

## Qur'anic War against Hunger for Sustainable Development

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### Abstract

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Food is necessary for every living creature to sustain and enjoy his life. This is why food security becomes a matter of concern in human society and the eradication of hunger a collective war of the comity of nations. The Qur'an being the statute of Islam has declared a very stringent war against hunger in order to ensure sustainable development of human beings as individuals and communities through various exhortations, legislations and institutions. This paper, thematically studies the Qur'an texts on the eradication of hunger as a means of food security for sustainable development to enable man fulfil the purpose of his creation and discharge his responsibility as Allah's vicegerent on earth appropriately. The paper suggests ways to diffuse the Qur'an provisions on the matter into the currents of the modern world and Nigerian nation in particular. It concludes that the Qur'anic measures for granting and guaranteeing food security are the best ways of action against hunger and that the struggle to entrench and sustain the measures is a collective responsibility of individuals, families, communities and governments of all nations irrespective of their religious affiliations.

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**Keywords:** Hunger, Sustainable Development, Collective responsibility, Food Security, Qur'an

### Introduction

Man is created in the best of moulds (Qur'an 95:4) which implies a perfect state of spiritual, mental and physical health. It is his duty to preserve this pattern on which Allah has made him (Qur'an 30:30). One of the ways to maintain this pattern is the satisfaction of his hunger and thirst through eating and drinking of moderate, clean and lawful foods and drinks. This is why any discourse on development must first address the issue of food security. Once that is guaranteed, the physical development of any society is readily achievable and sustainable. To achieve food security is to reduce hunger to the barest minimum. Many approaches were adopted by states, nations and the international community to achieve this goal. However, the Islamic approach, which is comprehensive and all inclusive, is seen as the most relevant, especially in the modern world where, according to the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP), one in nine people do not get enough food to be healthy and lead an active life (WFP, 2016).

The purpose of this paper is to describe the Islamic approach in anti-hunger war as enshrined in the Glorious Qur'an and to analyse the practicable steps to implement them in the modern world and explain how such implementation can guarantee sustainable development in human life. The paper adopts a thematic method in studying the Qur'anic texts in context. It uses relevant library materials on the subject with special emphasis on Qur'an exegesis, hadith commentaries and *fiqh* literatures.

### Conceptual Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarity some key concepts of the paper are defined below. These are hunger, food security and sustainable development.

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## Hunger

Literally, hunger is the physiological need for food (Word Web Dictionary), and the state of having not enough food to eat (Hornby, 2001). When it persists, it results into starvation, which is a state of extreme hunger resulting from lack of essential nutrients over a prolonged period. It is technically defined as: "An uncomfortable or painful sensation caused by insufficient food energy consumption". It is, scientifically, referred to as food deprivation (FAO, 2008, p.3).

Hunger as a physiological need is natural with all human beings and as such a normal state that is easily addressed through taking of moderate healthy food to satisfaction. However, hunger, as a lack of essential nutrients over a prolonged period, is a calamity to humanity and the highest risk to health worldwide. Its risk is greater than that of AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. There are 795 million undernourished people in the world today. That means one in nine people do not get enough food to be healthy and lead an active life (WFP, 2016).

The good news is that hunger is entirely solvable. There is enough food in the world to feed everyone and no scientific breakthroughs are needed. Today's knowledge, tools and policies, combined with political will, can solve the problem (WFP, 2016).

There are many causes of hunger in human societies but six are more pronounced as most important causes. These are: poverty, lack of investment in agriculture, climate change and weather, war and displacement, unstable market and food wastage. On food wastage, it should be known that: One third of all food produced (1.3 billion tons) is never consumed. This food wastage represents a missed opportunity to improve global food security in a world where one (1) in eight (8) is hungry. Producing this food also uses up precious natural resources that we need to feed the planet. Each year, food that is produced but not eaten guzzles up a volume of water equivalent to the annual flow of Russia's Volga River. Producing this food also adds 3.3 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, with consequences for the climate and, ultimately, for food production (WAP, 2016).

## Food Security

According to the Islamic Organisation for Food Security (IOFS, 2013), Food means: "Any substance, whether processed, semi-processed or raw, which is intended for human consumption (Article 1 No. 12)". While Food Security means: "A condition when all people, at all times, have physical, social, economic and financial access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (IOFS, Article 1, No. 13). From this definition, four dimensions of food security, which must be realized simultaneously, for food security objective to be realized, can be identified, thus:

1. Physical availability of food which addresses the supply side of food security and is determined by the level of food production, stock levels and net trade;
2. Economic and physical access to food which addresses the policy focus on incomes, expenditure, markets and prices in achieving food security objectives;
3. Food utilization which is the way the body makes the most of various nutrients in the food;
4. Stability of the other three dimensions over time which addresses the issue of sustainability. Inadequate access to food on a periodic basis resulting from adverse weather conditions, political instability, or economic factors (unemployment, rising food prices) renders one to be considered food insecure (FOA, 2008).

## Sustainable Development

Development literally means a process in which something passes by degrees to a different stage, especially a more advanced or mature stage (Word Web Dictionary). It is however defined differently by various scholars based on their disciplines. This paper views development as the healthy growth of man as a complete being in all spheres of his life, the spiritual and physical, which is achievable through his efforts guided by divine revelation and his rationality. Sustainable development therefore means the perpetual growth of man in his physical and spiritual domains, and the industrialization of his environment to achieve the purpose of serving his creator and bring about continued happiness to himself and other beings surrounding him. This cannot be achieved with sound health which is built on good nutrition. Food security and human development are, therefore, intricately linked, and meaningful progress on one cannot be sustained without concomitant progress on the other.

## The Qur'an on Hunger

The Glorious Qur'an which is the divine book of guidance revealed for human development has made clear its position on hunger in many verses. *Al-Ju'i* (الجوع), the Arabic equivalent of hunger, is mentioned five (5) times in the Qur'an (Abdul-Baqi, 2001: 229). While thirst *al-dhama'a* (الظمأ), is repeated three (3) times (Abdul-Baqi, 2001: 539). In these verses, the Qur'an posits that hunger is a trial and calamity which befalls human being (Qur'an 2:155). Hunger is further referred to as a divine punishment been inflicted on the ingrates in this world. Qur'an (16: 112) says:

﴿يُضْرَبُ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا مَّثَلًا قَرْيَةً كَانَتْ آمِنَةً مُطْمَئِنَّةً يَأْتِيهَا رِزْقُهَا رَغَدًا مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ فَكَفَرَتْ بِأَنْعَمِ اللَّهِ فَأَذَاقَهَا اللَّهُ لِبَاسَ الْجُوعِ وَالْخَوْفِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ﴾

Allah sets forth a parable: a city enjoying security and quiet, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place: Yet was it ungrateful for the favours of Allah. So Allah made it taste of hunger and terror (in extremes) (closing in on it) like a garment (from every side), because of the (evil) which (its people) wrought.

Hunger is therefore a penalty with which Allah punished a prosperous and secure city when it turned ungrateful to His bounties. It is the punishment that was meted against the people of Makkah when they proved to be rebellious to the truth (Al-Qurtubi, 2006). Food deprivation or insecurity is the fate of inglorious servants. Food security on the other hand is a divine succor for which man should appreciate through sincere worship and servitude to Allah. The Qur'an says: "Let them adore the Lord of this House, the Ka'bah. Who provides them with food against hunger and with security against fear (of danger)" (Qur'an 106:3-4). Hunger is a misfortune that the believers are averse to it as they are to its causal-effective companion; poverty (Qur'an 9:28). Distress is an appellation for hunger in Qur'an 12:88 (Ibn 'Atiyyah, 2001).

In another context, the people of the doom serve perpetual hunger as one of their severe punishments in the Hell. No food shall satisfy their hunger and no drink shall quench their thirst. The Qur'an describes them as follows:

Some faces, that Day, will be humiliated, labouring (hard), weary, the while they enter the Blazing Fire. The while they are given, to drink, of a boiling hot spring. No food will there be for them but a bitter *Dhari'*, which will neither nourish nor satisfy hunger (Qur'an 88: 2-7).

Conversely, food security and zero-hunger is a spectacular feature of paradise and a bounty bestowed on its companions. Addressing Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) on his provisions in Paradise, Allah says:

﴿يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الضَّالِّينَ﴾

There is therein (enough provision) for thee not to go hungry, nor to go naked. Nor to suffer from thirst, nor from the sun's heat (Qur'an 20: 118-9).

## The Qur'anic Action against Hunger

The Qur'an war against hunger is predicated on its concept of human development, that all resources in heaven and earth are created with the objective to serve human beings. As such humans are committed, in the light of this dedication of resources, to exert their utmost efforts in order to free the Islamic society as individuals and as a society from the pressure of need and to ensure that the individual in that society, irrespective of his beliefs or ideology, is guaranteed such satisfaction through his work or through the institutions in the society when his output and income are not enough to satisfy his needs (El-karanshaw, 1996).

To achieve the above developmental objective, the Qur'an instructed humanity to embark on a universal war against hunger through systematic attacks on its root causes. For the fact that hunger is an important cause as well as an effect of poverty (FAO, IFAD & WFP, 2002, p.4), the Qur'an adopts similar models in solving the two catastrophes. The Islamic models of eradicating poverty as presented by many researchers, notably Ahmad (1991) and Al-Qaradawi (1995) are therefore considered relevant to this section. However, this paper infers three models which the Qur'an deploys for its offensive and defensive war against hunger. These are:

### First Model: Moral Exhortations on Production, Distribution and Preservation of Food

The Qur'an exhorts individuals and communities to labour hard to produce food for their subsistence, consume it moderately, preserve it for the hard times and share it with the needy in the society. It also warns against depriving the needy from food and drink.

### Production of Food

Concerning production of food, the Qur'an encourages productive efforts to the point of making it a moral obligation (Ahmad, 1991) and the outcome of productive effort is described as a bounty from Allah (Qur'an 62:10). Man is constantly reminded that Allah is the Provider of food (Qur'an 6: 14, 36: 47, 106: 4, 26:79, 80:24) and He does not discriminate against any of His creatures in this regard. He has created all that is in the heaven and the earth for the exploit of man (2: 29, 45: 13) and has put sufficient resources for man to harness as food on earth (Qur'an 41: 10). It is therefore incumbent on man to avail himself of the vast opportunities of productive enterprise afforded by the limitless bounties of Allah (Qur'an 3: 93, 5: 5, 96, 80: 24-33, 15: 19-20, Ahmad, 1991). Al-Qurtubi (2006), commenting on Qur'an 9: 28, elaborated six legitimate means of earning livelihood to eradicate hunger and poverty. These are Jihad (exclusively for the Prophet), hand craft, business, farming, teaching and loan. The Qur'anic exhortation to *'amal* or the good works is constant and ubiquitous (Al-Faruqi, 1983). This is why man ought to produce if he is to live by the Qur'an. The Qur'anic exhortation to rise, to change one's material conditions, to work hard and to seek the abundant life, to usufruct nature and enjoy the goodly things of creation is addressed to all humanity (Al-Faruqi, 1983). This is because man's economic behaviour makes or unmakes the felicity of life on earth. According to Al-Faruqi (1983, P.210), "No religion, and no ideology has ever exhorted man to work as much or as strongly as Islam did". On the ethical principles of Production in Islam Al-Faruqi (1983 pp. 214-215) stated that:

Islam requires that production of goods and services be absolutely free of cheating and misrepresentation. Responsibility for carrying out [this] requirement devolved upon the *Hisbah* institution. In order to better fulfil his duty, the *muhtasib* was granted by the *shari'ah* the power of the police as well as the court of law. His was the prerogative, and a duty, not to sit back and wait until a complaint was placed before him, but to go out into the field and there pry into the open the complaints, violations and incidences of harm. Today, the duties of the *muhtasib* are assumed by a variety of government organs. But even today, the aggressiveness of the *muhtasib*, his initiative to expose them and the summary ways with which he could put an end to it are still missed, because modernity lacks the enthusiasm for the good which faith in Allah generates.

### Moderate Consumption of Food

On moderate consumption of food, the Qur'an instructed thus: "O Children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters" (7: 31). The wasters are condemned as companions of Satan. "And render to the kindred their due rights, as (also) to those in want, and to the wayfarer: But squander not (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift. Verily spendthrifts are brothers of the Evil Ones; and the Evil One is to his Lord (himself) ungrateful" (Qur'an 17: 26-27). Moderate consumption checks waste which is a major cause of hunger in human society as explained above.

### Food Distribution

Concerning food distribution or feeding the needy, the Qur'an has declared voluntary feeding of the needy as a special act of virtue (Qur'an 90: 11-18) and a spectacular character of the pious and the righteous (Qur'an 76: 6-9). It also castigated miserliness and stinginess as anti-social apathy and a portrait of the infidels (Qur'an 4: 37). Suratul-Ma'un contains the most stringent warning against starvation and deprivation of the needy from food. It reads thus:

Seest thou one who denies the Judgment (to come)? Then such is the (man) who repulses the orphan (with harshness), and encourages not the feeding of the indigent. So woe to the worshippers; who are neglectful of their Prayers. Those who (want but) to be seen (of men), But refuse (to supply) (even) neighbourly needs (Qur'an 107: 1-6)

The Surah condemns those who claim Islam and stop in the way of assistance to the needy, asserting that to push the orphan, not to insist on the feeding of the poor, is to deny religion itself, the whole of religion –doctrine, creed, ethics, law, spirit – everything (Al-Faruqi, 1983). This clearly implies that "religiousity, the whole of it, is equivalent to satisfaction by the Muslim of the material need of other man" (Al-Faruqi, 1983 p.203). This fact is also repeated in Qur'an 69: 33-34, 74: 40-47 and 89: 16-20.

### Preservation of Food

On preservation of food, the solution given by Prophet Yusuf (A. S.) to the food crisis in Egypt during his time sums up the Qur'anic exhortation. It goes thus: "(Joseph) said: "For seven years shall ye diligently sow as is your wont: and the harvests that ye reap, ye shall leave them in the ear, except a little, of which ye shall eat" (Qur'an 12: 47).

This is an advice to pump more funds to agricultural production while monitoring closely the resultant mass production obtained and storing it with all available storage facility and modern equipments (Shittu, 2012).

### **Second Model: Normative Legislations on Feeding for Sustainable Development**

The Qur'an has prescribed feeding as a religious, social and economic responsibility of every adult Muslim in different circumstances, in the family circle and beyond. It also prohibited hoarding of food items during periods of food scarcity and prescribed feeding as an act of penitence and expiation, all to ensure food security, thereby combating hunger.

In the family circle, the Qur'an made it obligatory on the husband to provide for himself, his wife (or wives), and his children adequate clothing, shelter and food according to his means. It instructs thus:

The mothers shall give suck to their offspring for two whole years, (that is) for those (parents) who desire to complete the term. But the father of the child shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child. Nor father on account of his child. An heir shall be chargeable in the same way. If they both decide on weaning, by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no blame on them. And if ye decide on a foster-mother for your offspring, there is no blame on you, provided ye pay (the mother) what ye offered, on equitable terms. But fear Allah and know that Allah sees well what ye do (2:233).

Ibn Qudamah had explained that maintenance of wife is compulsory as established by the Qur'an, Sunnah and *Ijma'a* (1968 8:195). There are other verses that establish maintenance of the family (wives and children) as right of the family like Qur'an 2: 240, 4: 34 & 36, 65: 6-7, etc. The parents who cannot on the account of need or old age maintain themselves should also be taken care of by their male children. Thus, the prescription of kindness to parents in Qur'an 2: 83, 4: 36, 6: 151, 17: 23-24, 29: 8, 46: 15 and showing gratitude to them in Qur'an 31: 14-15 involve proper care and supply of healthy and nutritious food to them.

The relatives are also to be maintained as well as the needy in the Muslim community. Right to food is guaranteed to them by several verses of the Qur'an. Allah says:

Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good- to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess: For Allah loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious; Those who are niggardly or enjoin niggardliness on others, or hide the bounties which Allah hath bestowed on them; for We have prepared, for those who resist Faith, a punishment that steepens them in contempt (Qur'an 4: 36-37)

According to Ibn Juzai (n.d.), maintenance is obligatory for four (4) categories of people. These are wives, biological children, parents and slaves. He however attributed to Abu Hanifah that all relatives are also entitled.

Summing up the Islamic social solidarity package at individual level, Asad (2014) inferring from the hadith attributed to the Prophet as saying: "He is not a Faithful who eats his fill while his neighbour remains hungry by his side" (Ibn Abi Shaibah 6:124 No.30359, Al-Baihaqi, 10:5 No. 19668), declared that: "poverty in the midst of plenty is a negation of the very principle of brotherhood by which Islam stands and falls" (p. 100). The same is true of hunger, the mutual corollary of poverty.

### **Third Model: Institutions of Zakat and Voluntary Sector**

The third model of Qur'anic action against hunger is to fight it through the religious and socio-economic institutions of zakat and the voluntary sector. Islamic economy is said to be a three-sector economy comprising the "private sector motivated by profit, the private sector free of any profit motive (the voluntary sector) and the public sector where profit motive is substituted by social welfare" (Farid, 1983, p. 34 Cited in Islahi, 1996).

Zakat falls under the third sector. It is a well sharing tax. Unlike charity (*sadaqah*), which is voluntary, and can be given directly to the recipient, at any time and in any amount, Zakat is an annual levy which must be given to the state or the Ummah's duly constituted authority (Al-Faruqi, 1983). The recipients of Zakat are stipulated in Qur'an 9: 60 thus:

Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah and for the wayfarer: (thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom.

The poor and the needy are mentioned at the forefront to show the sagacity of the Qur'an's fight against hunger and its fancy for food security which is the first pillar of sustainable development.

On the responsibility of an Islamic state, Asad (2014) maintained that, the Islamic State must see to it that equity prevails within the community, and that every citizen-man, woman and child- shall have enough to eat and to wear, shall be succoured in case of illness, and have a decent home in which to live. In pursuance of this aim, the constitution of the country must contain a provision to the effect that every citizen has a right to (a) productive and remunerative work while of working age and in good health, (b) training-at the expense of the state, if necessary- for such productive works, (c) free and efficient health services in case of illness, and (d) a provision by the state of adequate nourishment, clothing and shelter in cases of disability resulting from illness, widowhood, unemployment due to circumstances beyond individual control, old age, or under-age.

The Voluntary Sector represents *fi'l al-khair* (doing good or rendering public goods). Public goods are "the socially desirable goods that provide benefits which are not marketable to individual purchasers" (Islahi, 1996, p.368) that everybody can enjoy without diminishing the enjoyment of others, and from which it is impossible to exclude people from participating (Weiss, 1981, p. 296 cited in Islahi 1996, p.368).

The main components of the voluntary sector in Islamic economy as inferred from the Qur'anic command in Suratul Hajj, Qur'an 22: 77 and prophetic explanations are, according to Islahi (1996) the *sadaqat al nafilah* (voluntary and recommended charity), *hibah*, *hadiyya* or *atiyyah* (gift and grant), *al wasiyyah* (a will in the legacy), *al ariyah* or *al qard* (lending), *al nadhr* (the vow or dedication), *al waqf* (endowment) and cooperative associations. All these are directed at eradicating hunger and poverty in the Islamic community to foster sustainable development.

### Implementation of Qur'anic Action against Hunger in the Modern World

It is a fact that the international community has adopted the reduction of poverty and hunger eradication as overarching goals for development (FAO, IFAD & WFP, 2002), and it has been working through multi-faceted national and international, government and non-governmental organizations and agencies to achieve it. But the organizations and agencies themselves admit the inefficiency of the adopted models in the crusade and advanced several reasons to the inefficiency. This paper posits that the separation of the efforts from the religious duties of individuals and normative functions of the communities are the real causes for the inefficiency. It therefore proposes that the Qur'anic models be adopted. Countries and states should view it as a duty to implement and supervise others to do same with vigour and utmost responsibility. War against hunger should be upheld as both religious and social responsibility of every citizen. Credible Islamic Scholars should be involved in the strategy and execution of the strike against hunger. The government should keenly supervise the execution and bring delinquents and corrupt elements to book. They should be prosecuted to safeguard against greed and avarice and to serve as deterrence to potential culprits.

### Conclusion

The foregoing discusses the three-model action of the Qur'an against hunger. These are: moral exhortations on production, distribution and preservation of food, normative legislations on feeding for sustainable development and institutionalization of Zakat and the voluntary sector. If these models are adopted, hunger would be alleviated to the barest minimum, if not completely eradicated in human society. The political will of governments, in addition to personal conviction of individuals and communities to commit to these models are key ingredients to its proper implementation and success.

It can only be implemented to full success when the individuals and states uphold religious values and commit themselves to actualizing them. Any measure that does not consider the above is liable to failure and the continuous spread of hunger in the modern world, though there is sufficient provision to cater for all and the required knowledge and tools are readily available.

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