

Islamic Civilisation and Poverty Alleviation in the Context of SDG 1: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The first goal of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is SDG 1: No Poverty. From the historical perspective of Islamic civilisation however, efforts to address poverty had already been undertaken by prominent Muslim leaders and caliphs in the administration of their societies and states. Although numerous studies have examined the efforts of Islamic civilisation to alleviate poverty, systematic synthesis of the mechanisms employed across different periods remains limited. This article therefore examines the occurrence of poverty in Islamic civilisation and analyses the approaches and mechanisms applied to alleviate it. A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach. The documented search used Google, Google Scholar, Scopus, ResearchGate and Academia and recorded keywords relating to the Sustainable Development Goals, sustainability, poverty, Islamic civilisation, zakat, waqf, sadaqah, nafaqah and Bayt al-Mal. Of 55 records initially identified, 19 studies were included in the final analysis. The review shows that poverty occurred across several periods of Islamic civilisation, but a range of institutional, fiscal and socio-economic mechanisms were employed to address it. These included the distribution of zakat, the development of Bayt al-Mal, encouragement of trade and productive economic activity, 'Ata' and Iqta'at, and the institutionalisation of waqf. The findings demonstrate that poverty alleviation formed an important component of governance and social welfare in Islamic civilisation well before the formulation of the contemporary SDG framework. These historical mechanisms offer a civilisational perspective for understanding the pursuit of SDG 1 and the broader objective of social justice.

Keywords: SDG 1; No Poverty; systematic literature review; Islamic civilisation; poverty alleviation

INTRODUCTION

Amid the challenges of globalisation, contemporary societies continue to pursue economic development and social progress in order to build sustainable futures. The Sustainable Development Goals 2030, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, provide an important framework for national policy and development planning. The framework addresses the major dimensions of contemporary development, including economic, social, political and environmental challenges (Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 2020). Malaysia has likewise expressed its commitment to the implementation of the 17 goals and 169 targets. Central to the SDG framework is the principle of "Leave No One Behind", which emphasises social justice and the inclusion of communities that might otherwise be excluded from development.

SDG 1 No Poverty, is the first goal in the framework and is closely connected with the achievement of the other SDGs. Poverty can weaken social relations and constrain economic development; consequently, effective approaches to poverty alleviation are fundamental to sustainable national development (Nur Natasha & Nurul Hidayat, 2023). The meaning of poverty, however, has been approached from different intellectual traditions. Malthus (1973), in his discussion of population, viewed poverty and related pressures within the dynamics of population growth. Sen (1983) approached poverty in terms of deprivation and inability, while Ravallion (1998) associated it with income below the poverty line and insufficient access to

basic daily needs. Suryawati (2005) further described poverty as multidimensional deprivation that limits an individual's capacity to participate productively in society.

Islamic scholarship distinguishes particularly between the categories of *faqir* and *miskin*. Wahbah al-Zuhayli (1985) and Muhammad al-Husayni (2001) describe the *faqir* as a person without sufficient work or property to meet basic needs and financial responsibilities, whereas the *miskin* may possess employment or income but remains unable to meet essential living requirements adequately. Al-Ghazali (1988) similarly associates *faqir* with the absence of property needed for subsistence, while Ibn Kathir (2000) describes the *miskin* as a person whose resources are insufficient for food, clothing and shelter. Within the Shafi'i and Hanbali traditions, the condition of the *faqir* is generally regarded as more severe than that of the *miskin* (al-Nawawiyy, 2002).

These perspectives show that poverty is a longstanding problem in human civilisation and has repeatedly required institutional and social responses. Islamic civilisation provides a particularly important historical field for examining such responses because poverty alleviation was addressed through mechanisms of governance, redistribution, social welfare and economic participation across different periods. Although individual studies have examined *zakat*, *Bayt al-Mal*, *waqf* and the economic policies of particular rulers, the literature remains dispersed across different historical settings and mechanisms. A systematic synthesis is therefore useful for identifying both the historical occurrence of poverty and the principal approaches through which Islamic civilisation sought to alleviate it.

Accordingly, this systematic literature review addresses two questions: (1) To what extent did poverty occur within Islamic civilisation? and (2) What approaches and mechanisms were applied within Islamic civilisation to alleviate poverty? The study aims to examine poverty across selected periods of Islamic civilisation and to analyse the principal mechanisms employed to address it. By synthesising these mechanisms in relation to SDG 1, the study highlights the historical contribution of Islamic civilisation to ideas and practices associated with poverty alleviation and social justice.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative systematic literature review (SLR) design to synthesise previous studies concerning poverty and poverty alleviation within Islamic civilisation. The historical scope extends from the period of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to the Ottoman era. The review focuses on literature that contributes directly to two questions: the occurrence of poverty within Islamic civilisation and the approaches or mechanisms employed to alleviate it. The selected studies were examined in relation to their historical context, research focus, methodology and principal findings.

The review was organised using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach, which structures the identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion stages of a systematic review (Page et al., 2021). The search sources reported for the review were Google, Google Scholar, Scopus, ResearchGate and Academia. The search terms recorded in the original review process were Sustainable Development Goals, sustainability, poverty, Islamic civilisation, *zakat*, *waqf*, *sadaqah*, *nafaqah* and *Bayt al-Mal*, following the general systematic-search approach described by Abur Hamdi et al. (2020).

Search-strategy reporting is limited to the information retained from the original review process. The available review record identifies the search sources and keywords listed above, but it does not preserve database-specific search strings, Boolean combinations, search fields, truncation rules, exact search dates or the number of records retrieved separately from each source. These details are therefore not reconstructed retrospectively in the present article. Reporting an inferred or newly created search syntax would not accurately represent the search that generated the 55 records used in this review. The methodology consequently reports the search process only to the level supported by the original review documentation.

Eligibility was determined primarily by relevance to poverty and to mechanisms or approaches employed within Islamic civilisation to address poverty. The historical and geographical scope was Islamic civilisation from the Prophetic period through the Rightly Guided Caliphs, Umayyad and Abbasid periods, to the Ottoman era. Studies were retained when their content contributed directly to the research questions and provided analysable information on the occurrence of poverty, poverty-alleviation mechanisms, or both. Records that did not address these substantive concerns were excluded during title, abstract and keyword screening or during full-text assessment.

The original review record does not document predetermined restrictions for publication period, language or publication type beyond the substantive and historical relevance criteria described above. No additional restrictions for these categories have been introduced retrospectively because doing so could misrepresent the basis on which the original corpus was assembled. Accordingly, the inclusion and exclusion criteria reported here distinguish documented eligibility criteria from review characteristics for which no formal a priori restriction was recorded.

A total of 55 records were initially identified across the five reported search sources. Screening of titles, abstracts and keywords reduced the set to 46 records. Twenty-five full-text records were subsequently assessed for eligibility, and 19 studies were retained for the final systematic review. The PRISMA sequence was therefore identification (n = 55), screening (n = 46), eligibility or full-text assessment (n = 25), and inclusion (n = 19). Because source-specific retrieval counts were not preserved in the original review record, the 55 identified records cannot be validly disaggregated by Google, Google Scholar, Scopus, ResearchGate and Academia.

The 19 included studies were synthesised qualitatively. The analysis compared their historical settings, research focus, methodology and principal findings and then grouped recurring evidence into two overarching themes: the occurrence and historical circumstances of poverty within Islamic civilisation, and the mechanisms employed to alleviate poverty. The latter were further synthesised into the principal clusters reported in the Results and Discussion.

Methodological limitations should therefore be considered when interpreting the review. Although the identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion counts are available, the absence of archived database-specific search strings, exact search dates, source-level retrieval counts and formally recorded a priori restrictions for language, publication period and publication type limits full reproducibility of the search. The synthesis and the final corpus of 19 studies are reported as conducted, without adding retrospective search information that was not part of the original review record.

Table 1: Eligibility criteria used in the systematic literature review.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Study relevance	Addresses poverty in Islamic civilisation, poverty-alleviation mechanisms, or both.	Does not contribute directly to the review questions.
Historical geographical scope	Islamic civilisation from the Prophetic period through the Ottoman era.	Outside the stated civilisational and historical scope.
Publication period	No formal a priori restriction documented in the original review record.	No retrospective restriction imposed.
Language	No formal a priori restriction documented in the original review record.	No retrospective restriction imposed.
Publication type	No formal a priori restriction documented in the original review record.	No retrospective restriction imposed.
PRISMA stage	Number of records	
Identification	55	
Screening	46	
Eligibility / full-text assessment	25	
Included in systematic review	19	

RESULTS

Nineteen studies met the final inclusion criteria. The reviewed literature spans the period of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, and the Ottoman era. The studies were analysed according to their historical context, research focus, methodology and principal findings. All 19 studies employed qualitative approaches. The synthesis identified two overarching themes: the occurrence and historical circumstances of poverty within Islamic civilisation, and the mechanisms employed to alleviate poverty. Seven studies addressed the first theme, while 18 discussed one or more poverty-alleviation mechanisms. The overlap indicates that several studies considered both the existence of poverty and the institutional or policy responses to it.

Study	Focus	Principal finding
Ahmad Izzuddin (2018)	Prophetic strategies for state stability	The Prophet's political, economic and social strategies contributed to state stability and enabled people to move beyond poverty.
Hussein 'Azeemi, Muhamad Firdaus & Azman Ab Rahman (2019)	Empowerment of the poor based on the hadith of the Ansari man	Seven strategies were identified: basic-needs provision, accessibility, capacity screening, financial intermediation, liquidity, technical support, and education and awareness.
Azwar Iskandar & Khaerul Aqbar (2020)	'Umar ibn al-Khattab's zakat distribution policy	Distribution beyond the collection locality, attention to the effective cause in determining beneficiaries, and prioritisation of zakat and sadaqah for the poor.
Muhammad Ridho (2021)	Umayyad economic and administrative reform	Monetary reform and strengthened zakat administration under 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan and 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz contributed to economic development and poverty reduction.
Ahmet Serdar (2015)	Waqf and Ottoman economic development in Western Thrace	Waqf supported basic services including education, healthcare and public kitchens and was associated with improved conditions among poorer groups.
Mehmet Bulut & Cem Korkut (2019)	Ottoman cash waqf as an alternative financial system	Cash waqf functioned as a welfare and interest-free financing mechanism, including microcredit for poor entrepreneurs and small businesses.
Kamal Faezi & Ermy Azziaty (2020)	Economic resources under the Prophet in Madinah	Islamic economic governance emphasised Qur'an and Sunnah, social justice, the rights of the poor and equitable distribution of wealth.
M. Kamal Hadi (2021)	Poverty management under 'Umar ibn al-Khattab	Economic planning and Bayt al-Mal administration involving zakat, jizyah, kharaj and 'ushr were central to poverty management.
Muhammad Assyifaa, Mohamad Hilmi & Mohd Saifuddin (2021)	Bayt al-Mal from the Prophetic period to the Rightly Guided Caliphs	Bayt al-Mal developed alongside territorial expansion and supported the poor, including through debt settlement.
Mohd Soberi & Mohd Mahyeddin (2018)	Zakat distribution under the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs	Zakat distribution became more systematic after the Hijrah and was further institutionalised through Bayt al-Mal and distribution guidelines.
Hamizul, Faisal @ Ahmad Faisal & Adibah (2018)	Innovations in zakat collection under 'Umar ibn al-Khattab	Fourteen innovations in zakat collection were identified, reflecting adaptive fiscal administration.
Nur Ainul, Shamsul Azhar & Ermy Azziaty (2020)	Waqf in the Ottoman Empire, 15th–17th centuries	Waqf generated broad social benefits, including housing support for the poor and vulnerable.
Nur Fadillah & Roziah Sidik @ Mat Sidek (2021)	The Ottoman külliye	The külliye integrated religious, educational, social and commercial functions; its imaret provided free food to the poor.
Desi Andriani et al. (2023)	Islamic economic system	Zakat and Bayt al-Mal were important components of

	under the Abbasids	the state economy and social welfare.
Agussalim Rahman et al. (2021)	Poverty alleviation under ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz	Poverty-alleviation strategies were reported as highly effective, alongside infrastructure and economic measures.
Lahsen Oubdia & Abdessamad Raghbib (2018)	Sukuk-waqf and public finance	Sukuk-waqf was presented as a sustainable Shariah-compliant financing instrument applicable to public expenditure.
M Ashraf & M Omar (2017)	Zakat and poverty alleviation	The literature supports the role of zakat in addressing poverty across several Muslim societies.
Md Yousuf & Fahima Khanom (2014)	Cash waqf and contemporary poverty reduction	Cash waqf can generate investment income for socio-economic development and poverty alleviation.
Suwandi Simangunsong & Mohd Syakir (2021)	Islamic leadership of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab	Justice, concern for the people and firmness shaped leadership responses, including contextual ijthad during poverty-related emergencies.

Table 2: Synthesis of the 19 studies included in the systematic literature review.

DISCUSSION

Poverty Within Islamic Civilisation

Seven of the reviewed studies describe situations of poverty across different periods of Islamic civilisation. Ahmad Izzuddin (2018) and Kamal Faezi and Ermy Azziaty (2020) discuss poverty during the Prophetic period, particularly among the Muhajirun who migrated from Makkah to Madinah and left much of their property behind. Some migrants therefore undertook low-paid work to sustain themselves. The example of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib receiving a handful of dates for watering date palms illustrates the economic vulnerability experienced by some members of the early Muslim community. The literature nevertheless presents the Prophetic administration as responding to these circumstances through wider political, economic and social measures.

Poverty continued to be recorded during the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Mohd Soberi and Mohd Mahyeddin (2018) indicate that poverty remained during the caliphate of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq but declined in subsequent periods, particularly under ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab. Suwandi Simangunsong and Mohd Syakir (2021) illustrate ‘Umar’s concern for the poor through the account of his assistance to a hungry family, while M. Kamal Hadi (2021) associates poverty in this period partly with an economy dependent on agriculture and livestock and with episodes of severe hardship.

The reviewed literature also identifies poverty in later Islamic polities. Muhammad Ridho (2021) discusses the Umayyad period, especially the reforms of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, whose administration is portrayed as substantially reducing poverty through welfare and fiscal measures. Nur Ainul, Shamsul Azhar and Ermy Azziaty (2020) discuss poverty in the Ottoman context, including conditions in Constantinople around the period of its conquest by Sultan Mehmed II. Taken together, the seven studies demonstrate that Islamic civilisation was not historically free from poverty. Rather, poverty emerged under different political, economic and social circumstances, while the distinctive feature highlighted by the literature is the range of responses developed to address it.

Poverty-Alleviation Mechanisms in Islamic Civilisation

Eighteen of the 19 studies discuss mechanisms used to address poverty. The synthesis shows that these mechanisms were not confined to direct charitable assistance. They encompassed redistribution, access to productive assets, fiscal administration, economic participation, public welfare institutions and long-term social infrastructure. Five principal clusters emerge from the reviewed literature: ‘Ata’ and Iqta‘at together with empowerment measures; zakat; trade and productive economic activity; Bayt al-Mal; and waqf.

‘Ata’, Iqta‘At and Empowerment

Ahmad Izzuddin (2018) describes ‘Ata’ as a form of state allocation to the population that could include cash, gold, silver, agricultural produce, livestock or other goods held by the public treasury. Distribution was made according to particular criteria and individual circumstances. Iqta‘at, meanwhile, involved the allocation of land for purposes such as residence and agriculture. These mechanisms demonstrate an approach that combined immediate material support with access to productive resources. Hussein ‘Azeemi, Muhamad Firdaus and Azman Ab Rahman (2019), drawing on the hadith of the Ansari man, identify a broader empowerment model encompassing the fulfilment of basic needs, accessibility of leadership, assessment of financial capacity, financial intermediation, liquidity, technical support, and education and awareness. The combined emphasis is therefore not merely on relief, but also on enabling individuals to become economically independent.

Zakat as a Redistributive Mechanism

Zakat is the most frequently discussed poverty-alleviation mechanism in the reviewed literature. Kamal Faezi and Ermy Azziaty (2020) emphasise its importance during the Prophetic period, while M Ashraf and M Omar (2017) identify zakat as a major instrument for sustaining the poor. Mohd Soberi and Mohd Mahyeddin (2018) trace the development of zakat distribution from the period before the Hijrah to a more clearly regulated and systematic system after the Hijrah and under the Rightly Guided Caliphs. The establishment and development of Bayt al-Mal further strengthened its administration.

The literature also shows that zakat administration was responsive to changing circumstances. Azwar Iskandar and Khaerul Aqbar (2020) discuss ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab’s distribution policies, including the treatment of locality and beneficiary eligibility. Hamizul, Faisal @ Ahmad Faisal and Adibah (2018) identify 14 innovations in zakat collection under ‘Umar, demonstrating the use of ijtihad in fiscal administration. Muhammad Ridho (2021) highlights the strengthening of zakat under ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, while Desi Andriani et al. (2023) identify zakat as an important pillar of social welfare during the Abbasid period. Across these studies, zakat emerges as an institutional mechanism for redistribution, social justice and the reduction of inequality.

Trade and Productive Economic Activity

The third mechanism concerns the encouragement of trade and productive economic activity. The literature does not portray poverty alleviation solely as redistribution after poverty has occurred; it also highlights the creation of opportunities for individuals to generate income. Agussalim Rahman et al. (2021) describe how ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz supported economic activity through infrastructure such as bridges, transport links and roads, thereby facilitating trade and increasing opportunities for productive participation. This approach complements the empowerment principles identified in the Prophetic model, in which assistance was linked to the capacity to work and achieve greater economic independence.

Bayt Al-Mal and Public Welfare Administration

Bayt al-Mal constituted an important institutional mechanism for managing public revenue and social welfare. Muhammad Assyifaa, Mohamad Hilmi and Mohd Saifuddin (2021) trace its development from the Prophetic period through the Rightly Guided Caliphs and note functions that included assistance to the poor and the settlement of debts. Its institutional structure became more developed as the Muslim polity expanded. M. Kamal Hadi (2021) similarly describes Bayt al-Mal under ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab as a central institution that managed revenue from sources including zakat, jizyah, kharaj, ‘ushr, khumus, fay’, rikaz and loans. The establishment of diwans associated with social assistance illustrates the increasing administrative organisation of welfare. In the reviewed literature, Bayt al-Mal therefore appears not simply as a treasury but as a mechanism linking public finance with distributive and social responsibilities.

Waqf and Long-Term Social Infrastructure

The final major mechanism is waqf. The Ottoman literature in particular demonstrates the breadth of waqf as a social and economic institution. Nur Ainul, Shamsul Azhar and Ermy Azziaty (2020) describe waqf assets ranging from shops and manufacturing activities to public baths and bazaars, with revenues supporting social needs including housing for the poor. Ahmet Serdar (2015) shows the contribution of waqf in Western Thrace to social and educational institutions such as schools, mosques and student accommodation. These examples indicate that waqf could provide sustained social services rather than only one-off assistance.

Cash waqf further expanded the economic role of the institution. Mehmet Bulut and Cem Korkut (2019) describe Ottoman cash waqf as an alternative financial mechanism capable of providing interest-free financing and microcredit, including support for poor entrepreneurs and small-scale businesses. Md Yousuf and Fahima Khanom (2014) similarly show how returns from cash waqf could be directed towards poor workers, education, health and sanitation, orphanages, infrastructure, job creation and income-generating projects. Lahsen Oubdia and Abdessamad Raghieb (2018) extend this discussion through the sukuk-waqf instrument as a Shariah-compliant approach to public financing.

The Ottoman külliye illustrates how these functions could be integrated spatially and institutionally. Nur Fadillah and Roziah Sidik @ Mat Sidek (2021) describe the külliye as a complex incorporating religious, educational, social and cultural functions. Its imaret or dar al-it'am operated as a soup kitchen providing free food to the poor and travellers. Waqf therefore emerges from the reviewed literature as both a redistributive institution and a mechanism for sustaining public goods, social infrastructure and economic participation over the longer term.

Islamic Civilisational Mechanisms and SDG 1

When considered in relation to SDG 1, the reviewed mechanisms reveal several recurring principles: the protection of basic needs, redistribution of wealth, institutional responsibility for vulnerable groups, support for productive activity, access to financing and the provision of social infrastructure. The historical terminology and institutional forms differ from the contemporary SDG framework, and the review does not suggest that historical Islamic institutions were designed in response to modern SDG targets. Rather, the evidence shows that poverty alleviation and social welfare were established concerns within Islamic governance long before the formulation of the SDGs. This provides a civilisational perspective through which contemporary discussions of No Poverty may be understood, particularly in Muslim societies seeking to connect sustainable development with their historical and institutional traditions.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review demonstrates that poverty occurred across several periods of Islamic civilisation and arose under different historical circumstances. The significance of the reviewed literature lies not in presenting Islamic civilisation as a society without poverty, but in showing that Muslim rulers and institutions developed multiple responses to poverty and social vulnerability.

The 19 studies reviewed identify a broad set of poverty-alleviation mechanisms. These include 'Ata' and Iqta'at, empowerment strategies, zakat distribution and collection, encouragement of trade and productive activity, the development of Bayt al-Mal, and the institutionalisation of waqf in forms that supported social services, financing and public infrastructure. Taken together, these mechanisms show that poverty alleviation was approached through both immediate redistribution and longer-term measures intended to strengthen economic participation and social welfare.

In the context of SDG 1, the findings indicate that the concern with eliminating or reducing poverty has deep historical precedents within Islamic civilisation. These precedents were grounded in Islamic sources and translated into administrative, fiscal and social institutions across different periods. The experience of

Islamic civilisation therefore provides historical lessons for contemporary efforts to pursue poverty alleviation, social justice and sustainable development while preserving the relevance of civilisational knowledge in present-day policy discussions.

The findings should nevertheless be read alongside the review's search-reporting limitations, particularly the absence of archived database-specific search strings, exact search dates and source-level retrieval counts. These details were not reconstructed because they were not preserved in the original review record.

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