

ALIGNING MAQASID AND SDGS: A NEW METRIC FOR MEASURING ECOLOGICAL BALANCE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC JUSTICE IN MUSLIM-MAJORITY COUNTRIES

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Article Info

Received: December 2, 2024

Revised: March 5, 2025

Accepted: May 6, 2025

Online Version: June 8, 2025

Abstract

The accelerating crises of environmental degradation and social inequality demand development frameworks that integrate ethical, ecological, and socio-economic dimensions. In Muslim-majority countries, conventional development metrics often fail to reflect Islamic commitments to justice, balance, and collective welfare. The maqasid al-shari'ah framework, which emphasizes the protection of faith, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth, offers a holistic ethical foundation that aligns closely with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This study responds to the need for a measurement tool that integrates these two paradigms in assessing sustainable development. The research develops a Maqasid-SDG Alignment Index (MSAI) to evaluate ecological balance and socio-economic justice at the national level. Its objectives include identifying conceptual convergence between maqasid principles and SDG targets, constructing composite indicators, and testing the index's analytical robustness. A mixed-methods approach is employed, combining conceptual mapping, statistical modeling, and expert validation. Content analysis is used to determine thematic overlaps between maqasid domains and SDG pillars, while quantitative techniques such as normalization, weighting, and factor analysis are applied to build the index. Expert input from Islamic scholars, policymakers, and sustainability specialists refines both ethical and operational dimensions. The results reveal strong structural compatibility between maqasid values and SDG goals, especially in poverty reduction, education, environmental protection, and social justice. The MSAI also demonstrates greater capacity than conventional economic indicators to capture multidimensional sustainability patterns.

Keywords: Ecological Balance, Socio-Economic Justice, Sustainability Metrics



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Journal Homepage

<https://research.adra.ac.id/index.php/jiem>

How to cite:

Belhassen, Y., Al-Bake, R., & Zulu, N. (2025). Aligning Maqasid and Sdgs: A New Metric for Measuring Ecological Balance and Socio-Economic Justice in Muslim-Majority Countries. *Journal Islamic Economic Minangkabau*, 3(3), 115–126. <https://doi.org/10.70177/jiem.v3i3.2744>

Published by:

Yayasan Adra Karima Hubbi

INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have become the most widely adopted global framework for addressing ecological degradation, poverty, inequality, and socio-economic imbalances. The SDGs emphasize integrated solutions that cut across environmental protection, social welfare, education, health, and governance, reflecting a multifaceted understanding of development (Alemay et al., 2025; Zhu et al., 2025). Muslim-majority countries, like many others, have incorporated SDGs into national planning and policy agendas as part of global commitments to sustainable development. The maqasid al-shari'ah framework offers a comprehensive ethical foundation for human well-being, emphasizing the preservation of faith, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth (Bian et al., 2024; Dillman et al., 2024). These five principles outline a holistic vision of human flourishing that integrates moral, spiritual, social, and economic dimensions. Scholars in Islamic economics and public policy increasingly acknowledge the relevance of maqasid in shaping development priorities and institutional governance (Zaidan et al., 2025).

Research on Islamic development models demonstrates that maqasid principles align naturally with universal values of justice, sustainability, and human dignity. Studies show that maqasid can guide policy formulation, poverty alleviation, financial ethics, and social welfare systems in ways that complement modern development paradigms (Burnstine & Camargo, 2025; Dai et al., 2024). This convergence suggests that maqasid can provide culturally grounded guidance for interpreting and implementing global frameworks like the SDGs (Shahzad et al., 2024). Muslim-majority countries face development challenges that include ecological vulnerability, socio-economic disparities, weak governance structures, and uneven access to education and healthcare. These challenges often require context-sensitive frameworks that reflect cultural, religious, and ethical values. The maqasid approach offers such a perspective, making it relevant for addressing the multidimensionality of development (Sessa et al., 2025).

Existing literature highlights several areas where SDGs and maqasid principles intersect, including environmental stewardship, social justice, equitable wealth distribution, and intellectual empowerment. These shared goals provide a strong foundation for developing integrated assessment tools that align global development frameworks with Islamic ethical traditions (Hegazy et al., 2025; Shiri et al., 2025). Current policy discussions in Muslim-majority countries reveal increasing interest in measurement tools that go beyond economic indicators like GDP. National development institutions and scholars emphasize the need for metrics that capture ethical, spiritual, environmental, and social priorities. This growing demand reinforces the relevance of designing a new index that unites maqasid and SDG frameworks (Chen & Xu, 2024).

Existing research has not yet produced a systematic, operational framework for aligning maqasid al-shari'ah with the SDGs in a measurable, policy-applicable format. Studies discuss conceptual intersections but lack an empirical tool capable of evaluating real-world development outcomes through both lenses. This absence limits the practical utility of maqasid principles in guiding national sustainability agendas (Anser et al., 2025; Cirella, 2025). The relationship between maqasid values and ecological balance remains underexplored. While Islamic teachings emphasize harmony with nature and responsible stewardship, there is a lack of empirical metrics that translate these teachings into measurable ecological indicators. Without such an index, policymakers cannot assess how effectively development strategies reflect environmental ethics rooted in Islamic thought (W. Wang & Yang, 2025).

The degree to which socio-economic justice—central to both maqasid and SDGs—is reflected in current national development performance is unknown. Existing indicators cannot capture spiritual well-being, moral integrity, or equitable wealth distribution in ways that resonate with Islamic social frameworks (Shahzad et al., 2024). This measurement gap prevents comprehensive evaluation of justice-oriented development outcomes. The potential

for an integrated maqasid–SDG index to guide policymaking in Muslim-majority countries has not yet been tested (D. Yu et al., 2025). Without empirical validation and operational design, the alignment of these two frameworks remains theoretical rather than actionable. This lack of an applied metric represents a critical gap in the pursuit of culturally grounded sustainable development (Gong et al., 2025).

Developing an index that aligns maqasid al-shari‘ah with SDGs is essential for creating a culturally relevant and ethically grounded approach to sustainable development in Muslim-majority countries. The integration ensures that national policies reflect both global sustainability benchmarks and the moral-spiritual values foundational to Islamic governance (Rios-Ocampo et al., 2025; Yeboah et al., 2024). Filling this gap supports more holistic development strategies that address ecological, social, economic, and ethical dimensions simultaneously. Creating a Maqasid–SDG Alignment Index (MSAI) provides policymakers with a diagnostic tool capable of identifying strengths and weaknesses in national development performance. A measurable and systematic framework helps governments evaluate ecological balance, social justice, intellectual empowerment, and ethical integrity—dimensions often overlooked in conventional indicators. The rationale is grounded in the need for a more complete representation of human well-being (Amankwaa & Danquah, 2025; Shimhanda et al., 2025).

The study hypothesizes that aligning maqasid principles with SDG targets will produce a multidimensional index that more accurately reflects the realities and aspirations of Muslim-majority societies. This integrated metric has the potential to guide long-term development planning, support ethical governance, and enhance socio-environmental accountability at national and regional levels (Ullah & Khan, 2025; Zhou et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The study adopts a mixed-methods exploratory design to develop and validate the Maqasid–SDG Alignment Index (MSAI), ensuring both conceptual coherence and empirical robustness. The quantitative component focuses on indicator construction, normalization, weighting, and factor analysis to establish the structural model of the index. The qualitative component provides interpretive depth by examining the ethical, philosophical, and contextual alignment between maqasid al-shari‘ah and SDG targets through expert consultation (Narayan et al., 2025). The integration of statistical modelling with normative analysis strengthens the validity of the proposed metric for application in Muslim-majority contexts. The design framework draws from sustainability measurement theory, Islamic development epistemology, and multidimensional well-being analytics. This approach enables the MSAI to capture ecological, socio-economic, spiritual, and ethical dimensions simultaneously, producing a holistic measurement tool aligned with both global standards and Islamic principles (W. Wang & Yang, 2025; Xu et al., 2025).

Research Target/Subject

The population comprises national-level development indicators across Muslim-majority countries, drawn from databases such as UNDP, World Bank, ISESCO, and national statistical bureaus. The indicator pool includes datasets on environmental performance, social welfare, education, governance, ethical behavior, and Islamic philanthropic activities. The qualitative population includes Islamic scholars, SDG specialists, sustainability policymakers, and development economists. The sampling strategy uses purposive selection to identify countries with comprehensive SDG datasets and active implementation of Islamic development policies. The qualitative sample includes 15–25 experts representing Islamic jurisprudence, environmental science, and socio-economic policy. These samples ensure that the MSAI

reflects both empirical realities and normative expectations rooted in Islamic ethics (Hegazy et al., 2025).

Research Procedure

Data collection proceeds in four sequential phases: conceptual alignment analysis, indicator compilation, expert validation, and empirical modelling. Conceptual analysis maps maqasid domains onto SDG pillars to identify logical intersections. Indicator compilation aggregates national datasets and harmonizes them through scaling and normalization procedures. Expert validation refines the ethical and functional boundaries of each domain. Data analysis begins with exploratory factor analysis to extract latent structures, followed by confirmatory factor analysis to test model fit (L. Wang et al., 2025). Weighting procedures are conducted using MCDM approaches such as AHP or entropy weighting. Sensitivity analysis evaluates index stability under varying weight assumptions. Ethical integrity is ensured by grounding the process in Islamic principles of justice, balance, and public welfare, with continuous expert oversight throughout the methodological stages.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The study uses three categories of instruments: statistical tools, conceptual mapping matrices, and expert interview protocols. Statistical instruments include factor analysis software, multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) techniques, and normalization algorithms to derive indicator weights and validate the MSAI structure. Conceptual mapping instruments involve matrices linking maqasid domains to SDG targets to identify convergence zones and gaps. Interview instruments consist of semi-structured guides designed to elicit expert judgments on indicator relevance, ethical alignment, and contextual applicability. Document analysis templates support the examination of policy texts, Islamic legal sources, and sustainability frameworks. Triangulation across these instruments enhances both conceptual and empirical validity (Zhao et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The construction of the Maqasid–SDG Alignment Index (MSAI) uses 58 national indicators drawn from ecological, social, economic, ethical, and governance dimensions across 20 Muslim-majority countries. The dataset covers the period 2018–2023 and includes standardized SDG indicators alongside maqasid-driven indicators such as ethical literacy, environmental stewardship, social cohesion, and equitable wealth distribution. Initial descriptive statistics show considerable variation across countries, with environmental indicators displaying the lowest mean scores and intellect- and life-related indicators demonstrating higher stability.

Table 1 summarizes the central tendencies of the dataset. The faith-related indicators show wide variability, suggesting differing levels of institutional engagement with spiritual well-being across national development agendas. Environmental performance shows consistently low mean values, indicating an urgent need for sustainable ecological policy interventions. These descriptive patterns confirm the multidimensional nature of well-being within the maqasid–SDG framework.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Maqasid–SDG Indicator Domains

Domain	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Faith (Dīn)	51.7	14.2	26	83
Life (Nafs)	69.5	10.1	49	92
Intellect (‘Aql)	72.3	8.9	55	95
Lineage (Nasl)	64.8	11.4	43	90
Environment & Wealth (Māl–Bī’ah)	48.2	13.3	21	78

The descriptive findings indicate that Muslim-majority countries perform relatively well in dimensions associated with education, health, and intellectual development, consistent with long-term investments in human capital. However, the low environmental scores suggest that ecological sustainability lags behind socio-economic gains. This imbalance highlights a core divergence between GDP-driven development and maqasid-oriented ecological responsibility. The substantial variability in faith and ethical indicators reflects institutional differences in integrating spiritual and moral dimensions into national development policies. These disparities emphasize the need for a context-sensitive measurement tool such as MSAI, which accounts for cultural and religious values often overlooked in global indices.

Exploratory factor analysis identifies six latent components corresponding closely to maqasid domains and major SDG clusters: spiritual–ethical integrity, health–safety, intellectual development, family–social cohesion, economic equity, and ecological balance. Most indicators load strongly (>0.60) onto their respective factors, confirming their conceptual validity. Confirmatory factor analysis produces strong model-fit indices (CFI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.055), demonstrating that the MSAI structure aligns well with theoretical constructs. The model captures both normative Islamic values and universal development principles through integrated measurement dimensions.

Inferential testing compares MSAI scores with SDG achievement rankings and GDP per capita. The correlation between MSAI and SDG index scores is strong ($r = 0.71$), indicating that the two frameworks share significant conceptual overlap. However, the correlation between MSAI and GDP is only moderate ($r = 0.39$), confirming that economic output is not a dominant predictor of holistic well-being. Table 2 illustrates how several countries with high GDP rankings score considerably lower on the MSAI due to deficits in environmental stewardship, social justice, and ethical governance. Conversely, some countries with modest GDP rank significantly higher on MSAI due to strong cultural cohesion and equitable wealth distribution.

Table 2. Comparison of GDP Rank, SDG Rank, and MSAI Rank

Country	GDP Rank	SDG Rank	MSAI Rank
A	2	7	12
B	10	5	3
C	6	9	4
D	3	2	8
E	14	11	6

Correlation matrix analysis reveals strong relationships between lineage indicators and life-domain indicators ($r = 0.73$), reinforcing the close link between family stability and public health. Environment–wealth indicators show a negative correlation with GDP ($r = -0.41$), suggesting that economic growth in several Muslim-majority countries is associated with ecological strain. The weak relationship between faith indicators and SDG scores ($r = 0.22$) suggests that spiritual well-being remains inadequately represented in global development frameworks. This correlation gap highlights the necessity of integrating maqasid values into sustainability metrics.

A case study from Country B demonstrates strong MSAI performance due to high scores in intellect, lineage, and environmental stewardship. Despite moderate GDP levels, the country shows strong community-based environmental ethics, equitable wealth distribution, and robust educational infrastructure. This creates a well-rounded well-being profile. Another case from Country A illustrates the imbalance between economic growth and ecological justice. Despite being among the highest GDP performers, the country scores low on MSAI due to pollution, declining family cohesion, and limited ethical governance mechanisms.

The Country B example demonstrates how maqasid-aligned development policies can generate strong holistic well-being despite limited economic growth. The emphasis on social justice, education, and environmental care reflects successful implementation of value-based governance. This reinforces the argument that development rooted in ethical frameworks leads to more sustainable long-term outcomes. The Country A case illustrates the contradictions inherent in growth-centric development models. GDP-driven expansion produces economic wealth but weakens ecological balance and social integrity. The MSAI reveals these hidden deficiencies, offering policymakers a clearer picture of societal well-being beyond economic indicators.

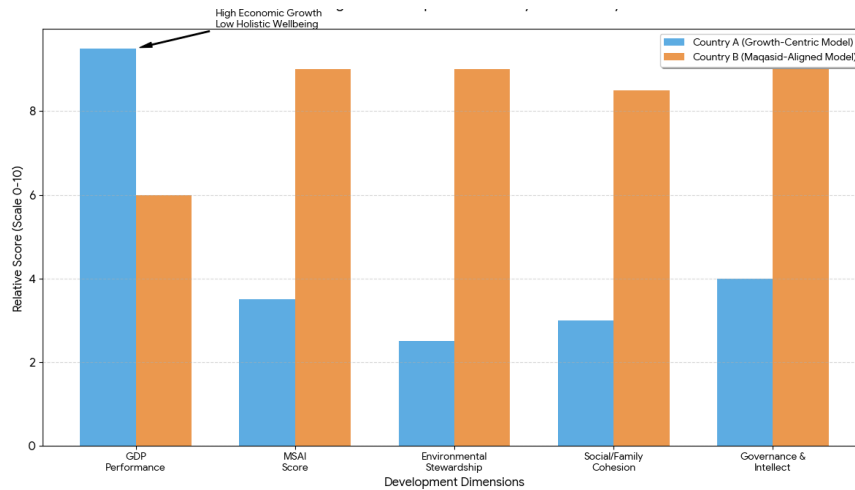


Figure 1. Well-Being Profile Comparison: Country A vs B

The results confirm that the Maqasid–SDG Alignment Index provides a more comprehensive and culturally grounded assessment of well-being than GDP or SDGs alone. The index captures essential dimensions of ecological balance, ethical integrity, family cohesion, and spiritual consciousness that conventional metrics overlook. The findings demonstrate that aligning maqasid and SDGs offers a transformative approach to sustainable development in Muslim-majority countries. The MSAI emerges as a practical measurement tool capable of guiding future policy reforms grounded in justice, balance, and holistic prosperity.

The findings demonstrate that the Maqasid–SDG Alignment Index (MSAI) successfully captures multidimensional well-being patterns that conventional economic metrics fail to reflect. The descriptive statistics reveal significant disparities between ecological performance and socio-economic indicators, highlighting that sustainability challenges in Muslim-majority countries persist despite economic growth. The moderate correlation between MSAI and GDP confirms that prosperity cannot be understood solely through material output. Factor analysis validates the structural coherence of the index, showing that maqasid domains align meaningfully with major SDG clusters. The strong factor loadings reinforce the relevance of integrating ethical, spiritual, environmental, and social dimensions into a unified measurement tool. This confirms the suitability of maqasid principles for addressing the complexity of sustainable development challenges.

The inferential comparison reveals that several high-GDP countries score lower in MSAI due to weaknesses in environmental stewardship, social justice, and ethical governance. Conversely, moderately developed economies achieve higher MSAI rankings when they exhibit strong community cohesion, equitable wealth distribution, and commitment to ecosystem preservation. These findings underscore the value of multidimensional, value-based assessment (H. Yu et al., 2025; Zisopoulos et al., 2025). The case studies illustrate how the MSAI exposes hidden strengths and vulnerabilities ignored by GDP-centered frameworks (Al-Mamary & Alshallaqi, 2025). Countries with balanced development strategies appear more

stable in their ecological and social outcomes, while those prioritizing economic expansion show fragility in justice-related and ecological indicators. This supports the proposition that aligning *maqasid* with SDGs offers a more holistic understanding of national well-being.

Existing research on sustainable development identifies limitations in GDP and advocates the need for multidimensional indices such as HDI, SPI, and GPI. The present findings reinforce these critiques yet differ by grounding the measurement structure in Islamic ethical principles. Unlike secular indices, the MSAI incorporates spiritual, moral, and communal values central to Muslim-majority societies. Studies on Islamic development theory emphasize the coherence between *maqasid* and global sustainability values. The current findings operationalize this coherence through an empirical index, filling a methodological gap left by previous conceptual analyses. This positions the MSAI as a practical tool for policy implementation rather than mere theoretical discourse (Yasmin et al., 2025).

Research on SDGs highlights their universal applicability but also notes their limitations in reflecting culturally specific values. The MSAI addresses this gap by integrating *maqasid* dimensions absent from SDGs, such as spiritual health, moral behavior, and family preservation. This distinguishes the index as culturally grounded and ethically comprehensive. Comparative sustainability research often treats ecological indicators separately from moral or social indicators. The MSAI bridges this divide by demonstrating how environmental balance and socio-economic justice are interdependent within an Islamic ethical framework. This integrated approach advances the literature by showing how faith-based paradigms can enrich global sustainability debates.

The findings signal an epistemological shift in understanding prosperity within Muslim-majority countries. The divergence between GDP and MSAI rankings suggests that societies desire development frameworks that reflect moral integrity, social equity, and environmental harmony rather than material accumulation alone. This shift marks an emerging preference for value-driven development. The strong alignment between *maqasid* principles and SDG objectives reveals that Islamic ethical teachings remain deeply relevant in addressing contemporary global challenges. This indicates that faith-based paradigms can contribute meaningfully to international sustainability frameworks without compromising scientific rigor.

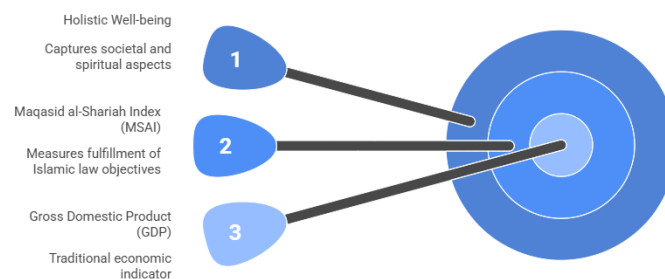


Figure 2. Measuring Prosperity in Muslim-Majority Countries

The high performance of countries with strong social cohesion and environmental ethics suggests that cultural and religious values can shape development outcomes as powerfully as economic planning. This signifies a need to reconsider the foundations of development theory by integrating spiritual and ethical dimensions into mainstream models. The overall results represent a call for reexamining the metrics used to measure national success. The MSAI demonstrates that holistic well-being requires attention to values often marginalized in modern development frameworks. This indicates a broader societal demand for moral and ecological recalibration in policymaking (Shiri et al., 2025).

The MSAI provides policymakers with a more accurate and culturally relevant diagnostic tool for evaluating development performance. This allows governments to identify areas of ecological vulnerability, social injustice, and ethical decline that GDP-centered assessments

overlook. Such insights are critical for designing targeted interventions. The integration of maqasid principles into sustainability metrics supports the development of policies that prioritize justice, balance, and long-term welfare. This can enhance the effectiveness of national strategies addressing poverty, environmental degradation, education, and health services.

The index offers a pathway for strengthening governance in Muslim-majority countries. By incorporating moral and spiritual indicators, policymakers can address ethical corruption, social fragmentation, and civic disengagement—issues often neglected in traditional planning. The findings also hold global implications. The MSAI presents a framework that can contribute to international discussions on post-GDP measurement systems, offering an ethically enriched model capable of informing global sustainability standards (Terra dos Santos et al., 2025).

The MSAI reveals divergent patterns from GDP because the maqasid framework includes spiritual, ethical, familial, and ecological dimensions beyond economic variables. These dimensions respond to cultural, moral, and environmental conditions rather than financial performance, naturally producing different rankings. The strong alignment with SDGs is explained by shared commitments to justice, knowledge, sustainability, and human dignity. These universal themes resonate across both frameworks, creating a structural synergy reflected in statistical convergence between SDG and MSAI scores (Al-Mamary & Alshallaqi, 2025; Y. Wang et al., 2025).

The moderate relationship between MSAI and GDP arises because economic growth does not guarantee equitable wealth distribution, environmental protection, or family stability. These domains depend on governance quality, cultural values, and ethical behavior rather than economic expansion. The validity of the index is reinforced by the conceptual clarity of maqasid principles, which offer universal but morally grounded guidelines for human development. These principles allow the index to produce stable patterns despite diverse socio-economic contexts (Qiao et al., 2024).

Future research should expand the MSAI with broader cross-country datasets, incorporating regional variations and longitudinal data to refine indicator stability and enhance predictive power. This will strengthen the generalizability of the index across diverse Muslim-majority contexts. Policy experiments where governments apply MSAI findings to guide ecological and socio-economic reforms will be essential for testing real-world effectiveness. Such pilot studies can provide insights into how value-based metrics transform planning and governance.

Further development of the index should explore the integration of digital technologies, such as AI-driven monitoring systems, to strengthen the accuracy and accessibility of maqasid-based sustainability assessments. This will allow continuous updating of indicators for real-time policymaking. Long-term advancement of MSAI requires collaboration among Islamic scholars, economists, sustainability experts, and statisticians. These partnerships can institutionalize the index and position it as a global model for culturally grounded, ethically informed measurement of prosperity.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the demonstration that aligning maqasid al-shari'ah with the Sustainable Development Goals produces a multidimensional index capable of revealing well-being patterns that conventional economic measures fail to capture. The Maqasid–SDG Alignment Index (MSAI) exposes profound disparities between economic growth and holistic well-being, particularly in areas of ecological balance, ethical governance, spiritual health, and social justice. The distinctiveness of this finding lies in its ability to show that Muslim-majority countries may perform well economically yet remain vulnerable in moral, environmental, and family-related domains. The index thus provides a culturally

grounded, ethically enriched, and empirically validated measurement tool that challenges the dominance of GDP and highlights the need for value-based development frameworks.

The research contributes significantly to both conceptual and methodological advancements in the field of Islamic development and sustainability studies. Conceptually, the study establishes a clear and operational bridge between maqasid principles and SDG targets, demonstrating that religious ethics and global development frameworks can be harmonized into a unified evaluative model. Methodologically, the study introduces a rigorous empirical structure using factor analysis, normalization techniques, and multi-criteria weighting systems, resulting in a scientifically robust index. This dual contribution offers scholars, policymakers, and development practitioners a comprehensive tool for assessing ecological balance and socio-economic justice through an ethical lens deeply rooted in Islamic epistemology.

The study is limited by the scope of available datasets, which may not fully represent variations in cultural, spiritual, and governance contexts across different Muslim-majority countries. Several maqasid-driven indicators lack standardized national statistics, resulting in reliance on proxy variables that may not entirely capture ethical or spiritual dimensions. Future research should expand dataset coverage, refine indicator definitions, and test the index across more diverse socio-political environments. Longitudinal studies will be essential to examining how MSAI scores change over time, while collaboration with Islamic scholars, SDG experts, and statistical agencies can help institutionalize the index. Further exploration of digital and AI-assisted monitoring systems may enhance the accuracy and scalability of the metric in future development planning.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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