

IIUM Journal of Religion and Civilisational Studies

Volume 5

Issue 2

2022



International Islamic University Malaysia

IJUM JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND CIVILISATIONAL STUDIES
(E-ISSN: 2637-112X)

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E-ISSN: 2637-112X

Published by:

IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia

P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Phone (+603) 6421-5018/5014, Fax: (+603) 6421-6298

Website: <https://www.iium.edu.my/office/iiumpress>

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Makmor Tumin

The Phenomenology of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's Community Engagement: A Theoretical Model for Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) Sustainability

Saheed Abdullahi Busari¹ and Noor Mohammad Osmani²

Abstract: Government and non-government agencies are concerned in recent times about the sustainability of socio-economic and environmental resources because the continuous survival of humanity relies strongly on the extent of ensuring a sustainable economy, society and environment. Sustainability studies have suggested the dire need to promote the implementation of environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) to enhance and guarantee the interests of stakeholders, such as customers, employees, investors and the entire ecosystem. However, a community engagement programme is distinct from community service as the former empowers the society for sustainability, similar to what Dhu'l-Qarnayn did to enhance socio-economic and environmental protection for the people of a territory. Through a phenomenology approach to the exegeses of textual sources of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, this article explicates how the implication of community engagement sustains the people of that time and its relevance to contemporary society. This article uses qualitative method based on a doctrinal approach to explore the historical implication of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's community engagement approach and its application to modern ESG sustainability. This study found that the community engagement approach by Dhu'l-Qarnayn is a sustainable

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empowerment model, rather than mere services to the people for free or in exchange for socio-economic and environmental benefits. The article identifies knowledge, wisdom, spirituality, engagement and empowerment as the fundamental principles used by Dhu'l-Qarnayn towards sustainable ESG in modern society. This study suggests the need to further conduct an empirical study on the understanding and application of sustainable ESG by religious institutions.

Keywords: Dhu'l-Qarnayn, Community Engagement, Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) Sustainability, Phenomenology.

Introduction

The primary role of the government is to provide and promote the implementation of policy development and facilitate the implementation of a sustainable society through its executive, legislative and judiciary arms of authority and other agencies. The role of a sustainable society is not limited to the government in the modern context. Instead, non-government agencies have also been concerned in recent times about sustainable socio-economic and environmental resources (van der Waldt, n.d.). Extant studies have shown that a sustainable society guarantees the survival of humanity as everyone depends on continuous human and natural resources. Although the concept of community services might be used interchangeably with community engagement, the former is limited to socio-economic assistance rendered to the community, while the latter focuses on empowerment. Services to the community are convergent between them, while empowerment for continuous sustainability is divergent between community service and community engagement (Bruce, 2008).

Dhu'l-Qarnayn is a character mentioned in the Quran with a unique community engagement strategy based on certain principles that are demonstrated in this study. His socio-economic and environment assistant to the people from the territory of Turk is a service to the people on one hand and community engagement on the other. Some historian argued that Dhu'l-Qarnayn's is originally from the Himyar tribe in old Yemen who explores a landmark socio-economic and environmental assistance to the people of Babylon from the territory of Turk (Ibn Kathir, 2000). The people who invited Dhu'l-Qarnayn

for assistance offered to compensate for the social services, though he preferred to do the service by teaching them how to do it together. Dhu'l-Qarnayn's engagement programme is distinct from community service as it empowers the society for sustainability, similar to what he did to enhance socio-economic and environmental protection for the people.

Environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) focuses on the impact of organisational activities on the social fabric, economic empowerment and environmental protection of a society. However, little academic research has been done on the study and application of ESG in modern society. Therefore, this paper has four sections, the first of which is a review of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's historical, socio-economic and environmental community engagement and the concept of ESG. The second section is the phenomenology methodology of the study, followed by the application of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's principles of community engagement to contemporary ESG. The third section includes a discussion of the study, while the final section provides a conclusion as well as recommendation for policy and practical approach to current gaps in the application of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's community engagement model in addressing ESG initiatives in modern society.

Literature Review

History of Dhu'l-Qarnayn

Some historical evidence indicate that Iskandar Dhu'l-Qarnayn mentioned in the Quran is in reality the figure Alexander the Great in Western history and not just a spiritual reflection. This is the person who ruled the East and West of the European territories. Apart from his power of authority within the region, he was recorded as being knowledgeable with sound wisdom, as exemplified in the intervention of the community that sought his assistance. The study by Nur Asma AB Aziz and Muhd Norzam Jamian (2016) identifies four main principles that embody the leadership of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, namely knowledge, wisdom, justice and virtuous deeds. Intellectual capacity is a guide towards the establishment of *hablum-mina Allah* (covenant from Allah) as spiritual guidance and *habulumina-nnas* (covenant from men), indicating the relationship with people, society and the environment.

These four principles are the golden characteristics of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, which earned him the success and achievement to rule and conquer the said territory for the protection of humanity in seeking the pleasure of Allah (Nur Asma Ab Aziz & Muhd Norzam Jamian, 2016). The story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn is important, as evident in Verse 83 of Surah Al-Kahf in the Quran: "And they ask you about Dhu'l-Qarnayn. Say, I will recite to you a record of him". The Quran also explicates how he helped the oppressed and established justice. According to the exegeses of At-Tabari (2001, no 5/433), four kings on the earth toured and extended authority between the East and West, but two of them were righteous (Suleiman bin Dawood and Dhu'l Qarnayn), while the other two were infidels (Bakhtnasir and Nimrod bin Kanaan). Historical evidence suggests that Dhu'l-Qarnayn accepted Islam through Ibrahim Al-Khalil and his son, Ishmael (PBUH), and he did the circumambulation with them at the Holy Kaabah. However, other historians have argued that Dhu'l-Qarnayn was an Egyptian philosopher named after Alexandria city which he established (Ibn Kathīr, 1990). Moreover, the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn in the Quran is centred around a monotheistic, powerful and knowledgeable person who built the dam of Gog and Magog, and this is where it differs from Alexander of Macedonia, who was reported to have reached the dam. In sum, there are different historical reports on the figure of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, which can be traced back to Christian and Jewish records, but Islamic records confirm that he was monotheistic, knowledgeable and powerful (Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, 1432).

Community Engagement

A community entails a group of people sharing common social, economic or environmental characteristics. A community of people has a sense of belonging that is bound together with similar geographical features, common interests, shared values, experiences or culture. Considering the purpose of common interests in the community, sustainability experts have argued that community engagement is a fundamental lifeline of the community in modern society. Although there is no specific definition of community engagement, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes community engagement as the process of collaboration and cooperation between a group of people in a close geographical location with similar interests for the benefit of

humanity and environment (Christens & Zeldin, 2016; Schlake, 2015). The socio-economic and environmental challenges of every society can collectively be identified and forestalled by a group of people having geographical proximity, similar interests and mutual collaboration and cooperation to achieve set objectives. According to the CDC (2011), effective engagement towards achieving a common interest to protect a society's socio-economic and environmental needs requires three main principles, which are items to consider before the commencement of operation, identification of items that necessitate engagement and essential items needed for successful engagement (Schlake, 2015) (Schlake, 2015).

Active community engagement projects have identified the significance of youths and adolescents as effective agents for achieving constructive and effective community progress and development. Community engagement helps organisations identify and empower youths on the importance and process of protecting the socio-economic and environmental interests of society. Community engagement with youths enhances sustainable social justice and youth-adult partnership in policy, governance and organisation. A youth community engagement programme is a modern socialisation dimension of getting youths involved in the constructive development of their socio-economic and environmental surroundings. Youth community engagement usually occurs in three models – volunteerism, youth in governance and community organising, which involves young people (Christens & Zeldin, 2016).

Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) Sustainability

ESG is a concept that measures the sustainability and ethical impact of business activities. It is mainly concerned with the environmental consequences of investment activities on climate change and the effect of nuclear energy on social sustainability in general (Busari & Sitiris, 2021). It also addresses diversity concerns, human rights, consumer protection as well as animal rights and welfare. Modern companies are assessed based on their ESG compliance in the management structure, labour relations, compensation of workers and responsible investments. There are increasing ESG concerns in government and company policies,

leading to financial rating factors in the company's overall corporate responsibilities (Kiehne, 2019). Empirical evidence from Friede et al. (2015) suggests that 200 studies have been conducted on the relationship between ESG and the financial performance of corporate companies. It is found that there is a significant positive relationship between ESG and corporate financial performance (CFP). It is important to note that despite the significance of ESG integration in corporate services and investment, the perception of corporate policymakers differs from one geographical location to another, such as USA and Europe, which somewhat influences global results and ratings (Friede et al., 2015). Researchers have argued that the benefits of understanding ESG and its implementation are multidimensional because investors are conscious of identifying and avoiding companies that violate socio-economic and environmental benefits to the entire ecosystem. Companies that are ESG compliant by reducing risk are more likely to increase profit, especially in the ESG intelligence compliance environment (Henisz et al., 2019).

Phenomenological Interpretation of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's Community Engagement

The phenomenological approach of qualitative inquiry explores the experience and lived interpretation of concepts and events. Phenomenology interpretation shows the second- or third-level perception of a particular construct (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Davidsen, 2013). It can be traced to the pioneer contribution of Ibn Haytham, a Persian psychologist who lived between Basra and Cairo (Saudi et al., 2007).

There are 15 verses in Surah al-Kahf that encapsulate the historical significance of Dhu'l-Qarnayn. The sociological background of these specific verses is explained in the exegeses of the Quran as a result of how the Christians and Jews questioned and interrogated Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) concerning information in their scriptures. These questioners were the Quraysh infidels who were indoctrinated by the Jews,

These Jews said to the Quraysh delegation:

“Ask him; the Prophet (PBUH) about three commandments; first, ask him about a matter of boys who left the city, second,

the case of a man that traveled, conquer, and established authority between the east and the west of the earth, and ask him about the soul" (Ibn Kathīr, bin Umar, 1997; Majmau Al-Buhus al-Islamiyyah Al-Azhar, 1992).

The first of the 15 verses states, "They will ask thee of Dhu'l-Qarnayn. Say: I shall recite unto you a remembrance of him" (Al-Kahf: 83). Allah wanted to establish the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) and commanded him to respond to the inquiry based on revelation.

Surely We established him in the land, and gave him the means to all things. (Al-Kahf: 84)

According to Al-Bagwī (1997), there are comments that Dhu'l-Qarnayn was a prophet or a king or both, but the established source suggests that he was a righteous person, with knowledge and wisdom, who loved Allah and whom Allah loved in return. Also, according to Verse 85 of Surah Al-Kahf ("So he travelled a course"), Dhu'l-Qarnayn traveled across the globe and reached the main landmarks between the East and the West (Al-Qurtubī, 2006; At-Tabari, 2001).

...until he reached the setting 'point' of the sun, which appeared to him to be setting in a spring of murky water, where he found some people. We said, "O Dhu'l-Qarnayn! Either punish them or treat them kindly." (Al-Kahf: 86)

The verse above describes Dhu'l-Qarnayn's sojourn, during which he encountered the people of the community whose houses were short and without covers. Whenever it was sunny, they would go into the river for cover and when the sun set, they would troop out in relief (Ibn Kathīr, bin Umar, 1997). Since Dhu'l-Qarnayn's task was to conquer the territory for the pleasure of Allah, he was given the command to either choose between punishing the people of the community or protecting and teaching them sustainability and survival (Al-Qurtubī, 2006).

He responded, "Whoever does wrong will be punished by us, then will be returned to their Lord, Who will punish them with a horrible torment" - As for those who believe and do good, they will have the finest reward, and we will assign them easy commands. (Al-Kahf: 87-88)

This message does not necessarily mean that Dhu'l-Qarnayn was a prophet who received revelation. Rather, it could have been an inspiration because he also responded that justice will be served – those who observed instruction will get mercy, while the mischievous will be punished in this world before the punishment in the hereafter. The wrongdoers would be those who went against Dhu'l-Qarnayn's conquer mission.

Then he travelled a 'third' course- until he reached 'a pass' between two mountains. He found in front of them a people who could hardly understand 'his' language. (Al-Kahf: 92-93)

Sadda and *sudda* are two words that refer to dam, but the former refers to the human dam, while the latter refers to one made by God. Dhu'l-Qarnayn found a dam between the two mountains that barricaded against the Gog and Magog incursion. He found a people without differences in culture and language living in front of the two dams, and no one else understood a word (Al-Bagwī, 1997). There were two mountains alternating between them, a gap through which Gog and Magog emerged from the land of the Turks in order to intrude and cause havoc upon the people, destroying the land and the offspring in the process (Ibn Kathīr, bin Umar, 1997).

They pleaded, "O Dhu'l-Qarnayn! Surely Gog and Magog are spreading corruption throughout the land. Should we pay you tribute, provided that you build a wall between us and them?" (Al-Kahf: 94)

The exegeses of Al-Bagwī (1997) put forth that since the Quran mentions that the people of the community between the two mountains could hardly understand the language of Dhu'l Qarnayn, how were they able to plead to him for assistance? Here, there is an indication that there was an interpreter who could understand the language of Dhu'l-Qarnayn and was able to enhance the communication between them.

He responded, "What my Lord has provided for me is far better. But assist me with resources, and I will build a barrier between you and them." (Al-Kahf: 95)

“Bring me blocks of iron!” Then, when he had filled up ‘the gap’ between the two mountains, he ordered, “Blow!” When the iron became red hot, he said, “Bring me molten copper to pour over it.” (Al-Kahf: 96)

Although the people of the community proposed to compensate Dhu'l-Qarnayn for helping them to prevent the incursion of the Gog and Magog, Dhu'l Qarnayn responded that the favour of Allah on him in terms of power and authority is bigger than their compensation. Instead, they should assist him with their labours and human capital in establishing the task (Al-Qurṭubī, 2006).

“And so the enemies could neither scale nor tunnel through it.” (Al-Kahf: 97)

The assistance that Dhu'l Qarnayn offered was sustainable such that Gog and Magog were not be able to penetrate the people of the community. According to the exegeses of At-Tabari (2001), the wall was thick and strong enough to deter enemy incursion.

He declared, “This is a mercy from my Lord. But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will level it to the ground. And my Lord’s promise is ever true.” (Al-Kahf: 98)

Dhu'l-Qarnayn affirmed that the construction and completion of the iron wall was mercy by the permission of Allah and its sustainability depended on His decree. The durability of the iron wall depended on the will of Allah. Dhu'l-Qarnayn asserted the significance of spirituality in socio-economic and environmental sustainability (Ibn Kathir, 1997).

Application of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's Community Engagement Model to ESG

As mentioned previously, ESG is a holistic perspective to sustainability, investment and business activities beyond mere environmental protection. The ESG framework demonstrates how organisations manage the impact of risk-related activities on the environment, society and economy. ESG stakeholders are not limited to investors, but also include concerned customers, suppliers and employees who should collaborate to enhance sustainable socio-economic and environmental protection (Kong,

2022). ESG focuses on health and safety issues, pollution reduction and corporate philanthropic assistance. It is also concerned with the impact of organisation activities on greenhouse gas emissions, the exploration and use of natural resources as well as complete resilience against environmental risks, such as flooding and fires. It also encompasses the impact of an organisation on the social structure and fabric of society, such as fair wages, employee engagement and supply chain partners. Moreover, it refers to the governance structure and component in the management and running of an organisation (Boffo & Patalano, 2020). Although the story and discussion of Dhu'l-Qarnayn are doctrinally based, it extends to how sustainability empowers a community in contemporary society. Furthermore, there are lessons to be learned from the empowerment approach and methodology of Dhu'l-Qarnayn with the people of the community. Dhu'l-Qarnayn's empowerment was sustainable enough to protect the incursion of the Gog and Magog because it was based on knowledge, wisdom, spirituality, engagement and empowerment (Busari, 2022). He was a knowledgeable warrior who understood what needed to be done and how it should be done. Evidence shows that he never lived in that particular community before the encounter and it is interesting to note how he knew what needed to be done to prevent the incursion of unwanted enemies. The Quran states, "Surely We established him in the land, and gave him the means to all things" (Al-Kahf: 84). It seems that knowledge is one of the fundamental traits that Allah bestowed upon Dhu'l Qarnayn on this earth. The experimentation on the construction of the iron wall is high-level engineering and environmental science work. The Quran states:

"Bring me blocks of iron!" Then, when he had filled up 'the gap' between the two mountains, he ordered, "Blow!" When the iron became red hot, he said, "Bring me molten copper to pour over it." (Al-Kahf: 96)

Secondly, the level of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's wisdom is demonstrated in the priority given to cooperative service and collaborative efforts over community services in exchange for compensation. Such wisdom shows that the knowledge, power and authority that Allah endowed on him is better than their compensation in exchange for the request for assistance. This wisdom made him choose to extend the mercy of Allah to those who accepted his mission and became submissive to Allah, though there would be punishment for wrongdoers.

Thirdly, Dhu'l-Qarnayn's spiritual intelligence is demonstrated in his reliance on Allah as the source of knowledge, power and strength to sustain any project and endowment. Despite the effort made in the construction of the iron wall, Dhu'l Qarnayn believed that its durability and continued protection against the incursion depends on the will of Allah. The lesson demonstrated is that spiritual intelligence starts from complete reliance on Allah and submission to His will.

He declared, "This is a mercy from my Lord. But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will level it to the ground. And my Lord's promise is ever true." (Al-Kahf: 98)

The engagement of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's methodology entails the exploration and conquering of territory for the pleasure of Allah. He represents a righteous person with power and authority who never relaxes in his comfort zone, but rather continues to travel in order to explore nature and expand the mission of *da'wah*.

Finally, the exploration and engagement of Dhu'l-Qarnayn in this context are based on the empowerment of the people of the community as a result of sharing knowledge, wisdom and technical skills without charging for compensation, except for their cooperation and collaboration. This is one of the reasons why community service is different from community engagement because the former aids others, while the latter teaches them how to aid others. This is in line with the popular adage, "Give a man a fish, he eats one day but teach a man how to fish, he eats every day".

Therefore, it seems to the researchers that the efforts and approach of Dhu'l-Qarnayn can be further transposed in a community engagement model in collaboration and cooperation for the socio-economic and environmental protection of all interests. This model can be represented as follows:

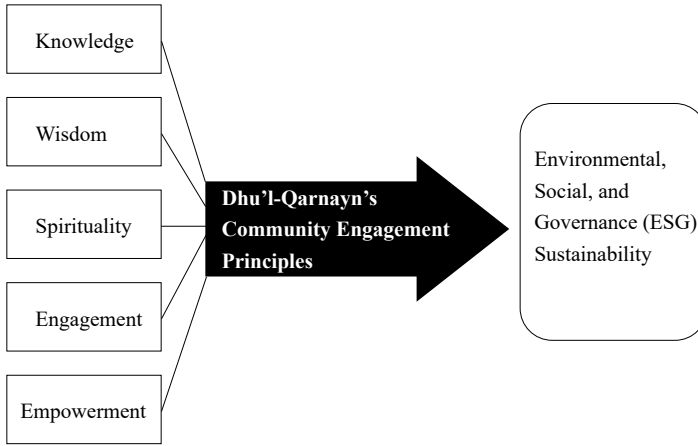


Figure 1.0: Proposed Dhu'l Qarnayn Community Engagement Model

Discussion

The purpose of ESG is to build a sustainable and responsible business that will maintain a balance in the ecosystem. ESG-based business activities protect the entire market structure, including the interests of investors, employees and the environment, in a responsible and balanced approach. The discussion of ESG in contemporary times is ongoing and creates a valuable impact on the community and the planet without jeopardising economic interest. This study identifies Dhu'l-Qarnayn's engagement as a case study that is relevant to contemporary society.

There are five identifiable main principles of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's engagement methodology that are described and discussed in this study. However, spirituality is a unique concept introduced in this study as a golden fundamental principle that guides sustainable socio-economic and environmental projects. The 15 verses in Surah Al-Kahf also demonstrate the significance of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's submission to the will of Allah and commitment to community engagement and empowerment. The spiritual intelligence explicated here made him reject financial compensation and, rather, insist on collaboration and cooperation to establish and construct the iron wall so as to prevent the incursion of the Gog and Magog.

There are many governmental and non-government organisations today that are open to the idea of ESG. As such, the lessons learned from Dhu'l-Qarnayn can be useful to them, especially the use of spiritual intelligence and engagement over community service. Community engagement programmes are also becoming attractive in educational institutions with the intent of creating a synergy between the town and gown. These institutions can leverage the principles of Dhu'l-Qarnayn to enhance responsible and sustainable community engagement. Institutions of higher learning that teach sustainability as a course can also borrow from these principles in order to develop a more comprehensive and sustainable curriculum for sustainability science in the socio-economic and environmental field of work.

Community engagement seems more sustainable rather than mere services to the people, as demonstrated by Dhu'l-Qarnayn who viewed that socio-economic and environmental empowerment is better achieved through collaboration and cooperation between stakeholders.

Conclusion

The concept of ESG is gaining attention in modern times due to the benefits of organisation compliance to the entire ecosystem. This study explores the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn and its implication for the socio-economic and environmental activities of government and non-governmental organisations. This story is doctrinal evidence in the Quran that has a significant underpinning concept of community engagement approach based on the principles of knowledge, wisdom, spirituality, engagement and empowerment for the benefit of all stakeholders in the community. This study found that the community engagement approach of Dhu'l-Qarnayn is derived from doctrinal evidence and should be useful to contemporary community engagement projects towards sustainable ESG. This approach also promotes community empowerment through the collaboration and cooperation of human capital, rather than mere services in exchange for a socio-economic and environmental benefit that is not sustainable. Further study needs to explore the viability and implication of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's fundamental principles – namely knowledge, wisdom, spirituality, engagement and empowerment – towards sustainable ESG in modern society.

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