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Islamic Imperatives to Curb Corruption and Promote Sustainable Development

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“Since religions have a vision of creating a better world that is not centred upon economic factors, their values and moral codes provide a strong foundation for a more sustainable and appropriate development strategy” (Lunn 2009: 945)

International conventions, conferences and institutions have focused on fighting corruption; in addition, civil society has been active in combating corruption. Most of these initiatives have been undertaken within a ‘secular’ framework. However, the codes of ethics promoted by different faiths have the potential to contribute to the process of curbing corruption. Despite this fact, there has not been a clear position on the role of faith in the fight against corruption; *this paper reflects on the impact of corruption, and presents Islamic imperatives on curbing its spread and promoting sustainable development.*

Introduction

According to the World Bank more than US\$1 trillion is paid in bribes every year (World Bank, 2009). Furthermore the cross border flow of proceeds from corruption, criminal activities, and tax evasion is US\$3.61 trillion every year, or the equivalent of 3 to 5 percent of the world’s GDP (APEC, 2009). The African Union estimated that corruption costs African economies in excess of US\$148 billion a year which represents 25% of Africa's GDP. The report also found that corruption increases the cost of goods by as much as 20%, deterring investment and holding back development (Blunt, 2002). Further reports highlight the social costs of corruption in public services. For example, a survey carried out by Transparency International (2002) found that petty corruption was endemic in all sectors in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and bribes were a constant burden upon households. Corrupt practices also impact upon the environment as they regularly breach regulations designed to protect it.¹

Corruption has different dimensions: economic, social and environmental as well as ethical. The definition of ‘corruption’ depends on the context in which it is being used. In the context of governance and public services, corruption is defined as the “use of public office for private gain, or the use of official position, rank, or status by an office bearer for his own benefit” (Myint, 2000: 35).² While in an operational context, Transparency International defined corruption as the “misuse of entrusted power for private gain”. However, it differentiates between corruption that is “according to rule” and “against the rule”.³

Corruption has a devastating effect on the process of social and economic development and the prospects of achieving sustainable development. In its anticorruption overview, the World Bank indicates that corruption is among the greatest obstacles to economic and social development; it highlights that such practices distort the rule of law and weaken the institutional foundation on which the process of economic growth depends. Furthermore, such practices put the poor at an even greater disadvantage as they are the least capable of paying the extra costs associated with

¹ For example, illegal logging, which according to the World Bank costs developing countries US\$18 billion a year in potential government revenues, can have devastating environmental and social impacts (Dillon, *et. al.*, 2006).

² The definition covers the following: bribery, extortion, fraud, embezzlement, nepotism, cronyism, appropriation of public assets and property for private use, and influence peddling. In that sense, corrupt behaviours can be divided into two categories; one that is undertaken by the person in charge of a public office such as fraud and embezzlement, and the second category, which involves an exchange between one or more persons such as bribery and extortion.

³ A bribe paid to receive preferential treatment where the recipient of the bribe is required to perform the service is considered ‘according to rule’ corruption, while a bribe paid to obtain services the bribe receiver is prohibited from providing is considered ‘against the rule’. See: http://www.transparency.org/news_room/faq/corruption_faq#faqcorr1 accessed 12th October 2009

corruption (World Bank, 2009). In its effort to highlight the importance of fighting corruption, Transparency International indicated that corruption is a key obstacle to development and undermines material wellbeing and social justice, and as a consequence, the aims of having a fairer world and eradicating extreme poverty require a dramatic reduction of corruption, which undermines education, health, trade and the environment.⁴

Corruption affects the quality of public infrastructure and services, and reduces tax revenues. This eventually leads to lower economic growth; furthermore, corrupt practices lead to poor economic performance through affecting the countries' priorities and government expenditure.⁵ This hinders the process of social and economic development as investment in areas that contribute to economic growth such as education and health is sidelined in favour of investment in large-scale projects (ibid).⁶ Hence, there is no doubt that corruption has a profoundly negative effect on the economy and society.

It is obvious that corruption is a vicious cycle of causes and consequences. Corruption can be triggered by forms of institutional inefficiency; bureaucracy, political instability, and weak legislative and judicial systems (Mauro, 1998:12). It affects governance and the effectiveness of public services; it affects infrastructure and development priorities, and it undermines the principles of justice, equality and accountability, deepening institutional inefficiency. This leads to a distortion of social harmony, trust, ethics and the value system of society. The paper begins by presenting the implications and definition of corruption, it then explores the relationships between the concepts of justice, corruption and accountability in Islamic teachings and how these oblige Muslims to fight corruption and advocate for sustainable development. Finally, the paper highlights the implications of this on Muslim charities working in international development.

Justice and Corruption in Islam

Justice is a central value in Islamic teaching and is considered to be the foundation for all God's creation (Surty, 2007: 170). According to the teachings of the Quran⁷, any actions and deeds of humankind that flout justice are an act of corruption on earth, and therefore, Quranic teachings focus on promoting and enforcing a code of ethics and morality for human behaviour. In the Quran many verses⁸ promote universal values, which should define the relationship that humans have with God and all creation, among which are: justice and equality, which are important for human happiness, peace, progress and prosperity (ibid, 134). According to the Quran, establishing justice has been the goal of all prophets and messengers of God's revelations (Yahya, 2003). Chapter 57, Verse 25 states:

Verily, We sent our Messengers with manifest signs and sent down with them the Book and the balance that people may act with justice... (57:25)

⁴ See http://www.transparency.org/news_room/latest_news/press_releases/2005/14_09_2005_mdg

⁵ Corrupt officials and politicians often lobby for more public resources to be spent on areas and activities that generate more bribes and economic rent rather than focusing on those areas that will genuinely benefit processes of development.

⁶ Although, removing the causes of corruption is better for society as a whole; corruption often benefits powerful stakeholders, therefore, there is little incentive, for those who misuse their assumed power, to change the status quo

⁷ Verses (Y) quoted or cited from a Chapter (X) in the Quran will be referenced in one of the following formats: (Chapter X, Verse Y), (Quran X:Y), (Verse X:Y) or (X:Y)

⁸ Verses that relate to the ecosystem and justice (verse 10:5, verse 21:33, verse 36:40), verses that relate to human behaviour, governance and ethics (verse 55: 7-9)

The ethical and moral code of religions present a framework for development and social justice, which relies on values and ethics rather than purely economic factors (Lunn, 2009: 945). Furthermore, Lunn argues that religions share a common message, ‘do to others what you have done to you’, which she described as an alternative moral framework for development. Ethics and morality are paramount in Islamic teachings, which focus on the individual wellbeing and the development of the world to establish peace and harmony for all (Dugbazah, 2009:25). In Chapter 16, Verse 90, the Quran lays the foundation for human behaviour and ethics in relation to God, other human beings and the environment; the verse stipulates⁹ God’s comprehensive commands for ethical human behaviour (Asad, 2003: 456, note 108). Furthermore, the whole society is commanded to follow the behaviour exhorted in the verse in order to demonstrate justice, *ihssan*/beneficence and generosity/charitable giving (Kamali, 2002: 112). Such commands shape the moral framework for sustainable development in Islam; furthermore, the command to observe such responsibilities by the society as a whole suggests a framework for social justice, peace and harmony. The verse states:

Verily, God commands justice, and Ihssan¹⁰/ beneficence and giving to kindred; and forbids indecency, and forbidden things, and wrongful transgression. He admonished you that you may take heed (16:90)

Indeed a moral framework for development encourages a more caring society, more development aid to the poor and stability in a world of mutual respect and cooperation (Tyndale, 2003: 22-28).

Social justice is central to the concept of development in Islam (Dugbazah, 2009: 34). In Islamic teaching, social justice includes the fair and equitable distribution of wealth, the provision of basic necessities, and the protection of the weak against economic exploitation¹¹ by the strong (Badawi, 1982). Furthermore values of fairness, honesty, ethics and mercy should be evident in the application of justice regardless of race, colour or creed (Khan, *et. al.*, 2009). Therefore, all behaviours that undermine those values and distort Islam’s moral framework are not acceptable in Islam.

The Quran addresses this issue by using the concept of ‘*fasaad*’, which is an Arabic word that can be translated as corruption. However, the concept of corruption in the Quran is broader than the mainstream concept of corruption, which is the misuse of entrusted¹² power. In this context,

⁹ The verse instigates the values of justice, beneficence /Ihssan and giving/generosity to one’s fellow men (denote the wider community), then, the verse highlights the forbidden behaviours of indecency, forbidding -behaviours, and wrongful transgression

¹⁰ Ihssan according to the prophet’s (pbuh) saying is ‘to worship God as you are seeing him and while you see Him not yet truly He sees you’ (Albukhari). Ihssan means doing everything in an excellent manner in relation to the following: in relation to god by feeling his presence; parents by honour and being thankful to them; relatives by saving their rights and being good to them; the weak and needy by charity and being nice to them; human relations in general by being good to all regardless of differences in faith; the whole world’s creatures including vegetables, animals and inanimates and the whole environment by not wasting or misusing resources and doing good in everything. See http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?pagename=IslamOnline-English-Ask_Scholar/FatwaE/FatwaE&cid=1119503545674, accessed 30th October 2009

¹¹ Islamic teachings envisage protecting the weak from the economic exploitation of the strong, for example, the prohibition of interest-taking (called Riba in Islam) in the teaching of the Quran is meant to prevent the ‘financially strong’ individuals or institutions from making profit from the needs and weaknesses of others (Mona, 2008)

¹² In the teaching of the Quran, the selection, appointment and performance of employees, based on their capabilities, is a major theme for justice. A job is a trust, whether it is assumed or offered to others, and to render justice is a trust also. Chapter 4 Verse 58 which was revealed in reference to positions and jobs, indicates that humankind is

Iqbal and Lewis highlighted that from an Islamic perspective, corruption harms the social, economic and ecological balance which is unequivocally condemned by Shari'a¹³ (Iqbal and Lewis, 2002). Therefore, the term "*fasaad*", encompasses all human behaviours that disrupt individuals' lives and social harmony, harm the environment and eventually undermine sustainable development. This is illustrated in Chapter 30, Verse 41, which states that *fasaad* affects the land and sea as a result of human behaviour and deeds:

"There has arisen a tumult (fasaad) in¹⁴ land and in sea because of what people do" (30:41).

Islamic teachings refer to corruption as human behaviour; therefore, the Quran differentiates between people on the basis of their behaviour and ethics in relation to corruption; those who do good deeds and those who create disturbance (*fasaad*) in the land. Chapter 38, Verse 28 states:

"Shall we make those who believe and do good deeds like those who create disturbance in the land (earth)" (38:28)

Therefore, from an Islamic perspective, corruption is a moral and ethical problem, which reflects the internal fortitude of an individual and the ability to foster self-restraint rather than enforcing laws and systems (Lewis, 2006: 13). Consequently, Quranic teachings promote a holistic ethical framework for human behaviour. For example, Chapter 11, Verse 85 highlights the importance of applying justice, equity, honesty and decency, and at the same time denounces corruption and the instigation of disorder on earth.

...give full measure and full weight with equity, and defraud not people of their things and commit not iniquity in the earth, causing disorder (11:85)

Therefore, one can conclude that Islam has promoted morality and justice for the betterment of humankind, which in turn promotes environmental balance, social harmony, peace and security.

Accountability in Islam

In Islamic teachings, the concept of accountability is linked to the fulfilment of humankind's duty on earth and therefore, should reflect the values and moral framework set out by Islam.

In Islam, humankind is a steward (*khalifa*) of God on earth. According to the teachings of the Quran, as a creator of everything, God is the ultimate owner of all that exists on earth (Hathout, 1995: 95). God offered the *Trust*- responsibility and guidance-to the heavens, earth and mountains before humankind; and humankind has accepted it, voluntarily, with all the responsibilities that it entails. This responsibility means that earth and its resources is a trust from God and therefore, humankind is accountable to God for all actions and deeds (Lewis, 2006). Therefore, Quranic teachings indicate that while humankind exercised its freedom of

accountable for how they manage a trust; God's command is to hand over the trust to whom it belongs. The Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) elaborated on this verse in a hadith and said: 'Whoever employs a man to a task while knowing the existence of a more qualified person for the same task, truly betrays God and his Messenger and the believers' (Kamali, 2002:59-60, 113).

¹³ Shari'a refers to the concept of Islamic religious law.

¹⁴ The use of 'IN' in this verse and the following one incorporates the ecosystem, as it says IN and not ON land/earth, which indicates that *fasaad/disturbance* caused by human behaviour affects the ecosystem. This indicates the centrality of Ihsan towards all creatures and the environment as a whole.

choice in bearing the responsibility of this trust, the rules and guidance of God will be the measure of compliance and performance in keeping the trust (Abdul Kader, 1973).

Verily, We (God) offered the Trust (responsibility-guidance) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and were afraid of it. But humankind bore it. Indeed, he is capable of being unjust to, and neglectful of, himself. (33:71)

As holders of the trust, human beings should act as stewards on earth in applying justice (Kamali, 2002: 113). Quranic teachings illustrate that justice is an essential component of humankind's *khilafa* (stewardships) on earth; for example, in Chapter 38, Verse 26; while the Quran addresses the messenger David, as *khalifa* on earth, it simultaneously calls upon him to apply justice. Indeed being a steward means applying justice as a command from God (Quran 16: 90). Chapter 21, Verse 47 in the Quran illustrates that justice is the foundation of accountability, and therefore, this indicates that both justice and accountability are linked to humankind's freedom of choice (Kamali, 2002: 15).

According to Islamic teachings, in order to fulfil their role as stewards on earth, it is important for human beings to follow the moral framework laid down by Islam, which includes all the guidance and teachings that promote morality. Humankind would ideally conform to such a moral framework, without the need for a legal system or external supervision because of their love and fear of God (Kamali, 2002: 113, and Zayd, 2006). This conformity reflects the concept of *taqwa*¹⁵, which is a central concept in the teaching of the Quran. *Taqwa* can be translated into the state of being pious or God-fearing. Like justice, conveying the importance of *taqwa* was the goal of all of the messengers sent by God (Quran 4:131); the message was to "obtain the *taqwa* of God" (Baianonie, 1998). The centrality of *taqwa* in relation to ethics¹⁶ and human behaviour is a guiding principle in the teachings of the Quran and has been linked to God's guidance on human behaviour¹⁷ in 151 verses (Karolia, 2003).

Therefore, one can conclude that compliance to Islam's moral framework is a measure of accountability to God. Consequently, from an Islamic perspective there is a significant moral and ethical dimension that should influence human behaviour in the fight against corruption (Lewis, 2006:13). Furthermore in the Quran, the concept of *taqwa* is instrumental in framing human behaviour and ethics. Therefore, from an Islamic perspective, the concept provides the foundation for ethical transparency and accountability in all humankind's deeds and sayings beyond the power of legal systems and the enforcement of laws and procedures.

¹⁵ *Taqwa* is an Arabic word; the root of the word is *Waq*, which means to preserve, protect, or safeguard. see <http://quranicteachings.co.uk/taqwa.htm>

¹⁶ The Quran encourages ethical choices while promoting *Taqwa*: for example, in the case of divorce prior to consummation, it is the man's legal right to get back the dowry from his wife. However, the Quran encourages men not to do this in order to be closer to *taqwa* (Quran 2:237)

¹⁷ In the Quran, *taqwa* is mentioned in contrast to the behaviour of those who are: criminals (Quran 19/85-86); those who stray from God's guidance; (Quran 38-28); causing social/ethical a stray (Quran 91-8); and those who transgress the divine limits (Quran 5-2). While the Quran highlights the misbehaviours in contrast to *Taqwa*, in many verses, it highlights the characteristics of those who have *taqwa*: those who provide for the welfare of others with what God has bestowed upon them (Quran 2-3); those who are generous with their wealth in favourable as well as in adverse circumstances and who become a source of tranquillity and comfort to people; those who quickly correct any wrong or indecency that they have committed and refrain from wilfully persisting in error (Quran 3:133-135); those who fear the approaching hour of accountability (day of judgment) (Quran 21:48-49). For more on the characteristics/behaviours of those who have *Taqwa* in contrast to all corrupt behaviours, go to Quranic teaching; what is *Taqwa* <http://quranicteachings.co.uk/taqwa.htm>, accessed on 30th August 2009

Empowerment and Advocacy in Islam

There are various sources of guidance on morality, ethics and human values; secular, liberal and cultural. However, each faith advocates for its respective faith-based values that underpin its own code of ethics and morality. Faith-based values provide an alternative framework to development that empowers people; Tyndale emphasises that empowering people gives them personal dignity, self-worth and contentedness that boosts their hopes and visions (Tyndale, 2001 and 2006, in Lunn, 2009). Regardless of social or political status, Islamic teachings command and empower individuals to advocate for values and ethics that better humankind, in material and spiritual terms.¹⁸

Islam obliges Muslims to advocate for justice and to work for a moral and ethical society (Khan, *et. al.*, 2009). This includes advocating on behalf of the poor, vulnerable groups, victims of injustice and social inequality. Furthermore, Quranic teachings state that the application of justice is the collective responsibility of the whole community (Shafaat, 1987). Therefore, members of the community should be empowered to assume this responsibility through: education, free interaction¹⁹ between citizens and the government and an awareness of people's rights and obligations (Al-Buraey, 1985: 343-44).

The centrality of this collective responsibility is highlighted in many verses in the Quran. For example, Chapter 9, Verse 71 highlights this role alongside two of the main pillars of Islam: prayer (salaat) and charitable giving (zakat). Furthermore, Chapter 2, Verse 251 instigates that fighting the spread of corruption is a collective duty. This is obvious in the latter verse, which illustrates that God protects the community from the spread of corruption, by empowering those who fight against the corruption of others (Shafaat, 2000).

And the believers, men and women, are friends one of another. They enjoin good and forbid evil and observe Prayer and pay the Zakat and obey Allah and His Messenger... (9:71)

...and if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, corruption would surely overwhelm the earth... (2:251)

Therefore, there is no doubt that Islam promotes morality and denounces corruption for the betterment of humankind. Furthermore, Islamic teachings oblige all Muslims to enjoin justice and good deeds, and to oppose corruption and wrong doing. And indeed, while Islam observes humankind's freedom of choice, Islamic teachings focus on empowering individuals and strengthening their role to advocate for justice and morality and indeed to advocate on behalf of the poor and the needy.

Implications for Muslim Charities

Islamic teachings call upon Muslims to advocate for justice and sustainable development, yet Muslim faith based organisations (FBOs) have focused on implementing projects that satisfy the basic needs of the poor and vulnerable rather than advocating for their rights and against

¹⁸ Article 22(b) in the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam states 'Everyone shall have the right to advocate what is right, and propagate what is good, and warn against what is wrong and evil according to the norms of Islamic Shari'ah', see <http://www.oic-oci.org/english/article/human.htm> accessed 10th November 2009

¹⁹ Article 23(b) in the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam states, 'everyone shall have the right to participate, directly or indirectly in the administration of his country's public affairs. see <http://www.oic-oci.org/english/article/human.htm> accessed 10th November 2009

injustice (Sparre and Petersen, 2007: 32, and Khan, *et. al.*, 2009: 5) Furthermore, while a reflection on Islamic teachings demonstrates that corruption distorts Islam's moral framework for development, undermines the principles of sustainable development and acts as a catalyst for the outbreak of conflict and instability, Clarke highlights that faith based development organisations in general use their respective religious teachings to promote the charitable obligations of their followers, but are less willing to advocate for political and social change (Clarke, 2007: 79). Therefore, while Muslim FBOs have used Islamic teachings to shape their identity and promote the centrality of charitable giving in Islam, they have not yet incorporated the Islamic moral framework on development into their strategies for international development.

The causes of poverty and the shortcomings of the international systems and aid structures for fighting poverty and injustice are apparent. Therefore, it is crucial for Muslim FBOs to start developing strategies to address these causes and shortcomings and engage proactively in the international effort to fight corruption, eradicate the causes of poverty and establish justice. Humans are accountable to their choices on earth; indeed this applies to the endeavours of Muslim FBOs to alleviate poverty and establish justice. Therefore, Muslim FBOs working in international development, should not only observe Islamic teachings to shape their identity, but indeed they should start investigating how to mainstream these teachings into their strategies and approaches to international development.

The call to stop the spread of corruption in all its manifestations is one of the characteristics of Islam. Therefore, advocating for ethical choices at the international level in terms of sustainable development, poverty alleviation and justice, is vital to remedy the status quo. Lastly, corruption means less education and health facilities and environmental degradation and therefore less food security for humankind and animals alike. Clearly corruption contributes significantly to the cycle of poverty; hence dealing with the root causes of poverty in a holistic manner is a matter of ethical choice and within the Islamic moral framework on development, it is a choice that must be made.

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