



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Sustainability of the Aquatic Environment in the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad- A New Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to scrutinize the texts of the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammed (SPM) and their stances on promoting the sustainability of the aquatic environment (AE). The article's value lies in its contribution to understanding the Prophet's concern for the AE resources and in emphasizing these concerns in both theoretical and practical terms, in a focused and independent manner. Accordingly, the article focuses on presenting the prophetic directives and stances that contribute to the sustainability of the AE through construction, expansion, purchase, or economical use, and explains the historical and qualitative features of these directives. The article has yielded several findings, among which is the SPM's focus on the development and sustainability of the AE resources, its emphasis that acts of public benefit are religiously praised and of an elevated status, its pioneering concept of water endowments, and its strict prohibition against wasting water in all activities and under all circumstances. Finally, the article presents a number of recommendations, including the importance of conducting detailed and focused studies on various environmental aspects in the SPM and the need for research that emphasizes innovation and practicality in presenting the SPM.



Mind Map of the Article

## INTRODUCTION

Reading the SPM, one can find an all-encompassing engagement with all aspects of life and a positive interaction with every facet of the universe. This includes the SPM's directives and stances on the environment surrounding humans, particularly concerning the AE. The AE holds significant importance in Islamic law, as evidenced by the fact that Allah informs us in the Holy Quran that He created all living beings from water (The Qur'an, 21:30). This emphasis on water is further underscored by its role as the primary means of purification in Islam, a concept clearly indicated in the Holy Qur'an as well (The Qur'an, 5:6). The centrality of purification in Islam, which is crucial for the realization of faith, is highlighted by the saying of Prophet Muhammad, "Cleanliness is half of faith" (Muslim, 1334 AH, no.223, vol.1/p.139).

In the SPM's texts, a clear interest is articulated in the various elements of the AE—both in the context of construction and development, and regarding the assurance of survival and continuity. Such an emphasis naturally progresses toward the sustainability of the AE resources, which constitutes a fundamental aspect of what is contemporarily termed (environmental sustainability).

While previous studies have extensively addressed the subject of water within Islamic teachings, I argue that a fresh reading of the SPM's texts and stances on the AE is needed. This will allow to highlight, focus on, examine, and analyze their contents more thoroughly. Thus, my objective is to cast a new light on these texts, to scrutinize and elucidate their contents, and to reveal their historical precedence, qualitative distinction, and humanitarian nobility.

### Definitions

#### Sustainability

Experts have defined sustainability in linguistic terms as the pursuit of permanence, continuity, and survival of something (Academy of the Arabic Language, 1972, vol.1/ p.305).

#### Environment

Experts have provided various definitions with similar meanings, among which I select the definition of the environment as "all the phenomena and physical elements that surround humans in this universe" (Al-Najjar, 1428 AH, p.297). This inherently includes the basic elements of the human environment, such as water, plants, animals, and urban structures.

#### The AE

The AE can be defined as a crucial component of the overall environment, encompassing various resources from which water is available or can be obtained, such as wells, rivers, and seas. In its various forms, this environment represents a fundamental human right (i.e., the right to water), which was defined by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2002 as "the right of everyone to have access to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible, and affordable water for personal and domestic uses" (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2012, p.1).

## **Sustainability of the AE in the SPM**

Based on the foregoing discussion, I define the sustainability of the AE in the SPM as the sayings, directives, and stances established in the SPM aimed at ensuring the continuity and maintaining the sustainability of all aspects and resources of the AE environment.

### **Construction and Ownership of the AE Resources in the SPM**

#### **Construction of the AE Resources in the SPM**

Prophet Muhammad encouraged finding and developing sustainable AE resources, stating that the reward for such actions is not limited to the lifespan of the doer but continues to accrue to him/her even after death. This serves as a significant incentive to undertake societal and environmental initiatives. In this regard, the saying of Prophet Muhammad is relevant, “There are seven deeds whose rewards continue for a servant in his grave after his death: imparting knowledge, digging a canal, drilling a well, planting a tree, building a mosque, bequeathing copies of the Qur'an, or leaving behind a child who seeks forgiveness for him after his death” (Al-Mundhiri, 2000, no.73, vol.1/p. 140).

By studying this prophetic Hadith, a number of points can be highlighted.

Firstly, among the seven deeds mentioned in the Hadith, two are directly concerned with the sustainability of water resources: (1) canal digging, which involves creating a path for a canal to aid people in their agriculture and other needs; and (2) drilling a well to supply water for drinking and other purposes.

Secondly, the inclusion of tree planting among the seven deeds underlines Prophet Muhammad's concern for the sustainability of another vital environmental element—the plant environment. This indicates that the SPM's interest in the sustainability of various environmental elements is systematic and intentional, rather than being merely coincidental.

Thirdly, Prophet Muhammad prioritizes acts of public benefit of society over those whose benefit is limited to their doer. The emphasis on imparting knowledge, digging canals, drilling wells, and planting trees precedes the mention of a child seeking forgiveness from Allah for their parent, which affirms the significance of the principles of public benefit and community service in the SPM.

Lastly, Prophet Muhammad also prioritizes acts of public benefit and environmental sustainability over those that seem limited to worship alone. This is evident in the deeds highlighted in the Hadith, such as building mosques and bequeathing copies of the Quran. In my view, this suggests three important points:

- Islam is engaged with all facets of human life.
- Acts of public benefit are fundamental to the religion and integral to the Islamic teachings.
- Acts of community service and environmental sustainability are among the good deeds for which the doer receives reward both in life and after death, provided they are done purely for the sake of Allah. It is also worthy of mention that good deeds are not confined to prayer, building mosques, and bequeathing copies of the Quran.

**Table 1: Classification of the Seven Deeds Mentioned in the Saying of Prophet Muhammad**

No.	The Deed	Direct Relatedness to Environmental Sustainability	Type of Environmental Sustainability
1	Imparting Knowledge	(✖)	(✖)
2	Canal Digging	(✓)	AE
3	Well Drilling	(✓)	AE
4	Tree Planting	(✓)	Plant Environment
5	Mosque Building	(✖)	(✖)
6	Bequeathing Copies of the Qur'an	(✖)	(✖)
7	Child's Seeking of Forgiveness from Allah for Their Parents after Their Death	(✖)	(✖)

The classification presented in Table 1 above is based on deeds that are directly and explicitly related to environmental sustainability. It is important to note, however, that some deeds, while not listed as such, may still indirectly and implicitly contribute to environmental sustainability, such as the act of imparting knowledge. In addition, two observations can be made from the table.

Firstly, the number of deeds directly related to environmental sustainability in general is (3 out of 7), which corresponds to a percentage of (42.8%).

Secondly, the number of deeds directly related to the AE alone is (2 out of 7), which corresponds to a percentage of (28.6%).

### **Ownership of the AE Resources in the SPM**

In the SPM, there is an incident that highlights the Prophet's keen interest in the sustainability of the AE through ownership by purchase, subsequently converting it into a waqf (i.e., endowment) available to everyone free of charge, and accessible for use by all, not only the owner. Thus, Prophet Muhammad encouraged the purchase of the well of Rumah (before 10 AH / before 631 AD), a source of fresh water in Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, to relieve the burden of its cost from the people, as they were previously required to purchase water from the owner. Following the Prophet's encouragement, Uthman bin Affan purchased the well and made it a waqf, making its water freely available to all (Ibn Kathir, 2003, vol.10/ p.290).

It is worth noting that some scholars believe that the first action in this story was Uthman bin Affan's purchase of the well, which he then enhanced by expanding and increasing its reach. Therefore, this story encompasses both the purchase and the construction of the well. Ibn Hajar states "If it was initially a spring, there is no issue with Uthman digging a well in it, and perhaps the spring was connected to a well, which he then expanded" (Ibn Hajar, 1379 AH, vol.5/ p.408). Thus, this incident serves as evidence for two points:

- The keen interest of Prophet Muhammad in constructing and securing the AE resources.
- The keen interest of Prophet Muhammad in purchasing and owning the AE resources and making them available for public benefit without charge.

Examining this incident against the principles set by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in 2002 in its General Comment No. 15 on the right to water, which defines it as “the right of everyone to have access to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible, and affordable water for personal and domestic uses” (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, p. 1, 2012), we find that Prophet Muhammad demonstrated leadership in recognising the right to water as a fundamental human right, which is evident in the following two aspects:

- Historical precedence: Prophet Muhammad advocated for the right of every human being to have access to fresh drinking water approximately fourteen centuries before the United Nations Committee adopted this right in 2002.
- Qualitative distinction: Prophet Muhammad ensured that this fundamental human right was accessible to all without charge by instituting the concept of water endowment, as exemplified by his request to Uthman bin Affan. In contrast, the United Nations Committee endorsed access to water for a nominal fee.

**Table 2: Comparison of the Right to Water between Prophetic Directives and United Nations Committee Decisions**

No.	The Aspect of Comparison	Prophetic Directive Related to the Right to Water	UN Committee Decisions on the Right to Water
1	Practical Impact	Purchase and expansion of the Rumah Well	General Comment No. 15 by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
2	Date	Before 10 AH = before 631 AD	2002
3	Characterisation	Free use (public endowment)	Use subject to a nominal fee

### **Maintaining the Sustainability of the AE in the SPM**

Maintaining the sustainability of the AE is evident in the texts and stances of the SPM, which aimed to preserve water from all forms of waste, whether intentional or unintentional. The following sections elaborate more on this point.

### **Preserving the AE from Accidental Waste and Loss**

Preserving the AE from accidental waste and loss involves protecting water from pollution and contamination that may occur unintentionally. In this regard, Prophet Muhammad’s directive to cover pots and cups containing water to prevent any form of pollution or contamination. Prophet Muhammad said: “Cover up the (kitchen) containers (i.e., pots, pans, etc.), tie up the mouth of the water-skin” (Muslim, 1334 AH, no.2014, vol.6/p.107). For the same purpose, Prophet Muhammad prohibited individuals from placing their hands into any container of water immediately after waking up from sleep, except after washing their hands three times. This is to protect water from contamination by any microbes, germs, or impurities that might have accumulated on the sleeper’s hands during sleep. Prophet Muhammad said: “When one of you awakens in the night, then let him not put his hand into the vessel until he has poured water on three times, for indeed he does not know where his hand has spent the night” (Muslim, 1334 AH, no.564, vol.1/p.160).

## Preserving the AE from Intentional Waste and Loss

Preserving the AE from intentional waste and loss involves protecting water from wastage and misuse, which is evident in the practices of many people. Allah commanded moderation in the use of water and cautioned against wastage (The Qur'an, 7:31). Prophet Muhammad reinforced this by saying: "Eat, drink, give sadaqa [i.e., charity] and wear clothes so long as neither prodigality nor pride is mixed up with it" (Ibn Majah, 2009, no.3605, vol.4/p.600). It is important to note that the prohibition against excessive use of water is not limited to drinking or specific situations but is a general prohibition applicable in all actions and under any circumstances, even when performing acts of worship, such as ablution, which is a prerequisite for prayer.

This emphasis on water conservation was clearly demonstrated in the words and actions of Prophet Muhammad. One of his practices that highlights his great concern for water, its economical use, and avoidance of wastage, even when used for a noble purpose like purification and ablution, was his own example. Thus, Prophet Muhammad was very economical in his use of water for ablution or bathing. He used to "perform ablution with one mud (a handful of water for the average person) and bathe with a sa' (only four or five times of mud)" (Al-Bukhari, 1422 AH, no. 201, vol.1/p.51). This means that Prophet Muhammad performed ablution with no more than a handful of water for the average person and used only four or five times that amount for a full-body wash.

Regarding the teachings of Prophet Muhammad on this subject, I select one educational instance here when he passed by one of his companions who was using excessive water for ablution. Thus, Prophet Muhammad asked him, "What is the meaning of this extravagance?" He replied, "Is there extravagance in ablution?" He said, "Yes, even if you are beside a flowing river." (Ibn Majah, 2009, no.425, vol.1/p.272).

Two points can be derived from this incident:

First, the prohibition of excessive use of water is general for all uses, including purification and ablution.

Second, the prohibition of wasteful use of water applies regardless of the abundance of water resources.

In light of the above, I can conclude that the prophetic sayings and stances mentioned in this article regarding the sustainability of the AE encompass two main themes:

- The development of AE resources through construction, purchase, and ownership.
- Maintaining the continuity and sustainability of various water resources.

Additionally, the foregoing discussion reveals the firmness and vitality of the institutional identity that King Faisal University has adopted, which is focused on food security and environmental sustainability.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have presented a new perspective on the sustainability of the AE in the SPM, from which numerous conclusions and recommendations have emerged. I will present the most prominent ones in the following sections.

## Most Significant Findings

- The texts and stances of the SPM show a clear interest in the AE resources, both in terms of their development and sustainability. This is part of a broader concern for the sustainability of elements essential for human life.
- The stances of the SPM on the right to water are characterized by historical precedence and qualitative distinction compared to the provisions of the relevant United Nations committees.
- The texts of the SPM place deeds that contribute to the public benefit of society at the forefront of religiously praised deeds and elevate such deeds to a higher status over those whose benefits are limited solely to their doer.
- In one of the texts of the SPM that encourages deeds whose rewards continue after death, the percentage of works directly related to environmental sustainability in general is (42.8%), and the percentage related to the sustainability of the AE is (28.6%).
- The story of the well of Rumah demonstrates the leadership of the SPM in the legislation of (water endowments), combining the purchase and expansion of resources for the sustainability of the AE.
- The texts of the SPM aim to preserve water from all forms of waste, whether intentional or unintentional, and encompass both theoretical foundations and practical applications.
- The prohibition against wasting water is general in all actions and situations, even in deeds that are religiously commendable, and even when water is plentiful.
- The importance of activating individual and societal responsibility to achieve the sustainability of the AE.

## Key Recommendations

- Encouraging researchers to study each component of the environment in the SPM in a detailed, focused and independent manner, to analyse its contents and highlight its relevance and practicality.
- Encouraging researchers to renew the interpretation and presentation of the texts and stances of the SPM, in both form and content.

## RECOGNITIONS

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