

A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING FOR ENHANCING COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

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Abstract

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Indonesia's macroeconomic growth in the early 2020s, which averaged approximately 5%, has not translated into an equitable distribution of well-being. Many workers remain trapped in low-wage informal employment, thereby perpetuating high levels of social inequality. This study examines the role of social development and social welfare concepts from an Islamic perspective in addressing development distortions and social inequality in Indonesia. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, drawing on both primary and secondary data. The analysis focuses on the definitions and practices of social development and social welfare, as well as the influence of Islamic values. The findings indicate that social development emphasizes equitable access to basic needs and services, including education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Indonesian Law No. 11 of 2009 stipulates that social welfare is achieved when citizens' material, spiritual, and social needs are adequately fulfilled. The Islamic perspective enriches this framework by emphasizing mutual assistance, justice, and inner peace. Integrating modern development strategies with Islamic teachings can therefore foster a more holistic and inclusive model of social welfare.

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INTRODUCTION

National economic growth is often conceptualized as an absolute benchmark for assessing the success of a country's development agenda. Dominant perspectives across the world have traditionally assumed that capital accumulation and increased market productivity will automatically generate trickle-down effects, thereby improving the living standards of the broader population (Basheer et al., 2022). For instance, Indonesia's economy grew by 5.03% in 2024, while growth reached 5.11% in early 2025, with a projected modest increase of 2.3% by the end of the year ((Hasan, 2021).



At first glance, these figures appear promising, as they suggest economic resilience and sustained progress in essential sectors that support the livelihoods of the Indonesian population. However, despite the positive trend indicated by macroeconomic growth figures, conditions on the ground demonstrate that these achievements have not necessarily translated into an equitable distribution of social welfare, particularly among lower- and middle-income groups. This discrepancy is reflected in the shrinking middle-class population, partly attributable to the limited availability of adequate formal employment opportunities. Annual reports published by the World Bank Group indicate that macroeconomic progress has not been sufficient to facilitate a substantial transition from informal to formal employment. Consequently, approximately 30% of Indonesia's workforce annually over the eight-year period from 2017 to 2024 remained engaged in precarious employment characterized by part-time work, low wages, and inadequate employment protection (Wiwardja & Cunningham, 2021).

Furthermore, the continued rise in the cost of living has placed additional pressure on household finances and gradually eroded purchasing power. This development has further widened structural inequalities between vulnerable populations and higher-income groups in Indonesia (Wiwardja & Cunningham, 2021). The discrepancy between favorable macroeconomic indicators and the socioeconomic realities experienced by communities reflects a phenomenon consistent with the concept of distorted development. This concept is grounded in the observation that economic progress frequently fails to eliminate persistent poverty and its associated constraints (Wasino et al., 2026).

This phenomenon has contributed to widening structural disparities across both rural and urban areas. Such disparities may persist when economic growth is left to operate without adequate social policy frameworks designed to distribute the benefits of development more equitably, particularly among lower-income populations. This situation runs counter to the principles of equitable resource distribution and freedom of access to essential resources, which should serve as tangible indicators of meaningful development (Judijanto et al., 2026).

A more targeted, people-centered development approach is therefore essential to empower historically marginalized groups to improve their own circumstances. The persistence of distorted development and an excessive reliance on material indicators suggest that genuine well-being cannot be assessed solely through economic statistics. Rather, it requires a comprehensive approach that addresses spiritual values and fundamental dimensions of human dignity and well-being (Hasan, 2021).

Addressing social and economic challenges requires greater attention to the role of spirituality in fostering a meaningful integration of empirically grounded knowledge with the moral guidance provided by religious doctrines and values. An Islamic approach to community development also suggests that efforts to address inequalities rooted in prevailing Western economic systems can be enriched by incorporating transcendental values through the five fundamental objectives of Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah (Kurniawan & Hudafi, 2021). These five objectives concern the protection of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth. Applying this framework is essential to ensuring that public policies are directed toward safeguarding human dignity and promoting comprehensive human welfare (Susetyo, 2023). Accordingly, Islamic principles can serve as a normative foundation for ensuring that individuals have equitable access to social welfare and the opportunity to realize their well-being amid capitalist modernization. However,

translating these principles into practice requires a coherent, long-term conceptual framework to guide their implementation. Against this background, this study seeks to examine the role of social development and social welfare concepts in addressing distorted development in society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Welfare

Social development can be conceptualized as an approach to advancing community well-being or social welfare. This approach differs from social philanthropy, social work, and social administration, all of which have been institutionalized as mechanisms for promoting social welfare. The concept of social welfare occupies a central position in social development theory and practice. In this context, the term *social welfare* refers to a social condition rather than to charitable acts undertaken by individual philanthropists, charitable organizations, or government-provided public assistance (Ansya, 2026).

James Midgley's conceptualization of social welfare encompasses both subjective and objective dimensions and can be examined through qualitative descriptions as well as empirical measures. In his work, Midgley observes that the term *social welfare* is frequently misunderstood. Although its original meaning carries positive connotations and refers broadly to conditions of well-being, satisfaction, and prosperity, the term is now commonly associated with charitable assistance or public aid provided to poor families and their children in the United States (Burmelli et al., 2026). In the United States, social welfare has increasingly acquired a stigmatizing connotation. Women who receive public assistance are sometimes labeled "welfare mothers" and are frequently portrayed as lazy, unwilling to work, or exploitative of government services. This perception is ironic, given that the United States itself has historically used the term *welfare* broadly to denote the nation's economic, social, and political well-being (Sukmana, 2022).

Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah

The concept of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* fundamentally concerns the primary objectives underlying the legislation of Islamic law (Paryadi, 2021). An examination of the issues addressed in the Qur'an and the purposes conveyed through its explanations indicates that Islamic law seeks to embody mercy for all creation. Through its verses, the Qur'an explains the benefits provided by the natural world, the proper ways of utilizing its resources, and the actions that lead to environmental degradation and destruction (Alifah, 2025).

One of the most influential formulations of this concept is al-Shatibi's theory of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, which can be translated as the "objectives of Islamic law" (Kurniawan & Hudafi, 2021). One of the most influential formulations of this concept is al-Shatibi's theory of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, which can be translated as the "objectives of Islamic law" (Kurniawan & Hudafi, 2021). Since the publication of his seminal work, *Al-Muwāfaqāt*, the concept of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* has become a foundational framework in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, the discipline concerned with the principles and methodology of Islamic jurisprudence, particularly in approaches that emphasize the purposes underlying Islamic legal rulings. Etymologically, the term *maqāṣid* derives from the Arabic root *qaṣada*, meaning "to intend," "to aim," or "to direct oneself toward something." Terminologically,

Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah refers to the objectives pursued and the underlying wisdom intended by the Lawgiver God and His Messenger through Islamic legal rulings, with the ultimate aim of safeguarding human welfare and promoting the common good (Kurniawan & Hudafi, 2021).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, which was selected as the most appropriate method for addressing the research questions. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of the role of social development and social welfare in addressing distorted development in society from an Islamic perspective. The study draws on both primary and secondary data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social development is a development approach that prioritizes human and social dimensions to improve the quality of life of communities. According to James Midgley, social development can be defined as a planned process of social change designed to enhance the well-being of the population as a whole by integrating the dynamics of economic development. Social development initiatives build on economic growth while seeking to improve people's living standards holistically. Their overarching objective is to ensure that every individual has better access to basic needs and opportunities for personal development (Bahri, 2025). Accordingly, social development places greater emphasis on justice and equity in living standards, including equitable access to education, healthcare, employment, and other social services. This perspective underscores the importance of comprehensive human development as a means of improving community well-being (Ritonga & Mucklis, 2026).

Consistent with the social development approach, the concept of social welfare encompasses the fulfillment of people's needs in a comprehensive manner. Indonesian Law No. 11 of 2009 on Social Welfare defines social welfare as a condition in which citizens' material, spiritual, and social needs are fulfilled, enabling them to live in dignity, develop their potential, and perform their social functions (Rabban, 2021). Beyond economic indicators and income levels, the fulfillment of non-material needs and individuals' capacity to participate in social life can also serve as indicators of social welfare within a given community (Billah et al., 2025). This perspective reflects the need to understand social welfare holistically, rather than merely as the practical task of lifting people out of poverty. It also entails fostering a society that is safe, healthy, and empowered over the long term. Accordingly, the success of community development is often assessed by the extent to which basic needs—including food, clothing, housing, education, and healthcare—as well as spiritual and social needs are fulfilled across all segments of society (Marliyah et al., 2025).

Social development policies are also frequently designed to balance economic progress with humanitarian considerations, recognizing that rapid economic growth must be complemented by social programs that enhance people's well-being (Billah et al., 2025). On this basis, social development and social welfare are closely interconnected. Ultimately, social development seeks to improve community well-being comprehensively. In practice, this objective is pursued through the provision of social welfare services and the equitable distribution of public policies and services. Indonesian

Law No. 11 of 2009 further stipulates that social welfare provision constitutes a deliberate, integrated, and sustainable effort undertaken by the central government, regional governments, and society (Piran & Mardjono, 2022).

Social service programs are intended to meet citizens' basic needs through social rehabilitation, social security, social empowerment, and social protection. Their ultimate objective is to improve quality of life and strengthen community resilience while reducing poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and insecurity. This approach recognizes that economic indicators, such as GDP growth and reductions in the poverty rate, are insufficient on their own to capture the actual state of social welfare. Social development must therefore also be assessed through social indicators, including access to education and healthcare and opportunities for community participation, to ensure that the benefits of economic progress are shared across society (Marliyah et al., 2025). Such a framework emphasizes that achieving social welfare requires inclusive and participatory strategies.

From an Islamic perspective, community well-being should be pursued through the equitable distribution of sustenance and the empowerment of every individual. One of the key instruments in Islam is zakat, an obligatory form of almsgiving that constitutes a pillar of the Islamic economic system and serves as a mechanism for poverty reduction and the promotion of social welfare. In its socioeconomic dimension, zakat is intended, among other purposes, to alleviate poverty, redistribute income, and improve community well-being (Karim et al., 2025). Historically, an effective zakat system has been regarded as capable of meeting the basic needs of broad segments of the population. For example, during the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab, zakat funds collected through the *bayt al-mal* (public treasury) were reported to have helped meet citizens' basic needs. Zakat therefore occupies a strategic position in social development by mobilizing the wealth of those with greater financial means to support disadvantaged groups through an organized and equitable mechanism. This underscores the importance of Islamic philanthropy—particularly zakat, *infāq* (voluntary charitable expenditure), *ṣadaqah* (voluntary charity), and *waqf* (endowment)—as a set of socioeconomic instruments for promoting a more equitable distribution of welfare within Muslim communities (Adel & Azzaki, 2025).

In addition to zakat, the Islamic perspective encourages the development of individual and community capacities as an integral component of social development. Social empowerment in Islam focuses on improving collective well-being by mobilizing the community's internal resources and potential. This process involves the active participation of community members in designing and implementing social programs intended to improve their living conditions. Examples include religious education, the development of economic and vocational skills, and the strengthening of social networks among community members (Efendi, 2024). Relevant Islamic principles include *taqlīl al-takālīf*, understood in this context as minimizing people's burdens, and *'adam al-ḥaraj*, which emphasizes the removal of hardship. From this perspective, social empowerment policies and programs should alleviate the economic burdens faced by Muslim communities and actively seek to eradicate poverty (Burmelli et al., 2026).

This participatory approach is consistent with the *bottom-up* development model, which positions communities as the principal agents of development. Community empowerment initiatives, such as entrepreneurship training, public education, and community organizing, are considered essential to ensuring that social development reaches the most disadvantaged segments of society (Susanto et al., 2025). Within this framework, mosques, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), zakat institutions, and faith-

based social organizations play important roles as facilitators of social change. For example, Islamic education programs organized through mosques and *pesantren* have been reported to support the socioeconomic empowerment of rural communities (Kusnawan, 2025). The involvement of religious actors in social development also encourages mutual assistance and social awareness, broadening the understanding of welfare beyond material conditions to encompass inner peace and the moral well-being of Muslim communities (Muhibudin et al., 2026).

Overall, social development and the pursuit of welfare in Muslim communities constitute a holistic process. Social development provides the policy framework and practical mechanisms for improving socioeconomic conditions, while Islamic teachings offer normative foundations and practical instruments for achieving these objectives. These complementary approaches ultimately seek to realize substantive social welfare through a society in which people enjoy material and spiritual well-being, justice, and empowerment. Integrating modern development strategies with Islamic values may therefore strengthen the effectiveness of social programs by aligning development aspirations with practical measures that address the needs of all segments of society.

CONCLUSION

Social development and the equitable distribution of welfare constitute a critical agenda in the broader process of societal development. The pursuit of social justice can no longer be regarded as an optional addition to public policy; rather, it represents an urgent and fundamental imperative. Achieving social justice therefore requires integrated collaboration across academic disciplines and the active engagement of all relevant stakeholders. Through such synergies, more comprehensive development approaches can be formulated to address social inequalities more effectively. This understanding provides a foundation for critically reassessing the limitations of previous development approaches.

The shortcomings of conventional economic approaches in addressing social inequality offer important lessons for formulating future development strategies. Development models that place excessive emphasis on economic growth and market mechanisms tend to overlook distributive concerns and social justice. Consequently, the benefits of economic growth are not necessarily shared equitably across all segments of society, thereby widening the gap between economically advantaged groups and vulnerable populations. An approach to development grounded in Islamic values offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding welfare. This perspective places distributive justice at the center of development and emphasizes the protection of human dignity. Welfare is understood not merely in material terms but also in relation to interconnected social and spiritual dimensions. This understanding is consistent with the principles of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, which emphasize the protection of the fundamental dimensions of human life, namely religion, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth. Accordingly, social development from an Islamic perspective seeks to establish a balance between meeting material needs and strengthening humanistic values. This approach provides a foundation for formulating a more equitable development agenda.

Ultimately, social development grounded in the principles of justice and human dignity is expected to foster a more balanced, equitable, and civilized society. This perspective reaffirms that development success should not be measured solely by material achievements but also by the overall quality of human life. This broader understanding

of well-being represents the central conclusion of the present study.

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