

Environmental sustainability in the prophetic Sunnah

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to explore the position of the Prophetic Sunnah on sustaining the green environment, encouraging its preservation, and preventing any tampering or vandalism. The article highlights the Sunnah's emphasis on environmental care by underscoring its instructions regarding the sustainability of natural greenery. This study examines the Prophet's teachings and directives that urge environmental sustainability by promoting planting and cautioning against actions that harm nature, such as cutting down trees or damaging green spaces. It emphasizes that environmental conservation is an integral yet often overlooked part of the Sunnah. Key findings include that the preservation, enhancement, and careful treatment of the environment and its resources are core values in the Sunnah. The Sunnah explicitly discourages the destruction of trees and green land, even in the most challenging times and conditions, and declares any distortion or damage to the green environment as a transgression in Islamic law. The article concludes with several recommendations, foremost among them being the development of a university-level environmental education program aimed at raising awareness, protecting the environment, and preventing its degradation.

Keywords: Green environment, Charity, deforestation, Prophetic Sunnah, Sustainability, Tree planting.

1. Introduction

The Sunnah of the Prophet paid special attention to the environment, and was the first to establish special legislation to ensure its safety, prevent its destruction, and preserve its various resources and multiple forms. The green environment has received special importance in Islamic law, as God mentioned in the Holy Qur'an the blessing of palm and grape gardens that cover the earth with their greenery, and the lush gardens, and the fruits and herbs, as in the verse (Abasa: 26:30).

The Holy Quran has drawn attention in its verses to two basic elements of the benefits of greenery, one of which is benefit as in the verse (Sajdah: 27), and the other is beauty and goodness as in the verse (An-Naml: 60). The Sunnah of the Prophet has urged the sustainability of the green environment as it has forbidden cutting down trees, destroying green land, not harming it, or causing anything that affects its role in the environmental community. The Prophet's directives regarding the green environment are varied: some prohibit causing harm to it, others encourage planting and associate it with spiritual reward, and still others describe it as a form of ongoing charity.

Therefore, the Prophetic texts concerning the green environment warrant study and analysis to highlight their meanings and reveal their various insights. This article aims to contribute to elucidating the Prophetic Sunnah in this expansive area, reaffirming its role and demonstrating its commitment to the preservation of the green environment, as well as emphasizing its unique and elevated approach.

2. Definitions

The term "sustainability" in language encompasses continuity, stability, and permanence. (Dictionary of Contemporary Arabic, 1/790, 2008). The linguistic root of "sustainability" is associated with green trees, particularly "doum" (a large tree of the palm family) whose fruit resembles the size of

an apple, featuring a hard red shell. The doum palm has a large kernel with a spongy pulp, a characteristic shared by large trees of various types. (The Arabic Language Academy, 1/305, 1972). Environment: The Public Environmental System in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia defines "environment" in its first article as: "Everything that surrounds a person, including water, air, land, outer space, and all that these environments contain, such as minerals, plants, animals, various forms of energy, natural systems, processes, and human activities." (Royal Decree No. M/34, dated 28/7/1422 AH, and Cabinet Decision No. 193, dated 7/7/1422 AH).

The concept of the environment reflects the reciprocal relationship between humans and their ecological surroundings. There exists a mutually beneficial relationship between humans and trees and other plants, as well as a connection between humans and animals in terms of care and concern from humans, alongside the various benefits derived from animals.

Definition of "Green Environment: A primary element of the environment that includes all forms of vegetation on earth, encompassing gardens, trees, algae, shrubs, various crops, different types of plants, and any area covered in greenery.

Definition of Green Environment Sustainability in the Prophetic Sunnah: The directives and recommendations in the Prophetic Sunnah aimed at preserving all forms of greenery and vegetation, encouraging their proliferation by highlighting their spiritual rewards and eternal benefits, and warning against their destruction or damage.

3. Encouragement to Plant and Preserve Trees, and Linking It to Reward

The Prophetic Sunnah encourages the planting and care of trees, associating it with spiritual reward; it even considers it an ongoing charity (Sadaqah Jariyah) that continues to benefit the one who plants it, whether alive or deceased. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever builds a structure or plants a tree without causing harm or injustice, will have an ongoing reward as long as any creature of the Merciful benefits from it." (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, No. 15616, 24/382, 2001)

The benefits derived from this hadith are:

1. Planting trees is considered an ongoing charity, with rewards that endure until the Day of Judgment.
2. The continuation of this reward is conditional upon the act being free from harm to others or encroachment upon their land.
3. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) conditioned the ongoing reward for planting on the benefit it provides to others, encouraging the planting of trees that serve the needs of people.
4. The use of a competitive spirit to motivate good deeds and encourage actions with lasting benefits for others.

The Sunnah identifies seven actions that continue to benefit a person with ongoing rewards even after death, while they are in their grave:

1. Teaching knowledge and spreading it among people due to its profound benefit, as it guides others to the right path, distinguishes truth from falsehood, and helps identify what is right and wrong.
2. Diverting rivers by creating water channels or rivers to facilitate access to water for people, allowing them to drink and irrigate their fields.
3. Digging wells, which provide a continuous source of water, benefiting both people and a variety of animals.
4. Planting date palms; date palms are particularly highlighted for their significant benefit and high value to people, as they are among the best and most distinguished of trees.
5. Building mosques due to their immense communal benefits.
6. Endowing a Qur'an, as its use and benefit to people ensure great ongoing reward.
7. Leaving behind a child who prays for the deceased parent—a benefit specific to the deceased person. According to the hadith (Al-Bazzar, No. 7289, 13/483, 2009), the Prophetic Sunnah includes the planting of date palms among these seven beneficial actions, indicating the Prophet

Muhammad's (peace be upon him) commitment to green environment sustainability and its multiple benefits.

3.1. *Encouragement to Plant Trees without Age Restriction*

In a hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "If the Hour (of Judgment) is established and one of you has a sapling in his hand, let him plant it." (*Al-Bazzar*, No. 7408, 14/17, 2009).

From studying this hadith, the following points emerge:

1. The "Hour" refers to its signs and indications of its approach.
2. A Muslim is rewarded for benefiting others, even without deliberate intent.
3. The hadith emphasizes the importance of planting trees and digging canals, ensuring that this world remains flourishing until its end.
4. The planter's reward endures as long as the crop and its subsequent benefits last, until the Day of Judgment.
5. This hadith encourages perseverance in work and not abandoning it, even if one does not expect to see its results, as other creatures may ultimately benefit from it.

3.2. *Planting Trees as a Form of Charity for the Planter*

Planting trees is an act of charity for the planter, as they earn rewards for anything that benefit from the tree's produce, whether it is consumed by a person, animal, bird, or even stolen. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "No Muslim plants a tree but that anything eaten from it will be charity for him, and anything stolen from it will be charity for him, and anything consumed by wild animals or birds will be charity for him. No one diminishes anything from it except that it is charity for him." (Muslim, No. 1552, 3/1188, 2009).

This hadith highlights several key points:

1. The virtue of agriculture and planting, and the encouragement to engage in these practices.
2. If the benefits of the planted tree extend to humans, animals, or birds, the planter receives a reward for this benefit.
3. Planting trees holds both religious significance and practical worldly benefits.
4. Out of Allah's immense grace and generosity, a person continues to be rewarded for their good deeds even after their death.
5. The hadith affirms that the planter's reward remains constant, even if some of the tree's produce is taken or causes minor damage to the plant.
6. The hadith indicates that women receive the same reward for planting as men, as the address applies equally to both, with no distinction in the reward for planting.

A table showing the types of beneficiaries of planting and the planter's reward:

Table 1.

Beneficiary of planting	Beneficiary of planting	Beneficiary of planting
Human	Eating	Charity
Human	Theft	Charity
Beast	Eating	Charity
Bird	Eating	Charity
Animal	Eating	Charity

The Prophet Muhammad clarified that anyone who plants a tree, endures the effort and hardship of caring for it, attends to watering it, and protects it from harm until it bears fruit, will be rewarded with charity for everything taken from its produce, along with a great reward from Allah. This is referenced in a Hadith (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, No. 16586, 27/127, 2001).

An example illustrating this is the conversation between the Prophet Muhammad and Umm Mubashir al-Ansariyyah:

The Prophet: Whose date palms are these?

Umm Mubashir al-Ansariyyah: Mine.

The Prophet: Who planted them, a Muslim or a non-Muslim?

Umm Mubashir al-Ansariyyah: A Muslim.

The Prophet: "No Muslim plants a tree or sows crops, and someone—whether a person, bird, or animal—eats from it, without it being counted as charity for them." (Abd ibn Humayd, No. 1570, 2/412, 2012).

The following points emerge from this dialogue:

1. The planter is the one rewarded for the planting, even if the planted land is not their own property.
2. The Prophet Muhammad specifically mentioned "eating" here, as it is one of the most significant forms of benefit. However, the reward extends to all forms of benefit derived from the planting—whether it provides food, shade, visual enjoyment, or enhances the landscape's beauty.

4. The Prophetic Commandments and Guidance for Preserving the Green Environment

The noble Sunnah serves as a beacon for promoting sustainable development in human societies, instructing individuals to avoid causing harm and wasting natural resources, which can lead to environmental destruction and degradation. Allah has distinguished humankind with the responsibility of managing natural resources and making humanity a steward over them. This role includes caring for the environment, preserving its diverse forms, and consistently striving to improve it.

The Sunnah encourages the sustainability of the green environment, prohibiting actions such as cutting down trees or destroying green lands, even in the most challenging situations and difficult times—even if these resources might benefit the enemy. One unique Prophetic commandment is the Prophet Muhammad's advice to his army before their march to the Battle of Mu'tah: "Do not kill a woman, a weak child, and an elderly person and do not cut down a tree, mutilate a palm tree, nor destroy a home." (Al-Bayhaqi, 18207, 18/301, 2011).

A study of this noble hadith reveals the following points:

A. Among the six Prophetic commandments related to the sustainability of the green environment are:

1. Prohibition of burning palm trees: This is intended so that people can benefit from the dates as food and find shade under their leaves, as they provide great blessings.
2. Prohibition of uprooting trees: This is significant due to the role trees play in building a healthy community and improving the quality of life.

B. One of the six Prophetic commandments included in the advice is "Do not destroy a home," highlighting that the home is part of the environment. This reflects the Prophet Muhammad's concern for the sustainability of another vital element of the environment—the home and habitation. It illustrates that the noble Sunnah's emphasis on environmental sustainability is a deliberate approach, not mere coincidence.

C. The hadith encompasses regulations that serve as a constitution for preserving the environment and its green resources.

D. It forbids the unjust and irrational exploitation of the environment by humans.

E. It clarifies the reasoning behind the prohibition of cutting trees through two points:

1. Impact on the beauty of the environment.
2. Deprivation of people and animals from benefiting from the trees. This is particularly important as the presence of trees ensures food security for livestock and protects them from drought, as illustrated in the hadith (Abdul Razzaq, 9209, 5/146, 1403).

The Table 2 that categorizes the six Prophetic commandments mentioned in the hadith of Prophet Muhammad according to their relation to environmental sustainability:

Table 2.

Commandment	Commandment	Commandment
Do not kill a woman	(✓)	Biological environment
Do not kill a small child	(✓)	Biological environment
Do not kill an old man	(✓)	Biological environment
Do not destroy a palm tree	(✓)	Green natural environment
Do not uproot trees	(✓)	Green natural environment
Do not destroy a house	(✓)	Natural environment

It is observed that the classification presented in the table is based on the sections of the environment and its various components, all of which have a direct relationship with the environment, ranging from the biological environment to the natural environment.

From the table, the following can be inferred:

1. The number of commandments related to environmental sustainability is 6 out of 6, which is 100%.
2. The number of actions related to the green environment is 2 out of 6, which is approximately 33%.

4.1. *The Ten Recommendations for Preserving the Green Environment*

The Companions were diligent in following the Prophet Muhammad's guidance to preserve the green environment, avoiding harm or actions that might compromise its role within the ecological community. History has recorded enduring advice from Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq on safeguarding the environment, demonstrating that caring for the green environment was an inherited value from the Prophet and a lasting code for all nations.

Abu Bakr said: "O people, stop and listen to my ten recommendations, and keep them in mind: Do not betray, do not steal, do not act treacherously, do not mutilate, and do not kill a small child, an elderly person, or a woman. Do not cut down or burn palm trees, do not cut down fruitful trees, and do not slaughter sheep, cows, or camels except for food. You will come across people who have dedicated themselves to worship in their sanctuaries, so leave them to what they are devoted to." (Al-Tabari, 3/227, 1387).

The following insights can be derived from these ten recommendations:

1. Three of the ten instructions specifically emphasize the protection of trees during warfare: prohibiting the uprooting of palm trees, the burning of palms, and the cutting down of fruit-bearing trees.
2. Islam places importance on caring for the green environment in both times of peace and war.
3. Islam provides guidance and care for every aspect of human life without neglect.
4. The Islamic system is elevated in its legislation, ethics, principles, and values.
5. These recommendations reflect the ethical framework for interacting with the environment, as outlined by Islamic values.

The Companions, led by Abu Hurairah, informed people and shared the Prophet Muhammad's guidance on preserving and sustaining the green environment, which included avoiding the burning, flooding, or damaging of palm trees. This is referenced in the hadith collection of Abu Dawood (Hadith No. 315, p. 239, 1408).

4.2. *Prohibition of Unnecessary Destruction and Damage to the Green Environment*

The Sunnah emphasizes that preserving the environment is akin to preserving human life itself; thus, it prohibits the destruction or defacement of the environment in any form. Any action that disrupts

or disfigures the green environment is therefore considered a crime in Islamic law. This is demonstrated by the warning given to those who unjustly cut down a lone tree in the desert, which could provide shade for travelers and animals. The Prophet Muhammad said, "Whoever cuts down a lote tree (The Sidrat al-Muntaha) [in a desert] without reason, God will direct his head into the Fire" (Abu Dawood, Hadith No. 5239, 4/361, 1998).

The Prophet also forbade a man who went to battle from harming the environment by burning or drowning palm trees, cutting down beneficial trees, or killing animals without necessity, as all of these actions deprive believers of what is beneficial to them. This is referenced in another hadith (Abu Dawood, Hadith No. 543, 364, 1408).

In addition to religious teachings, modern legal systems have criminalized the cutting of trees, enacted laws to protect them, and imposed penalties for such offenses.

Table 3.
Penalties for tree cutting in different countries

Country	Law and implementing authority	Penalty description
Saudi Arabia	Special forces for environmental security	Cutting trees from vegetative cover lands, uprooting, transporting, eroding, or trading them without a license is against environmental law, with a penalty of up to 20,000 SAR per tree
Egypt	Article 99 of the water resources and irrigation law	Violators of article 8 of this law are fined between 1,000 and 5,000 EGP per tree or palm tree
United Kingdom	Forestry Act of 1967	Fine up to 2,500 GBP
Russia	Article 260 of the Russian Penal Code	Fine of up to 500,000 RUB (approximately 7,645 USD) or imprisonment for up to 4 years

4.3. Benefits of Green Environments in Contemporary Societies

The importance and benefits of trees, which both humans and animals rely on, include the following:

1. Providing essential food for humans and animals.
2. Reducing accumulated carbon dioxide levels, which are harmful to the environment.
3. Producing sufficient oxygen needed by living creatures.
4. Shielding living beings, plants, and crops from strong winds by acting as natural windbreaks.
5. Filtering pollutants in the air and reducing dust, which impacts human health. (Shahata, p. 62, 1421 AH)

From the above, it becomes clear that the Prophetic advice and sayings regarding the sustainability and preservation of green environments focus on several key points:

- First Point: Linking tree planting and care with the reward in the afterlife.
- Second Point: The widespread benefit of planting and farming that extends to both the planter and those who benefit from it.
- Third Point: Ensuring the sustainability of green environments and discouraging their destruction and degradation.

Researchers in this article emphasize the green identity that Saudi Arabia seeks to implement, launching the "Saudi Green Initiative" as part of its Vision 2030. This also aligns with the environmental sustainability identity chosen by King Faisal University, which includes the sustainability of green environments.

5. Conclusion

The researchers in this article presented an overview of the sustainability of green environments in the Prophetic tradition, revealing several findings and recommendations, which can be highlighted as follows:

5.1. Findings

1. The Prophetic tradition emphasizes the importance of sustainable development in human societies, urging people to avoid harming and wasting natural resources.
2. The Prophetic tradition is committed to the sustainability of green environments, prohibiting the cutting of trees and damaging green lands even in the harshest conditions and most challenging times.
3. The attention given to environmental sustainability in the Prophetic tradition is a deliberate approach, not merely a coincidence.
4. Any act that disrupts or degrades the green environment is considered a crime in Islamic law.
5. The Prophetic tradition links the planting and care of trees with spiritual rewards, designating it as a continuous charity (sadaqa jariyah) whose rewards are granted to those who plant it, whether they are alive or deceased.
6. The Prophetic tradition views the preservation of the environment as akin to the preservation of human life, prohibiting the destruction or degradation of the environment in any form.
7. Maintaining, nurturing, and protecting the environment and its components is one of the neglected Prophetic traditions that must be revived.

5.2. Recommendations

1. Holding international conferences and seminars to highlight the importance of green environments and ways to preserve them.
2. Developing an environmental educational program suitable for higher education to raise awareness about environmental protection and to prevent degradation.

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