

A Comparative Study between the Mainstream, Critical, and Islamic Approaches to Sustainable Development

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Abstract

There are never-ending debates revolving around the concept of sustainable development as different groups of people have a different understanding of it. However, in a broader sense, it consists of three essential elements: conservation of the environment, intragenerational, and intergenerational justice. Currently, there are three broad groups of approaches to sustainable development: mainstream, critical, and Islamic approaches. It is best to assume that those three essential elements are inherent within each approach. The study aims to explain how those three approaches differ in establishing and maintaining the three elements of sustainable development by using a comparative analysis framework. Each element of sustainable development in each approach will be assessed based on the ability to produce relative decoupling, Rawlsian theory of justice, and whether they can help future generations meet their needs according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The study shows that each approach has its good and bad, looking at their practices. It can be said that the practices of the Islamic approach to sustainable development can fulfil the three elements the best and more easily among the three approaches compared. It is just that it does not have a clear set of specific guidance on how the Islamic view on the environment can be applied.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Environmental Conservation, Intragenerational Justice, Intergenerational Justice, Islam.

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Abstrak

Perdebatan mengenai konsep pembangunan berkelanjutan masih terus berlangsung sampai sekarang karena setiap kelompok memiliki pemahamannya sendiri. Akan tetapi, secara garis besar, ide pembangunan berkelanjutan terdiri dari tiga elemen utama: pelestarian lingkungan, keadilan intragenerasional dan intergenerasional. Saat ini, ada tiga kelompok besar pendekatan terhadap pembangunan berkelanjutan yang populer yakni: pendekatan arus utama, kritis dan Islam. Bisa dibilang bahwa ketiga elemen utama pembangunan berkelanjutan terdapat pada masing-masing pendekatan tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan bagaimana ketiga pendekatan tersebut berbeda dalam menerapkan ketiga elemen pembangunan berkelanjutan dengan menggunakan kerangka studi perbandingan. Setiap elemen di setiap pendekatan pembangunan berkelanjutan akan dinilai berdasarkan kemampuannya untuk menghasilkan *relative decoupling*, teori keadilan oleh John Rawls dan kemampuannya untuk membantu generasi penerus memenuhi kebutuhannya. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa masing-masing pendekatan memiliki kelebihan dan kekurangannya. Dapat dikatakan bahwa dalam praktiknya, pendekatan Islam terhadap pembangunan berkelanjutan adalah yang terbaik di antara ketiga macam pendekatan dalam memenuhi ketiga elemen tersebut. Hanya saja, Islam tidak memiliki pedoman yang spesifik bagaimana kita seharusnya menerapkan pelestarian lingkungan sesuai dengan perintah agama.

Kata Kunci: Pembangunan Berkelanjutan, Pelestarian Lingkungan, Keadilan Intragenerasional, Keadilan Intergenerasional, Islam.

Introduction

Although almost everyone agree that “development” means human progress toward any desirable objectives or goals regarding human well-being and quality of life,¹ many practitioners, politicians, scholars, and the public perceive them differently. The mainstream approach is usually associated with words like “modernisation,” “industrialisation,” “westernisation,” and “capitalism.”² They are correlated with some phrases like the growths of “gross domestic/national products,” “income per capita,” “purchasing power parity,” et cetera.³ Such a “purely economic” approach is later criticised by many, saying that development also includes “critical changes in

¹ Jessica Schafer, Paul A. Haslam, and Pierre Beaudet, “Meaning, Measurement, and Morality in International Development.” In *Introduction to International Development: Approaches, Actors, and Issues*, ed. Paul A. Haslam, Jessica Schafer and Pierre Beaudet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 16.

² Jimmy Chulu. “Modernization: Is it Pathway to Achieving Sustainable Economic Growth and Investments.” 17 January 2016. Accessed September 25, 2021, <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=2717083>>.

³ Jessica Schafer, Paul A. Haslam, and Pierre Beaudet, “Meaning...,” 8.

social relations and institutions”⁴ that “enables people to take charge of their destinies and realise their full potential.”⁵ Many scholars then continue this criticism from several perspectives. Some criticise the effect of global capitalism as the machine of development on creating an unequal world within each nation and globally,⁶ while others attack the approach for neglecting the gender aspect of societal development.⁷ The content of the Cocoyoc Declaration in 1974 also justified their criticism on mainstream approach that undermines the connection between humanly development and its environmental, climatic, and even planetary impacts.⁸ Not to mention the criticism from the post-development camp based on post-colonial analysis on mainstream development discourse as “Eurocentric,” “anti-political,” “North-South divide ignorant,” and “imagination (re)colonisation.”⁹ Meanwhile, the Islamic approach emerges as an alternative to (western) development. Like usual post-development thoughts, Islamic economics offers alternative epistemology on development whose ontological focus remains intertwined.

The adjective “sustainable” basically does not change the state-of-the-art of development approaches above despite their agreement on the constitution of “sustainable development:” environment conservation, intragenerational equity, and intergenerational equity.¹⁰ The Brundtland Report by the World Commission on

⁴ John Brohman, *Popular Development: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Development*. Vol. 8 (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 298.

⁵ John Clark, *Democratizing development: The role of voluntary organizations* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1991), 36.

⁶ See Andre Gunder Frank, *The Development of Underdevelopment* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966); Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 4 (1974), 387.

⁷ Cecile Jackson and Ruth Pearson. “Interrogating Development: Feminism, Gender and Policy.” In *Feminist Visions of Development: Gender Analysis and Policy*, ed. Cecile Jackson and Ruth Pearson, (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁸ Hugo Slim, “What is development?” *Development in Practice* 5, no. 2, (1995), 143.

⁹ Aram Ziai, “Post-Development and Alternatives to Development.” In *Introduction to International Development: Approaches, Actors, and Issues*, ed. Paul A. Haslam, Jessica Schafer and Pierre Beaudet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 80-81.

¹⁰ See section “Sustainable Development: A Conceptualisation” for further explanation.

Environment and Development¹¹ defined “sustainable development” as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Its legacy is realised into a set of to-be-reached goals called the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite becoming a so-called “end” to be achieved globally instead of becoming the “recipe” for conducting development—leaving the “means to end” open for practical and theoretical interpretations—, the development discourse brought by SDGs is still homogenising the purpose of the development while piggybacking mainstream understanding of development simultaneously. Therefore, it is believed that the general understanding of sustainable development must be extrapolated further so one can also utilise it to get into a variety of development approaches, namely ones that have been “marginalised.” This is where the urgency of comparing development approaches has never been high before.

Therefore, this paper aims to compare mainstream, critical, and Islamic approaches to sustainable development based on each approach in addressing the three abovementioned elements. This paper tries to contribute to broader discussion about development approaches. Our research design is shaped based on a literature review conducted on studies from Johannes Wilhelm Jonker, Mir Zohair Husain, Carlos J. Castro, Asad Zaman, and Asma Salman & Huma Nawaz. Jonker compared the implementation/application of development theories in research between Global North and Global south researchers.¹² In interpreting Islam’s position on development discourse, Husain did similar things to the Islamic revivalism school of thought.¹³ Both authors taught us the content analytical method to compare approaches or theories as research objects. Castro’s paper, which compares the mainstream approach and critical approach through anti-thetical analysis,¹⁴ had inspired us to use the theoretical

¹¹ United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future (New York: The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), 43.

¹² Johannes Wilhelm Jonker, A comparative analysis of development theories in ICTD research from developed and developing countries. PhD Thesis, (Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University, 2016), 120-123.

¹³ Mir Zohair Husain, *Global Islamic Politics*, 2nd, (London: Pearson, 2002), 152-157.

¹⁴ Carlos J. Castro, “Sustainable development: mainstream and critical perspectives.” *Organization & Environment* 17, no. 2, (2004), 195.

review in each comparison. Both Zaman's research on Islamic alternatives to normative economic development¹⁵ and Salman & Nawaz's studies comparing Islamic and conventional banking systems¹⁶ contributed to our research to use the universal language of indicators to compare our research objects.

After starting with the introduction, this paper will conceptualise what the authors mean by sustainable development. It will further explicate each previously mentioned element of sustainable development along with theoretical frameworks that could assess, compare, and evaluate them. The next step is a comprehensive explanation of each sustainable development approach. This part included both theoretical/conceptual and practical summary of mainstream, critical, and Islamic approaches. Advanced comparative analysis will be inferred in the form of a comparative table before the conclusion.

This paper derives the Brundtland Report version of the sustainable development definition into three elements: environment conservation, intragenerational equity, and intergenerational equity. The derivation is made as to the authors' summary of the concept based on our theoretical review of preceding studies in sustainable development.¹⁷

Environment conservation here refers to the conservation of "environment" in its narrow understanding, which, inter alia, includes the air, water, soil, and biodiversity. In terms of sustainable development, environment conservation will be determined based on the ability of economic and development activities to produce relative decoupling (when the growth rate of the environmentally relevant

¹⁵ Asad Zaman, "Islam's gift: An economy of spiritual development." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 78, no. 2, (2019), 443.

¹⁶ Asma Salman and Huma Nawaz, "Islamic financial system and conventional banking: A comparison." *Arab economic and business journal* 13, no. 2, (2018), 155.

¹⁷ Hugo Slim, "What is..."; Odeh Rashed Al-Jayyousi, *Islam and sustainable development: New worldviews*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), Abdul Haseeb Ansari, Parveen Jamal, and Umar A. Oseri, "Sustainable development: Islamic dimension with special reference to conservation of the environment," *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 6, no. 5, (2012), Frans Hermans and Luuk Knippenberg, "A principle-based approach for the evaluation of sustainable development," *Journal of Environmental Assessment Policy and Management* 8, no. 3, (2006), Wolfgang Sachs. *The Age of Development: An Obituary*. 27 February 2020. Accessed October 30, 2020, <<https://newint.org/features/2019/12/09/long-read-age-development-obituary>>.

variable is positive but less than the growth rate of the GDP).¹⁸ According to the Global Resources Outlook 2019 by United Nations Environment Programme and International Resource Panel, such decoupling is a critical strategy that can support the achievements of the Sustainable Development Goals while remaining inside the planetary boundaries."¹⁹

Intragenerational equity refers to "justice among the people." This study will utilise John Rawls' theory of "justice as fairness" to assess this equity because of the myriad presence of preceding studies in the field of sustainable development using this theory as the framework such as what was done by Henderson,²⁰ Fleetwood,²¹ Töns,²² and Langhelle,²³ - indicating that it reflects the concept of sustainable development well. According to Rawls,²⁴ justice within a society can be achieved in two conditions. First, each person has an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others. Second, socioeconomic inequalities must be arranged to be both reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage and attached to positions and offices open to all. Therefore, "basic equality of liberties" and "fairness" will be the two main indicators in achieving this equity.

Intergenerational equity is the "ability of future generations to meet their needs." Abraham Maslow's typology is helpful to explain such needs. According to him, there are five needs: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualisation needs.²⁵ The authors considered only the first

¹⁸ OECD, "Indicators to measure decoupling of environmental pressure from economic growth. SG/SD(2002)1/FINAL." OECD. 2002. Accessed February 22, 2021. <[http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=sg/sd\(2002\)1/final&doclanguage=en](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=sg/sd(2002)1/final&doclanguage=en)>, 18

¹⁹ Bruno Oberle and J. Clement, "A societal response to determine our shared future." In Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want (Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, 2019), 125.

²⁰ Henderson, G. E. (2011). Rawls & sustainable development. McGill International Journal of Sustainable Development Law & Policy, 7, 1.

²¹ Fleetwood, J. (2020). Social justice, food loss, and the sustainable development goals in the era of COVID-19. Sustainability, 12(12), 5027.

²² Töns, J. (2021). John Rawls and Environmental Justice: Implementing a Sustainable and Socially Just Future. Routledge

²³ Langhelle, O. (2000). Sustainable development and social justice: expanding the Rawlsian framework of global justice. Environmental Values, 9(3), 295-323

²⁴ John Rawls, Justice as fairness: Political not metaphysical. In Equality and Liberty, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 53.

²⁵ Abraham H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," Psychological Review 50, no. 4, (1943), 370.

two types of needs as the most fundamental ones. It is somewhat easier for them to evaluate each development approach in fulfilling this equity.

This study will utilise previously discussed indicators—derived from three elements of sustainable development—to make a variable-based comparative analysis that reflectively²⁶ compares mainstream, critical, and Islamic approaches in terms of theories and practices.²⁷ In this research, we will use secondary data that represent the theoretical stances and best practices of each sustainable development approach. This is because we employ helicopter view in this study, i.e., we look at things in general instead of diving deep into it. Looking at things in general is done because the purpose of this study to compare the three approaches. Hence, in this case, the primacy of using secondary data prevails. We collect them from policy documents, academic journals, international organisations such as the United Nations, reports from Islamic non-governmental organisations, and documents from various national governments authorised to do multiple actions contributing to sustainable development. Content and partially discourse analyses will be employed to analyse the data collected—using the predetermined concepts from the theoretical framework.²⁸ Should our whole study be simplified; Table 1 would be the best way to represent it.

Table 1

Methodology of the Study

“Sustainable Development”		Mainstream	Critical	Islam
Environmental Conservation	Relative Decoupling			
Intragenerational Equity	Rawlsian Concept of Justice			

²⁶ This research is a qualitative research which falls under the interpretivist paradigm. It means that the researcher is going to have his own reflection on facts as “objective and subjective meanings are deeply intertwined.” See Donatella della Porta, “Comparative Analysis: Case-Oriented versus Variable-Oriented Research.” In *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Science: A Pluralist Perspective*, by Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24.

²⁷ Donatella della Porta, “Comparative Analysis...” 208.

²⁸ Christopher K. Lamont, *Research Methods in International Relations*, (London: Sage, 2015), 80-82, 87, 89-91.

Intergenerational Equity	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs			
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Mainstream Approach

The most prominent feature of the mainstream approach to sustainable development is quantifying necessary elements such as implementing environmental taxes, environmental subsidies and permit trading system.²⁹ It is in line with what Solow³⁰ suggested, i.e., that we need more real actions toward sustainability by quantifying the necessary elements. The mainstream approach to sustainable development believes in the use of the market mechanism. It argues that it will be more effective if each country applies it rather than requiring businesses to use specific technology, which will be costlier. Applying market mechanisms will regulate the businesses in a particular country – as in how much emission they will produce according to their economic capacity.³¹

In its implementation, there are several characteristics typical of the mainstream approach to sustainable development, i.e., being “resolutely internationalist”, “based on principles of rational normative planning”, “strongly scientific”, and “embraces continued economic growth”.³² Being resolutely internationalist means that the mainstream approach to sustainable development put a special emphasis on international cooperation to resolve the ever-worsening condition of the world such as through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).³³

Using principles of rational normative planning as a basis suggests that it is better for technicians to deal with the issues

²⁹ Anna Széchy, *Environmental and climate policy*, (Budapest: Corvinus University of Budapest, 2020), 3-5.

³⁰ Resources for the Future, *An Almost Practical Step Toward Sustainability*, 23 Aug 2019. Accessed 13 December 2020. <<https://www.resourcesmag.org/common-resources/almost-practical-step-toward-sustainability/>>

³¹ See Carlos J. Castro, “Sustainable development..” (2004), Anna Széchy, “Environmental...” (2020)

³² W. M. Adams and D. H. Thomas, “Mainstream sustainable development: The challenge of putting theory into practice”. *Journal of International Development*, 5(6), 594-595

³³ *Ibid.*, 594

instead of legislators. This idea is similar to Hays',³⁴ who said that "a political system guided by the ideal of efficiency and dominated by the technicians who could best determine how to achieve it". It is no surprise that the aforementioned agencies are among the leading actors in reaching sustainable development. Being strongly scientific means that implementing the mainstream thinking of sustainable development relies heavily on the application of science. At the same time, embracing continued economic growth refers to the main focus of the approach, i.e., continuous economic growth.

Many instances can be taken as the practices of the mainstream approach, inter alia, the implementation of the European Union's circular economy and cash transfer in Indonesia and the Philippines. The first one ensures an as-long-as-possible cycle of products, increasing its economic value while decreasing the burden given to the environment.³⁵ Whereas, the second one provides transfer payment to improve the quality of life of the recipients.

The implementation of circular economy has proven its effectiveness in lessening the environmental impact. It ensures that more than 40% of the packaging wastes are recycled, and those small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the EU employ at least one measure towards it when it comes to handling energy, waste, or water usage.³⁶

As for the cash transfer programmes in Indonesia and the Philippines, they have succeeded in improving the quality of life of the recipients in the short term, inter alia, by increasing the school attendance for kids and raising the disposable income.³⁷ However,

³⁴ Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the gospel of efficiency: The progressive conservation movement, 1890–1920* (No. 40). (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 3.

³⁵ Martin Geissdoerfer, et al., "The Circular Economy – A new sustainability paradigm?" *Journal of Cleaner Production* 143, no. 1 (2017), 757-768. See also Francesca Bassi and Jose G. Dias, "The use of circular economy practices in SMEs across the EU," *Resources, Conservation and Recycling* 146, (2019), 523-533.

³⁶ Leandro Javier Llorente-González and Xavier Vence, "Decoupling or decaffing? The underlying conceptualization of circular economy in the European Union monitoring framework," *Sustainability* 11, no. 18, (2019), 4898. Francesca Bassi and Jose G. Dias, 523-533.

³⁷ Inayati Nuraini Dwiputri, "The impact of the unconditional cash transfer program (BLT) on cigarette consumption in Indonesian society," *Journal of Indonesian Economy and Business* 32, no. 2 (2017), 138-150. Luisa Fernandez and Rosechin Olfindo, "Overview of the Philippines' Conditional Cash Transfer Program: The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (Pantawid Pamilya)," *Philippine social protection note*, no. 2, (2011).

many people see it as triggering the laziness of the recipients. They can receive free money from the government instead of earning it by working like the rest of the population.

Despite the evident success in the short term,³⁸ it is still questionable whether it can succeed in reaching its long-term goal of poverty eradication . It is safe to say that there should be a long-term strategy applied in the form of cash transfer with an established mechanism of control and evaluation to ensure the measures’ reliability for long-term social protection and poverty reduction following the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Table 2 summarised our findings and analysis on the mainstream approach.

Table 2

Summary on Theoretical and Practical Examination on the Mainstream Approach

Name of Practice	Conservation of the Environment	Intragenerational Justice	Intergenerational Justice
Circular Economy in the EU	Yes. Making the cycle of products last longer produces less burden for the environment. It also has proven to lessen the greenhouse emission by 70%.	Not dealing with this	Not dealing with this.

³⁸ Brière, B. De la, and L. B. Rawlings. 2006. Examining conditional cash transfer programs: a role for increased social inclusion? The World Bank; Leroy, J. L., M. Ruel, and E. Verhofstadt. 2009. The impact of conditional cash transfer programmes on child nutrition: a review of evidence using a programme theory framework.” Journal of development effectiveness, 1(2), 103-129.

Cash Transfers in Indonesia and the Philippines	Not dealing with this.	Yes. Both the conditional and unconditional cash transfers allow the society to have a more equal start because they can better afford going to school and buy more goods to improve their well-being in general.	Yes. Having started their journey in a “more equal start” compared to where they were supposed to be indeed gives a hand for the future generations to be able to fulfil their needs.
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Critical Perspective

There are many critiques of the mainstream concept of sustainable development – with Ecological Marxism being one of the most widely known critical perspectives. With his communist view, Karl Marx talked about philosophy, economy, and sociopolitics. Environmental issues are also a part of communism proposed by him. Far before the modern environmental problems emerged, he suggested that one day, due to the implementation of capitalism, some environmental issues will emerge – one of them being the soil, which can impact agriculture.³⁹ Moreover, Lowy⁴⁰ suggested that capitalism has always been using fossil fuels to drive the economy and development is enough evidence that it is the primary culprit of climate change and ecological crisis. Its nature of collection and expansion, of course, further exacerbates the condition of the ecology.

Several elements characterise Marx’s discussion on sustainability. First, sustainability itself is related to the permanent condition of life or reproduction necessary for the chain of successive generations. It refers to his conception of metabolic relation between

³⁹ J.B. Foster, 1997. “The crisis of the earth: Marx’s theory of ecological sustainability as a nature-imposed necessity for human production.” *Organization & Environment*, 10(3).

⁴⁰ M. Löwy, 2018. *Why ecosocialism: For a red-green future*. Great Transition Initiative

human and nature – a nature-imposed condition subject to human agency. Second, we are here just to use and manage the world according to our needs while preparing to pass it down to future generations in a desirably even better condition. Third, capitalism, with all of its greedy features, is unsuitable for the achievement of sustainability. Fourth, long-distance trade is a form of hindrance impeding human-nature harmony, particularly with agriculture. Such a form of trade allows more developed countries to exploit the lesser ones. Next, the system should be changed to communism as it is easier to serve the purpose of sustainability – which is based on communal production. Last but not least, it can only happen when technical changes are combined with social reform because, for him, the issue of sustainability is never merely a technical problem.⁴¹

Ecological Marxism believes that “the market’s profit logic and the logic of bureaucratic authoritarianism within the late departed ‘existing socialism’, are incompatible with the need to safeguard the natural environment”.⁴² The approach has an aim of solving the ecological crisis because it “is premised on the overcoming of the capitalism rather than the attainment of levels of well-being existing in industrialized countries without incurring the problems associated with Soviet state-socialism.”⁴³

A great example of the practice of Ecological Marxism is the concept of ecological civilisation in China, which originated from the era of President Hu Jintao in 2004, where he introduced the concept of scientific development with distinct characteristics: “quality, competitiveness, and environment-friendliness.”⁴⁴ Since 2010, the development in China has been reflecting the concept of ecological civilisation – which was previously reflected on the circular economy concept.⁴⁵ When it comes to the recent implementation of the ecological civilisation concept, Lu et al. explained that Xi Jinping did not simply stop on the pronouncement of ecological civilisation; he chose to

⁴¹ J.B. Foster, 1997. “The crisis...” *Organization & Environment*, 10, (3).

⁴² M. Löwy, 2005. “What is ecosocialism?” *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 16, (2), 18.

⁴³ C.A. Lu, Y.G. Dong, and J.Y. Lian. 2016. “On the concept of ecological civilization in China and Joel Kovel’s ecosocialism.” *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 27(1), 28.

⁴⁴ Ariel Salleh, “Eco-socialism and “Ecological Civilization” in China,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 19, no. 3 (2008), 127.

⁴⁵ Yifan Gu, Yufeng Wu, Jianguo Liu, Ming Xu, Tieoyong Zhuo, “Ecological civilization and government administrative system reform in China,” *Resources, Conservation, and Recycling* 155, (2020).

take national action for the implementation.⁴⁶ The implementation actions are divided into three categories: innovation-driven strategy, achieving a greater level of democracy, and education.

China, despite having incorporated the features of capitalism into its administration of the economy, should not be categorised as a capitalist country. However, it is also not a purely communist country. It should be appropriately called as a communist country with special feature.⁴⁷ Thus, taking China, particularly, for the practice of Ecological Marxism, as an example of the implementation of critical approach to sustainable development is an appropriate thing to do.⁴⁸

Innovation-driven strategy refers to creating new policies and technologies to achieve the ultimate goal of sustainable development. Whereas, achieving a greater level of democracy involves the people more on the implementation of the policy. Finally, education means that the government ought to formulate a way to educate the society on the concept of sustainable development as such a concept may be foreign for them.⁴⁹

The Chinese government has also done some reforms in its administration to facilitate the achievement of sustainable development targets. Those reforms are “reforming its environmental monitoring and management system”, “developing policies to internalize resource and environmental externalities in its taxation system”, and “overhauling the performance evaluation metric system for its officials in the first cohort of eco-civilization demonstration areas.”⁵⁰ The first reform disallows local government to interfere with environmental conservation under the environmental law while at the same time obliging local environmental agencies to report to higher-level agencies on the issue. Its implementation has resulted in PM2.5 and sulphur dioxide emissions decreasing by 24.3% and 36.1%, respectively, from January 2015 to May 2015. The second reform generates quite a lot of revenue (\$130 billion during 2008-2016) which can be allocated for other needs of the country. The last reform

⁴⁶ C.A. Lu, Y.G. Dong, and J.Y. Lian. 2016. “On the concept...”, 27(1), 28.

⁴⁷ Csanadi, M. (2016). *China in between Varieties of Capitalism and Communism*. Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Science.

⁴⁸ Yifan Gu, Yufeng Wu, Jianguo Liu, Ming Xu, Tieoyong Zhuo, “Ecological civilization...”, 155, (2020).

⁴⁹ Chang An Lu, Yang Guang Dong, and Jun Ya Lian, “On the concept...”, 27(1), 31-32.

⁵⁰ Yifan Gu, Yufeng Wu, Jianguo Liu, Ming Xu, Tieoyong Zhuo, “Ecological civilization...”, 155, 2-3.

acts as an incentive for political officials to prioritise environmental conservation as one of their agendas.⁵¹

After implementing measures according to ecological civilisation, cities in China can be categorised into three different groups. The first one is the stable all-round type where the cities are significant in ecological and socioeconomic development. Among the examples of the first group are Hongdao and Nanjing. The second is the ecology leads type, where they lack economic development but have ecological advantages. Among the examples of the second group are Huairou, Qinhuangdao and Pinggu. Last but not least, the third group is the late-developing and catch-up type, where they lack both ecological and socioeconomic development. Among the examples of the last group are Mashan, Zhaosu, and Nanchong City.⁵² Table 3 summarised the assessment on this approach.

Table 3

Summary on Theoretical and Practical Examination on the Critical Approach

Name of Practice	Conservation of the Environment	Intragenerational Justice	Intergenerational Justice
Ecological Civilisation in China	Yes. It ensures that the environment is protected by reforming the environmental monitoring and management system	It is covered under the mechanisms of tax levy and reallocation to the needs of the general public.	Does not really deal with this

Islamic Approach

The emergence of the Islamic approach to sustainable development started at the International Environment Forum from an Islamic Perspective in 2000. It was jointly organised by

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2

⁵² Fanxin Meng et al., "Urban ecological transition: The practice of ecological civilization construction in China," *Science of the Total Environment* 755, no. 2, (2021).

the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Meteorology and Environment Protection Department of Saudi Arabia in Jeddah in 2000.⁵³ According to Islam, it was the first attempt to give a spotlight and introduce non-Muslims to the concept of sustainable development. Following the conference, the OIC countries jointly issued the Islamic Declaration on Sustainable Development - which was then presented in the World Summit as “General Framework of Islamic Agenda for Sustainable Development” in Johannesburg in 2002. In Islam, religion and other aspects of life cannot be dichotomised in the west because Islam is a way of life. Thus, practising Islam means that one will have to involve it in every single aspect of life.⁵⁴ In this case, sustainable development is no exception. The Islamic approach to sustainable development also emerged as a critique of its mainstream counterpart. The approach is based on the orthodoxy among Muslims that all people exist in this world carrying a mission as the vicegerent of God on earth as explained in the Quran (02:30).

Al-Jayyousi, in his critique of the mainstream approach to sustainable development, said that “the current market economy is not telling us the ecological truth and that GNP is not the right metrics to measure the health and wealth of nations”.⁵⁵ He further explained his critique by arguing that “there are no metrics to measure sustainability and no addressing poverty and natural conservation” and that we need to “think beyond GNP as a measure of the wealth of nations”.⁵⁶ According to Rkiouak,⁵⁷ the Islamic approach to sustainable development is based on the maqasid al-Shari’a (the purpose of the revelation of the sharia – literally means the way of

⁵³ Ansari, Parveen Jamal, and Umar A. Oseni, “Sustainable development...”, no. 5, (2012).

⁵⁴ M.A. Haneef, 1997. “Islam, the Islamic worldview, and Islamic economics.” IIUM Journal of Economics and Management; Aburonia, H., and M. Sexton. 2006. “Islam and sustainable development.” Research Institute for Built and Human Environment, University of Salford; Abdul Haseeb Ansari, Parveen Jamal, and Umar A. Oseni, “Sustainable development...”, no. 5, (2012)

⁵⁵ Odeh Rashed Al-Jayyousi. 2016. Islam and sustainable development: New worldviews. New York: Routledge, 9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁷ D.L. Rkiouak. 2016. Bridging the gap: An Islamic Sustainable Development Model for the WANA Region. Amman: WANA Institute, Majlis El Hasan.

life). The maqasid al-Shari'a is summarised by Hasan⁵⁸ as "to promote the well-being of all mankind which lies in safeguarding their faith (din), their human self (nafs), their intellect (aql), their posterity (nasl) and their wealth (maal)". There are two widely-discussed types of "sustainable development in Islam". The first is following the mainstream concept of sustainable development but trying to Islamise the implementation to make it sharia-compliant. This is mainly done by organisations cooperating with various agencies of the United Nations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The second is the one trying to create different models of sustainable development according to what is in the Islamic sources of law, i.e., the Quran, prophetic sayings (sunnah), fatwas by elite Islamic scholars (ijma'), and the deductive analogy (qiyas), such as what was done by Rkiouak,⁵⁹ Hasan,⁶⁰ and Mirakhor & Askari.⁶¹

Among the most widely practised measures toward sustainable development offered by Islam are zakat and waqf. Zakat provides a mechanism for trickling down the wealth from the haves and the have nots. It comes in various forms under the two big names of zakat al-fitr and zakat al-maal, payable every year. Waqf also provides the mechanism for the same thing. However, its nature is not compulsory, unlike zakat.⁶²

The research on the impact of zakat and waqf in Indonesia and Pakistan showed that it had shown a desirable impact – although the practices can be much more improved. Those two measures have proven to create more justice among the people while ensuring that future generations can meet their needs. Among the forms of channelling zakat and waqf are aids for disaster relief, free healthcare,

⁵⁸ Hasan, Z. 2006. "Sustainable development from an Islamic perspective: Meaning, implications, and policy concerns." *Journal of King Abdulaziz University: Islamic Economics*, 8.

⁵⁹ D.L. Rkiouak. 2016. "Bridging..."

⁶⁰ Hasan, Z. 2006. "Sustainable development..."

⁶¹ Mirakhor, A., & Askari, H. (2010). *Islam and the path to human and economic development* (pp. 26-33). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶² Amiatul Yumna and Matthew Clarke, "Integrating zakat and Islamic charities with microfinance initiative in the purpose of poverty alleviation in Indonesia," In *Proceeding 8th International Conference on Islamic Economics and Finance*, Center for Islamic Economics and Finance, Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, Qatar Foundation (December 2011); Radieah Mohd Nor, *Baitulmal management during the reign of Caliph Umar Ibn Abdul Aziz* 3, no. 5 (2015), 1; Rifdaningsi and Mukhtar Yunus, "Optimization of Zakat Management in Baznas on Community Empowerment in Parepare City," *Al-Iftah: Journal of Islamic studies and society*, 1, no. 1 (2020), 98-111.

and microfinance for SMEs under *qardh al-hasan* (benevolent loan) where the borrowers do not pay interest educational trust fund. According to Maslow's hierarchy, it even goes the extra miles by fulfilling the two most basic needs and the other two higher-level needs, i.e., belonging and love needs.⁶³ Waqf and zakat fulfil the aforementioned two needs by providing a community where present and future generations can feel belong. The concrete implementation involves taking care of their well-being from the resources gathered in waqf and zakat.⁶⁴

Besides that, one of the most prominent practices of waqf in Pakistan is the waqf management by the Begum Aisha Bawany Waqf Foundation. It is a private waqf foundation that does not receive any donations from the public. Its main contribution to the society of Pakistan is channelling the funds they have for the youths to be able to go to college. Besides that, it also helps the poor by providing financial aids and helping the construction of mosques. The funds mainly come from the assets possessed by the foundation, e.g., multipurpose 12-storey buildings, commercial buildings, and residential buildings – which are put on rent. In addition, it also has two businesses, i.e., advertising services and publishing house. Those assets are the backbone carrying the waqf institution.⁶⁵

Despite the seemingly good practices of waqf and zakat, there are still things lacking from them. For instance, when it comes to waqf, there are several challenges to it, among others, “the lack of government support”, “low level of professionalism among the nazir (waqf manager)”, and “the lack of public awareness on waqf issues”.⁶⁶ Hence, the employment of waqf as an instrument to achieve sustainable development is yet to be optimised. If its practices are improved, it can contribute more as the complementary measure of zakat toward sustainable development. One of the role models in improving it is the waqf management done by Masjid Jogokariyan,

⁶³ Agus Faisal and Irma Yuliani, “Productive zakat of Baznas Yogyakarta on the growth of micro business,” *Shirkah: Journal of Economics and Business* 2, no. 3, (2018)

⁶⁴ Muhammad Dandy Alif Wildana and Syed Musa Syed Jafaar Alhabshi, “Proposed Waqf Framework for Food Security and Price Stabilization Policy of Rice in Indonesia,” *Journal of Islamic Finance* 7, no. 2, (2018), 70-85.

⁶⁵ Usman, M., and A. Ab Rahman. 2020. “Funding higher education through waqf: a lesson from Pakistan.” *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management*, 409-424.

⁶⁶ Sukmana, R., M. Solihin, I. S. Beik, Y. Lestari, W. D. Irawan, and S. R. Ajija. 2021. “National Waqf Index: A Measurement for Waqf Performance.” *Badan Wakaf Indonesia Working Paper Series*.

located in the Special Administrative Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia.⁶⁷

Islam indeed guides its adherents to conserve the environment. It is following the teaching of the prophet which says that we are not allowed to “cut down fruit-bearing trees or destroy buildings”, “slaughter a sheep or a camel except for food”, and “burn or drown palm trees” even in the case of war according to the Islamic humanitarian law.⁶⁸ However, Islam, in all agreed sources of its orthodoxy such as the Quran and prophetic traditions, does not give specific guidance on how to conserve the environment, which can be compared with other approaches’ measures. As it is too general, it can be said that any environmental protection measures can fall under the practice of Islam if it does not breach the sharia. Table 4 simplified the explication of this approach.

⁶⁷ Taufiq, M., & Purnomo, M. (2018). Model Pemberdayaan Aset Wakaf Masjid Secara Produktif Di Masjid Jogokariyan Yogyakarta. *PERADA*, 1(2), 129-139.

⁶⁸ Ahmed Al-Dawoody. “Islamic law and international humanitarian law: An introduction to the main principles.” *International Review of the Red Cross* 99, no. 906, (2017), 1005.

Table 4
Summary on Theoretical and Practical Examination on the Islamic Approach

Name of Practice	Conservation of the Environment	Intragenerational Justice	Intergenerational Justice
Islamic View on the Environment	Unclear. Islam only gives a very general guideline on how humans must conserve the environment. As for the implementation, it is up to the humans themselves if they do not breach the sharia.	Not dealing with this.	Not dealing with this.
Zakat	Not dealing with this.	Yes. Zakat is a mean of redistribution of wealth with the aim that each member of the society has a “more equal start” and hence the gaps between the haves and the have-nots will not be too huge.	Yes. Giving the current generation a more equal start also affects the future generations’ ability to meet their needs.

Waqf	Not dealing with this.	Yes. Waqf acts in a rather similar way with zakat. When it comes to intragenerational justice, the difference between the two practice is rather slim.	Yes. Waqf is eternal in its nature. Waqf beneficiaries will also feel the sense of belonging to a community which cares for them besides being benefited by the money or buildings managed under the waqf.
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Conclusion

Implementing the mainstream approach to sustainable development, taking the circular economy and cash transfer as examples, fulfils all the three elements of sustainable development. The first one deals with the conservation of the environment, and its implementation enables the production of relative decoupling, as previously explained. On the other hand, the cash transfer makes sure that wealth is more equally distributed among the population, ensuring that future generations will have a more equal start and help them fulfil their physiological and safety needs. Whereas, with Ecological Marxism taken as an example, the critical perspective can accommodate the conservation of the environment and justice among the people just fine. The practice of ecological civilisation can produce relative decoupling while at the same time ensuring an equal society by levying environmental taxes and reallocating them for the benefit of the many. Unfortunately, as the representation of Ecological Marxism, the practice of ecological civilisation does not ensure intergenerational justice. It can be said that the practices of the Islamic approach to sustainable development can fulfil the three elements the best and more easily among the three approaches compared. Implementing zakat and waqf can ensure that justice among the people is served while also ensuring that future generations can meet their needs. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it even fulfils

a higher level of needs, i.e., belonging and love needs. However, Islam only gives a very general concept of environmental conservation without insight into how the Islamic view on the environment can be applied.

It is advisable for future researchers on this topic to use a quantifiable measure so that we can conclude more accurately on which approach covers the three essential elements of sustainable development the best. It must be admitted that this research has only managed to compare them qualitatively based on the used sources, i.e., previous research on the issue and implementation and policy documents.

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