

Can I make a difference?

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At the conclusion of last month's column, I discussed 'a duty of care'. This duty goes beyond ticking the box. It is guided by important objectives such as the Maqasid Shariah. In individual ways, each of us across all faiths can have an impact by living our duty.

To have big impact, people must work together. Last year's election win for Pakatan Harapan in Malaysia is a profound example of the power of collaboration. It has been very emotional watching the citizens of Malaysia now facing a brighter future with their new prime minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The sort of collaboration seen in Malaysia is happening in a number of ways across many issues.

Getting people to work together requires shared intent and shared goals. Fortunately, there are some very important goals for people everywhere. These goals come from the UN, and hence they are called the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

These 17 goals were established to transform the world for sustainable development by 2030. The scale of the aspiration embodied in the SDGs is huge. When successfully accomplished, the world will clearly be a better place.

Can these goals be achieved? Yes, they can.

As proof, look at the previous UN effort called the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals covered the period from 2000 to 2015. During that period, significant progress was achieved:

- More than one billion people lifted out of extreme poverty
- The percentage of undernourished people in developing regions reduced by almost half (23.35% to 12.9%);
- More girls attended school than ever before
- The child mortality rate for those under five reduced by over 50%, and
- New HIV infections fell by 40% (3.5 million to 2.1 million).

Many of you have probably never heard of the MDGs. Without getting everyone

Diagram 1: The global goals for sustainable development



Source: The UN

involved, the UN was still able to have significant impact.

As part of developing the SDGs, the UN assessed lessons learned from the MDG experience about what worked and what could have been done better. Three big changes were made when the SDG program was being launched:

1. The goals were set in a very collaborative process involving more than eight million people representing global stakeholders.
2. The communication efforts to make people aware of the SDGs are profoundly stronger and should enable far more people to help achieve the goals.
3. The goals have much more accountability with 169 specific targets across the goal and key indicator metrics to measure interim progress.

Each of us as part of our duty should align our efforts with the SDGs. The SDGs are about doing good and having impact. Every religion has guidance on what is good, and fortunately, the definition of good is very similar across religions. For Muslims, this alignment of duty is very consistent with the Maqasid Shariah. Everyone can come together to fulfill their duty, while using the power in our numbers to have an impact for a better world.

It is time to take action. Action can come in many forms:

- If you work in financial services, ideally you should try to work for a firm that is part of the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI). PRI is a leading voice for assuring financial activity occurs in an ethical manner.
- If you work in banking, help to get your bank involved with the Global Alliance for Banking on Values. The GABV is applying ethics to banking.
- When you give Zakat, give to organizations that align their efforts with the SDGs.
- When you contribute time and experience to charities, ask the charities how they have aligned their efforts with the SDGs.



I live my duty by being involved in these types of organizations. One example is the RFI Foundation which is building connections between the world of Islamic finance and the world of responsible investing. I am also one of the first RFI emissaries. The emissary program is a new effort to increase collaboration across ethical finance organizations around the world.

Whatever you decide to do, get started now. If the effort is aligned with the SDGs, it is relevant. If the effort has good people, you can trust it. Your effort creates the impact. ☺