Analysis of Muslim Populated Countries' Performance on Wellbeing Measures[1]

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Abstract

Social progress measures aim to give countries a clue about what should matter and not. In that sense selected well known measures which are Human Development Index, Happy Planet Index and World Happiness Report are assessed and analyzed in terms of countries which have more Muslim population. By exposing the data from different measures, countries performance on various indicators highlighted. Moreover, indexes stance on measuring wellbeing via various indicators and its effect on Muslim countries performance discussed. As a result, apart from the economic indicators for a few Gulf countries, the indexes tend to put Islamic countries around the bottom of the lists and it does not seem possible to change this ranking in the short term.

Keywords: *Islamic Countries, Happiness, Social Progress, Human Development*

Introduction

Social progress can be defined as a sustainable improvement in economic and noneconomic well-being over time (Thorbecke, 2009), or as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Custance and Hillier, 1998). Some explain that social progress should first meet "needs" and then satisfy "wants" (Osberg, 2001 p.33). There can be as many definitions and explanations of social progress. However, it is an umbrella term that covers the fields of wellbeing, human development and quality life.

Within the term social progress, scholarly discussions about human development and its index need to be considered. Human development is an idea, which encompasses improving the richness of human life, enlarging the choices of people and enhancing their wellbeing (UNDP, 1990 p. 10). For many years, human development was measured only by GDP (Gross Domestic Product) which is an economic indicator. When the UNDP realised that the economic growth itself does not necessarily create human development, the idea of the human development index (HDI) was developed (UNDP, 2011 p. 1). Afterwards, there are many approaches to well – being, development and happiness appeared such as the Happy Planet Index (Nef, 2009) and the World Happiness Report (Helliwell, Layard and Sachs, 2012).

Measures of Social Progress Human Development Index (HDI)

Human development is an idea, which encompasses improving the richness of human life, enlarging the choices of people and enhancing their wellbeing (UNDP, 1990:10). Human development used to be measured only by GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in the past years. However after the realization that solely economic growth does not necessarily create human development or happiness in that sense, human development index was formed (UNDP,

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2011:1).

The Index was introduced in 1990 and the motive was to measure wellbeing or human development via various indicators such as education and health. Since its introduction in1990, the index has been revised multiple times and the last index aims to monitor the progress of national social policies in three dimensions: health, education and living standards. Life expectancy at birth by years composes the health component of the index. In order to measure education indicator, two variables are used; the mean years of schooling for adults aged 25 and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age. Gross national income per capita is used as an indicator for living standards.

UNDP states that it considers the criticism about the indicators and its weight in the index. (Klugman, Rodriguez and Choi, 2011). However, choosing an indicator for the index is a challenging task. Finding an indicator to the index, the data has to be internationally comparable, reliable and regularly available since the index aims to monitor countries' progress over time (Raworth and Stewart, 2003:141).

Firstly, human development index by excluding various variables in the name of simplicity and accuracy of the data, it opens up a discussion that it is not comprehensive and wholly reflective of human development. Secondly, indicators such as expected years of education and mean years of education are based on predictions either about the future or the past and it does not assist us to evaluate current policies in a state: rather they are the result of previous practices. Furthermore, human development index in its capacity is not able to screen short-term changes across globe. Since the world changing very rapidly in global era, index needs to keep up with the developments in different areas of the globe.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Approach

The idea of GDP was developed by Simon Kuznets, an economist at the National Bureau of Economic Research in the United States, in 1937. The motivation behind developing such a measurement was to assess a country's economic welfare by a single measure (Dickinson, 2011). GDP simply means "the market value of the domestic factors of production (adjusted for indirect business taxes and subsidies) entering into production of final goods and services" (Mack, 2003:2). GDP has also been explained as "a gross measure of market activity" (Cobb, Halstead and Rowe, 1999:2).

GDP measures economic progress. There are three measures of GDP, namely, the product (or output) approach, the income approach, and the expenditure approach. These three approaches to GDP should give the same result, at least in principle, since they measure the same economic activities (HM Treasury, 2006). The product (or output) approach calculates the total value added by producer enterprises in the economy, the expenditure approach "values what government and households spend on the acquisition of those products"
(UNSTATS, 2008:3-4). And finally, the income approach "sums the earnings which households derive from providing labour and capital services for use in generating production" (UNSTATS, 2008:3-4).

The explanations of each approach to the GDP imply that it is mainly an indicator of economic activity, as opposed to an indicator of social progress. This can be deduced as none of the approaches considers socio-psychological indicators nor do they incorporate qualitative assessments such as that of people's satisfaction with life-which are certainly important when considering social progress within a country. It is very significant on the ground that the ultimate goal of any society or any person can be to achieve their best capacity to attain a level of

happiness or peace that can lead them a peaceful, satisfactory life. This is where the key arguments against the GDP approach to social progress arise.

Doyal and Gough (1991) argue that the deficiencies of GDP such as not taking account of the distribution of welfare between groups and the impact of production on the environment are well known in terms of measuring welfare. However, they acknowledge that GDP was not devised to measure welfare (Doyal and Gough, 1991:153).

However, the reliability, objectivity and accessibility of this single measure are increasing its use by economists and policy makers worldwide (Schepelmann, Goossens and Makipaa, 2010:19). Nevertheless, many critics claim that measuring social progress or countries' well-being by only GDP, hides the fact that wealth is not equal to well-being (Stiglitz, Fitoussi and Sen, 2009).

Happy Planet Index

The Happy Planet Index was developed by the New Economics Foundation (Nef) (Nef, 2009). The main emphasis is on the environment in the index. The index used to employ three indicators to measure happiness in a certain country. These were ecological footprint, life satisfaction and life expectancy. After 2016, the index started using 4 indicators to measure wellbeing. The new indicator is inequality of outcomes that measures "how unequal the distribution of life expectancy and experienced wellbeing scores are within a particular country" (Nef, 2016).

The data for life expectancy is taken from the HDI index. Life satisfaction is measured via various survey findings; in particular, the Gallup World Poll and World Values Survey are used. The question asked to participants in these surveys was "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?" Answers were numbered from 0-10, where 0 indicates absolute dissatisfaction and 10 meant full satisfaction with the participant's present life (Nef, 2009).

Third indicator designed in order to assess how people use the world's resources to become happy. The idea is that the best possible way to measure the use of resources is to look at carbon usage of each country as well as the total global usage. Again, the data they use is taken from an external organisation, which in this case is the Global Footprint Network. The method used to collect the relevant data was developed by ecologists Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees (Nef, 2009). According to Wackernagel and Rees theory, it is possible to estimate the total amount of productive hectares available on the planet. Dividing this by the world's total population, we can calculate a global per capita figure on the assumption that everyone is entitled to the same amount of the planet's natural resources. This approach is motivated by ecological concerns as can be seen from the index. It is interesting to note that the US had 20.7 point whereas Mexico, its' much poorer (economically) neighbour, had 40.7 in the HPI 2016 (Nef, 2016). Interestingly, in the HDI index, the US HDI value is 0.92 (10th) whereas Mexico's value is 0.76 (77th) (UNDP, 2016). The two approaches produce very different results.

As for comparing the Happy Planet Index with World Happiness Report, it could be said that Happy Planet Index measurement system is dominated by ecological weight, hence countries which have less economic prosperity but more social concerns, natural capital and environmental measures like Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Guatemala occupy first places. Whereas in the World Happiness Report, economic standards determine the wellbeing of countries, in which people have high level of income and economic growth. First glance at both lists reveals us that the order of countries in both lists is determined by two

different approaches to the issue. One is predominantly environmental and the other one is primarily economical.

The index has been published four times, in 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2016. In terms of rankings, it is quite unusual. If the HDI and HPI are compared, it can almost be said that if we turn the HDI upside down we can find the HPI. Norway has the top HDI value in 2011 list, whereas it ranked 88 out of 143 countries in the HPI list of 2009. Another striking example is the case of Vietnam. It is the 115th country in the HDI 2016, whereas it takes fifth place in the HPI (Nef, 2016).

World Happiness Report

In April 2012, a new World Happiness Report was published by Columbia University and commissioned for the April 2nd United Nation's conference on Happiness (mandated by the UN General Assembly). The new report reflects a demand for finding new ways of increasing a nation's happiness rather than only focusing on economic growth, which was the major concern of some academics in the field of social policy. As we can see again from a newly published report on social progress or human development, the focus is being put on abstract and humanitarian side of human beings not material gains that will give people just means of becoming happy, not the result. Although, up to a certain level which our basic needs can be met, income is very significant, after that point there are some more important things that concerns us about our happiness such as relationships, and family. In this sense, the World Happiness Report is taking into account of different indicators of happiness such as political freedom, less corruption, mental health, employment, marriage, friends etc... According to the report, the happiest countries are Scandinavian ones such as Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Netherlands. Given that Togo, Benin, Central African Republic and Sierra Leone are the least happy countries in the world, the claim that economic growth plays a minor role in happiness is somehow disproved again by the owners of the theory by their own report (Helliwell, Layard and Sachs, 2018: 23).

Moreover, there is an obvious difference in happiness-based indexes. Even though the World Happiness Report is using more or less the same as Happiness index such as The Gallup World Poll (GWP), the World Values Survey (WVS), and the results are completely different. This is due to the weight of ecological dimension of the Happiness index in measuring happiness of countries. Whereas in the World Happiness Report, even though environmental concerns are acknowledged, the report does not consider environmental causes one of the dimensions of happiness in measuring it. This makes the difference in both lists.

It is explained that various measurements based on subjective well-being surveys were compared and used. The Gallup World Poll (GWP), the World Values Survey (WVS), the European Values Survey (EVS) and the European Social Survey (ESS) were used in the report to show the state of happiness of the world. These surveys usually aim to find out either life satisfaction or happiness state of countries on a scale of 0-10. The report compares and evaluates these findings from various data. "To summarize, life evaluations, whether they are general questions about life satisfaction, the ladder question in the Gallup World Poll, or overall happiness questions of the sort used in the European Social Survey, all give similar answers about the relative importance of the economic and social supports for a good life" (Helliwell, Layard and Sachs, 2012 :16).

Both external and internal factors affect the wellbeing of people according to the report. Some external factors are income, work, community and governance, and values and religion.

Internal factors are shown in the report as mental and physical health, family experience, education, gender, and age. There is also an issue of two-way interaction with happiness. For example, income may improve happiness and happiness may increase income. Comparative income is significant in rich countries whereas in poor countries net income is crucial for wellbeing. There are also other social and emotional factors are listed in the report including social trust, quality of work, and freedom of choice and political participation (Helliwell, Layard and Sachs, 2012:9).

The World Happiness Report, Happy Planet and many others on the same line are a response to the failure of GDP, income based measurements of social progress. Given that income or material prosperity is not direct cause for happiness, strategists and policy makers started to develop new ways of making policies to create happy and satisfied citizens.

HDI, GNI, HPI, WHR and Islamic Countries HDI (Human Development Index)

How do Islamic countries perform in the HDI? Is there any significant progress over the last few years? In which dimension of the index, they do better? These questions will be answered in this chapter. At this point, it should be noted that there might be dispute about which countries should be classified as Islamic. There is also the related discussion about 'How Islamic are Islamic countries?'(Rehman and Askari, 2010). However, I will suffice by mentioning these discussions in this paper since these arguments go beyond our limits in this paper. For the purpose of assessing where "Islamic" countries are located on existing measures of progress we take the definition that an Islamic country is a country that has a Muslim population of more than 50% of its total population. There were 39 Islamic countries including relatively small African countries such as Burkina Faso and Niger, in the HDI 2016 list that fit our definition (UNDP, 2016).

As far as the HDI 2016 is concerned, there were six Muslim countries in the very high human development list amongst other 45. This was the case for the past year as well. According to HDI 2011, in the high human development list, there were 13 Muslim countries out of 47, whereas in HDI 2016, 16 Muslim countries can be found in the high development section. On the other hand, again comparing with HDI 2011, while eleven Islamic countries can be seen in the low human development list in the HDI 2011, seven countries out of 40 are Muslim in HDI 2016. (UNDP, 2011, 2016).

As for monitoring any progress over the last few years, the last 3 years HDI's are examined. After a quick comparison of Islamic countries over the last three years of HDI, it is seen that the same Islamic countries (Brunei, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait) managed to stay in very high human development section in all three years' lists. However, this is only for one reason: GNI. The six countries average income GNI per capita was almost 72.265 US dollars in 2016. There are only two countries which are Liechtenstein and Singapore had higher income amongst very high developed countries after the average income of Muslim countries in the very high developed section. Interestingly, these six countries average expected years of schooling was 14.25, which was the second lowest, amongst others in very high human development section after Andorra. The same pattern can be seen in other indicators such as mean years of schooling. Kuwait had the lowest mean years of schooling with 7.3 years and six countries' average was 9.1 years, which is way below than any other country in the very high human development list in HDI 2016, except Portugal (UNDP, 2016). Even these statistics indicate that the main aim of the index, which was to monitor human development not under the shadow of material gain, is not reached. GNI per capita values overpower other indicators in the list at least in the case of Islamic Gulf countries.

Furthermore, I also argue that for countries that are experiencing internal war such as Syria, it might be somehow problematic to get higher ranks in the HDI without solving the war within the country. These numbers then do not necessarily display the efficiency of countries' social policies. Iraq, Sri Lanka, Syria, Egypt are obviously going to have problems with the index due to internal conflicts happened and still happening. Yet, the index tells that the life expectancy was 57.7 years in Iraq according to 2005 statistics right after the war with the U.S, whereas in the last report it was 69.0 years (UNDP, 2011 and 2008). It seems that the UN managed to obtain updated data from Iraq. However, how relevant these numbers are in the case of human development is again a matter of discussion.

As for the education dimension of the index, countries like Turkey, can make efforts to improve the mean years of schooling by increasing the years of compulsory education but not the quality of it. In that case, we see Turkey has higher rankings due to an increase in the education indicator of the index but the outcome of the years spent in classes could be overlooked. Hence, knowing the number of years people spend in education says little about human development. Moreover, the main purpose of education should be something, other than keeping children within school buildings. For this reason, many international organisations around the world deal with the education sector aim not to increase the time that people spend in education institutes but to increase the quality of education and to equip people with the necessary skills for life (World Bank, 2011).

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys were widely accepted indicators of such quality. In the latest survey, more than half a million 15 year old students from 72 countries took the test. Turkey as an only Muslim populated country among OECD countries in the PISA survey, score below than average in every tested area in 2015. Turkey ranked 54th in the whole list in science literacy section as an example (OECD, 2016).

As far as the decent standard of living dimension of the index is concerned, it is also worth mentioning that the index shows insightful data about the countries which have a higher GNI per capita but low human development compared to the countries, which have low economic values but a higher HDI value in total. For instance, Yemen as an Islamic country has $2.300 GNI per capita and ranks 168 in the HDI 2016 index, whereas Madagascar has $1320 GNI per capita and ranks 158 (UNDP, 2016). The difference between the two countries explained by the gap between the mean years of schooling. By exposing these kinds of cases, the UN actually does put pressure on these countries which have problems of transparency in money spending, and draw the issue to the attention of international communities. This is especially the case for Islamic countries.

GNI (Gross National Income)

In terms of Islam and Muslim countries, GNI measurement scores might not be very welcomed by Muslim politicians. GDP or GNI values for Islamic countries are mainly found towards to bottom of the HDI lists. Only very few Islamic countries have managed to stay around the $40.000-$50.000 GNI per capita level which is a little more than the average income of the countries in very high development section of HDI list (UNDP, 2016).

According to the HDI 2016, Qatar is the top Muslim country with $ 129,916 GNI per capita in the list amongst Muslim countries and other countries. Second is Kuwait, which has $ 76,075 GNI per capita. Brunei Darusselam comes next with $ 72,843. (UNDP, 2016). The list goes on with a few numbers of Muslim countries towards the bottom.

Even though the Muslim population around the world represents approximately 1/4 of the total population in the world, it is worth noting that Muslim countries in the HDI have much less than 1/4 of the total income. In the very high human development section, there were only six Muslim countries (Brunei, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait) out of 51. As far as GNI is concerned, Qatar had one of the biggest GNI values in the list alongside the Kuwait. However, this does not hide the fact that majority of Muslim countries had very poor economic statistics compared to other countries in general. The majority of Muslim countries were in the medium human development (10) section in the list with around $7200 average GNI (UNDP, 2016).

Moreover, it could be argued that these numbers do not really reflect the reality of people on the ground in Muslim world. The situation might be worse or better in reality. Unevenly distributed wealth in Islamic countries has always been an issue, and the Arab spring movement has showed that in a very unorthodox way. If we believe that the wealth in Muslim countries is at the hand of a small group of people, the picture about the Muslim world becomes worse than the HDI has depicted.

HPI (Happy Planet Index)

Islamic countries, in this relatively subjective listing (HPI), rank much better than in other indexes such as GNI and HDI. Some Muslim countries can even be found in the top 20 in the Happy Planet Index (HPI 2016) such as Bangladesh, which took 8th place, and Albania 13th and Indonesia 16th. Comparing with older HPI indexes, there were 16 Islamic countries in the first 70 countries listed in the HPI 2.0, whereas in the last 73 countries, nine of them were Islamic. It is interesting to note that Kuwait ranked 128th in the Happy Planet Index 2.0 and Qatar ranked 149th in HDI 2012, whereas these countries have always been one of the best performing countries in the HDI lists. This is due to the weight given to GNI in the HDI as explained. In the HPI, no material component is calculated and weighted; therefore, it is easy to see some very rich countries at the bottom like Kuwait and USA (Nef, 2009). Although the bottom 20 countries were African, very poor economically and more or less the same as the HDI listing, the whole list is completely different as far as Islamic countries are concerned. Islamic countries performed better in the HPI list and this is due to producing fewer footprints and more life satisfaction than other countries. Bangladesh produced a 0.7 point foot print whereas Albani have a 2.2 foot print value in the HPI 2016 (Nef, 2016). Although Bangladesh has poor wellbeing score (4.5), since its footprint is very low, its ranking goes up to 8th place. Both countries have low footprint score and relatively good life expectancy (70, 8 and 77, 3 respectively). An average of these values gave them 38,4 and 36,8 points on the HPI score and made them rank in top 20 (Nef, 2016).

WHR (World Happiness Report)

Comparing Islamic countries in the HPI with the Islamic countries represented in the World Happiness Report (WHR), it is interesting to note that the World Happiness Report resembles the HDI report more than HPI. There was only one Islamic country, which is United Arab Emirates in top 20 in the WHR list, and seven in the first 50. Bangladesh ranked 115th country in the whole list (Helliwell, Layard and Sachs, 2017: 22). We have seen that Bangladesh was the best performing Islamic country in the HPI. This comparison reveals that measures of social progress (happiness, subjective wellbeing, life satisfaction) generate completely different results that no way to combine them to have a meaningful conclusion about Islamic countries.

Discussion

In conclusion, it is almost impossible to have a meaningful combination of these measurements and to conclude that certain countries are definitely happier than others or some countries' social progress is much faster or better than others. It is the same for Muslim countries as well, except the small detail that they perform very poorly in almost every list but just few of them excel with some characteristics of income or foot print. In this regard, it is hard to comment on the performance of Islamic countries in terms of social progress, but if it is has to be done, it seems that it can only be done in a negative way.

Different understandings of life and progress may vail across globe in terms of countries and people. Therefore united measure of social well-being has to fail in every area of life; regarding subjective theories of happiness and wellbeing seem to be widely accepted by people from different walks of life. Muslim countries especially are not immune from this generalization. What matters and not in terms of social policies and wellbeing discussions is clearly not an easy to task to formulate. Generalizations and global measures seem to lack an emphatical lens on countries' specific traits. Furthermore, global rankings under many different titles may serve little in reality for real people on the ground.

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