Beyond GDP: Toward A Falah Development Index (FalahDI) Framework For Measuring Prosperity In Islamic Economics

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ABSTRACT
This paper proposes the Falah Development Index (FalahDI) as a multidimensional framework for measuring societal prosperity within the ethical paradigm of Islamic economics. The index seeks to address the limitations of conventional development indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which focus primarily on economic output while overlooking ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions of human well-being. The study adopts a conceptual research approach based on normative analysis of Islamic economic principles and contemporary development literature. Drawing on the objectives of Maqasid al-Shariah, the paper develops a multidimensional index framework integrating economic justice, social welfare, financial inclusion, environmental stewardship, governance integrity, and spiritual development. The proposed model combines conventional socio-economic indicators with Islamic-specific measures related to social finance institutions. The study presents the conceptual structure and measurement framework of the FalahDI, demonstrating how Islamic ethical principles can be operationalized into measurable development indicators. The framework highlights the role of Islamic social finance instruments such as Zakat and Waqf in promoting inclusive development and poverty alleviation. The FalahDI provides policymakers with a holistic tool for assessing development outcomes and designing policies that integrate economic performance with social justice, ethical governance, and sustainable development. This study contributes to the literature by proposing an integrated Islamic framework for development measurement that bridges ethical principles and empirical evaluation, offering an alternative paradigm for assessing societal prosperity.

Keywords: Islamic economics, falah, Maqasid al-Shariah, development measurement, Islamic social finance, sustainable development

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1. Introduction

The measurement of societal progress has long relied on conventional economic indicators, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and, to a lesser extent, the Human Development Index (HDI), which prioritize material output and human capabilities but often neglect ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions of development. While these measures provide useful insights into economic activity and basic welfare, they fail to capture the broader objectives of human flourishing emphasized in Islamic teachings, including justice, equity, moral accountability, and collective well-being. In Muslim societies, where development is ideally aligned with the ethical and spiritual principles outlined in the Qur'an and operationalized through Maqasid al-Shariah, there is a pressing need for an alternative framework that integrates material prosperity with social justice, environmental stewardship, and spiritual growth. This study responds to this gap by proposing the Falah Development Index (FalahDI), a multidimensional tool designed to provide a more holistic, ethically grounded, and operationally feasible measure of societal progress in accordance with Islamic values.

2. Methodology and Analytical Approach

This study adopts a conceptual and analytical research methodology aimed at developing a normative framework for measuring development from an Islamic economic perspective. The research integrates insights from Islamic jurisprudence, development economics, and social finance literature to construct a multidimensional index rooted in Islamic ethical principles.
The methodology proceeds in four stages.

First, a literature review is conducted to examine the theoretical foundations and limitations of existing development indicators, including GDP, HDI, GPI, GNH, and SPI. This review identifies gaps in conventional measurement frameworks, particularly their limited ability to capture ethical, spiritual, and distributive dimensions of development (Stiglitz et al., 2009), 2009; Fleurbaey, 2009).

Second, the study establishes a normative conceptual foundation by drawing upon the Islamic concept of falah and the objectives of Maqasid al-Shariah, which serve as guiding principles for defining human well-being and societal progress (Chapra, 2008; Kamali, 2008).

Third, the research develops the structural framework of the Falah Development Index, identifying six core dimensions and associated indicators that reflect material, social, environmental, governance, and spiritual aspects of development.

Finally, a measurement and scoring methodology, incorporating normalisation techniques,, weighting structures, and composite index calculations. This approach ensures that the proposed index can be operationalized for empirical analysis and policy application.

3. Limitations of Conventional Development Indicators

For decades, GDP has been widely used as the primary indicator of national economic performance. Although GDP measures the total value of goods and services produced within an economy, it does not capture broader aspects of human welfare such as income inequality, environmental degradation, or social well-being (Stiglitz et al., 2009).

In response to these limitations, several alternative indices have been developed. The Human Development Index (HDI) incorporates indicators of health, education, and income to provide a broader measure of human development (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Similarly, the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) attempts to adjust economic output by accounting for social and environmental costs (Kubiszewski et al., 2013).

Other frameworks include the Gross National Happiness (GNH) index developed in Bhutan, which emphasizes psychological well-being, cultural values, and environmental sustainability (Ura et al., 2012), and the Social Progress Index (SPI), which evaluates social outcomes such as access to basic needs and opportunities (Porter et al., 2017).

Despite these advancements, these indices generally remain secular in orientation, often overlooking ethical and spiritual dimensions of human development. From the perspective of Islamic economics, genuine prosperity requires the integration of material welfare with moral responsibility, social justice, and spiritual fulfillment.

4. Bridging Ethics and Development: Toward an Islamic Framework for Measuring Prosperity

For Muslim societies in particular, the limitations of conventional development indicators raise a fundamental question regarding the alignment between prevailing economic metrics and the ethical vision of justice embedded in Islamic teachings. Islam advances a holistic conception of prosperity that integrates material well-being with social justice, equitable wealth distribution, moral accountability, and spiritual fulfillment (Chapra, 2008; Zaman, 2008). The Qur'anic emphasis on justice (adl), benevolence (ihsan), and collective responsibility underscores the importance of an economic system that promotes the common good rather than narrow individual interests. Within this framework, economic activity is not merely a means of wealth generation but a mechanism for achieving social balance, human dignity, and ethical accountability (Chapra, 1992).

Islamic socio-economic principles further institutionalize this vision through redistributive and welfare-oriented mechanisms such as Zakat, Waqf, Sadaqah, and Qard Hasan, which are designed to promote social solidarity, alleviate poverty, and maintain economic balance within society (Ahmed, 2004; Mohsin, 2013). These instruments represent institutional expressions of Islamic ethical values and serve as practical mechanisms for advancing inclusive development and social welfare. Through these redistributive institutions, Islamic economics emphasizes collective responsibility and social justice as integral components of economic organization (Obaidullah and Shirazi, 2015).

Consequently, there is an increasing need to move beyond reliance on conventional indicators such as Gross Domestic Product and develop alternative measures of development that more accurately reflect the ethical and normative foundations of Islamic Economics. Traditional economic indicators primarily measure economic output but often fail to capture broader dimensions of human well-being, including inequality, social justice, environmental sustainability, and moral development (Stiglitz et al., 2009). As a result, development measurement frameworks must evolve to incorporate multidimensional indicators that better reflect the complexity of societal welfare.

Within this context, this study proposes the Falah Development Index (FalahDI) as an Islamic framework for measuring prosperity. The concept of falah represents comprehensive success in both this life and the hereafter and constitutes a central objective within Islamic economic thought (Chapra, 2008). Achieving falah requires the harmonious development of material welfare, ethical conduct, social justice, and spiritual fulfillment.

To operationalize this concept within a measurable framework, the FalahDI is anchored in the principles of Maqasid al-Shariah, which emphasize the preservation and promotion of essential dimensions of human welfare which includes, faith (din), life (nafs), intellect (aql), wealth (mal), and family and dignity (nasl/ird) (Kamali, 2008; Chapra, 2008). Building on these principles, the FalahDI adopts a multidimensional structure that integrates six core dimensions of development: economic justice and poverty alleviation, social welfare and human development, financial inclusion and economic empowerment, environmental stewardship, governance and institutional integrity, and spiritual and moral development. By combining conventional socio-economic indicators with Islamic-specific measures derived from social finance institutions and ethical governance principles, the FalahDI provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating societal prosperity.

In this way, the FalahDI bridges the gap between ethical principles and development measurement, offering a holistic alternative to conventional indices. By aligning development indicators with the normative objectives of Islamic teachings, the framework contributes to a more balanced and ethically grounded understanding of progressone that prioritizes justice, sustainability, and human dignity alongside economic performance.

5. Conceptual Framework and Dimensions of the Falah Development Index (FalahDI)

The conceptual foundation of the Falah Development Index (FalahDI) is rooted in the Islamic concept of falah, which denotes comprehensive success and well-being in both worldly life and the hereafter. Within the framework of Islamic Economics, prosperity is not confined to material accumulation or economic growth but encompasses moral integrity, social justice, human dignity, and spiritual fulfillment (Chapra, 2008; Zaman, 2008). Economic activity, therefore, is viewed not merely as a mechanism for wealth generation but as a means of promoting social balance, ethical accountability, and collective welfare in accordance with the moral guidance of Islamic teachings (Chapra, 1992).

To translate this ethical vision into a structured framework for development measurement, the Falah Development Index (FalahDI) is anchored in the principles of Maqasid al-Shariah, which represent the higher objectives of Islamic law aimed at safeguarding the essential dimensions of human welfare. Classical Islamic jurists identified five fundamental objectives: the preservation of faith (din), life (nafs), intellect ('aql), wealth (mal), and family and human dignity (nasl and 'ird). Rather than functioning as isolated objectives, these dimensions operate as an integrated and mutually reinforcing system in which progress in one dimension contributes to the achievement of the others. Collectively, they establish a comprehensive normative framework for evaluating economic systems, institutions, and public policies according to their contribution to holistic human well-being, social justice, and sustainable development.

Within the proposed FalahDI, each Maqasid dimension constitutes a major pillar of the index and is translated into measurable indicators reflecting both material and non-material aspects of development. The preservation of faith (din) is assessed through indicators related to religious freedom, ethical governance, integrity, social trust, and opportunities for spiritual development. The preservation of life (nafs) encompasses health outcomes, halal food security, access to clean water and sanitation, environmental quality, public safety, and social protection. The preservation of intellect ('aql) is measured through indicators of education quality, literacy, innovation, research capacity, digital inclusion, critical thinking, and access to knowledge. The preservation of wealth (mal) evaluates productive employment, income generation, equitable wealth distribution, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, Islamic social finance, and responsible resource management. Finally, the preservation of family and human dignity (nasl and 'ird) captures family stability, gender equity within the Islamic ethical framework, child welfare, social cohesion, protection of human rights, and respect for individual dignity.

To ensure that these dimensions operate collectively rather than independently, the FalahDI adopts a multidimensional aggregation framework in which each pillar contributes to the overall index through a weighted composite score. The weighting scheme may initially assign equal importance to each Maqasid dimension to reflect their complementary nature, while alternative weights can subsequently be derived using expert consultation, stakeholder surveys, or empirical techniques such as the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), Principal Component Analysis (PCA), or factor analysis. Each dimension is first normalised to a common scale, aggregated from its constituent indicators, and then combined into an overall Falah score. This approach enables policymakers to assess not only overall development performance but also strengths and deficiencies across individual Maqasid dimensions, thereby facilitating targeted policy interventions.

An important feature of the FalahDI is that it recognises the interdependence among the Maqasid objectives. Improvements in education and knowledge ('aql), for example, enhance productive employment and wealth creation (mal), which in turn strengthen family welfare (nasl), improve health and quality of life (nafs), and create conditions that enable individuals to fulfil their religious and ethical responsibilities (din). Likewise, ethical governance and spiritual values reinforce transparency, accountability, and trust, which positively influence economic performance, institutional quality, and social cohesion. By explicitly recognising these dynamic interactions, the FalahDI moves beyond conventional development indices that measure economic or social indicators in isolation, offering instead a holistic framework that integrates spiritual, moral, social, economic, environmental, and institutional dimensions of sustainable human development in accordance with the objectives of Maqasid al-Shariah.

Within the context of development measurement, the Maqasid framework provides a comprehensive ethical basis for assessing whether economic and social systems promote justice, equity, and sustainable prosperity. Unlike conventional development models that prioritize economic output, this perspective emphasizes balanced development that protects human dignity, strengthens social cohesion, and ensures responsible stewardship of resources (Dusuki and Abdullah, 2007). By grounding development indicators in these objectives, the FalahDI operationalises the Maqasid al-Shariah into a multidimensional measurement framework in which each objective is represented by a set of measurable indicators reflecting its economic, social, institutional, environmental, and ethical dimensions. These indicators are subsequently aggregated into a composite index that enables policymakers to evaluate not only the overall level of development but also the extent to which progress is balanced across the different Maqasid objectives. This approach ensures that economic growth is assessed alongside improvements in human well-being, social justice, institutional integrity, environmental sustainability, and spiritual and ethical values, thereby aligning development outcomes with the holistic concept of falah (human flourishing) envisioned in Islamic economics.

Building on this conceptual foundation, the FalahDI adopts a multidimensional structure that reflects the holistic understanding of human well-being embedded in Islamic teachings. The framework incorporates five core dimensions derived directly from the Maqasid framework, each representing a fundamental aspect of societal prosperity.

The first dimension, Protection of Faith (Din), reflects the ethical and spiritual foundations of social and economic life. In the Islamic worldview, faith functions as a moral compass that guides individual behavior and institutional practices. This dimension evaluates the extent to which social and economic institutions promote ethical conduct, integrity in financial transactions, religious freedom, and moral responsibility. The presence of strong ethical values within economic systems is essential for fostering trust, accountability, and social cohesion (Chapra, 2008).

The second dimension, Protection of Life (Nafs), focuses on safeguarding human welfare and dignity by ensuring access to essential services and basic living conditions necessary for a healthy and secure life. Indicators associated with this dimension include healthcare accessibility, food security, public safety, and overall quality of life. From an Islamic perspective, protecting human life constitutes a central objective of socio-economic policy, as the preservation of life forms the foundation for a just and compassionate society (Kamali, 2008).

The third dimension, Protection of Intellect (Aql), emphasizes the development of human capabilities through education, knowledge creation, and intellectual advancement. Sustainable socio-economic progress depends on the cultivation of human capital and the promotion of innovation and critical thinking. Accordingly, this dimension evaluates indicators related to educational attainment, research and development, access to knowledge, and innovation capacity, which collectively contribute to intellectual growth and long-term societal advancement (Chapra, 2008).

The fourth dimension, Protection of Wealth (Mal), addresses the economic structure of society and focuses on promoting equitable wealth distribution, financial inclusion, and poverty alleviation. In Islamic economic thought, wealth is considered a trust from God that should circulate widely within society rather than being concentrated among a small segment of the population (Chapra, 1992). Indicators within this dimension assess income distribution, employment opportunities, financial accessibility, and poverty reduction efforts. It also highlights the importance of institutional mechanisms that facilitate economic justice and balanced development.

The fifth dimension, Protection of Family and Human Dignity (Nasl and Ird), focuses on strengthening family institutions, promoting social stability, and safeguarding human dignity. Strong families and cohesive communities play a critical role in maintaining social harmony and ensuring intergenerational well-being. Indicators in this dimension may include measures of family stability, community cohesion, social protection, gender dignity, and the welfare of vulnerable groups.

A distinctive feature of the FalahDI framework is its integration of redistributive and welfare-oriented mechanisms derived from Islamic social finance. Instruments such as Zakat, Waqf, Sadaqah, and Qard Hasan represent institutional expressions of Islamic ethical principles and serve as practical tools for promoting social solidarity, poverty alleviation, and inclusive development (Ahmed, 2004; Obaidullah and Shirazi, 2015; Mohsin, 2013). By incorporating these instruments into development measurement, the FalahDI captures dimensions of social justice and communal responsibility that are largely absent from conventional economic indicators.

Through this multidimensional structure, the FalahDI integrates the philosophical concept of falah with the normative framework of Maqasid al-Shariah, thereby providing a coherent conceptual model for assessing societal progress. The framework bridges ethical principles with empirical measurement and offers a values-based approach to development evaluation that aligns economic performance with justice, sustainability, and human dignity. As such, the FalahDI represents a comprehensive and integrated holistic alternative to conventional development indices and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of prosperity within contemporary Muslim societies and the broader global development discourse.

6. Measurement Framework of The Falah Development Index (FalahDI)

The Falah Development Index (FalahDI) translates the normative objectives of Maqasid al-Shariah into a structured and quantifiable system for assessing societal prosperity. The framework is rooted in the Islamic concept of falah and measures development in terms of not only economic performance, but also social justice, ethical governance, environmental sustainability and spiritual well-being. The measurement framework operationalizes the conceptual model by linking the Maqasid objectives, the FalahDI core development dimensions, and a set of measurable indicators that together capture the multidimensional nature of human welfare (Chapra, 2008; Kamali, 2008).

6.1. Indicator Structure

Based on the Maqasid framework presented in the previous table, the FalahDI incorporates six core development dimensions, each represented by a set of indicators reflecting both material and ethical aspects of development.

Table 1: Mapping the Objectives of Maqasid al-Shariah to the Core Dimensions and Indicators of the Falah Development Index (FalahDI)

FalahDI Dimension	Link to Maqasid Objective	Sample Indicators
Spiritual and Moral Development	Protection of Faith (Din)	Religious freedom, ethical governance, corruption perception index, social trust, institutional integrity.
Social Welfare and Human Development	Protection of Life (Nafs)	Life expectancy, healthcare access, food security, poverty rate
Education and Intellectual Development	Protection of Intellect (Aql)	Literacy rate, school enrollment, research output, innovation capacity
Economic Justice and Poverty Alleviation	Protection of Wealth (Mal)	Income distribution (Gini coefficient), employment rate, financial inclusion, poverty reduction
Governance, Family Stability, and Human Dignity	Protection of Family and Dignity (Nasl/Ird)	Rule of law, family stability indicators, social protection coverage, gender dignity
Environmental Stewardship	Principle of Khalifah (Stewardship of Earth)	Environmental performance index, renewable energy usage, pollution control

A distinctive feature of the FalahDI framework is the inclusion of Islamic redistributive institutions such as Zakat, Waqf, Sadaqah, and Qard Hasan, which serve as mechanisms for poverty alleviation, social welfare provision, and inclusive economic participation (Ahmed, 2004; Obaidullah and Shirazi, 2015). Indicators related to the mobilization and impact of these institutions may therefore be incorporated within the economic justice and social welfare dimensions.

6.2. Data Normalization

Since the indicators are measured using different units and scales, they must be standardized before aggregation. The FalahDI adopts the min–max normalization method, which converts indicator values into a common scale ranging from 0 to 1.

The normalized value of each indicator is calculated as:

Sij=Xij−XminXmax−XminS_{ij} = \frac{X_{ij} - X_{min}}{X_{max} - X_{min}}Sij =Xmax−XminXij−Xmin

Where:

- SijS_{ij}Sij = normalized score for indicator i in country j
- XijX_{ij}Xij = observed value of the indicator
- XminX_{min}Xmin = minimum value across observations
- XmaxX_{max}Xmax = maximum value across observations

For indicators where lower values represent better outcomes (such as poverty rate or corruption levels), the formula is reversed to maintain consistency in interpretation.

6.3. Dimensional Scoring

After normalization, the score for each development dimension is calculated as the average of its respective indicators.

Dk=1nk∑i=1nkSikD_k = \frac{1}{n_k} \sum_{i=1}^{n_k} S_{ik}Dk=nk1i=1∑nkSik

Where:

- DkD_kDk = score of dimension k
- nkn_knk = number of indicators in dimension k
- SikS_{ik}Sik = normalized score of indicatori in dimension k

This step generates a composite score representing performance within each development dimension.

6.4. Composite FalahDI Calculation

The overall Falah Development Index is obtained by aggregating the scores of the six development dimensions.

FALAHDI=∑k=16wkDkFALAHDI = \sum_{k=1}^{6} w_kD_kFALAHDI=k=1∑6wkDk

Where:

- FALAHDIFALAHDIFALAHDI = overall Falah Development Index score
- DkD_kDk = score of dimension k
- wkw_kwk = weight assigned to dimension k

Two weighting approaches may be applied:
Equal weighting approach
Each dimension is assigned equal importance:
wk=16w_k = \frac{1}{6}wk=61

Normative Maqasid-based weighting
Weights may alternatively reflect the relative importance of Maqasid objectives based on expert consultation or scholarly interpretation (Chapra, 2008; Kamali, 2008).

6.5. Interpretation of FalahDI Scores

To facilitate policy analysis, FalahDI scores can be classified into development categories.

Table 2: Measurement Framework and Indicator Structure of the Falah Development Index (FalahDI)

FalahDI Score Range	*Level of Falah Development*
0.80 – 1.00	Very High Falah Development
0.60 – 0.79	High Falah Development
0.40 – 0.59	Moderate Falah Development
0.20 – 0.39	Low Falah Development
0.00 – 0.19	Very Low Falah Development

This classification enables policymakers to identify development gaps and evaluate the effectiveness of socio-economic policies in promoting balanced and inclusive prosperity.

6.6. Data Sources

The indicators used in the FalahDI framework may be derived from international development datasets such as those produced by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and national statistical agencies. Additional data related to Islamic social finance institutions may be obtained from reports published by the Islamic Development Bank and national zakat or waqf authorities.

7. Implications and policy recommendations

The proposed Falah Development Index (FalahDI) carries several important implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and researchers seeking more comprehensive approaches to measuring societal progress.

First, the FalahDI provides a holistic framework for evaluating development beyond conventional economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). By incorporating ethical, social, environmental, and spiritual dimensions of well-being, the index offers a broader understanding of development that aligns economic performance with human welfare and social justice. This multidimensional perspective allows policymakers to evaluate development outcomes more comprehensively rather than relying solely on aggregate economic output.

Second, the framework highlights the strategic role of Islamic social finance institutions, including Zakat, Waqf, Sadaqah, and Qard Hasan, in promoting inclusive development. These institutions function as redistributive and welfare-oriented mechanisms that can effectively address poverty, reduce inequality, and strengthen social solidarity. By integrating indicators related to the mobilization and impact of these instruments, the FalahDI framework enables policymakers to assess the contribution of Islamic social finance to national development strategies.

Third, the FalahDI provides a policy-oriented analytical tool that enables governments to design evidence-based development strategies aligned with ethical values. The index can assist policymakers in identifying development gaps across different dimensions, including economic justice, social welfare, environmental sustainability, and governance quality. This approach encourages the formulation of integrated policies such as redistributive fiscal programs, inclusive financial systems, sustainable resource management, and institutional reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability.

Finally, the adoption of the FalahDI can contribute to strengthening the alignment between development policy and the normative objectives of Islamic economic thought, particularly the principles of justice, social responsibility, and human dignity embedded in the framework of Maqasid al-Shariah.

8. Conclusion

This paper proposes the Falah Development Index (FalahDI) as a multidimensional framework for measuring societal progress within the ethical paradigm of Islamic economics. Unlike conventional development indicators that focus primarily on economic output, the FalahDI integrates material well-being with ethical, social, environmental, and spiritual dimensions of human development.

By linking the concept of falah with the objectives of Maqasid al-Shariahwhich emphasize the preservation and promotion of faith, life, intellect, wealth, and human dignitythe framework translates Islamic ethical principles into a practical measurement tool. Through the incorporation of measurable socio-economic indicators and the recognition of Islamic social finance institutions as key development mechanisms, the FalahDI offers a comprehensive and ethically grounded alternative to conventional development indices.

More broadly, the proposed framework demonstrates how the normative foundations of Islamic economics can be operationalized into empirical tools capable of guiding policy formulation and development strategies. By aligning economic performance with social justice, ethical governance, and sustainable resource management, the FalahDI contributes to a more balanced and inclusive understanding of societal prosperity.

Future research should focus on the empirical validation and operationalization of the FalahDI framework, including cross-country applications, statistical testing of indicator reliability, and integration with existing international development datasets such as those produced by the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank. Such efforts would help refine the index and enhance its potential as a globally relevant measure of holistic human development and prosperity.

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