock and earth by the power of Allah and in the name of Him, as if they say بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ. Thus, as a human being who would like to commit into protecting the environment, to save the earth, we must say Bismillah and understand that as a signal of reliance to Allah as do other creations of Allah who do their zikr and tasbih to Allah in a language we do not understand as mentioned in Chapter Al-Isra' verse 44:

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا

The seven heavens and the earth, and all beings therein declare His glory: there is not a thing but celebrates His praise; And yet ye understand not how they declare His glory! Verily He is Oft-Forbear, Most Forgiving!

As the narrated in *the First Word of The Short Words* (Nursi, 2016), the allegory of the affiliated traveler and the unaided traveler in the desert. The humble affiliated traveler can roam freely due to the protection by the chieftain as compared to the conceited man. Thus, we should humbly admit our helplessness without the support from the Almighty, so we have to recite بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ to get His Protection and Guidance in accomplishing our tasks and responsibilities. Without doing such a thing, we are like the conceited man who would like to save the planet but place our trust to other human beings, technologies, policies and regulations which are

meaningless without blessings and grace from Allah. Since all things say: “In the Name of Allah,” and bearing Allah’s bounties in Allah’s name, give them to us, we too should say: “In the Name of Allah.” We should give in the name of Allah and take in the name of Allah. And we should not take from heedless people who neglect to give in Allah’s name.

Paradoxically, we tend to place our trust on the cause such as technologies, policies, strategies and regulations which does not has ‘aql (intellect) and these causes ironically are submissive to the will and permission of the Creator in its execution. Hence, a humble Muslim does not only rely and dependent to Allah, but he knows he will also gain blessings in his effort in protecting the earth making it a safe place for future generations with fewer pollutions and damages with the intention to seek the pleasure of Allah. His khidmat or service as the vicegerent upon the Earth, caretaker of the world will be witnessed by all creations that he serves even though humans do not recognize, acknowledge, dislike and are ignorant of his effort. Besides that, we must also realize that by saying بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ wholeheartedly, understanding the meaning and its implication, the reliance to Allah has an infinite immense power that no human can betray or stop. It seems like a short kalimah but the significance of saying it indicates the trust and belief towards Allah and leave everything to the jurisdiction of Allah SWT after all effort.

Saying, بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ to begin with, is very essential. If we study from the Quran and Sunnah, there are many examples of verses and hadith that shows that sustainability is very much part of Islamic principles. For example, no poverty (SDG1), Islam makes it compulsory the almsgiving or zakat and encourage shadaqah and infaq and taking care and protecting the orphans. Next, Zero hunger (SDG2), Islam urges us not to go to bed at night without making sure that our neighbors are not hungry. Sustainable cities and communities (SDG11), clean water and sanitation (SDG6), responsible consumption and production (SDG16) are principles that are already in the teaching of Islam such as adl, hakim, ihsan and so on.

No wastage of water, resources such as food, energy, money are already part of the understanding of the verse in the Quran, Chapter al-Isra’ verse 27 where Allah claimed that *Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and ever has Satan been to his Lord ungrateful.* However, we have become insensitive to this aspect, even before we go for our prayers, we did not realize that we took our ablution

with lots of wastage in water. We must try to understand and practice accordingly as in the following hadith that command us on water conservation.

عن عبد الله بن عمرو بن العاص رضي الله عنهما أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم "مر بسعد وهو يتوضأ، فقال: "ما هذا السرف؟" فقال: أفي الوضوء إسراف؟ قال: " نعم، وإن كنت على نهر جار."

Abdullah ibn Amr reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, passed by Sa'd while he was performing ablution. The Prophet said, "What is this excess?" Sa'd said, "Is there excess with water in ablution?" The Prophet said, "Yes, even if you were on the banks of a flowing river."

This indicates that if we are cautious in taking our ablution by using water sparingly, practice it every time then it is a good deed or amal soleh and we are following the sunnah of the prophet. Truly, that is also the understanding of saying *بِسْمِ اللَّهِ* before taking our ablution, humble and unconceited.

A study by Zaeid (2017) on water use in ablution from taps found out that 30–47 % amount of water is wasted and flows directly to the drain without contamination. However, the amount that was used by the Holy Prophet Muhammad SAW, to make ablution was one "Mudd" of water as narrated by Hadith from Bukhari and Muslim, which is equivalent to about 0.544 L of water. He reported a study by Abu Rozaiza (2002) who found that 3 to 7 L water was used per person in ablution in nearly 40 Masjids and in the two holy Masjids. Just imagine the amount of water wastage of one person per prayer. We can also extend this understanding to electricity. A Muslim does not switch off the lights merely for saving the money to pay the bill. However, the act is to please Allah, to do simple good deeds in the name of Allah. We are not doing something to submit to the cause but actually to be submissive to Allah SWT. This is what we need to teach our future generation, a sustainable amal not only for dunia but something that we may possibly reap the fruit in akhirat even though just by switching off the lights, sparingly taking the ablution and so on. It is also part of removing a harmful object from the road as ordained by Rasulullah SAW. A small action yet it is a sign of iman to preserve the safety of the road thus conveniences to others.

Bediuzzaman's Risale-i Nur (Nursi, 2013) also elaborated that (shariah) have two sections:

(i) Kalamullah that contains Allah commands and if we obey, the reward is given at the Hereafter (ii) Sunnatullah that indicate the wisdom of the Creator in His creation which we must follow, not to disobey or to destroy the Divine system in

the current world. For example, one of the major campaigns in sustainable development is reducing carbon footprint by planting trees. There are many hadith that encourage planting trees. It is a good deed, a shadaqah and it is very important to finish sowing the seed even though the Hour is about to be established. Besides giving back in terms of fruits or harvesting vegetables, plants will absorb carbon from the air and give out oxygen and water molecules every second. The roots will become the food and nutrition for the soil and organism. Our effort will also be the cause in giving life to plants that will continuously do zikr and tasbih to Allah SWT if Allah permits. Even, while performing umrah and Hajj we are prohibited to cut trees and harm the animals around the two sacred sites in Mekah and Madinah for the sustainability of flora and fauna around these two holy cities. All these initiatives are mentioned in Risale-i Nur (Nursi, 2016b) as *doa fi'li* or our prayers in the form of effort in protecting our planet for a better and sustainable environment for the future generations.

Furthermore, we can also relate sustainability to the Names of Allah (Al-Asmau'l-Husna) in Risalah 'Asma Sitta' (Nursi, 2016c) which are Al-Qudus, al-Hayyu, al-Qayyum, Al-Hakim, al-Adl as mentioned in The Flash Number 30. Allah Al-Qudus looks after the universe in His care, cleaned and balanced. Allah is Al-Hayyu that gave life to His creation accordingly with Adil and Hakim. Allah is the sustainer of existence reflected by His name Al-Qayyum.

The final point, Ahmad Sarkawi et al. (2016) presented three binding concepts of sustainability with the Islamic worldview which are the contract of vicegerency, the wider perception of Islam on environment or nature and Islam being a way of life inclusive of human life socially, economically, politically and so on. They shared the prayer read by MawlayIdris al-Azhar in the opening of Fez city in Morocco *"Oh my lord, you know that I don't intend by building this city to gain pride of show off, nor do I intend hypocrisy or reputation or arrogance but I want you to be worshipped in it, your laws, limits and the principles of your Quran and the guidance of your Prophet to be upheld in it as long as the world exist"*. Thus, sustainability could be achieved through upholding the teachings of Islam and practiced in every aspect of human life.

Conclusion

These are some initial points of sustainability in Islam with Divine Guidance as the core integral part of the initiatives. First, all effort must begin with the Name of

Allah to get His protection, for His sake in order to receive the blessings of Ar-Rahman dan Ar-Rahim. We need to seek Allah's pleasure by following His command and the teaching of the Prophets, to reflect, always, Allah's name on the sustainability initiatives to gain the grace and blessings from Allah, His Guidance and His help and getting closer to Him. This is a sign of worship to the Creator and the Protector of the universe.

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