95340 - Poverty in Islam: Negative Effects and Means of Elimination

the question

How can Islam fight poverty?

Summary of answer

1- Poverty is one of the calamities that Allah has decreed should happen, either to a specific person or a family or a society. Poverty has negative effects on people's beliefs and conduct.
2- Islam fought poverty by: 1- teaching people that provision comes from Allah and that He is the Provider, 2- seeking refuge with Allah from poverty, 3- encouragement to work and earn a living, 4- making zakah obligatory on the rich, 5- encouragement to give charity, set up waqfs and sponsor orphans and widows, 6- prohibition of riba, gambling and deceit in selling, and encouragement to help the needy and support the weak.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Negative effects of poverty

Poverty is one of the calamities that Allah has decreed should happen, either to a specific person or a family or a society. Poverty has negative effects on people's beliefs and conduct. Many Christian missionaries exploit the poverty and want of some peoples to spread Christianity among their ranks. Similarly, immoral behaviour becomes widespread to a large extent because of poverty, as a means of meeting people's needs, so theft, murder, zina and sale of haram things become widespread.

Undoubtedly these things have a negative effect on individuals and societies. Allah tells us that some of the mushrikin used to kill their children, the apples of their eyes, either because of the

poverty in which they were living or for fear of poverty that might befall them. Allah says of the first case (interpretation of the meaning):

“…kill not your children because of poverty — We provide sustenance for you and for them” [Al-An'am 6:151]

And He says of the second case (interpretation of the meaning):

“And kill not your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them as well as for you. Surely, the killing of them is a great sin.” [Al-Isra’ 17:31]

In al-Sahihayn, there is narrated the story of a woman of the Children of Israel who, when she needed money and felt under pressure, she could not find anyone but her paternal cousin who wanted to have his way with her in return for giving her money. Then Allah saved her from that after she reminded him of Allah and told him to fear Him.

Whatever the case, it is well known that poverty leads to crimes and corruption. Many nations suffer from it and are looking for solutions to this problem, but to no avail, and there is no solution except in Islam, which brought rulings for all people until the Hour begins.

How did Islam fight poverty?

The means that have been prescribed by Islam to solve the problem of poverty and combat it are as follows:

- Teaching people to believe truly that provision comes from Allah and that He is the Provider (al-Razzaq), and every calamity that Allah decrees is for a reason, and that the poor Muslim should be patient in bearing his calamity and strive to relieve himself and his family of poverty.

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily, Allah is the All-Provider, Owner of Power, the Most Strong” [Al-Dhariyat 51:58]

“And no moving (living) creature is there on earth but its provision is due from Allah. And He knows its dwelling place and its deposit (in the uterus or grave). All is in a Clear Book (Al-Lawh Al-Mahfuz — the Book of Decrees with Allah).” [Hud 11:6]

“Who is he that can provide for you if He should withhold His provision? Nay, but they continue to be in pride, and (they) flee (from the truth).” [Al-Mulk 67:21]

“And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with At-Tayyibat (lawful good things), and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preferment.” [Al-Isra’ 17:70]

It is because of these beliefs that a man should bear with patience whatever befalls him of the calamity of poverty, and turn to Allah Alone in seeking provision, and accept the decree of Allah, and strive to earn a living.

Suhayb Ar-Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “How wonderful is the situation of the believer, for all his affairs are good. If something good happens to him, he gives thanks for it and that is good for him; if something bad happens to him, he bears it with patience, and that is good for him.” (Narrated by Muslim, 2999)

We can understand the effect of this belief on the Muslims by looking at what happens to others. In Japan – for example – in 2003 thirty-three thousand people committed suicide! And one of the main reasons for that was unemployment. In a report on the BBC website on 1/9/2004 they said:

“Official statistics show that thirty-three thousand people killed themselves last year in Japan. Japanese officials say that one of the reasons for this rise in the suicide rate is the economic recession that Japan is facing, which is regarded as the worst in fifty years. This has led to an unprecedented rise in unemployment as well as a rise in cases of depression, especially among middle-aged men.”

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Truly, your Lord enlarges the provision for whom He wills and straightens (for whom He wills). Verily, He is Ever All-Knower, All-Seer of His slaves.” [Al-Isra’ 17:30]

Ibn Kathir (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“The words of Allah “Truly, your Lord enlarges the provision for whom He wills and straightens (for whom He wills)” tell us that He, may He be exalted, is the Provider, the Withholder and the Bestower, Who deals with His creation as He wills. He grants independence of means to whomsoever He wills and makes poor whomsoever He wills, with wisdom in that. Hence He says “Verily, He is Ever All-Knower, All-Seer of His slaves” i.e., He knows and sees who deserves to be rich and who deserves to be poor.

In some cases wealth may be a means of letting people get carried away in sin and poverty may be a punishment. We seek refuge with Allah from both.” Tafsir Ibn Kathir (5/71).

- Seeking refuge with Allah from poverty.

The Sunnah relates to us what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to do and what he taught his ummah to do, which is seeking refuge with Allah from poverty, because of the effect that it has on a person, his family and his society.

It was narrated that Muslim ibn Abi Bakrah said: My father used to say following every prayer: Allahumma inni a’udhu bika min al-kufri wa’l-faqri wa ‘adhauab il-qabr (O Allah, I seek refuge with You from disbelief, poverty and the torment of the grave), and I used to say them too. My father said: O my son, where did you get this from? I said: From you. He said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to say that following every prayer. (Narrated by al-Nasa’i (1347); classed as sahih by al-Albani in Sahih al-Nasa’i)

`Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to say in his prayer: “Allahumma inni a’udhu bika min al-ma’tham wal-maghram (O Allah, I seek refuge with You from sin and heavy debt).” Someone said to him: “How often you seek refuge from heavy debt!” He said: “When a man gets into debt, he speak and tells lies, and

he makes a promise and breaks it." (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 832) and Muslim,589).

- Encouragement to work and earn a living , and to travel in the land to seek provision.

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"He it is Who has made the earth subservient to you (i.e. easy for you to walk, to live and to do agriculture on it); so walk in the path thereof and eat of His provision. And to Him will be the Resurrection." [Al-Mulk 67:15]

"Then when the (Jumu'ah) Salah (prayer) is ended, you may disperse through the land, and seek the Bounty of Allah (by working), and remember Allah much, that you may be successful." [Al-Jumu'ah 63:10]

It was narrated from Al-Miqdam (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "No one ever eats any food better than that which he has earned with his own hands. The Prophet of Allah, Dawud (peace be upon him), ate that which he earned with his own hands." Narrated by al-Bukhari, 1966).

It was narrated from al-Zubayr ibn Al-'Awwam (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "If one of you were to take a rope and bring firewood on his back and sell it, thus preserving his dignity, that is better for him than asking of people who may give to him or withhold from him." (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 1402).

- Making zakah obligatory on the wealth of the rich

Allah has granted the poor a share of zakah , which is to be given to the poor to keep, and is to be given until he becomes independent of means and is no longer poor.

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"As-Sadaqat (here it means Zakah) are only for the Fuqara' (poor), and Al-Masakin (the poor) and those employed to collect (the funds); and to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined (towards Islam); and to free the captives; and for those in debt; and for Allah's Cause (i.e. for

Mujahidun — those fighting in Allah's cause), and for the wayfarer (a traveller who is cut off from everything); a duty imposed by Allah. And Allah is All-Knower, All-Wise." [Al-Tawbah 9:60]

"And those in whose wealth there is a recognised right for the beggar who asks, and for the unlucky who has lost his property and wealth (and his means of living has been straightened)." [Al-Ma'arij 70:24, 25]

- Encouragement to give charity , set up waqfs and sponsor orphans and widows

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"So keep your duty to Allah and fear Him as much as you can; listen and obey, and spend in charity; that is better for yourselves. And whosoever is saved from his own covetousness, then they are the successful ones." [Al-Taghabun 64:16]

"and whatsoever you spend of anything (in Allah's Cause), He will replace it. And He is the Best of providers." [Saba' 34:39]

"And whatever good you send before you for yourselves (i.e. Nawafil — non-obligatory acts of worship: prayers, charity, fasting, Hajj and 'Umrah), you will certainly find it with Allah, better and greater in reward." [Al-Muzzammil 73:20]

It was narrated that 'Adiyy ibn Hatim said: I heard the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: "Whoever among you can shield himself against the Fire, even with half a date, let him do so." (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 1347) and Muslim,1016)

It was narrated that Sahl ibn Sa'd said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "I and the one who sponsors an orphan will be like this in Paradise" – and he gestured with his forefinger and middle finger, holding them slightly apart. (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 4998). Muslim,2983) narrated a similar report from the hadith of Abu Hurayrah)

Abu Hurayrah said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "The one who strives to help widows and the poor is like the one who strives in jihad for the sake of Allah and the

one who prays at night and the one who fasts during the day." (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5038) and Muslim,2982)

- Prohibition of riba (usury), gambling and deceit in selling

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"O you who believe! Fear Allah and give up what remains (due to you) from Riba (from now onward) if you are (really) believers. And if you do not do it, then take a notice of war from Allah and His Messenger but if you repent, you shall have your capital sums. Deal not unjustly (by asking more than your capital sums), and you shall not be dealt with unjustly (by receiving less than your capital sums)." [Al-Baqarah 2:278-279]

"O you who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), and gambling, and Al-Ansab (stone altars for sacrifices to idols etc) and Al-Azlam (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are an abomination of Shaytan's (Satan's) handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful." [Al-Ma'idah 5:90]

Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) passed by a pile of foodstuff; he put his hand in it and found that it had gotten wet. He said, "What is this, O seller of the foodstuff?" He said: It got rained on, O Messenger of Allah. He said: "Why don't you put it on top of the food so that people can see it? Whoever deceives (people) does not belong to me." (Narrated by Muslim, 102)

That is because if these things are done and become widespread among people, it means that some are taking people's wealth unlawfully, and people may lose all their wealth because of them. Hence the texts clearly forbid them.

- Encouragement to help the needy and support the weak

It was narrated that An-Nu'man ibn Bashir said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "The likeness of the believers in their mutual love, mercy and compassion is that of the body; when one part of it is in pain, the rest of the body joins it in restlessness and

fever.” Narrated by al-Bukhari, 5665, and Muslim, 2586).

It was narrated from Ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “He is not a Muslim who eats his fill when his neighbour goes hungry.” (Narrated by al-Bayhaqi in Ash-Shu’ab (9251) and by others. Classed as hasan by Al-Albani.)

In Muwatta’ al-Imam Malik (1742) it is narrated from Yahya ibn Sa’id that ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) met Jabir ibn ‘Abdillah who was carrying some meat with him. He said: What is this?

He said: O Amir al-Mu’minin, we desired meat so I bought some meat for a dirham.

‘Umar said: Would one of you want to fill his belly apart from his neighbour or his cousin? What, don’t you pay heed to the verse “You received your good things in the life of the world, and you took your pleasure therein” [Al-Ahqaf 46:20]?

This is a brief look at poverty, which points to some of its bad effects. The Muslim knows that poverty and richness, and whether things are given to one or withheld, are all subject to the decree of Allah. So he bears hardships with patience when they come, and he thanks Allah, may He be exalted, for good times when he finds them. But he is required to work and seek to earn a living so as to relieve himself and his family of poverty. But if someone is unable to do that because of health reasons or problems in his land, then Islam relieves him of poverty by means of zakah and charity that are given by the rich. This is the share of their wealth that the poor are entitled to.

And Allah knows best.