

# The Role of *Zakat* in Establishing Social Welfare and Economic Sustainability

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**Abstract:** *Zakat* is among the most important systems bestowed for mankind in an Islamic order. *Zakat*'s functions, natures and structures are among the systems that lightened the beauty of Islam and its compassion towards establishing a sustainable development for mankind. Hence it becomes imperative to elucidate the basic tenets of Islam and to highlight *zakat* as basic institution of social order. *Zakat* is enshrined to serve two major purposes; it is among Islamic principles and ideology which makes it compulsory upon every able Muslim, and to play an active in social life of Muslim society. This study aims to examine the role of the *zakat* institution in creating a collective social security scheme for mutual help/sympathy among Muslim societies. the researcher employs qualitative method of research, reviewing the traditional and contemporary Islamic sources to also explicate the significance of *zakat* as an institution, elaborate impact of *zakat* on social life of Muslim society as it is the basic theme of the study. The studies is significant in creating awareness about *zakat*'s role among all sections of society particularly intellectual, elites and opinion leaders and to promote further research about the impact of *zakat* on social life of Muslim society so that *zakat* an institution is established in Muslim countries.

**Keywords:** Establishing Social Welfare and Economic Sustainability, social life of Muslim society.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Zakat* is an integral part of the Islamic economic system based on the Islamic teachings and it is aiming at economic wellbeing of the Muslim communities, universal brotherhood and equitable distribution of income. It is designed to establish a community in which every individual or group is committed to social justice, equity and freedom. Islamic economic systems are designed not only to attain social wellbeing but rather to gain piety and increase *Iman* in cognizance with the concept of "*maqasid al-shar'iyah*" (Chapra, 2006).

Many studies have discussed the objectives in establishing a sound society and improve social wellbeing among communities. Although, the concept of their views regarding the objectives of *zakat* varies according each writers area of interest, they concluded that if systematic *zakat* management is ensured, *zakat* will play a significant role in maintaining social wellbeing among the society.

### 1.1- The *Zakat* Obligation:

*Zakat* is defined as a compulsory alms paid by rich Muslims upon acquiring a certain amount of wealth called *nisab*, given to particular category of people called *asnaf*. Muslim jurists from the classical to contemporary times have agreed on the obligation of *zakat* as a religious obligation (al-Kasani 1986) and (al-Shaukani 1281H). Therefore discussion on the obligation of *zakat* will focus on the classical scholar's views over relevant tradition of *zakat* in the *Quran* and *Sunnah*.

The Obligation of *zakat* is affirmed by the *Quran* where Allah commands the Prophet to collect *zakat* from the rich among the believers and distribute it to the poor. Allah says:

*"Of their wealth, take alms, that so thou mightest purify and sanctify them; and pray on their behalf. Verily thy prayers are a source of security for them: And Allah is One Who heareth and knoweth. "(Al-Quran. Al-Taubah 9:103).*

Following this revelation, the Prophet practically sent Muaz bn Jabal to Yemen as a governor and instructs him saying:

*“You are going to (lead) people of the scriptures, (if you go) invite them to accept the shahadah; that there is no God but Allah and I am His Messenger; if they accept that, tell them that Allah has enjoined five prayers upon them during the days and nights. If they accept that, tell them He also enjoined sadaqah upon their wealth which will be taken from the rich and be given to the poor. If they accept that, refrain from laying hands upon their goods and fear the cry of the oppressed, for there no barrier between Allah and it.” (Ibn Rajab 1996).*

## 2. THE ROLES AND OBJECTIVES OF ZAKAT

*Zakat* is designed by Islam to achieve many roles in the life of Muslims and in some instances non-Muslims as well, a critical study of articles and papers on *zakat* helps the researcher arrived at following themes in respect to *zakat*'s role and objectives:

### a- Elimination of Poverty:

*Zakat* serves as a preventive mechanism against poverty, Hairunnizam and Radiah, (2010) adopted the framework by Mikami and Inoguchi, (2008) who studies cause and effects of political systems as perceived by the people. Their finding indicates that *zakat* is a unique measure introduced by Islam with a view to abolish poverty by making it social obligation on the rich.

Study carried by Riaz (2007), indicates poverty alleviation as objective that can be achieved via *zakat* distribution. He stressed that *zakat* could be used as part of long term strategy for poverty alleviation. Similar opinion is maintained by Fuadah et al. (2013) where it relates that *zakat* could free recipients from poverty and improve their living standards.

An empirical study by Shirazi and Amin, (2006), indicates that countries have different policies and strategies regarding poverty alleviation, but insist that OIC member countries could use the provision of *zakat* and *sadaqah* to eliminate poverty. Their findings also show that 15 out of 37 economies require only small amount of resource for poverty alleviation.

However, there are other arguments regarding whether the proceeds alone can work in elimination of poverty. This will be discussed later in the study.

### b- Purification of Soul:

*Zakat* serves as a medium in which the givers soul is purified from impurities, such as greed and excessive love of wealth. A human being is naturally created to love wealth excessively, the Qur'an 70: 19 – 24 says:

*“Truly man was created very impatient, Fretful when evil touches him; And niggardly when good reaches him;- Not so those devoted to Prayer;- Those who remain steadfast to their prayer; And those in whose wealth is are cognised right” For the (needy) who asks and him who is prevented (for some reason from asking);*

Patmawati (2006) maintained that *zakat* purifies the heart of the rich from selfishness and greed and makes him play a greater role in the society. Abdullah and Abdulquddos (2013) maintained that *zakat* creates soul purification from selfishness, greed and hatred, *zakat* saves the giver from self-indulgence and ego-centricity.

Ibn al-Qayyim, (1994) upholds that *zakat* could help in purifying the souls of the giver.

### c- Sincerity of Faith:

Through the practice of *zakat*, the sincerity of the Muslim faith towards his God is understood. By giving out *zakat* the level of righteousness and piety of a Muslim increases (Fuadah et. al 2013). *Zakat* is also referred to as *sadaqah* derived from the word *sidq* which means truth. Hence, the truthfulness of the *zakat* giver can be assessed by proper calculation of his assets with view to observe religious duty by giving it to the poor (Abdullah and Abdulquddos 2013). *Qur'an* supports this view in *AlNaml* 27:2-3;

*“It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness- to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and give Zakat (regular charity); to fulfill the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God fearing” Al-Quran. Al-Baqarah 2:177).*

**d- Obedience to Law:**

Another important theme emerged from the review is the role of *zakat* in showing the level of the givers readiness to abide by Allah's injunctions. This is established in findings of a survey carried by Abdullah and Abdul Quddus (2011), where many *zakat* givers asserts that they are only observing *zakat* to fulfill the injunctions of Allah upon them as Muslim's. This is in line with Allah's command where He says;

*"O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority"*

**e- Redistribution of Wealth:**

*Zakat* helps in wealth redistribution among the communities and prevents accumulation of wealth in the hands of few. Hairunnizam and Radiah (2010) reveal that by giving *zakat* redistribution of wealth is ensured to avoid inequality prevalence. Patmawati, (2006), stressed that *zakat* does not only ensure social justice in the society but also mobilizes and makes resources available for the poor. *Zakat* also improves the production capacity of the Muslim community (Muhammad *et. al* 2013).

This is supported by *Qur'anic* verse where Allah says;

*"This (Wealth) may not circulate solely among the rich from among you"*

**f- Generosity:**

Man is asked by Allah to be generous and clear their hearts against any act of greed, Allah says;

*"And whoso is saved from his (own) avarice such are they who are successful"*

*Zakat* helps man to evade personal interest and selfish desires and persuade man towards giving *zakat* as financial aid to less privileged and destitute (Suleiman 2003).

**g- Social Justice and Security:**

*Zakat* established social justice, eliminates strife and social tension. Patmawati, (2006) relates that *zakat* promotes social justice helps in promoting the fiber of the society and engenders political stability. In another similar view; Suhaili and Nur Azzah, (2009), maintained that *zakat* ensures the social justice designed for every Muslim community. In respect to this assertion, Allah says in the *Qur'an*;

*"The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, pay Zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise" (A-Quran. Al-Taubah 9:71).*

**h- Fulfillment of Religious Obligation:**

It has been mentioned earlier in the definition of *zakat* above that *zakat* is a compulsory act; therefore every rich Muslim must perform *zakat*. Failure to imply with *zakat* provisions causes Allah's anger as will be discussed later. The prophet (S.A.W.) is reported to have said:

Abdullah bin Omar narrated that the messenger of Allah, (May peace and benediction of Allah be upon Him) said:

*"I have been ordered to fight against people until they testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah and until they perform the prayers and pay the zakat, and if they do so they will have gained protection from me for their lives and property, unless [they do acts that are punishable] in accordance with Islam, and their reckoning will be with Allah the Almighty" [Al-Bukhari & Muslim].*

Abdullah and Abdul Quddus (2011) maintained that believing in *zakat* as religious obligation is among the reasons for the strict observance of *zakat* by the givers.

**i- Reduce Inequality:**

*Zakat* prevents social welfare loss and reduce inequality among communities. Kusuma and Sukmana, (2010), reveal that reducing income inequality in socio-economic framework is among the major objectives of *zakat*. In their empirical study, they identified three stages of distribution schemes as; pre-distribution stage, post-distribution stage and redistribution in the Islamic views. Their finding shows two important issues; equitable distribution to the poor and needy could result in sound opportunities in the economy and that there are positive changes light growth and inequalities.

Patmawati, (2006), also believes that equitable distribution of *zakat* by filling the gap of the poor will help in reducing income inequality and promotes social wellbeing.

#### **j- Reconciliation of the Heart of the Poor Against the Rich:**

Human being is created with natural envy and jealous towards one another. Giving *zakat* abolishes the natural envy of the poor against the rich. *Zakat* brings the rich and the poor closer to one another and ensures the real spirit of brotherhood enjoined by Islam Abdullah and Abdulquddos (2013). *Quran* has mentioned performance of prayer and observance of *zakat* as pre requisite for Islamic brotherhood, the *Qur'an* says;

*“Your (real) friends are (no less than) Allah, His Messenger, and the (fellowship of) believers,- those who establish regular prayers and regular charity, and they bow down humbly (in worship). As to those who turn (for friendship) to Allah, His Messenger, and the (fellowship of) believers,- it is the party of Allah that must certainly triumph” (Al-Quran. Al-Maidah 5:55-56)*

Patmawati, (2006) and Farah et. al (2012), reveals that *zakat* is among the actions that help in reconciling the heart of the poor from ill-feelings and envy against the rich. If the poor is aware that he has a definite share from the wealth of the rich, he will help protect the rich and be prayerful for the increase in his wealth.

#### **k- Gratitude and Thankfulness to Allah:**

*Zakat* gives the opportunity to show how thankful and grateful the rich Muslims are towards Allah; this is achieved by giving out a simple portion among the bounties of wealth given to them by Allah. A person who pays *zakat* is certainly showing gratitude to the eternal Giver. Fu'adah et al (2013) relates that while prayers and other physical worships express gratitude to Allah for creation, *zakat* serves to express to gratitude for the material gifts given to us by God.

By giving *zakat* and showing gratitude to Allah, He promised the *zakat* givers of paradise. Qur'an 23: 1- 4 says;

*“The believers must (eventually) win through,- Those who humble themselves in their prayers; Who avoid vain talk; Who are active in deeds of charity;”*

#### **l- Promoting Self Respect:**

*Zakat* is a religious obligation on the rich Muslims and a person that is given *zakat* is seen as a person observing his religious duties, which if he fails to observe he is liable for punishment and wrath of God. However, a person that pays *zakat* earns special respect and recognition among the society by assisting the poor (Abdullah and Abdulquddos 2013). In order to maintain this status Allah warned the *zakat* and *sadaqah* givers not destroy their good deeds by show-ups and bragging, *Qur'an* Says;

*“O you who believe! Render not vain your almsgiving by reproach and injury”*

#### **m- Discouraging Beggary:**

Beggary is unwanted attitude in Islam and Muslims are urged to refrain from begging. The Prophet (S.A.W.) is reported to have said;

*“Whoever begs from people so as to accumulate riches, he is asking for live coal (fire) from Hell, so let him ask for a lot or a little”*

Recently, beggary becomes a menace facing many societies. In Kano state, beggary have become one of the most visible things in the markets, on streets, motor parks, filling stations and etc. (Abdullah and Abdulquddos 2013) reveals that *zakat* could help reduce beggary by helping the real poor people looking for help among beggars.

#### **n- Softens the Heart of the New Converts:**

*Zakat* is also seen as a means that helps in softening the heart of the new converts, it will pave him a way to understanding the true spirit and beauty of Islamic brotherhood. *Zakat* is also used to invite non-believers into the folds of Islam. Fuadah (2013) quoted Qardawi (2006) to argue that *zakat* can be given to a group of non-believers especially when they show interest to accept Islam. According to Fu'adah this is justified considering that the Prophet (S.A.W.) invites Safwan to Islam but Safwan refuses until after the prophet gave him Camels as a gift in the battle of *hunayn*.. This attitude attracts Safwan and becomes a good Muslim. This is believed to be evident in showing how *zakat* could play a better role if given to the people whose heart is inclined to Islam.

### 3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Considering what this study tries to establish in showing the role of zakat in establishing social welfare and economic development, this study suggests that the zakat should be institutionalized and properly managed by the Islamic states and various Muslim communities. The use of charity organizations will be helpful in places where there is no Islamic state. Similarly, local zakat committees should be constituted at the lower level, all zakat activities is to be overseen by the shariah committees who to be responsible for ensuring shariah compliance and avoidance of any misapplications. This use of Electronic and print media, Muslim Scholars and *Khateeb*s (Religious Scholars) may join hands to aware the people about the importance of zakat and its social, moral, economic and spiritual impact on the society.

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