

# Poverty, Wealth, and Social Responsibility: Empowering youth for change

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## Abstract:

The paper highlights the Islamic worldview on poverty, wealth, and the concept of social responsibility, relating to how all these can aid the empowerment of youth, using qualitative method. The paper relies on the Qur'an, Hadith, and other literatures to discuss the Islamic worldview on poverty and wealth, which reveals how Islam frowns at fear of poverty, the essence of youth empowerment, and the view of Islam on social responsibility as religious obligation. It proposes practical ways of motivating the youth towards fulfilling both individual and societal obligations as outlined by Islam, borrowing leaves from NASFAT's various initiatives for youth training, education, and skills acquisition. The paper recommends that various religious organizations should endeavor to productively engage their youths, as the aphorism goes that "the idle hands are the devils' workshops."

**Key words:** Poverty, Wealth, Social Responsibility, Youth Empowerment, NASFAT

## Introduction

Wealth and poverty are recurring concepts in Islamic discourse, each carrying specific ethical, social, and religious implications. Islam, being a way of life with scriptures that leave no issue untreated, makes seeking lawful (halal) wealth a responsibility of every Muslim. Anas ibn Malik reports that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Seeking the lawful is a duty upon every Muslim" (Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 12, Hadith 2138). As far as Islam is concerned, Muslims are taught not to fear poverty, but to place their trust in Allah, for the reason that Shaytan (Satan) uses fear of poverty to lead people astray: Satan frightens you with poverty and bids you to commit indecency, whereas Allah promises you His forgiveness and bounty. Allah is Munificent, All-Knowing (Qur'an 2:268).

## Islamic Teachings on Poverty and Wealth

Islam encourages seeking lawful sustenance, teaching that it is a trust and trial, realizing the fact that it is not an end by itself, but a means to an end,

by maintaining a focus on the afterlife. Wealth in Islam is seen not merely as material possession, but as a means of achieving higher spiritual goals. As narrated by Zayd ibn Thabit, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever is concerned about the world, Allah will disorder his affairs... but whoever is concerned about the Hereafter, Allah will settle his affairs and make him content in his heart" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 81, Hadith 18).

#### *Wealth in the Heart as Against Physical Possessions*

Wealth is fundamentally a state of the heart. As the Prophet said to Abu Dharr, "Wealth is in the heart, and poverty is in the heart. Whoever is wealthy in his heart will not be harmed, no matter what happens in the world" (Sahih Muslim, Hadith 1051). This principle frames the pursuit of wealth not as an end but as a means for community benefit and religious observance and also that the view of an individual on the concepts of wealth and poverty is a function of his mindset.

#### **Social Responsibility and Community Building**

**Social responsibility is viewed as an ethical or ideological theory than an entity, whether it is a government, corporation, organization, or individual, has responsibility to the society at large. This responsibility can be negative—meaning there is a responsibility to refrain from acting (resistance stance)—or positive—meaning that there is a responsibility to act beneficially (proactive stance). (Almasi 2010)**

Whereas, in Islam, according to Azzam (2018), the individual's responsibility for the community in Islamic societies and conversely the community's

responsibility for the individual are of primary magnitude, constituting a trust of life and the highest of its responsibilities, Little wonder therefore, that Islam introduced community worship, such as jum'ah and Eid prayers, and also encourages prayers generally in congregation, with congregational prayers having 27 more rewards. Islam also enjoins the group not to neglect the individual, obligating it to safeguard his various interests, to respect his rights and freedom, and to harmonize different interests.

The demonstration of the society to be a check and balance on individuals is captured aptly in the following two Hadith:

Narrated An-Nu'man bin Bashir: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "The example of the person abiding by Allah's orders and limits (or the one who abides by the limits and regulations prescribed by Allah) in comparison to the one who does wrong and violates Allah's limits and orders is like the example of people drawing lots for seats in a boat. Some of them got seats in the upper part, while the others in the lower part; those in the lower part had to pass by those in the upper one to get water, and that troubled the latter. One of them (i.e., the people in the lower part) took an ax and started making a hole in the bottom of the boat. The people in the upper part came and asked him, saying, 'What is wrong with you?' He replied, 'You have been troubled much by my (coming up to you), and I have to get water.' Now if they prevent him from doing that, they will save him and themselves, but if they leave him (to do what he wants), they will destroy him

and themselves." (Sahih Bukhari 2686) (Sunnah.com n.d.)

Moreover, Anas narrated that: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or he is an oppressed one. People asked, "O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)! It is all right to help him if he is oppressed, but how should we help him if he is an oppressor?" The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "By preventing him from oppressing others." (Bukhari 2444) (Sunnah.com n.d.)

Islamic teachings extend beyond personal piety and physical religious obligation; they go beyond the mosque, rather focusing heavily on social responsibility. The Qur'an (5:2) encourages cooperation in righteousness and piety, while warning against aiding in wrongdoing and hostility. Muslims cannot live in isolation; they are integral part the community, and neglecting their role in governance and development risks societal collapse, as warned in the Qur'an (8:25), and consequently debars them from even carrying out their religious obligations.

#### ***Fard al-'Ayn and Fard al-Kifayah (Individual and Societal/Communal Obligations)***

In the Islamic framework, according to Nawawi Abd-Allah (2007), obligations are divided into individual (fard al-'ayn) and societal (fard al-kifayah) duties. Every Muslim is responsible for performing their individual religious obligations, such as daily prayers and fasting. However, societal obligations, such as ensuring the availability of professionals and institutions that serve the community, are equally important.

He also mentions some major differences between the two concepts of individual and societal obligations:

(a) Individual obligations can be made up if missed. Societal obligations are exacting and cannot be made up if missed. A dying person who needs drugs and foods, a burning house, a car involved in an accident, etc.

(b) Individual obligations have predetermined times, places, or procedures.

Societal obligations are situationally based: qualifications and the number of professionals required depend on the realities on the ground and can change.

Khalaf (1996) noted that neglecting societal obligations can lead to collective punishment, even if individual duties are fulfilled.

#### ***Youth Empowerment and NASFAT Initiatives***

Nasrul-Lahi-l-Fatih Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) has undertaken various initiatives aimed at youth empowerment. These include skill acquisition programs, IT training, through collaborations like "Activate Cohort 1," and mentorship programs for young professionals.

A total of 52 youths were trained in various IT and other soft skills in the recently concluded Activate Cohort 1.

One notable example is Mr. Noibi's, the society's National Empowerment Secretary, who pledged employment opportunities for 200 youth during his 2-year tenure as an executive member of Nasfat, 27 of whom have already been placed in jobs, These were achieved within a few months of his

assumption of office in 2024, thereby, illustrating the tangible outcomes of NASFAT's interventions.

Furthermore, NASFAT's "Train-to-Fund" scheme, developed through its charitable wing, Nasfat Zakat and Sadaqah Agency (NAZAS), offers vocational training to youth, ensuring they acquire both technical skills and financial support to start their enterprises. Such initiatives align with the Islamic ethos of societal obligation and economic empowerment.

Similarly, for the youth who may be interested in becoming accountants, NASFAT organizes tutorial lessons to prepare its youngsters for the Accounting Technicians Exams; 15 of them participated in the exam diet of September 2024.

Also in 2024, 10 youth were sponsored in various skills at the Industrial Training Funds, Lagos, and they were all given start-up implements, courtesy of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Efforts have also commenced to train 1000 youth free of charge on modern teaching methods for one year, pay them a monthly stipend, and get them fixed up by various state teaching service commissions. This initiative, tagged "Recruit for Nigeria," planned in collaboration with an NGO, aimed at recruiting 1000 competent teachers for Nigeria.

In the area of impacting correct Islamic teachings that would promote peaceful co-existence and good interfaith relations, grooming potential Islamic scholars through the Train-the-Trainers' Course in Islam, Da'wah, and Dialogue (TTC), recently renamed, "Nurturing Your Faith" and others

## Conclusion

The Islamic perspective on wealth and poverty emphasizes balance—seeking lawful sustenance while focusing on spiritual growth and community development. Social responsibility is not optional, but a mandate, especially for the youth, who must be groomed to take leadership roles in ensuring the well-being of the larger society. NASFAT's initiatives provide a model for how religious organizations can actively contribute to youth empowerment and social development.

The teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah on recognition of youth's role in societal development and the importance of social responsibility were articulated in the paper.

The paper examined contemporary strategies employed by NASFA as a society for youth empowerment and how Islam offers a moral framework for achieving personal and collective prosperity. It is never regarded as something abominable to be wealthy in Islam. Seek, by means of the wealth that Allah has granted you, the Abode of the Hereafter, but forget not your share in this world and do good as Allah has been good to you, and do not strive to create mischief in the land, for Allah loves not those who create mischief (Q28:77).

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