

## **Food Security and Islamic Ethics**

### **Suggested Themes and Topics**

The question of sustainable food security has become one of the pressing challenges in our modern time, given the rising number of people hitting the starvation line in 2020 (estimated 265 million) and the steady increase of people suffering undernourishment (over 800 million). It is ironic to have this concern while hailing the flag of human rights and with 20 percent of food produced worldwide being wasted (Food Waste Index Report 2021). Of the most vulnerable groups facing the challenge of food deprivation are migrants and the displaced, be it a cause of migration or an outcome of migration. This issue raises many philosophical, ethical, social and political questions for the world's leading powers and organizations.

Religious traditions have always normatively called upon its adherents to support the poor and the needy, especially those in a state of hunger and starvation. Islam promotes this support in philosophical, moral and legal terms. The philosophy of life in Islam establishes four minimum rights for the living: food, clothing, water and shelter (Qur'an 20: 119-120). Morally, a believing Muslim, according to one Prophetic tradition, is no longer a believer, if he sleeps and his neighbor is hungry. In terms of Islamic legal rulings, rules of *zakah* and *sadaqah* have been detailed to leave no room for avoiding the rights of the poor and the needy of basic needs and RIGHTS. Providing food comes on the top of the list of these rights.

The proposed seminar intends to discuss the question of food security with three combined perspectives: the world response to the challenge of sustainable food security, the Islamic perspective in addressing food security concerns and the most vulnerable groups who face this issue, including women, children, migrants and the displaced.

#### **1. Food Security, Islamic Law and *Maqasid Al Shari'ah***

Within this theme, the seminar will discuss food security from Islamic law and *Maqasid Al Sharia* perspectives. The aim is to assess how the normative principles of *maqasid* promote human well-being in addressing food security issues. To do so, *maqasid* theories will be examined to analyze their relevance to food security issues and challenges. It is intriguing to observe how *maqasid* principles were redefined in the modern time to include "food security" as one of its principles. Furthermore, the question of how these theories were put into action in legal terms through jurisprudential rules or *fatwas* is asked to demonstrate to what extent theories were fulfilled on the ground and to what extent policy makers and civil society organizations can utilize these rulings to moralize the food security issue for their patrons and sympathizers.

#### **2. Food Security policies of Muslim countries**

This topic should cover how food security policies are formulated in Muslim countries. While food security strategies can increase the resilience of food systems in Muslim countries, many OIC countries have low rankings in food security, which exposes them to potential food crises. The topic will assess existing food policies and strategies in selected Muslim countries to identify best practices and gaps. What are food security ethics? What policy recommendations are required to enhance the formulation of food security policies in Muslim countries. The analysis should identify to what extent food security policies are informed by or based upon particular Islamic ethics.

### **3. Food Security and Islamic Finance**

This topic will analyze how Islamic finance can be leveraged to support food security strategies. As the principles of Islamic finance support development objectives generally, Islamic finance is well suited to food security projects. This topic will discuss how Islamic finance strategies and instruments have been, are, and can be used to mobilize financing for projects and strategies that address food security. This can include, for example investments in agriculture and food production in other countries.

### **4. Food Security, sustainable development and Islamic Ethics**

This topic will discuss the role of Islamic ethics in promoting food security and sustainable development. As sustainable development aims to achieve a better and sustainable future for all, the sustainable development goals (SDGs) include a significant number of interconnected objectives related to agriculture and food. On the other hand, integrating Islamic ethics in the elaboration of food security strategies helps achieve the objectives of equity and social justice. The topic will analyze how the interaction between these three concepts can promote human well-being.

### **5. Food Security and the Covid-19 Pandemic**

This topic will specifically discuss the implications of Covid-19 pandemic on food security in one or more Muslim-majority countries. It may be a case or comparative study. According to the World Bank, COVID-19 is estimated to have dramatically increased the number of people facing acute food insecurity in 2020. This topic will therefore discuss food security challenges during Covid-19 pandemic as well as the global strategies and initiatives deployed to mitigate them. The in-depth analysis of these initiatives can support the development of appropriate food policies to prevent food security crisis in future.

### **6. Food Security and migrant labour in the Gulf states**

The GCC countries have a large population of migrant workers. According to the international labor Organization (ILO), migrants in the six GCC States account for over 10 per cent of all migrants globally. Therefore, food accessibility for vulnerable population segments such as low-skill and low-income migrant workers requires further policy measures. Thus, the topic will discuss food security challenges for migrant workers in the Gulf States and mitigation measures to address them.

### **7. Food Security and gender challenges**

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) affirms that gender and food security are closely related with many studies showing that although there is a wide diversity in household production patterns, women in all regions play a predominant role in household food security through agricultural and food production. Therefore, it is important to understand and emphasize the role of gender to household food security. This topic will discuss food security and gender challenges in the context of Muslim countries. The aim is to

support the policy makers in the formulation of food security policies and programs targeting households.

## **8. Food Security and the role of key Muslim charity institutions**

This topic will discuss the role of charity institutions in mitigating food security challenges prior to and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Charity institutions have a critical role in developing support mechanisms for the most vulnerable populations. They usually leverage on the compassion of Muslim populations to mobilize financing in the form of donations that they allocate to charity activities. The topic will assess their role in supporting these populations during the recent covid-19 pandemic. The purpose is to identify best practices and innovative strategies that could further enhance their role in poverty alleviation.

## **9. Food Security and refugees**

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that global forced displacement has surpassed 80 million at mid-2020. The refugee population faces several challenges that include limited access to education, medical care and public food. Several countries in the region such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey host large populations of refugees, which require dedicated strategies for their presence in the population and address food insecurity issues. This topic will discuss the experience and policies of Muslim countries towards refugees before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The in-depth analysis of these experiences could impact the way policies are developed.

## **10. Food Security, nutrition, health and well-being in Muslim countries**

Food security is an important element in the multi-factorial systems analysis of health and well-being. Therefore, any strategies that aim to improve wellness should take into consideration the intersection between food security, nutrition, health and well-being. This topic assesses the impact of food security on nutrition, health and well-being in the populations of Muslim-majority countries. To do so, food security, health and nutrition indications in selected Muslim countries will be examined to assess their impact on the well-being of their populations.

## **11. Food Security and food wastage in Muslim countries**

In the recent 2021 UN Food Waste Index Report, it was revealed: “Twenty percent of all food bought by households, retailers, restaurants and other food services in 54 countries around the world was thrown away in 2019 — contributing to some 931 million tonnes of food waste and feeding climate change.” The Report also showed (with some reservations on measurement accuracy) that the Western Asian region (mainly Mashreq countries) has the highest average household food waste compared with all other regions of the world. This issue is a counter point to food security that begs for solutions in food waste prevention. How do Muslim households deal with food waste as something *haram* - in principle and in practice?