



Research Article

Maqāṣid al-Qur'ān and Human Development: Reflections on Qur'ānic Objectives and Prophetic Practices

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Abstract. This article explores human development as a holistic process grounded in the Qur'an's maqāṣid (higher objectives), moving beyond modern approaches that often center narrowly on material and economic indicators. While development thinking shifted in the late twentieth century to focus more directly on human welfare—emphasizing education, fair distribution, and protection of rights—such frameworks emerged late and have struggled to prevent rising poverty, unemployment, and inequality. By contrast, this study describes the Islamic perspective as reflected in the Qur'an, which integrates spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions of development, and then deduces how these maqāṣid lay the foundation for a balanced model of human flourishing. Drawing on classical and contemporary scholarship, including the contributions of Ibn 'Ashūr, Riḍā, al-Qaraḍāwī, and al-'Alwānī, the article outlines core objectives such as refining character, protecting human dignity and life, promoting knowledge and freedom, ensuring justice, and affirming humanity's role as khulafā' (vicegerents) on earth. The study further highlights practical examples from the life of the Prophet in Madinah—such as the establishment of brotherhood, organizing economic and social life, prohibiting ribā (usury), and safeguarding public welfare—that demonstrate how these objectives were translated

into practice. Ultimately, the article concludes that the Qur'anic maqāṣid offer a comprehensive, ethically anchored framework for human development that remains profoundly relevant today, emphasizing that genuine progress must harmonize spiritual purpose, moral integrity, and collective responsibility to achieve sustainable human well-being.

Keywords: Maqāṣid al-Qur'ān - Human Development - Maqāṣid Framework - Prophetic Model.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'Human Development (HD)' — as a formal development paradigm — emerged prominently in the late 1980s and was popularized in 1990 with the publication of the first United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report (HDR). (Haq, 1995). In modern days, development is commonly assessed through material indicators listed under the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 1990, 2024). The HDI encompasses dimensions such as income and wealth, literacy and education, life expectancy, political participation, access to clean water and sanitation, overall living standards, and gender equality. Nevertheless, in addition to material progress, ethical and spiritual dimensions rooted in religion are crucial to the comprehensive development of human society (Chapra, 2008).

Modern societies have made tremendous achievements in material development (Abdulhameed, 2021). However, neglecting religious and moral values has made this progress counterproductive, often harming human well-being. The erosion of religious ethics has weakened respect for human dignity, trust, and fairness in social and economic life, fueling inequality, mental unrest, and conflicts worldwide. As (Chapra, 2008) notes, the Qur'ān 13:11 reminds us that people shape their own development or decline. True development must balance material and spiritual needs to ensure lasting human welfare and prevent societal collapse. Islam offers a comprehensive framework that not only establishes the foundation for social relations but also upholds moral principles that guide economic, political, and ethical responsibilities within society (Oladapo & Ab Rahman, 2017). The moral principles of Islam constitute the basic foundation of HD which is based on the Qur'ānic maqāṣid (objectives).

More significantly, the holistic vision of HD reflected in the maqāṣid al-Qur'ān closely aligns with the themes of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as poverty reduction, education, health, justice, and social equity (United Nations, 2015). However, the Qur'ānic framework adds a distinct ethical and spiritual dimension by emphasizing human dignity, moral refinement, communal responsibility, and the role of humanity as stewards (khulafā') on Earth (Kamali, 2008). This integration offers more than material progress: it presents HD as a balanced process rooted in both values and action. In this way, the maqāṣid perspective complements contemporary development agendas by highlighting that sustainable and meaningful progress requires nurturing the whole person—materially, intellectually, and spiritually.

The term maqāṣid means 'objectives' (singular: maqṣad, meaning 'an objective'), while the Qur'ān is the divine source of Islamic guidance and law.

Together, the phrase *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* refers to the theory concerned with identifying and understanding the higher objectives underlying Qur'ānic discourse. These objectives extend to every aspect of human existence, including both individual and collective development. As a discipline, *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* focuses on uncovering the deeper purposes and overarching aims of the Qur'ānic message (Islam, 2011). (ibn 'Āshūr, 1984) explained that the Qur'ān's objectives (*maqāṣid*) aim to guide human well-being and societal reform. He identified eight key aims: correcting belief, refining character, establishing laws, guiding community organization and governance, educating through stories of past nations, providing education suited to the audience's time, Offering exhortation, warnings, and encouragement, and demonstrating its divine truth through its miraculous nature. These objectives collectively lay the foundation for moral, intellectual, and social development.

Similarly, (Riḍā, 1990) expanded the understanding of the Qur'ān's objectives (*maqāṣid*) by highlighting their relevance into modern social and political life. He identified ten key aims: clarifying the true meaning of belief in God, resurrection, and righteous action; explaining the realities of prophethood and the roles of messengers; affirming the innate soundness of Islam; promoting social, political, and national reform; outlining Islam's unique principles for personal obligations; defining its political and international principles; guiding sound financial management; regulating warfare to limit harm and injustice; securing full rights for women; and abolishing slavery. According to Riḍā, these aims reflect the Qur'ān's comprehensive vision of human progress, justice, and dignity. (al-Qaraḍāwī, 2000) identified seven key objectives of the Qur'ān: (1) correcting beliefs and perceptions about divinity, prophethood, and accountability; (2) affirming human dignity and rights; (3) calling people to worship Allah alone; (4) purifying the human soul and refining moral character; (5) building righteous families and ensuring justice for women; (6) establishing a Muslim community that serves as a witness over humanity; and (7) calling for a cooperative, humane global society. Similarly, (al-'Alwānī, 2003) identified three overarching objectives of the Qur'ān, which he termed "The Higher Governing Objectives of the Qur'an (*Al-Maqāṣid al-Qur'āniyyah al-'Ulyā al-Ḥākimah*)": *Tawḥīd* (affirming the Oneness of God), *Tazkiyah* (purification and moral upliftment), and *'Umrān* (civilizational development). Together, these perspectives emphasize that the Qur'ān's vision extends beyond ritual practice to the complete spiritual, ethical, and societal flourishing of humanity."

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive and deductive approach. It begins by describing the modern concept of human development and its relevance in contemporary discourse. Building on this, the study then deduces and analyzes the *maqāṣid* (higher objectives) that the Qur'an presents in relation to human development—drawing from classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship. Finally, the research reviews selected practical models from Islamic history, particularly from the life of the Prophet (PBUH) in Madinah, to illustrate how these objectives were translated into social policies and community practices. This approach aims to show how the Qur'anic vision of human development integrates spiritual, moral, and social

dimensions, offering a comprehensive alternative to purely material development models.

DISCUSSION

HD in Contemporary Economic Discourse

In the years leading up to the 1980s, various attempts were made to achieve the desired development goals, especially after the world emerged from devastating world wars that resulted in widespread destruction, disrupted production, and negative growth rates. As a result, most countries have strongly sought to accelerate reconstruction, development, and production—particularly with the discovery of new energy sources capable of boosting development and growth (such as oil and electricity). Simultaneously, there has been a steady increase in population and a growing demand for healthcare, education, and employment.

However, these efforts did not achieve the desired outcomes, largely because the human dimension was missing in many development programs (UNDP, 1990). It was in this context that the concept of HD emerged clearly in the first HDR issued by the UNDP in 1990, which defined HD as “the process of enlarging people’s choices” (UNDP, 1990). These choices included education, health, employment, and freedom to access the resources necessary for a dignified life.

(Haq, 1995) defined HD as “a process aimed at expanding individuals’ choices and freedoms,” while (Sen, 2011), one of the founders of this approach, described it as “a process to expand individuals’ real freedoms.” (Corm, 1997) further broadened the concept by emphasizing that it should not be limited to economic aspects alone but should focus on increasing people’s capabilities to achieve their full potential as individuals and as communities—where economic capacity is only one part of these broader capabilities.

Despite the efforts undertaken under the auspices of the UN since 1990, these attempts did not always produce the desired results, and in some regions, living conditions worsened instead of improving (UNDP, 2005). The UN’s ability to impose or recommend specific HD programs has been limited by the difficulty of changing established economic models, the high costs of economic restructuring, and the tension between profit-driven multinational corporations and the goal of putting human needs at the centre of economic development.

HD in Islamic Economic Thought

Islam, in addition to being the final divine message to humanity, also serves as a divine constitution that regulates economic, social, and political affairs, among many other aspects of Muslim society (al-Qaraḍāwī, 1999; Chapra, 1992). It covers all matters related to people’s lives and livelihoods. Indeed, the maqāsid (objectives) of Islam represent a progressive vision aimed at preserving life, progeny, and wealth—considered necessities without which human life cannot function properly (Auda, 2008). Western thought has strived to achieve similar goals to ensure a dignified life for its followers, yet these efforts often culminated in destructive wars and societies plagued by moral and financial bankruptcy. Although the fundamental approach of Western development plans shifted in the last quarter of the 20th century towards a

greater focus on human beings, this transformation came late. Consumerist attitudes had already deeply permeated Western economies and were transmitted to economies of the so-called Third World. As a result, economies everywhere lost their human dimension, with profit as the sole driver dominating economic and commercial thinking.

Before exploring the concept of HD specifically in Islam, it is worth discussing Islamic development more broadly. Islamic development is distinct in its comprehensiveness, balance, realism, justice, responsibility, and efficiency. Its ultimate goal is to enable humans to truly serve as God's vicegerents (caliphs) on Earth (al-Shukayrī, 1988). These features make Islamic development highly effective and successful, rooted in a philosophical approach built upon three core theological concepts: Tawḥīd (Oneness of Allah), Khilāfah (vicegerency), and Tazkiyah (spiritual and moral purification) (al-Fārūqī, 2000; al-'Atṭās, 1993; Auda, 2008). These foundations are unique to the Islamic paradigm.

Furthermore, Islam presents an economic system that encourages the utilization of resources entrusted to humans, viewing worldly wealth as a trust from Allah to test human faith. This wealth ultimately belongs to Allah and is meant to achieve the purposes of the divine law, including public benefit and economic and social justice (Chapra, 1992). This Islamic economic approach offers a reliable guarantee for genuine development: resources are harnessed to support humanity's role as God's stewards on Earth; they are seen as a shared trust for the benefit of all people, rather than the privilege of a few. Within this framework of economic and social justice, there is no favouritism for one group over another, and wealth is distributed according to effort and work. In our view, this is the true essence of HD.

When we discuss HD, it differs in Islamic economic thought from a conventional perspective. In Islam, human beings are always at the centre, even though there may be similarities in goals and resources (al-Kamālī, 2014). Moreover, Islamic development—whether in general or in its HD aspect—is framed by an ethical system derived from the Qur'ān and Sunnah. It aims for human well-being and happiness, and its procedures and policies must remain within the boundaries of Islamic law (al-Shukayrī, 1988). According to (Dawābah, 2007) Islam also sees HD as a path to the “good life” (ḥayāt ṭayyibah). As Allah says:

"Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – We will surely grant him a good life" (Al-Nahl 16:97).

Prosperity, freedom, health, education, and employment opportunities are all elements that ensure a dignified and good life. Allah further declares:

"We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created" (Al-Isrā' 17:70).

This represents the ultimate form of human dignity, bestowed by the Creator Himself. Islam also emphasizes ensuring every person's fair share of the nation's total production to secure at least a minimum standard of living—contrary to what many Muslim countries face today: restrictions on freedoms, absence of justice, declining health standards, poor education, and difficulty in finding work. Additionally, HD in the Islamic framework is intellectual, moral, and administrative, alongside being

economic, social, and political (al-Kamālī, 2014). Its main foundations can be summarized as follows:

Granting humans the role of vicegerency (khilāfah)

Allah honoured humans with reason, the capacity to think and learn, and the availability of material resources to fulfil this mission of stewardship and building civilization (Raḥmān, 1980). As Allah said:

“And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, ‘Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority (khalīfah)’” (Al-Baqarah 2:30).

And:

“And He has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth – all from Him” (Al-Jāthiyah 45:13).

Mandating humans to build and cultivate the earth:

Allah says:

“It is He who produced you from the earth and settled you therein” (Hūd 11:61).

This includes both the material and spiritual aspects. Islam requires that the development of the earth be grounded in God-consciousness (taqwā). Unlike today's world, where material advancement is the main measure of progress, Islam measures human excellence in this life and the hereafter through faith and righteous action; if either is absent, society falters (al-'Awadī, 2009).

Honouring humanity:

As in:

“We have certainly honoured the children of Adam” (Al-Isrā' 17:70).

Allah granted humans freedom, liberated them from servitude to other humans, and entrusted them with the responsibility of developing the earth by using reason and resources within the framework of divine guidance.

Adherence to Islamic values and a sound social and economic environment:

Belief in God's oneness, acknowledgment that everything in the universe is under His control, and recognition of humans' unique status as rational beings entrusted with stewardship create a cohesive society and supportive conditions for work and creativity (Ahmad, 2004). The absence of social cohesion leads to development failure, regardless of resources.

The virtue of work

Allah says:

“And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah and remember Allah often that you may succeed” (Al-Jumu'ah 62:10).

Islam encourages productive work and only prohibits activities that contradict divine law. It encourages the production of essential goods and the provision of necessary human services.

Reviewing Qur'ānic Objectives Related to HD

The Noble Qur'ān, revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through successive transmission (tawātur), is the only divine scripture that Allah has promised to preserve from distortion—unlike earlier scriptures that suffered alteration. Over the centuries, the Qur'ān has been the focus of extensive scholarly work, including recitation, interpretation, commentary, and efforts to uncover its higher objectives (maqāṣid). Exploring these maqāṣid has become an essential approach for Muslims today to understand the deeper meanings of Qur'ānic verses and to draw from them guidance for reform and progress (Auda, 2008).

A Muslim striving for societal improvement and development is unlikely to succeed by depending solely on outdated Western economic and social philosophies. Instead, true success lies in adopting an Islamic philosophy rooted in the Qur'ān itself—a philosophy that offers principles and rulings aimed at ensuring human well-being and holistic development. As (al-Kamālī, 2014) notes, “Islam views HD as nurturing human potential, harnessing the environment for human benefit, overcoming challenges, and transforming surroundings to bring happiness and fulfil aspirations”.

Being the flawless word of Allah, the Qur'ān provides guidance encompassing every dimension of human life—religious, social, economic, etc. Although the modern term “HD” emerged recently, its essence can readily be discerned through reflection on the Qur'ānic verses revealed over 1400 years ago. Human beings have been at the central concern from the outset: honoured with a divine mandate to populate and cultivate the earth and granted access to material resources for this mission.

Thus, HD in Islam, particularly in the Qur'ān—follows an ethical framework aimed at protecting human beings from harm, securing their benefits, meeting their needs, and fulfilling their legitimate aspirations. By contrast, despite modern economic theories eventually adopting terms like “HD” and “humanizing development,” these concepts often serve to soften the reality of systems primarily designed to channel wealth toward powerful elites and reinforce their control over the global economy (Stiglitz, 2013). Before discussing the maqāṣid (objectives) of Qur'ānic verses related to HD, it is important to clarify that this study focuses on the three main dimensions of HD from the perspective of the Qur'ān's objectives:

A Healthy Life Free from Illness

Human beings have been entrusted with the duty of building and cultivating the earth (‘imārah) and honored with the role of vicegerency (khilāfah). This responsibility is supported by the mental, physical, intellectual, and spiritual capacities granted to help them fulfill this mission. Islamic law (sharī‘ah) has identified five necessities (al-ḍarūriyyāt al-khams): the preservation of life, intellect, lineage, religion, and wealth (al-Shāṭibī, 2004). These are essential for the proper functioning of society and to enable humans to fulfil their divine duties. Allah says:

“We have certainly created man in the best of stature” (At-Tīn, 95:4),
and also:

“And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and preferred them over much of what We have created” (Al-Isrā', 17:70).

According to (al-Khayyāt, 2000), the objective reflected in these verses is that Islam seeks to protect human life in both its material and spiritual aspects: safeguarding physical well-being, upholding human dignity, honouring the intellect, ensuring adequate sustenance, and strictly prohibiting self-harm and suicide. This underscores Islam's profound commitment to preserving life and dignity, and guiding humanity through reason and divinely revealed faith free from idolatry and superstition. Islam also stresses proper nutrition and forbids self-harm through excessive asceticism or harmful deprivation (al-Ghazālī, 2015; al-Qaraḍāwī, 1999). This advanced Qur'ānic vision of preserving life stands in contrast to modern human and social theories and UN development policies, which have achieved limited success in certain regions. Despite the past century witnessing the independence of many nations and the establishment of the UN, the world has seen rising levels of oppression, violence, disease, and restrictions on freedom (Pogge, 2002).

Pursuing Knowledge and Ensuring Means for a Noble Life

Allah says:

“Read in the name of your Lord who created” (Al-‘Alaq, 96:1).

Islam encourages seeking knowledge, understanding, and protecting the mind from ignorance (al-‘Aṭṭās, 1999; Nasr, 1989). Humanity was honoured with intellect and comprehension to reflect and contemplate, starting from recognizing the purpose of creation: worshipping Allah and fulfilling the mission of building the earth (al-Fārūqī, 2000; Sardar, 1985). Early Muslims' appreciation for knowledge led to countless contributions in medicine, engineering, astronomy, philosophy, and beyond laying the foundations for the Western scientific and cultural renaissance (Robinson, 2016; Saliba, 2007). During the height of Islamic civilization, the Muslim world excelled scientifically, economically, politically, and socially (Bennison, 2009; Morgan, 2008).

However, knowledge alone isn't sufficient; adequate resources are necessary to fulfill the human role of vicegerency. Thus, Allah's imposition of responsibility (taklīf) was accompanied by facilitation (taskhīr): Allah, in His wisdom, created and shaped countless blessings on land, sea, and in the air to suit human needs, capacities, and understanding. The Qur'ān repeatedly highlights that Allah has subjugated the earth's resources to humanity's service, as in:

“Do you not see that Allah has subjected to you whatever is on the earth and the ships which run through the sea by His command?” (Al-Ḥajj, 22:65)

and:

“And He gave you from all you asked of Him. And if you should count the favour of Allah, you could not enumerate them” (Ibrāhīm, 14:32–34).

These verses affirm that Allah Almighty created and subjugated various kinds of resources for human beings so that they may utilize them in accordance with the divine guidance, thereby attaining a dignified and good life — which, in fact, is the ultimate objective of HD that is sadly lacking today.

According to the Islamic perspective, as (al-Subhānī, 2005) points out, the human being is not a disobedient outcast or a fugitive without purpose; rather, he is the noble representative of the Sacred, entrusted with the most honourable vicegerency. This vicegerency forms human identity, existence, purpose, and a positive role in life, and protects the individual, society, and civilization from alienation and loss. It is further emphasized that, human happiness is a central concern of Islam, achieved through spiritual fulfilment and by safeguarding life, intellect, and lineage, while ethical management and fair distribution of resources pave the way for true prosperity (Chapra, 1985).

Safeguarding Political, Economic, and Social Freedoms and Human Rights

The maqāṣid-based understanding of Qur'ānic verses related to human freedoms—whether political, economic, social, or concerning human rights—begins with the Islamic view of the human being: a creation honoured by Allah with a noble character, endowed with intellect, and granted the capacity to discern right from wrong. Allah says:

“There is no compulsion in religion; the right path has become clear from the wrong. So, whoever disbelieves in false gods (ṭāghūt) and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the firmest handhold, which will never break. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing” (Al-Baqarah, 2:256).

This verse points to the servant's submission to Allah alone, liberating him from submission to other people or social institutions that might restrict his political or social views or impose specific economic choices on him. Indeed, Islam came to free people from servitude to fellow humans and direct them instead to servitude of the Lord of all creation. Another verse states:

“Indeed, We offered the al-amānah (the trust or moral responsibility or honesty and all duties which Allah has ordained) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and feared it; yet man undertook to bear it. Indeed, he was [by nature] unjust and ignorant” (Al-Aḥzāb, 33:72)

It becomes clear that the fact that Allah distinguished humans from all other creatures by entrusting them with the responsibility of stewardship (khilāfah) is itself proof of the freedom granted to them in making choices—a divine gift that cannot be granted or revoked by any earthly law. Humans are born free, as famously proclaimed by Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb: *“Since when do you enslave people when their mothers bore them free?”* The very essence of Islam's message is to give life to humanity—to awaken and liberate human faculties and potentials, so that people's actions and movements arise authentically from within and are directed sincerely towards Allah, the Almighty. Allah says:

“O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life” (Al-Anfāl, 8:24).

And:

“O mankind, We created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another; indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous” (Al-Ḥujurāt, 49:13).

True honour, then, lies not in lineage or wealth but in piety—a universal value that transcends worldly hierarchies. To explain this further, here is a brief outline of the different dimensions of human freedoms in Islam:

Political freedoms

The source of the freedoms enjoyed by human beings is Allah Almighty Himself. Humanity was created primarily to worship Allah, as He says:

“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me” (Adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:56).

Submission to Allah alone frees human beings from subjugation to other humans and from having their freedoms restricted or destinies controlled by others. Political freedoms are closely tied to freedom of thought, for humans have been endowed with intellect and free will and granted freedom from birth to choose their path (Gharā'ibah, 2000). Freedom of opinion is thus upheld in Islamic belief, aligning with human nature and the purpose of existence. Political freedoms in Islam are fundamentally rooted in the principle of *shūrā* (consultation). Allah says: “

And [mention] when your Lord said to the angels, ‘Indeed, I will make upon the earth a vicegerent.’ They said, ‘Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?’ Allah said, ‘Indeed, I know that which you do not know.’ And He taught Adam the names—all of them. Then He presented them to the angels and said, ‘Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.’ They said, ‘Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.’” (Al-Baqarah, 2:30–32).

This act of consultation was meant as an ideal model for Muslims, so that all their affairs should be guided by *shūrā*. Allah also instructed Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to remind and guide people without compelling them to accept what he wanted, leaving their accountability to Allah: “

So remind, [O Muhammad]; you are only a reminder. You are not over them a controller.” (Al-Ghāshiyah, 88:21–22).

Economic Freedoms

In continuation of the discussion on political freedoms, economic freedoms in Islamic thought are regarded as an essential complement to individual and political liberties. Economic freedom in Islam is fundamentally rooted in the principle that ultimate ownership of everything in the universe belongs solely to Allah Almighty. As the Qur'ān declares:

“Do you not know that to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and you have not besides Allah any protector or helper?” (Al-Baqarah, 2:107)

and also:

“And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them; and to Him is the [final] destination.” (Al-Mā'idah, 5:18).

These verses illustrate a foundational concept within the Islamic worldview: while Allah is the true Owner, human beings are vicegerents (*khalifah*) entrusted to utilize and manage resources as permitted by divine guidance. As (Hilālī, 2010) observes: Each individual thus enjoys the freedom to choose an economic activity

aligned with personal interests and capabilities, provided it does not contradict Islamic legal principles or fall into harmful professions. Moreover, Sharia encourages professional work and earning a livelihood to fulfill people's needs. This perspective is further supported by Qur'ānic encouragement towards good action:

"And do good that you may succeed." (Al-Ḥajj, 22:77).

At the same time, the Qur'ān emphasizes that human life inevitably involves struggle and responsibility, as highlighted in the verse:

"We have certainly created man into hardship." (Al-Balad, 90:4)

Despite affirming individual economic freedom, Islam also sets ethical boundaries to safeguard both individual welfare and the collective interest of society. The Qur'ān clarifies:

"They ask you about the bounties (al-anfāl). Say, 'The bounties belong to Allah and the Messenger.' So fear Allah and set right that which is between you and obey Allah and His Messenger if you should be believers." (Al-Anfāl, 8:1).

This verse signifies that the right to private ownership cannot override the public good—especially regarding shared resources such as minerals, forests, seas, and other natural assets. This principle reflects one of the distinguishing strengths of Islamic economic model: it protects public resources from unrestricted individual exploitation, which may prioritize profit over environmental sustainability and intergenerational equity. Furthermore, Islamic HD aspires to secure dignified living standards by ensuring diverse employment opportunities that align with each person's abilities. True human dignity, in this view, is achieved not solely through formal legal freedoms but also through economic independence—freedom from dependence on others and liberation from subjugation. This principle lies at the heart of the Islamic economic system derived from the Qur'ān. Crucially, Islam does not perceive the human being merely as a productive unit, as some socialist models do, nor as a market-valued commodity, as seen in capitalist frameworks. Rather, each individual is regarded as a morally responsible agent, entrusted with fulfilling divine commands and avoiding prohibitions. By doing so, a person attains authentic success and lasting well-being.

Social Freedom

The Qur'ān transformed Arab society from one mired in pre-Islamic ignorance (jāhiliyyah) into a compassionate, cooperative, and morally elevated community. This transformation is vividly reflected in the words of Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib when he stood before the Negus (al-Najāshī) of Abyssinia and explained why Quraysh's idolatrous leaders persecuted the Muslims. He said:

"O King, we were a people steeped in ignorance: we worshipped idols, consumed carrion, indulged in sexual immorality, severed family ties, mistreated neighbours, and the strong among us oppressed the weak. We remained in this state until Allah sent us a Messenger—whose lineage, honesty, trustworthiness, and chastity we knew well—who called us to worship Allah alone and renounce what we and our forefathers worshipped besides Him of stones and idols. He commanded us to speak truthfully, fulfil our trusts, uphold family ties, honour good neighbourliness, and refrain from what is forbidden and from shedding blood. He forbade us from immorality, false speech,

consuming the wealth of orphans, and slandering chaste women. And he commanded us to worship Allah alone without associating partners with Him, and enjoined upon us prayer, charity, and fasting” (al-Bukhārī, 1997)

What law, constitution, or policy could so comprehensively set out this moral and ethical framework that grants people true freedom, liberates their minds, protects their lives, honours their dignity, and preserves their wealth? The Qur'ān laid down the foundation for a society in which social freedom is guaranteed for all its members, without discrimination. Allah says:

“O mankind, We created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.” (Al-Ḥujurāt, 49:13).

These verses unambiguously establish that, in the Islamic paradigm, human worth and honour are measured by piety (taqwā). As (al-‘Ānī, 2002) observes, humans are by nature social beings who prefer to live among families, clans, and wider communities. Yet Islam rejects all discrimination based on gender, colour, or lineage; instead, it upholds piety as the sole standard of merit. Under this system, an individual does not submit to the dictates of any sect or ideological faction, for his or her life and choices belong ultimately to the Creator alone. Social freedom, therefore, includes a person’s ability to live in the manner they find comfortable—so long as it aligns with Islamic ethical guidelines and remains free from interference by political or religious authorities.

Human Rights

Human rights in Islam differ from those found in secular laws primarily in their source: in Islam, these rights are derived from the Qur'ān, the Sunnah (Prophetic tradition), and other established sources of Islamic law such as qiyās (analogical reasoning) and ijtihād (independent juristic effort). Allah says:

“Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they find described in the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and forbids them what is wrong, makes lawful for them the good things, prohibits for them the evil, and relieves them of their burden and the shackles that were upon them. So those who believe in him, honour him, support him, and follow the light which has been sent down with him—it is they who will be successful.” (Al-A‘rāf, 7:157).

This verse beautifully summarises the Islamic perspective on human rights: it emphasises liberating the human being from the chains of servitude to worldly powers and from intellectual and material subjugation. Instead, it guides humanity toward freedom in thought, living, and livelihood, all by following the divine path laid out in the Qur'ān and the example of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This framework inherently affirms the sanctity and respect of human rights. In fact, some scholars, such as (Ḥusayn, 2015), have argued that in Islam, human rights and freedoms rise to the level of necessities (ḍarūriyyāt) rather than merely being seen as optional entitlements. The Qur'ānic verses that follow further clarify and detail these fundamental rights.

Freedom of Belief

Allah says:

“So We said, ‘O Adam, indeed this is an enemy to you and to your wife. Then let him not remove you from Paradise so you would suffer.’” (Ṭā Hā, 20:117).

This verse shows that Allah made Adam fully aware of Satan's enmity but ultimately left Adam free to choose how to act—illustrating the principle of freedom in matters where humans are granted choice. The same principle extends to all people: in those areas where Allah has left matters open, every individual has the freedom to either succeed through righteousness or to fail by neglect. As Allah says:

“By the soul and He who proportioned it and inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness! He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it.” (Ash-Shams, 91:7–10).

And elsewhere:

“Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful.” (Al-Insān, 76:3).

Further, Allah instructs the Prophet (PBUH):

“So remind, [O Muhammad]; you are only a reminder. You are not over them a controller.” (Al-Ghāshiyah, 88:21–22).

This verse underscores that the Prophet's role is to convey the message and advise—not to compel or coerce—reflecting the Islamic emphasis on sincere faith chosen freely, not imposed by force.

Freedom of Expression

Allah says:

“The Most Merciful taught the Qur'ān, created man, [and] taught him clear expression.” (Ar-Raḥmān, 55:1–4).

And He also says:

“Did We not make for him two eyes, and a tongue and two lips, and shown him the two ways [of good and evil]?” (Al-Balad, 90:8–10).

These verses illustrate that Allah endowed human beings with faculties and capacities to articulate, express opinions, and communicate freely—without coercion or suppression. Likewise, Allah says:

“This day I have perfected for you your religion, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.” (Al-Mā'idah, 5:3).

Islam, being the final and complete divine message, was sent as a mercy to humanity: to reinforce human dignity, liberate them from the shackles of servitude to others, and affirm the value of freedom of thought and expression.

The Qur'ānic framework for affirming human rights fundamentally differs from secular approaches, which, despite relentless efforts under the banner of HD worldwide, have often led to dead ends and disappointing outcomes. Even in the most advanced countries, the actual state of human rights remains deeply flawed. In contrast, Islamic civilization historically reached impressive levels of development, refinement, and humanity through its commitment to the balanced guidance of the sharī'ah and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH).

HD through the Lens of Prophetic Practice

Islam's concern for humanity is not confined to matters of faith and worship; rather, it embraces all aspects of life, placing human development at its core. It aims to foster development that safeguards people's worldly interests—essentials for a stable and dignified life. Although “human development” is a modern term, its principles and practical expression can be clearly observed in the Prophet's actions in Madinah. Before the migration, the Prophet (PBUH) had already instilled firm faith in the hearts of his followers; upon arriving in Madinah, he laid the foundations of the first Islamic state. The Hijrah itself—from Makkah to Madinah—was a profound strategic and spiritual move, ensuring the survival and flourishing of the nascent Muslim community under grave threat. This thoughtful planning and decisive action reflect the very essence of human development: protecting human capital and opening pathways to success. The period that followed was a turning point in Islamic history, as the Prophet (PBUH) began organizing society and establishing administrative and social structures grounded in Islamic principles.

Given the breadth of this topic and space limitations, we will focus on presenting the following selected examples of applied HD from the Prophet's life and early Islamic history.

The Pact of Brotherhood (Mu'ākhāh)

One of the Prophet's first measures to ease the hardships faced by the Muhājirūn (emigrants) — who had left behind their families and wealth — was to establish bonds of brotherhood between them and the Anṣār (helpers) of Madinah. This step also provided the Anṣār with a framework to integrate and support their new brothers from Makkah. The Mu'ākhāh represents one of the most striking manifestations of Islam's compassion and its noble objectives, rooted in the Qur'anic principle:

“Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you”
(*Al-Ḥujurat*, 49:13).

The purpose of this pact was to lay down new foundations for society, eliminate tribalism, and achieve economic balance and cooperation (al-ʿĀnī, 2002). Similar themes are discussed in modern UN HDRs, which highlight the importance of equality among members of the same society in education, health, employment, and political rights. Yet, the state of the contemporary world is far removed from the spirit of brotherhood: conflict, violence, and internal strife have reached alarming levels. This reality strongly suggests that the message of Islam remains humanity's most reliable guarantee for peace, guidance, and true solidarity.

Employment, Work, and Economic Development

HD places great emphasis on meeting people's needs — many of which can only be fulfilled through economic means, the foundation of which is productive work. Following the establishment of the pact of brotherhood, the Prophet (PBUH) immediately began building the mosque in Madinah, which served as both the spiritual and administrative heart of the new state. All Muslims, including the

Prophet himself, actively participated in its construction, underscoring the central importance of work in Islam. Some jurists have even considered a Muslim's effort to earn a living and support themselves and their family as an individual obligation (Chapra, 1985). Allah says:

"And remember when He made you successors after 'Ād and settled you in the land: you build palaces on its plains and carve homes from the mountains. So remember the favours of Allah and do not act corruptly on the earth" (Al-A'rāf, 7:129).

Another verse states:

"So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it" (Az-Zalzalah, 99:7-8).

These verses encourage constructive work and the building of civilization. Additionally, the Prophet (PBUH) designated a place for the marketplace in Madinah to regulate trade according to the principles of Islamic law. Prohibitions on usury (ribā), monopolistic practices, fraud, and invalid transactions served to protect commerce, strengthen the economic foundation, and facilitate fair and transparent exchange (al-Subhānī, 2005).

Prohibition of Usury (Ribā)

At first glance, this applied principle may seem somewhat distant from the concept of HD. Yet, a closer examination of the economic implications of prohibiting ribā reveals its profound developmental significance. Nations overwhelmed by debt have suffered severe financial crises: their economies have stagnated, currencies have collapsed, unemployment has surged among youth, and financial reform plans have repeatedly failed to revive growth. Excessive reliance on ribā has been a major driver of declining human development; notably, heavily indebted countries such as Sudan, Yemen, and Mali consistently rank among the lowest in the HDI. The prohibition of ribā in Islam seeks to prevent the exploitation of the needy and disallows enrichment at their expense. Instead, it aims for individual wealth to grow organically—free from exploitation, hoarding, and harm. Growth of wealth through unethical means, on the other hand, strips development of its real substance (al-Shukayrī, 1988). Protecting Madinah's emerging society from ribā was therefore essential, as the Islamic economic system is fundamentally based on excluding usury from all transactions. Allah says:

"But Allah has permitted trade and forbidden usury" (Al-Baqarah, 2:275).

Ribā undermines economic stability; thus, the Prophet (PBUH) established the economic foundations of Madinah's state upon Qur'anic guidance. The prohibition of ribā was, and remains, a mercy for humanity, especially after the tyrannical moneylenders of pre-Islamic Arabia reached the point of controlling people's destinies—even forcing them to sell their homes and children to repay debts.

Commitment to Public Welfare

Islam strongly affirms the principles of both private and public ownership as foundational, rather than exceptional, aspects of the Shari'ah. Private property is respected and protected (al-Harawī, 2004). At the same time, public property exists for the shared benefit of all without discrimination. The Prophet (PBUH) said:

“People are partners in three things: water, pasture, and fire” (al-Subhānī, 2001). The Prophet (PBUH) also revoked a grant of land in Ma'rib previously assigned to al-Abyad ibn Ḥammāl al-Ma'ribī for extracting salt when he learned it was not barren land, as it rightly belonged to the community. Similarly, he designated certain grazing areas near Madinah as communal land for Muslims to pasture their horses. In the Islamic system, safeguarding public benefits is a clear and established principle. The state bears the responsibility of providing public goods and services. So seriously was this duty regarded that Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (may Allah be pleased with him) reportedly feared he might be questioned by Allah if even a single animal stumbled on a road in Iraq because the government in Madinah had failed to maintain the route (al-Subhānī, 2005). How remarkable: a state leader so concerned that a beast might trip—while today, people are killed or left abandoned in the streets for days or weeks without concern. Regrettably, many in the Muslim world have set aside the Qur'an and Sunnah in pursuit of external models, distancing themselves from an authentic heritage deeply rooted in faith.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored how the maqāṣid (higher objectives) of the Qur'an offer a holistic vision of HD that harmonizes faith, ethics, knowledge, freedom, and social justice. Scholars like Ibn 'Ashūr, Riḍā, al-Qaraḍāwī, and al-'Alwānī have shown that these objectives encompass correcting belief, refining character, promoting knowledge and rational thought, protecting dignity and rights, and building a just, cohesive society. Central to this vision is the Qur'anic concept of khilāfah: humanity's role as God's stewards on earth. This role calls for responsible use of resources, pursuit of knowledge, and upholding justice—not merely for personal benefit but for the welfare of society as a whole.

The Prophetic model in Madinah brought these principles to life: forging bonds of brotherhood beyond tribalism, organizing work and economic life, prohibiting exploitation like ribā, safeguarding public goods, and affirming human freedom and dignity. Qur'anic teachings further emphasize protecting life and intellect, ensuring equitable access to resources, and empowering human potential. Unlike development models limited to material growth, the Qur'anic maqāṣid offer a balanced and deeply humane framework—reminding us that authentic progress is achieved through nurturing the whole person and community, anchored in divine guidance and moral responsibility. Today, this vision remains profoundly relevant for building a society rooted in justice, compassion, and purpose.

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