

Spirituality and Sustainability

EXPERIENCES OF
THE INTERNATIONAL
ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

Edited by

Abdul Rashid Moten

With a foreword by Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dato' Dzulkifli Abdul Razak,
Rector, the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)



IIUM



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CHAPTER 11

**Women Waste
Collectors, Recyclers
and Repurposers for
Circular Economy:
An Ethnographic Study**

Rohaiza Rokis

Excessive wastes endanger the sustainable existence of human-kind. Yet, there are people whose life partly depends on wastes. Women are directly involved in household waste production, and they too, normally engage in the waste disposal. They are often considered the right persons to manage it. When women receive support (from the community and their husbands), they could empower themselves and become effective members. They collect, recycle and repurpose wastes.

This chapter is based on an ethnographic study through the eyes and lives of women who are engaged in doing “something good” for their ecological surroundings, and consequently, obtained financial benefits from doing so. It explores the life experiences of financially-challenged women, who could be considered as belonging to the B40 economic group. The researcher observed their daily routines and intermingled with them for one year. These eco-superwomen had shown a remarkable commitment to managing their household garbage and other wastes. It was a small contribution on their side yet had a tremendous outcome for others. This chapter discusses connections between the “people” (women), the “medium” (*maqāṣid al-sharī’ah*) and the “outcome” (sustainable socio-economy) for greater humanities. It begins with a brief discussion on the most relevant concepts i.e. *MqS* (medium), SDGs (outcome) and women’s empowerment (people), followed by discussions on their interconnectedness. The following section explains the actual research account, which then further establishes the eco-superwomen’s achievement. It concludes by summarising the findings and suggesting ways forward.

***Maqāṣid al-Sharī’ah*, Women’s Empowerment and SDGs**

Islamic *sharī’ah*, i.e. the divinely decreed normative way in Islam, is solidly based on the teachings of the Qur’ān and those of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The *sharī’ah* prescribes its followers the fundamental aspects of worship (*‘ibādah*) that includes, but not restricted to, prescribed rituals, familial commitment (*munākaḥat*), and human co-existing relationship

(*mu'āmalāt*). According to Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur (2006), *MqS* is a methodology of the renewal of Islamic normative ways and laws that has remained intact since the contributions of the great imams (Fauziah, 2014). The idea of *MqS* is simple but necessary, as it aims to establish welfare in this world and ensure success in the hereafter.

Women's empowerment refers to women having rights and gaining control in various life opportunities (Elias, 2015). For example, in their household it embraces the idea of having opportunities for generating income, contributing to making household decisions, having ownership of assets, equity in marriage and a special and revered place in motherhood (Rohaiza, 2018). As much as women's empowerment is guaranteed by the *sharī'ah*, it is still a hotly debated topic. Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) attribute this situation to the lack of interpretation of the concept. Rohaiza (2018) finds the root of the debate in social-cultural obstruction. Some of the implications in women's empowerment includes the ability to strengthen their potential in the socio-economic sector, particularly in developing countries. Yet, many women still cannot identify their capabilities, what more to empower themselves, in this case, to better their situation (Al-Shami et al., 2018; Al-Shami et al., 2017). In the light of this theoretical backdrop, this chapter develops discussions that encompass the symbiosis among the three connections: "people" (women), "medium" (*maqāsid al-sharī'ah*) and "outcome" (sustainable socio-economy).

A leading proponent of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*, Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al Shatibi (d.790H) stressed the need to respect and observe explicit injunctions that adhere to Qur'ānic texts. Protecting the eco-system is an obvious example of that. Allāh (SWT) has created human beings to be His *khulafā'* (vicegerents) in this world. The Qur'ān states: "It is He who has made you (His) vicegerent, inheritors of the earth" (Al-Qur'ān, 6:165). Nature and the environment are signs of Allāh's Greatness. It is thus not surprising that human relationship with the environment is closely intimate, because caring for the environment is treated as a religious obligation, ordained by Allāh (SWT). The Qur'ān (7:56) reads:

And do not do evil on the earth after it has been set in order, and call upon Him with fear and with hope. Surely the Mercy of Allāh is near to the doers of good.

The link between managing and conserving the environment as stressed in the *MqS* is also evident in the United Nation's sustainable development goals (SDGs). If the *MqS* aspects are ignored, there will neither be coherence nor orderliness, which results in massive loss (due to corruption or *fasād*) in the world and the hereafter. This illustrates the importance of human's efforts to ensure sustainability of the orderliness on earth (SDG) is achieved to protect the faith (*al-dīn*), human life (*al-nafs*) and future generations (*al-nasl*) through preservation of the eco-system (*al-māl*) with good reasoning (*al-'aql*).

Women's Empowerment and Waste Management

The objective of this chapter is to show the linkages among the "people" (women), the "medium" (*maqāsid al-sharī'ah*) and the "outcome" (sustainable socio-economy) in conserving the eco-system. This project is a result of collaboration between researchers from IIUM, University Sultan Zainal Abidin, Rimba Malaysia and Wild Asia. The project received a grant (IIUM/504/G/14/3/1/1/RMGS17-005-0031) from the Research Management Centre (RMC), IIUM. The researcher from IIUM's Department of Sociology and Anthropology (SOCA) became the principal researcher. All the researchers from the four entities took time to share the fieldwork burdens, and contributed towards the completion of the study. The fieldwork's schedules and timetables were set, and discussions were conducted via online and occasional face-to-face meetings.

The project is based on an ethnographic empirical fieldwork – a narrative of the eco-superwomen who never held official jobs but incidentally found their ways in contributing to their households' finances, whilst conserving the eco-systems. Generally, an ethnographic study is a study of people in their social setting. The researchers chose ethnographic study due to its strength in giving out detailed accounts of the targeted community being studied. Not only are cultural aspects studied, but as is the common trend, contemporary ethnographers also look for what may be considered as ordinary or mundane to those living within a community. For this project, these are women and the management of household wastes. The researchers applied participant observation and face-to-face interview sessions with the women collectors, recyclers and repurposers of household wastes. In this case, an emic (insiders' perspective or "folk narrations") and etic (outsiders' perspective or "analytic

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Spirituality and Sustainability

EXPERIENCES OF

THE INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

The International Islamic University Malaysia has, since 2018, redoubled its struggle to restore its wisdom, strengths, and dignity and promote comprehensive excellence. Hence, the University adopted the United Nations' sustainable development agenda as a complement to the University's vision and mission of Islamisation, Integration, Internationalisation and Comprehensive Excellence.

The book explains the ways in which the SDGs will provide a new strategy to apply the concept of Islamisation, which has long been the foundation of the IIUM. Consequently, the university's operations and facilities have been adjusted so that they become mediums in applying and showcasing a lifestyle that is sustainable. Everything in the university i.e. the curricular and extra-curricular courses, the research activities, and everyday operations in administrative offices and other places are geared towards sustainable development in line with the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah. Elements of sustainability are integrated in every aspect of the university's administration and, indeed, in teaching, research and community engagement. Consequently, the IIUM has adopted "Humanising Higher Education through maqāṣid al-sharī'ah and SDGs" as its official strategic mission.

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