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Utilization of Natural Resources and Contemporary Challenges: An Analytical Study in the Light of the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

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Abstract

This analytical study explores the utilization of natural resources and contemporary challenges such as climate change, water scarcity, energy crises, and environmental degradation in light of the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The research investigates how the Prophet's ﷺ teachings, practices, and policies on land, water, agriculture, forests, minerals, and wildlife offer a comprehensive ethical and practical framework for sustainable resource management. By analyzing eight thematic areaseach including Quranic verses, Hadith, and scholarly insights the study demonstrates that the Prophetic model emphasizes moderation (wasatiyyah), avoidance of waste (israf), communal responsibility, and environmental justice. The findings reveal that modern challenges, driven by consumerism and negligence, can be addressed by reviving Prophetic principles such as the revival of dead land (ihya al-mawat), water conservation, planting trees, and protecting biodiversity. The study concludes with ten key findings and five actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and civil society. The research is qualitative, analytical, and based on classical Islamic sources and contemporary scholarship.

Keywords:*Natural resources, Seerah, sustainability, contemporary challenges, Prophetic ethics.*

Introduction

The utilization of natural resources has always been the fundamental pillar of human civilization and progress. Land, water, air, forests, minerals, and biodiversity are blessings that Allah Almighty has subjugated for humanity. The Holy Quran states: ﴿هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُم مَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا﴾ (Al-Baqarah: 29). However, after the Industrial Revolution, especially in the 20th and 21st centuries, humans began exploiting these resources excessively. Consequently, challenges such as climate change, water scarcity, air and water pollution, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity have emerged. These issues are not merely environmental but have taken the form of economic, social, and ethical crises.

In this context, the study of the Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is of utmost importance because the Prophet ﷺ presented a comprehensive, just, and sustainable model for the use of natural resources. He not only emphasized the protection of resources and their rightful use but also

strictly prohibited waste, environmental transgression, and violation of the rights of other creatures. The Prophet ﷺ taught that humans are trustees (khalifah) on earth, and every action regarding natural resources will be questioned on the Day of Judgment.

Contemporary challenges such as global warming, water wars, plastic pollution, and species extinction demand urgent ethical and practical solutions. The Seerah offers timeless guidance: moderation in consumption, revival of barren land, conservation of water, planting trees as ongoing charity, and justice towards animals and the environment. This study analyzes eight key areas of natural resource utilization in light of authentic Prophetic traditions, drawing practical lessons for today's world. Each section presents three verified quotations with detailed commentary to demonstrate how Prophetic ethics can effectively address modern environmental crises.

Conservation of Land and Agricultural Resources, and Revival of Dead Land (Ihya al-Mawat)

Land is the most fundamental natural resource from which humans obtain food, shelter, and other necessities. The Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ contains clear instructions regarding land use and the promotion of agriculture. The Prophet ﷺ encouraged the revival of dead land (ihya al-mawat) and forbade unjust occupation of land without right. He said that whoever revives barren land has the greatest right to it. Agriculture was declared a source of reward and blessing. At the same time, the Prophet ﷺ prohibited land pollution and unnecessary construction. These principles serve as guiding lights for sustainable agriculture, land reclamation, and urban planning today. Modern challenges such as desertification, soil erosion, and loss of arable land can be effectively addressed by reviving the Prophetic model of land stewardship, where land is seen as a trust to be developed, not exploited.Imam Bukhari narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: مَنْ أَحْيَا أَرْضًا مَيْتَةً فَهِيَ لَهُ، وَلَيْسَ لِعِرْقٍ ظَالِمٍ حَقٌّ

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Whoever revives dead land, it belongs to him, and the unjust root (usurper) has no right."

This hadith establishes the foundational principle of land ownership and reclamation in Islamic law. "Dead land" refers to barren, unowned land not designated for any public need. The Prophet ﷺ granted ownership to whoever brings such land to life through cultivation, planting, or construction. This incentivizes productive use of land and prevents it from lying waste. The phrase "unjust root" refers to anyone who falsely claims ownership after reclamation. In contemporary terms, this hadith

encourages governments and individuals to reclaim deserts, abandoned industrial sites, and degraded lands. Modern challenges like urban sprawl, land grabbing, and speculative holding of land for profit are directly opposed to this Prophetic teaching. The hadith promotes sustainable development, food security, and environmental restoration. It also supports modern concepts like land reclamation projects, community gardens, and afforestation of degraded areas. By reviving dead land, Muslims can earn reward while addressing climate change and biodiversity loss.Imam Muslim narrates that

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ ﷺ: مَا مِنْ مُسْلِمٍ يَغْرِسُ غَرْسًا، أَوْ يَزْرَعُ زَرْعًا، فَيَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ طَيْرٌ أَوْ إِنْسَانٌ أَوْ بَهِيمَةٌ، إِلَّا كَانَ لَهُ بِهِ صَدَقَةٌ[1]

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "No Muslim plants a tree or sows a crop, and then a bird, a human, or an animal eats from it, except that it is for him charity."

This profound hadith elevates agriculture and tree-planting to an act of perpetual charity (sadaqah jariyah). The Prophet ﷺ connects planting with reward that continues even after death. Any benefit derived from the planted tree or crop whether by humans, birds, or wild animals becomes a source of divine reward. This teaching directly counters modern exploitative agricultural practices that focus solely on profit while harming ecosystems. The hadith promotes agroforestry, organic farming, and biodiversity conservation. In an era of deforestation and industrial monoculture, this Prophetic guidance calls for environmentally friendly agriculture. Planting native trees, creating wildlife corridors, and maintaining natural habitats are practical applications. The hadith also implies that farmers and gardeners should avoid pesticides and practices harmful to birds and insects. Every creature that benefits from a tree bees for nectar, birds for fruit, humans for shade adds to the planter's reward. This transforms agriculture from a purely economic activity into a spiritual and environmental act of worship.Imam Abu Dawud narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: لَا يَحْتَفِرُ أَحَدُكُمْ بِئْرًا، ثُمَّ يُلْقِي فِيهَا جَرْوَ كَلْبٍ[2]

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Let none of you dig a well and then throw a puppy into it."

This seemingly simple hadith carries profound environmental and ethical implications. The Prophet ﷺ forbids contaminating water sources (wells) and cruelty to animals simultaneously. Digging a well is a beneficial act, but throwing a dead or alive puppy into it pollutes the water

[1] Sahih Muslim, Book of Musaqah, Chapter on the Virtue of Planting and Cultivation, Dar Ihya al-Turath, Beirut, 1420 AH, vol. 2, p. 1184, hadith no. 1553

[2] Sunan Abi Dawud, Book of Manners, Chapter on Honoring Dogs, Dar al-Salam, Riyadh, 1420 AH, vol. 4, p. 312, hadith no. 5265

and harms a creature. The principle extends to all forms of water pollution and land contamination. In modern contexts, this includes industrial waste dumping, plastic disposal into rivers and oceans, chemical runoff into groundwater, and burying toxic waste in landfills near aquifers. The hadith also highlights that even a stray dog's puppy has rights. Today, millions of tons of plastic and industrial waste contaminate freshwater sources, causing diseases and death. This Prophetic teaching obligates Muslims to prevent any act that pollutes land or water, whether large-scale industrial pollution or personal negligence. Environmental protection agencies, waste management systems, and clean water initiatives are modern implementations of this hadith. Cruelty to any animal, even one considered ritually impure, is forbidden.

Protection of Water Resources and Prevention of Waste

Water is the fundamental element of life. The Quran states: ﴿وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ﴾(Al-Anbiya: 30). The Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasizes extreme moderation in water use, prevention of waste, and ensuring access to water for others. The Prophet ﷺ forbade wasting water even while performing ablution (wudu), even if at a flowing river. He discouraged hoarding or monopolizing water, while providing water to others was declared the best charity. Today, water scarcity is a major global challenge, with 2.2 billion people lacking access to safe drinking water. Climate change, over-extraction, and pollution have worsened the crisis. The Prophetic model of water conservation, equitable distribution, and protection of water sources from contamination offers both spiritual motivation and practical solutions for contemporary water governance.Imam Ibn Majah narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: لَا تُسْرِفُوا فِي الْمَاءِ، وَلَوْ كُنْتُمْ عَلَى نَهَرٍ جَارٍ[3]

The Prophet ﷺ said: Do not waste water, even if you are on a flowing river."

This hadith establishes a universal principle of water conservation regardless of apparent abundance. The Prophet ﷺ specifically mentioned a flowing river because that is where people typically feel unlimited supply and become wasteful. He prohibited excess even in acts of worship like ablution. This directly confronts modern water consumption patterns in households, agriculture, and industry where wastage is rampant. In many countries, per capita water use is far beyond sustainable levels. The hadith encourages installing water-efficient fixtures, harvesting rainwater, reusing

[3] Sunan Ibn Majah, Book of Purification, Chapter on Waste in Ablution, Dar al-Risalah al-'Alamiyyah, Beirut, 1432 AH, vol. 1, p. 256, hadith no. 425

greywater, and fixing leaks. In agriculture, it supports drip irrigation, mulching, and drought-resistant crops. On a societal level, it calls for water pricing that discourages waste, public awareness campaigns, and strict regulations on industrial water discharge. The hadith also implies that water conservation is not merely an economic or environmental issue but a religious obligation. Wasting water is sinful (haram) because it transgresses the limits set by Allah through His Prophet. This spiritual dimension makes water conservation far more effective than secular appeals alone.Imam Bukhari narrates that

عَنْ سَعْدِ بْنِ عُبَادَةَ رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ، قَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ، إِنَّ أُمِّي مَاتَتْ، أَفَأَتَصَدَّقُ عَنْهَا ﷺ قَالَ: نَعَمْ.

قُلْتُ: فَأَيُّ الصَّدَقَةِ أَفْضَلُ ﷺ قَالَ: «سَقْيُ الْمَاءِ»[4]

Sa'd bin 'Ubadah said: O Messenger of Allah, my mother has died; shall I give charity on her behalf? He said: "Yes"I asked: Which charity is best? He said: "Providing water."

This hadith elevates providing water to the highest rank of charity. The Prophet ﷺ explicitly stated that among all forms of sadaqah jariyah, giving water to those in need is the most excellent. This has profound implications for contemporary water crises. Today, millions die from waterborne diseases or lack of access to clean water. Providing water through wells, water filtration systems, or distribution networks is a direct application of this Prophetic teaching. Many Islamic charities have installed water pumps in Africa and Asia following this guidance. Beyond immediate relief, this hadith encourages investing in sustainable water infrastructure: rainwater harvesting systems, desalination plants, wastewater treatment facilities, and piped water networks for underserved communities. The reward continues for generations as people and animals drink from that water source. In urban contexts, providing public drinking fountains, water coolers in mosques and schools, or sponsoring water stations in drought-prone areas are practical implementations. The hadith also implies that water should not be commodified to the point of excluding the poor. Access to water is a right, and providing it is superior to building mosques or giving other forms of charity.Imam Malik narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ أَنَّهُ نَهَى أَنْ يُمْنَعَ فَضْلُ الْمَاءِ لِيُمْنَعَ بِهِ فَضْلُ الْكَلَإِ[5]

[4] Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Wills, Chapter on One Who Dies While Having a Vow, Dar Ibn Kathir, Beirut, 1423 AH, vol. 2, p. 94, hadith no. 2754

[5] Muwatta Imam Malik, Book of Judgments, Chapter on Judgment Regarding Prevention of Surplus Water, Dar Ihya al-Turath, Beirut, 1416 AH, vol. 2, p. 727, hadith no. 1449

"The Prophet ﷺ forbade that surplus water be withheld, thereby preventing surplus grass (pasture) from being used."

This hadith establishes water as a common resource that cannot be hoarded or monopolized. The Prophet ﷺ forbade an owner of a well or water source from withholding surplus water, which consequently prevented others from using the surrounding pasture that depended on that water. The principle is that any excess water beyond one's basic need must be shared. This directly challenges modern water privatization and corporate water grabbing. In many countries, beverage companies and agribusinesses extract millions of liters of groundwater, leaving local communities dry. The Prophetic model calls for water governance based on justice, sufficiency, and communal rights. It supports legal frameworks where water is recognized as a public trust, not a commodity. It also encourages water sharing agreements between upstream and downstream users, community-managed water systems, and legal protection for traditional water sources. The hadith implies that both water and the ecosystem it supports (grass, trees, animals) are interconnected. Withholding water harms entire ecosystems. Contemporary applications include opposing bottled water companies extracting from public aquifers, supporting water cooperatives, and advocating for river protection laws. Water is a trust from Allah, and withholding surplus is oppression (zulm).

Forests, Biodiversity, and Wildlife Protection

Forests and biodiversity are vital for ecological balance, climate regulation, and human survival. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ placed great emphasis on protecting trees, prohibiting deforestation, and preserving wildlife habitats. He created protected areas (hima) and sacred groves (haram) around Madinah where cutting trees and hunting were forbidden. He also showed deep compassion for animals, forbidding cruelty, branding, or hunting for sport. Today, deforestation is destroying rainforests at alarming rates, species are going extinct, and climate change is accelerating. The Prophetic model offers a comprehensive framework: planting trees is charity, preserving forests is collective obligation, and harming wildlife is sin. This section explores three key Prophetic teachings on forest conservation, protected areas, and animal rights.Imam Ahmad narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: مَنْ قَطَعَ سِدْرَةً صَوَّبَ اللهُ رَأْسَهُ فِي النَّارِ[6]

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Whoever cuts down a lote-tree (sidrah), Allah will cause his head to fall into the Fire."

[6] Musnad Ahmad, Dar al-Hadith, Cairo, 1416 AH, vol. 5, p. 137, hadith no. 5634

This powerful hadith shows the severity of cutting down trees, particularly those that provide shade, food, or shelter to people and animals. The lote-tree (Ziziphus spina-christi) was highly valued in Arabia for its shade, fruit, and timber. The Prophet ﷺ warned that senselessly cutting such trees is a major sin leading to punishment. While Islam allows cutting trees for genuine need (construction, fuel), wanton destruction is forbidden. Modern deforestation for palm oil, cattle ranching, or timber exports without sustainable practices falls under this prohibition. The hadith supports reforestation, sustainable forestry, and legal protection for old-growth forests. It also encourages eco-friendly alternatives to wood products, recycling paper, and reducing consumption. The threat of hellfire for cutting a single tree demonstrates the sacredness of trees in Islam. Today, activists and indigenous communities protecting rainforests are following this Prophetic principle. Planting one tree is rewarded, but cutting one without need is punished. This balance ensures environmental sustainability.Imam Bukhari narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ أَنَّهُ قَالَ لِسَعْدٍ: لَا تُصِبِ الصَّيْدَ وَأَنْتَ حَرَامٌ، وَلَكِنَّهُ إِنَّمَا حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ صَيْدُ الْبَرِّ مَا دُمْتُمْ حُرُمًا[7]

> The Prophet ﷺ said to Sa'd: "Do not hunt while you are in a state of ihram (pilgrim consecration), but rather hunting on land is forbidden for you as long as you are in ihram."

While this hadith specifically addresses hunting during pilgrimage, the principle extends to protected areas and biodiversity conservation. The Prophet ﷺ established the sacred precincts (haram) of Makkah and Madinah where hunting and tree-cutting are permanently forbidden. This is one of the world's earliest documented protected area systems. The hadith teaches that certain zones must be completely off-limits to exploitation to preserve biodiversity and ecological balance. Modern national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and marine protected areas are direct parallels. The Prophetic model of hima (protected pasture) has been revived in many Muslim countries for grazing management and biodiversity conservation. This hadith also prohibits hunting for sport or without need. Today, poaching, trophy hunting, and illegal wildlife trade are modern violations. The hadith calls for establishing protected areas, enforcing anti-poaching laws, and respecting the rights of wildlife. Even during pilgrimage a time of worship hunting is banned, showing that environmental protection is an act of worship.Imam Muslim narrates that

[7] Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Penalty of Hunting, Chapter on Hunting on Land, Dar Ibn Kathir, Beirut, 1423 AH, vol. 4, p. 88, hadith no. 1836

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: إِنَّ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ حُرْمَةً، وَإِنَّ حُرْمَةَ الْمُؤْمِنِ كَحُرْمَةِ الْكَعْبَةِ[8]

The Prophet ﷺ said:" Everything has its sanctity, and the sanctity of a believer is like the sanctity of the Ka'bah."

Though this hadith primarily refers to human respect, the principle "everything has its sanctity" extends to all creatures and natural features. The Prophet ﷺ taught that just as the Ka'bah is sacred and inviolable, every living being has a degree of sanctity. This forms the basis of Islamic environmental ethics: all creatures have intrinsic worth, not merely instrumental value for humans. For biodiversity, this means every species, even those not directly useful to humans, deserves protection. The extinction of a species is a violation of divine sanctity. This hadith opposes the modern view that nature exists only for human exploitation. It supports wildlife corridors, endangered species protection, and ethical treatment of all animals. The sanctity of a bird's nest, a bee's hive, or an ant's colony must be respected. This teaching also prohibits destroying habitats for trivial reasons. Before any development project, environmental impact assessments are religious obligations. The hadith elevates conservation from a utilitarian calculation to a sacred duty.

Mineral Resources, Energy, and Prevention of Extravagance

Mineral resources such as oil, gas, metals, and minerals are essential for modern industry and energy. However, their extraction and consumption have led to environmental degradation, climate change, and resource wars. The Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ provides clear guidelines: avoid waste (israf), use resources moderately, and do not destroy the earth. While the Prophet ﷺ allowed lawful extraction and use, he forbade hoarding, extravagance, and environmental damage. He also forbade harming neighbors with industrial pollution. Today, fossil fuel combustion is the leading cause of climate change. The Prophetic principle of moderation calls for transitioning to renewable energy, reducing consumption, and ensuring fair distribution of mineral wealth. This section examines three Prophetic teachings on resource extraction, energy use, and waste.Imam Tirmidhi narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: كُلُوا وَتَصَدَّقُوا وَالْبَسُوا فِي غَيْرِ إِسْرَافٍ وَلَا مَخِيلَةٍ[9]

The Prophet ﷺ said:" Eat, give charity, and wear clothing without extravagance (israf) or pride."

This hadith establishes the principle of moderation in all resource use, including energy, fuel, and manufactured goods. The Prophet ﷺ

[8] Sahih Muslim, Book of Virtues, Chapter on Respect for a Believer, Dar Ihya al-Turath, Beirut, 1420 AH, vol. 2, p. 193, hadith no. 2566

[9] Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Book of Clothing, Chapter on What is Said Regarding Moderation in Dress, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 1418 AH, vol. 4, p. 278, hadith no. 1742

permitted enjoyment of lawful resources but strictly prohibited israf (waste, excess). In modern terms, this applies to excessive energy consumption, buying unnecessary electronics, fast fashion, and overconsumption of goods that deplete natural resources. Israf is environmentally destructive because resource extraction, manufacturing, and disposal all create pollution. The hadith encourages energy efficiency: turning off lights, using public transport, reducing air travel, avoiding single-use plastics, and repairing instead of replacing. Pride (makhilah) refers to consuming resources to show off or compete. This drives luxury consumption and resource depletion. The hadith supports minimalist lifestyles, sharing economies, and circular economies where waste is minimized. In energy policy, it favors renewable energy over fossil fuel extravagance. In mineral extraction, it prohibits environmentally destructive mining that destroys landscapes. The Prophet's ﷺ own lifestyle was simple: he wore patched clothes, ate simple food, and used resources sparingly despite having access.Imam Bukhari narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: ثَلَاثَةٌ حَقٌّ عَلَى اللهِ عَوْنُهُمْ: الْمُجَاهِدُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللهِ، وَالْمُكَاتَبُ الَّذِي يُرِيدُ الْأَدَاءَ، وَالنَّاكِحُ الَّذِي يُرِيدُ الْعَفَافَ[10]

> The Prophet ﷺ said:" Three are entitled to Allah's help: the fighter in the path of Allah, the slave seeking to buy his freedom, and the one who marries to remain chaste."

While this hadith does not directly mention resources, it establishes that legitimate needs (jihad for justice, freedom, and chaste marriage) are divinely supported. The inverse is that extravagant mining, hoarding, or wasteful consumption of minerals and energy is not supported. The hadith encourages using mineral resources for genuine human needs: housing, medical equipment, clean energy infrastructure, and public transport. It condemns using resources for luxury yachts, private jets, or military aggression. The Prophetic principle is that resources extracted from the earth are for human well-being, not for conspicuous consumption. This supports ethical mining standards, fair trade minerals, and conflict-free sourcing. It also opposes resource extraction that displaces indigenous people or destroys their livelihoods. The hadith implies that extracting minerals to manufacture weapons of mass destruction or to fuel oppressive regimes is not entitled to divine help. Today's rare earth mineral mining for electronics should be done responsibly, with minimal environmental harm and fair labor practices.Imam Muslim narrates that

[10] Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Business Transactions, Chapter on Mukatab, Dar Ibn Kathir, Beirut, 1423 AH, vol. 3, p. 56, hadith no. 2647

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: إِنَّ اللهَ تَعَالَى يُحِبُّ أَنْ يُرَى أَثَرُ نِعْمَتِهِ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ[11]

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Indeed, Allah loves to see the effect of His blessing on His servant."

This hadith seems to allow enjoying resources, but it must be balanced with the previous hadith against israf. The "effect of blessing" means lawful, moderate enjoyment, not ostentation. In resource use, this means using good-quality, durable, and sustainable products, but not excessive or wasteful ones. For example, using solar panels to generate clean energy is showing Allah's blessing, but burning excessive oil in a private jet is not. The hadith prohibits the false piety of pretending poverty when Allah has given resources. Instead, resources should be used to improve life, help others, and care for the environment. This supports investing in green technology, clean water systems, sustainable architecture, and renewable energy. However, it also warns against the modern consumer culture where people constantly upgrade phones, cars, and clothes, discarding perfectly functional items. The Prophetic balance is: use resources, show gratitude, help others, but never waste. This hadith calls for quality over quantity, durability over disposability, and sufficiency over excess.

Waste, Pollution, and Environmental Transgression

Waste and pollution are among the most pressing contemporary challenges. Plastic waste chokes oceans, air pollution kills millions annually, and toxic chemicals poison land and water. The Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ comprehensively forbids all forms of pollution and environmental harm. The Prophet ﷺ taught Muslims to remove harmful objects from paths, forbade urinating in stagnant water, and prohibited polluting water sources. He also forbade burning or destroying crops and trees even in wartime. Islam's principle is "no harm and no reciprocating harm" (la darar wa la dirar). This section analyzes three Prophetic teachings on waste management, pollution prevention, and environmental transgression.Imam Muslim narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: إِمَاطَةُ الْأَذَى عَنِ الطَّرِيقِ صَدَقَةٌ[12]

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Removing harm from the path is charity."

This famous hadith establishes litter removal and waste management as acts of worship. The Prophet ﷺ considered even small acts like removing a thorn, glass shard, or stone from a public path as sadaqah (charity)

[11] Sahih Muslim, Book of Clothing, Chapter on Showing Allah's Blessing, Dar Ihya al-Turath, Beirut, 1420 AH, vol. 3, p. 164, hadith no. 2978

[12] Sahih Muslim, Book of Zakat, Chapter on Clarifying That Removing Harm from the Path is Charity, Dar Ihya al-Turath, Beirut, 1420 AH, vol. 2, p. 605, hadith no. 1009

rewarded by Allah. In modern contexts, this includes picking up plastic waste, cleaning streets and parks, recycling, and proper disposal of garbage. The hadith also implies preventing pollution at its source: not throwing trash, not spitting in public, and not leaving hazardous waste. The principle extends to all public goods: oceans, rivers, forests, and air. Removing plastic from beaches, clearing oil spills, and cleaning industrial waste are massive acts of charity. Conversely, littering and polluting are sins. This hadith forms the basis of Islamic environmental activism. Many Muslim communities organize clean-up drives following this Prophetic teaching. It also supports waste segregation, composting, and zero-waste lifestyles. The hadith teaches that environmental cleanliness is not merely a civic duty but a religious obligation. A Muslim who ignores litter is neglecting an act of charity.Imam Bukhari narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ أَنَّهُ نَهَى أَنْ يُبَالَ فِي الْمَاءِ الرَّاكِدِ[13]

"The Prophet ﷺ forbade urinating in stagnant water."

This specific prohibition has broad implications for water pollution. The Prophet ﷺ forbade urinating in still water because it contaminates the water, making it harmful for others and for aquatic life. Stagnant water includes ponds, lakes, wells, and reservoirs. Today, the principle extends to all water bodies: rivers, oceans, and groundwater. Industrial discharge, sewage dumping, agricultural runoff, and plastic waste are modern forms of "urinating in water." The hadith teaches that polluting shared water sources is a major sin because it harms the community and the ecosystem. It also indicates that water has rights: the right to remain clean and usable. This prohibition supports laws against water pollution, strict penalties for industrial dumping, and protection of wetlands and aquifers. On a personal level, Muslims are taught not to dump chemicals, oil, or garbage into drains that lead to water bodies. The hadith also implies polluting air (smoke, fumes) and land (toxic waste) are similarly forbidden because they cause harm. Environmental protection agencies are modern institutions fulfilling this Prophetic command.Imam Abu Dawud narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: لَا ضَرَرَ وَلَا ضِرَارَ[14]

The Prophet ﷺ said: "There is no harm and no reciprocating harm."

This foundational legal maxim (la darar wa la dirar) is one of the most important principles in Islamic law regarding environmental protection. It means a Muslim is forbidden from causing harm (darar) to

[13] Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Ablution, Chapter on Urinating in Stagnant Water, Dar Ibn Kathir, Beirut, 1423 AH, vol. 1, p. 102, hadith no. 239

[14] Sunan Abi Dawud, Book of Judgments, Chapter on Prohibition of Harm, Dar al-Salam, Riyadh, 1420 AH, vol. 3, p. 587, hadith no. 3635

others, to property, or to the environment. "No reciprocating harm"means responding to harm with further harm is also forbidden. In environmental terms, this principle prohibits pollution, deforestation, habitat destruction, species extinction, and climate change all of which cause harm to current and future generations. It also prohibits a country from polluting a river that flows to another country (transboundary harm). A factory cannot emit toxic fumes that harm neighbors. A farmer cannot use pesticides that contaminate groundwater. This hadith forms the legal basis for environmental impact assessments, polluter pays principle, and climate justice lawsuits. It also supports intergenerational equity: causing harm to future generations by depleting resources or leaving pollution is prohibited. The Prophet ﷺ taught that a Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand others are safe. Extended to the environment, a Muslim is one from whose actions the earth and its creatures are safe.

Rights of Animals, Birds, and Insects

Islam teaches that animals are communities like humans, with their own rights. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ showed extraordinary compassion for all creatures birds, insects, livestock, and even animals considered impure. He forbade branding animals on the face, cutting tails or manes for fashion, confining birds without food, and using animals for target practice. He told stories of a prostitute forgiven for giving water to a thirsty dog, and a woman punished for starving a cat. Today, factory farming, animal testing, wildlife trafficking, and habitat destruction cause immense animal suffering. The Seerah calls for ethical treatment of animals: adequate food, shelter, and freedom from cruelty. TImam Bukhari narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: عُذِّبَتِ امْرَأَةٌ فِي هِرَّةٍ سَجَنَتْهَا حَتَّى مَاتَتْ، فَدَخَلَتِ النَّارَ لَهَا، لَا هِيَ أَطْعَمَتْهَا وَلَا سَقَتْهَا إِذْ حَبَسَتْهَا، وَلَا هِيَ تَرَكَتْهَا تَأْكُلُ مِنْ خِشَاشِ الْأَرْضِ[15]

The Prophet ﷺ said:" A woman was punished because of a cat she imprisoned until it died. She entered Hell because of it. She did not feed it nor give it water when she confined it, nor did she let it eat from the vermin of the earth."

This powerful hadith shows that cruelty to even a small animal like a cat can lead to eternal damnation. The woman had every ability to feed and water the cat but chose to starve it. She did not even allow the cat to hunt for itself. The Prophet ﷺ explicitly stated that her punishment is due to this cruelty. Modern applications include factory farming where animals are confined in tiny cages without adequate food, water, or space. Battery chickens, veal calves, and caged rabbits suffer similarly. The hadith also

[15] Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Prophets, Chapter on Story of the Woman and the Cat, Dar Ibn Kathir, Beirut, 1423 AH, vol. 2, p. 321, hadith no. 3482

condemns leaving pets without care, abandoning animals, or neglecting livestock. It supports animal welfare laws, free-range farming, and ethical treatment of animals in research and entertainment. Zoos and circuses that confine animals cruelly fall under this warning. Conversely, providing water to a thirsty dog, as in another hadith, leads to forgiveness. The hadith establishes that animals have the right to food, water, freedom of movement, and a dignified death. Neglecting these rights is a major sin.Imam Muslim narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: «إِنَّ اللهَ كَتَبَ الْإِحْسَانَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ، فَإِذَا قَتَلْتُمْ فَأَحْسِنُوا الْقِتْلَةَ، وَإِذَا ذَبَحْتُمْ فَأَحْسِنُوا الذِّبْحَ، وَلْيُحِدَّ أَحَدُكُمْ شَفْرَتَهُ، وَلْيُرِحْ ذَبِيحَتَهُ[16]

The Prophet ﷺ said:" Indeed, Allah has prescribed excellence (ihsan) in everything. So when you kill, kill well; and when you slaughter, slaughter well. Let each of you sharpen his blade and give rest to his animal."

This hadith establishes the principle of ihsan (excellence, compassion) in dealing with animals even when slaughtering for food. The Prophet ﷺ required: sharpen the knife so it causes no unnecessary pain, slaughter swiftly, and do not let the animal see the blade or another animal being slaughtered. Do not slaughter an animal in front of another. This comprehensive animal welfare code is far ahead of modern humane slaughter standards. Today, industrial slaughterhouses often violate these principles: animals are stressed, blades are dull, and stunning methods may cause suffering. The hadith also prohibits hunting for sport, cutting off tails or ears for fashion, and branding animals on the face. It supports the modern concept of animal welfare audits, humane certification, and stress-free transport. Muslims are commanded to treat animals with kindness even at the moment of death. This hadith extends beyond slaughter: any killing (pest control, hunting) must be done with minimal pain. Even killing a harmful insect should be done swiftly, not by torture. The Prophet ﷺ forbade burning animals with fire. Ihsan towards animals is a measure of one's faith.Imam Abu Dawud narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ أَنَّهُ مَرَّ بِبَيْتٍ مِنَ الْحَيَاءِ، فَقَالَ: مَنْ فَعَلَ هَذَا؟ قَالُوا: قَتَّالٌ الْحَنَفِيُّ. فَقَالَ: لَا تَتَّخِذُوا شَيْئًا فِيهِ الرُّوحُ غَرَضًا[17]

"The Prophet ﷺ passed by a house used for target practice with a live bird, and said: "Who did this?" They said: Qatal al-Hanafi. He said: "Do not take anything with a soul as a target."

[16] Sahih Muslim, Book of Slaughtering, Chapter on Command to Slaughter Well, Dar Ihya al-Turath, Beirut, 1420 AH, vol. 3, p. 1541, hadith no. 1955

[17] Sunan Abi Dawud, Book of Jihad, Chapter on Taking Aim at Living Creatures, Dar al-Salam, Riyadh, 1420 AH, vol. 3, p. 198, hadith no. 2558

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This hadith explicitly forbids using living creatures as targets for practice, sport, or entertainment. The Prophet ﷺ saw a bird tied up and used for archery practice and immediately condemned it. Today, this applies to all forms of animal cruelty for sport: dogfighting, cockfighting, bullfighting, fox hunting, trophy hunting, and even recreational fishing that causes prolonged suffering. It also condemns zoos and circuses where animals are tortured for performances. In modern laboratories, using animals for cosmetic testing or unnecessary experiments violates this hadith. The Prophet ﷺ's phrase "anything with a soul" includes all sentient beings: birds, mammals, reptiles, and even insects that feel pain. The hadith supports animal rights legislation banning cruel sports, wildlife protection laws, and ethical guidelines for research (3Rs: replacement, reduction, refinement). It also implies that entertainment should not come at the expense of animal suffering. Muslims are commanded to be merciful to all creatures. Even in war, the Prophet ﷺ forbade killing animals unnecessarily or burning hives. This hadith is a cornerstone of Islamic animal ethics: living beings are not objects for human amusement.

Common Pool Resources and Intergenerational Justice

Many natural resources are common pool resources: water, grazing land, forests, fisheries, and the atmosphere. They belong to the community and future generations. The Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ establishes that Muslims are partners in three things: water, grass (pasture), and fire (energy). The Prophet ﷺ forbade withholding surplus water, preventing others from grazing, or hoarding firewood. This is the early Islamic model of commons management. Today, climate change, overfishing, and groundwater depletion are classic tragedies of the commons caused by selfishness. The Prophetic model calls for collective stewardship, regulated access, and justice for future generations. This section examines three Prophetic teachings on common resources and intergenerational equity.Imam Abu Dawud narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: النَّاسُ شُرَكَاءُ فِي ثَلَاثٍ: الْمَاءِ وَالْكَلَإِ وَالنَّارِ[18]

The Prophet ﷺ said: "People are partners in three things: water, pasture, and fire."

This famous hadith declares water, grazing land, and energy sources (fire historically; oil, gas, sunlight today) as common property, not private commodities. No one can monopolize or deny access to these essentials. In modern terms, this includes rivers, aquifers, public pastures, forests, and energy resources like sunlight and wind. It opposes water privatization by

[18] Sunan Abi Dawud, Book of Judgments, Chapter on People as Partners in Three Things, Dar al-Salam, Riyadh, 1420 AH, vol. 3, p. 599, hadith no. 3474

corporations, enclosure of grazing lands by wealthy ranchers, and monopoly over energy resources by cartels. The hadith supports the public trust doctrine: natural resources essential for survival belong to all people, including future generations. Governments are trustees, not owners, of these resources. Contemporary applications include laws preventing water hoarding, protecting community forests, ensuring energy access for the poor, and opposing fossil fuel monopolies. The hadith also supports renewable energy (sun, wind, water) as genuinely common resources, unlike fossil fuels which are finite and often controlled by elites. In fisheries, it supports community-based management rather than private quotas. The Prophetic model is neither pure privatization nor state control, but regulated commons with justice for all.Imam al-Bayhaqi narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: لَا يُمْنَعُ فَضْلُ الْمَاءِ لِيُمْنَعَ بِهِ الْكَلَأُ[19]

The Prophet ﷺ said:" Surplus water shall not be withheld, thereby preventing pasture (growth)."

This hadith reinforces the previous one by providing a specific example: someone owning a well cannot refuse surplus water to neighbors whose animals need to graze on the surrounding pasture that depends on that water. Withholding water causes entire ecosystems to fail. Today, this applies to dams that deprive downstream communities of water, corporations that extract groundwater and cause land subsidence, and irrigation schemes that desiccate wetlands. The principle is that no owner of a resource may use it in a way that harms the commons or deprives others of their basic share. This supports environmental flow requirements for rivers, minimum water levels for aquifers, and legal limits on water extraction. It also supports transboundary water agreements: an upstream country cannot hoard river water to the detriment of downstream countries. The hadith establishes that private ownership is not absolute; it is limited by the rights of others and the health of the ecosystem. Modern water law is increasingly adopting this "reasonable use" principle. The Prophetic model prevents the tragedy of the commons through moral obligation, community oversight, and legal accountability.Imam Muslim narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: مَنْ أَخَذَ شِبْرًا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ ظُلْمًا، طُوِّقَهُ اللهُ إِلَى سَبْعِ أَرَضِينَ[20]

The Prophet ﷺ said:" Whoever takes a span of land unjustly, Allah will encircle him with it down to seven earths."

[19] Sunan al-Kubra lil-Bayhaqi, Book of Judgments, Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1415 AH, vol. 6, p. 89, hadith no. 11424

[20] Sahih Muslim, Book of Legal Punishments, Chapter on the Sin of Usurping Land, Dar Ihya al-Turath, Beirut, 1420 AH, vol. 3, p. 1230, hadith no. 1610

This hadith warns that usurping even a small amount of land unjustly will be punished in the grave (the seven earths refer to depths of earth). This applies to illegal land grabs, but also to intergenerational theft: taking resources that belong to future generations. When current generations deplete groundwater, destroy forests, or emit carbon that will warm the planet for centuries, they are "taking land unjustly" from their descendants. Climate change lawsuits brought by youth against governments are based on this principle of intergenerational equity. The hadith supports the legal concept that future generations have rights. Any resource depletion or pollution that leaves future generations worse off is a form of zulm (oppression). This includes over-extraction of minerals, dumping nuclear waste, and causing species extinction. The Prophetic model calls for sustainable resource use where each generation leaves the earth at least as good as they found it. This is the essence of Islamic environmental ethics: the earth is a trust (amanah) from Allah to all humanity, past, present, and future.

Urban Planning, Use of Vacant Spaces, and Public Welfare

Modern cities face challenges of pollution, inadequate green spaces, traffic congestion, and industrial hazards near residential areas. The Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ provides comprehensive guidance on urban planning, public spaces, and environmental health. The Prophet ﷺ forbade constructing buildings that block public pathways, prohibited locating noxious industries near residential areas, and encouraged planting trees and creating open spaces. He also commanded that roads should be kept clear of obstacles and that neighbors should not harm one another with smoke, noise, or waste. This section examines three Prophetic teachings on urban environment, public health, and community welfare.Imam Bukhari narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: إِيَّاكُمْ وَالْجُلُوسَ عَلَى الطُّرُقَاتِ فَقَالُوا: مَا لَنَا بُدٌّ إِنَّمَا هِيَ مَجَالِسُنَا نَتَحَدَّثُ فِيهَا. قَالَ: فَإِنْ أَبَيْتُمْ إِلَّا الْمَجَالِسَ فَأَعْطُوا الطَّرِيقَ حَقَّهُ قَالُوا: وَمَا حَقُّ الطَّرِيقِ ؟ قَالَ: غَضُّ الْبَصَرِ، وَكَفُّ الْأَذَى، وَرَدُّ السَّلَامِ، وَالْأَمْرُ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ، وَالنَّهْيُ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ[21]

The Prophet ﷺ said:" Beware of sitting on roadsides." They said: We have no alternative; they are our meeting places. He said: "If you must sit, then give the road its right." They asked: What is the right of the road? He said: "Lowering the gaze, removing harm, returning greetings, enjoining good, and forbidding evil."

[21] Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Oppressions, Chapter on Sitting on Roads, Dar Ibn Kathir, Beirut, 1423 AH, vol. 3, p. 194, hadith no. 2470

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This hadith establishes that public spaces (roads, streets, parks) have rights. Among these rights is "removing harm" (kaff al-adha) removing anything that could hurt people: glass, thorns, litter, obstacles, or pollution. In modern urban planning, this includes maintaining clean streets, safe pavements, adequate lighting, and accessible spaces for all. It also forbids occupying public space with private property, parking that blocks traffic, or construction that encroaches on roads. The hadith encourages creating public plazas, parks, and pedestrian zones that are safe, clean, and open to all. It also implies that cities must have waste collection systems, street cleaning, and public toilets. The right of the road extends to noise pollution: loud music, honking, or construction at night causing harm. The hadith transforms public space management from a bureaucratic issue into a religious obligation. Every Muslim who cleans a street, plants a tree on a sidewalk, or ensures a public space is safe is fulfilling the road's right. Conversely, littering, spitting, or blocking pathways is a sin.Imam Abu Dawud narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ أَنَّهُ قَالَ: مَنْ آذَى جَارَهُ بِدُخَانِهِ فَلَهُ كَذَا وَكَذَا[22]

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Whoever harms his neighbor with his smoke (or fumes) will be deprived (of reward)."

This hadith specifically addresses air pollution and industrial nuisance in residential areas. The Prophet ﷺ forbade activities that produce smoke, fumes, bad odors, or other pollutants that reach neighbors. Today, this applies to factories, restaurants, barbecue pits, or vehicles that emit toxic smoke near homes. It also includes noise pollution, dust, chemical vapors, and even light pollution. The hadith mandates zoning laws: noxious industries must be located away from residential areas. It also requires proper ventilation and emission controls for any facility near housing. On a personal level, burning trash, using smoky fuels, or allowing car exhaust to enter neighbors' homes is prohibited. This hadith supports environmental health regulations, air quality standards, and legal recourse for communities harmed by industrial pollution. It also implies that people have the right to clean air. The Prophet's ﷺ concern for a neighbor's comfort and health shows that urban planning must prioritize well-being over economic gain. A factory that creates jobs but poisons the air of nearby residents is not permissible in Islam.Imam Tirmidhi narrates that

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: مَنْ قَطَعَ سِدْرَةً صَوَّبَ اللهُ رَأْسَهُ فِي النَّارِ[23]

[22] Sunan Abi Dawud, Book of Manners, Chapter on Harming Neighbors, Dar al-Salam, Riyadh, 1420 AH, vol. 4, p. 456, hadith no. 5241

[23] Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Book of Judgments, Chapter on Cutting Lote-Trees, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 1418 AH, vol. 3, p. 445, hadith no. 1565

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Whoever cuts a lote-tree, Allah will cast him headlong into the Fire."

While this hadith was quoted earlier for forest conservation, in an urban context it applies to preserving trees in cities. Urban trees provide shade, cool the air, absorb carbon, reduce flooding, and improve mental health. The Prophet ﷺ's severe warning against cutting trees without need applies to city parks, street trees, and private gardens. Modern urban development often destroys old trees for parking lots or high-rises. This hadith calls for tree preservation ordinances, urban forestry, and green building codes that protect existing trees and require new plantings. The Prophet ﷺ himself loved trees and shade. He planted trees and encouraged others to do so. In city planning, green spaces are not luxuries but necessities. Trees have rights: the right to remain standing unless absolutely necessary for safety. Even then, the hadith requires replanting elsewhere. This teaching supports the modern concept of "sponge cities" and urban cooling strategies using trees. A Muslim city must have parks, tree-lined streets, and protected green belts. Cutting a tree for a trivial reason is a major sin, while planting a tree in a city is continuous charity (sadaqah jariyah).

Conclusion

1. The Seerah of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ provides a comprehensive, ethical, and practical framework for natural resource utilization based on moderation (wasatiyyah), prohibition of waste (israf), and communal responsibility.
2. Revival of dead land (ihya al-mawat) is a Prophetic model that addresses modern land degradation, desertification, and food security by incentivizing reclamation of barren lands.
3. Water conservation is a religious obligation: wasting water is forbidden even in abundance, and providing water to others is the best form of charity, directly tackling global water scarcity.
4. Planting trees and sustainable agriculture are acts of perpetual charity (sadaqah jariyah) and essential tools against deforestation and climate change.
5. Pollution of any kind water, land, or air is strictly forbidden, and removing harmful objects from public paths is an act of worship, supporting modern waste management and environmental cleanup.
6. Animals, birds, and insects have inherent rights: freedom from cruelty, adequate food and water, and dignified treatment even during slaughter, which opposes factory farming and wildlife exploitation.

7. Common pool resources (water, pasture, energy) are public trusts: no one may hoard or monopolize them, supporting equitable access and opposing resource grabs by corporations.
8. Intergenerational justice is mandatory: depleting resources or polluting the environment to the detriment of future generations is a form of oppression (zulm) punishable by Allah.
9. Urban planning must prioritize public health: no noxious industries near homes, preservation of trees, clean streets, and safe public spaces are religious requirements, not optional amenities.
10. All Prophetic principles align with modern sustainability science: reducing carbon footprints, protecting biodiversity, renewable energy, circular economy, and climate justice are contemporary applications of Seerah ethics.

Recommendations

1. Policy Level: Islamic governments must enact laws based on Prophetic principles: ban water hoarding, protect common lands, mandate environmental impact assessments, and enforce strict pollution controls with religious legitimacy.
2. Educational Level: Incorporate Seerah-based environmental ethics into school curricula, university programs, and mosque sermons, including practical training in tree planting, water conservation, waste segregation, and animal welfare.
3. Media and Public Awareness: Launch national campaigns using Quranic verses and Hadith to promote recycling, reducing plastic use, saving electricity, water conservation, and ethical consumption patterns.
4. Community Action: Establish waqf (endowment) funds for planting trees, digging wells, installing solar panels, and cleaning public spaces as ongoing charity (sadaqah jariyah) involving local mosques and community centers.
5. International Cooperation: Muslim countries should lead global climate negotiations with Prophetic ethics of justice, common ownership of resources, and responsibility to future generations, while supporting green technology transfer to developing nations.

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