

Qur'anic Models for Social Welfare Policy: Insights from Prophet Yusuf and Zulkarnain in Addressing Indonesian Social Justice Challenges

***Alif Hibatullah¹, Muh. Niam²**

^{1,2}Universitas Muhammadiyah Madiun, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: alifhibatullah07@gmail.com

Abstract

Indonesia's diverse society faces persistent challenges from environmental uncertainty and social conflict, which threaten both economic security and social cohesion. Existing welfare initiatives, such as the bantuan sosial (bansos) program and food estate projects, have achieved limited success due to structural weaknesses, inaccurate targeting, and the risk of long-term dependency. These issues point to the need for an ethically grounded and contextually relevant welfare policy framework. This study introduces a normative model of social welfare based on Qur'anic narratives—specifically the stories of Prophet Yusuf and Zulkarnain—interpreted through Paul Spicker's social welfare theory. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach and content analysis of Qur'anic verses, the research identifies core principles aligned with Spicker's framework: basic needs fulfillment, rights protection, and equitable resource access. This integration of Qur'anic ethics with modern welfare theory offers a novel policy perspective for Indonesia. Key findings show that Prophet Yusuf's approach to social assistance relied on barter systems to foster independence, complemented by strategies emphasizing job creation, sustainable land use, and active collaboration between government and society. The involvement of social workers as strategic partners strengthens policy implementation and community empowerment. While the conceptual model advances theoretical understanding, further empirical validation in real policy contexts is needed. This research demonstrates that social policies rooted in Qur'anic values and contemporary welfare theory can provide a viable pathway toward a more just and prosperous Indonesian society.

Keywords: *Social Welfare, Qur'anic Narrative, Prophet, Social Justice*

A. Introduction

Indonesia is home to a wide range of ethnicities, religions, and cultural traditions that together shape the country's social and political landscape (Prasisko 2019; Rahayu 2017). While this diversity is often viewed as a national asset, it also poses complex challenges for social policy, particularly in the effort to ensure equal access to welfare and economic security. In many parts of rural

Indonesia, for example, farmers and fishermen remain highly vulnerable to unpredictable weather and shifting market conditions (Afridania et al. 2022; Aqmal 2020). These ongoing vulnerabilities affect not only individual livelihoods, but also broader patterns of social cohesion, as persistent disparities in resources and opportunity can give rise to tension and undermine a sense of justice within society (Putriyansyah and Nurhadi 2024; Krismiyanto and Kii 2023).

Over the years, Indonesian governments have attempted to address these challenges through national welfare initiatives, most notably the bantuan sosial (bansos) program, which is designed to alleviate poverty and promote inclusive welfare. However, the effectiveness of these policies is often limited by persistent structural weaknesses. Key issues include inaccurate targeting, resulting in the exclusion of eligible beneficiaries and the inclusion of ineligible ones (Arfandi and Sumiyarti 2022). Furthermore, an emphasis on unconditional assistance, without strategies for empowerment, tends to create dependency and erode community resilience. Agricultural reforms, such as the food estate program, have also struggled to achieve sustainable outcomes, resulting in ecological degradation and disappointing productivity (Baringbing 2021).

These policy shortcomings reflect a deeper systemic problem: the absence of a welfare framework that is both ethically grounded and adaptable to Indonesia's complex social realities. Current policy debates frequently overlook the potential of indigenous ethical and spiritual traditions as foundations for social welfare. The Qur'an, as a core text for the majority of Indonesians, contains narratives that provide not only moral guidance but also practical strategies for governance and welfare. The stories of Prophet Yusuf and Zulkarnain, for example, illustrate the importance of anticipatory governance, community collaboration, and distributive justice (Ash-Shiddieqy 2012; B. Mustafa n.d.).

Previous research has largely focused on the symbolic and theological dimensions of these Qur'anic narratives (Ismail 2015; Hidayat 2021) or addressed practical solutions in separate domains, such as technological innovation and intergroup relations (Panjaitan et al. 2022; Krismiyanto and Kii 2023). However, these studies have tended to analyze either doctrinal aspects of the text or specific sectoral challenges, without directly connecting Qur'anic ethical principles to the formulation of state-level welfare policies. There remains a significant gap in the literature: few studies have systematically operationalized Qur'anic narratives as foundational models for the design of modern social welfare policy, especially by bridging Islamic ethical insights with established frameworks such as Paul Spicker's theory of social welfare. As a result, the development of a normative, context-sensitive welfare model that is grounded in the Qur'anic tradition and responsive to the challenges faced by Indonesia's diverse society is still lacking.

This study aims to address this gap by constructing a conceptual welfare model based on the stories of Prophet Yusuf and Zulkarnain, mapping their core themes—anticipatory governance, participatory problem-solving, and distributive justice—onto Spicker’s social welfare principles. By integrating Qur’anic values with contemporary welfare theory, this research offers an actionable and contextually relevant approach to rethinking Indonesian social policy, with an emphasis on justice, collaboration, and empowerment within a multicultural context.

B. Metode

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the integration of Qur’anic narratives with contemporary social welfare theory. The primary data sources include documents such as the Qur’an, classical and modern tafsir literature, and relevant journal articles (Putri and Arifinsyah 2025:111). Data were collected using a documentation technique, which is widely recognized as a complementary instrument in qualitative research (Sugiyono 2010:82). For data analysis, content analysis was applied (Safrudin 2022:41). The research specifically examines the narrative of Prophet Yusuf and his management of famine, interpreting these findings in the context of current welfare challenges. A thematic coding framework guided the analysis, with reference to Paul Spicker’s foundational principles of social welfare: fulfillment of basic needs, protection of human rights and dignity, and the promotion of freedom and egalitarian access (Spicker 1988). Selected Qur’anic verses were analyzed for their embedded moral imperatives, governance strategies, and social interventions. These elements were then interpreted as analogues for ethical policy development.

To operationalize Spicker’s theory, the study mapped the actions and institutional mechanisms found in the narratives onto specific social policy constructs. In the story of Prophet Yusuf, the structured preparation for a seven-year famine, reliance on community cooperation, and use of a barter-based distribution system were all analyzed as expressions of empowerment-oriented welfare that discourages dependency. Similarly, Zulkarnain’s collaborative approach to building a protective wall with a vulnerable community was interpreted as a model of participatory governance and community resilience, reflecting the principles of inclusive welfare planning. The interpretive process was conducted in three stages. First, relevant Qur’anic verses and tafsir commentaries were identified and extracted. Second, socio-political values and welfare mechanisms within the texts were identified. Third, these insights were synthesized into a conceptual welfare model aligned with Spicker’s analytical domains.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Ethical Leadership and Social Planning: Insights from Prophet Yusuf and Zulkarnain

The account of Prophet Yusuf in Surah Yusuf (43–49) provides a concrete example of strategic governance in response to social risk. The King of Egypt's dream, interpreted by Yusuf as a sign of seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine, prompted practical policy steps. Yusuf advised that grain be stored during the productive years, with the harvest preserved in its husks. This plan led to his appointment as treasurer, reflecting a selection process based on ability and trust (Hassan 2021:240; Ash-Shiddieqy 2012:242).

From the perspective of Paul Spicker's social welfare theory, this case demonstrates the principle of addressing basic needs through planned and sustainable intervention. Yusuf's approach secured food for all groups in Egyptian society. His leadership promoted self-reliance and preparation, which reduced the risk of dependency. Spicker's argument is that states should create welfare policies that guarantee essential resources for everyone as a right (Spicker 1988:83).

The narrative also highlights the importance of appointing capable individuals to positions of responsibility. Spicker stresses institutional responsibility and the need for equity within the welfare system. Yusuf's management of resources is a model for how welfare can be organized as a public right and not simply as a charitable act (Spicker 1988:77).

In Surah Al-Kahf (94–95), Zulkarnain's story gives another illustration of participatory social welfare. When a vulnerable community asked for protection from outside threats, Zulkarnain asked them to contribute their efforts and resources to help build a barrier, rather than offering a top-down solution or accepting payment (Ash-Shiddieqy 2012:242). This action reinforced the idea that effective welfare requires community involvement and mutual obligation.

Spicker's framework views this approach as an example of equal treatment in welfare. Leadership works together with the community and does not take advantage of vulnerable groups. The ethical dimension here is clear: the community's participation is essential, and assistance must strengthen, not undermine, people's own capacity (Sexton and Frankel 2023:823).

Both the story of Yusuf and Zulkarnain promote a model of social welfare based on strong leadership, collective planning, and shared responsibility. These stories align with the view that a welfare system should provide not only material support, but also protect dignity and support participation. For Indonesia today, where there are ongoing problems with the distribution of aid and agricultural policy, these examples remain highly relevant as a reference for building more ethical and effective welfare programs.

2. Community Collaboration and Sustainable Welfare: Lessons from Qur'anic Narratives

Prophet Yusuf's management of Egypt's resources provides a practical example of sustainable and participatory planning in economic policy. Rather than expanding into new agricultural areas, he prioritized the optimal use of existing fertile land to maintain ecological balance and maximize available resources (Amrullah 1990:3659). This method reflects Paul Spicker's idea of reciprocal welfare, where both government and society share responsibility for collective well-being (Spicker 1988:44). Yusuf's instruction to involve all sectors in managing the harvest also demonstrates the value of social participation and shared accountability in achieving just and effective welfare systems.

Yusuf also introduced preservation techniques using simple, community-based methods, such as keeping grain in its husks. This strategy strengthened food security and extended the shelf life of agricultural products without relying on advanced technology (Amrullah 1990:3659). Limiting consumption to daily needs promotes an ethic of prudence and sustainability. This approach emphasizes that social welfare depends not only on access to resources, but also on responsible and restrained use.

Similar principles are evident in the traditional practices of the Baduy people, whose local systems of food management incorporate sustainability and distributive justice. By minimizing land conversion, respecting natural cycles, and distributing yields fairly, the Baduy model aligns with Spicker's view of embedded welfare—community-led systems that reinforce both rights and responsibilities (Satriadi 2015:559). The Baduy approach shows that effective welfare is not just an institutional issue, but also a cultural and ecological one.

Such strategies are especially relevant for Indonesia today. Attempts to open new land for agriculture, such as the food estate program in Kalimantan, have not met expectations (Yestati and Noor 2021:53). A more effective approach is for the government to work alongside farmers to optimize their existing land. By providing technical support, ensuring stable prices for seeds, fertilizers, and equipment, and guaranteeing fair purchase prices for harvests, the government can help protect farmers from financial loss. Collaboration between government and community is essential for achieving food self-sufficiency and sustainable welfare.

The Qur'an also highlights the importance of collaboration between leaders and communities, as seen in Surah Al-Kahf (95-96). Zulkarnain asked the community to help build a barrier by contributing their strength and resources, instead of relying solely on his authority or resources (Al-Jawi 1951:304). This story underlines the value of identifying root causes of problems and finding solutions that prioritize cooperation, mutual respect, and the maintenance of social harmony.

Spicker's welfare theory emphasizes that full membership in society brings not only rights but also shared responsibilities. Every individual is entitled to protection and social services, but must also contribute to collective life and respect social norms. This reciprocal relationship is a foundation of social justice in the welfare state (Spicker 1988:44).

Understanding the underlying causes of social conflict is essential before any intervention can be effective. Assessment should be carried out carefully, and interventions should be based on accurate understanding of community needs. Policymakers should involve social workers to bridge communication with communities, ensuring that solutions are relevant and truly meet the needs of those affected (Hasibuan, Thamrin, and Ginting 2024:65).

3. Social Assistance, Empowerment, and Community Independence: Reflections from Prophet Yusuf's Model

The distribution of basic food aid has been a recurring policy in Indonesia, especially in response to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions on public movement and the resulting economic impact made it necessary for the government to provide free food supplies to those in need (Maulana N. M. et al. 2022:36). While this measure was appropriate under emergency conditions, continuous evaluation is essential to ensure such assistance remains effective and reaches the intended recipients.

Providing aid to the community is not a new concept. In the narrative of ancient Egypt, when Prophet Yusuf was entrusted with managing state resources, he implemented advanced preparation for a seven-year famine (Rohmaniyah and Cecep 2023:20). He managed the fields efficiently, stored the harvest properly, and encouraged consumption according to need. When the famine arrived, people came to exchange their valuables for food. Yusuf did not distribute aid for free, but managed a fair barter system that met the needs of the population.

As described in tafsir Al-Iklil, bartering started with silver and gold, then moved to jewelry and other valuables, livestock, slaves, land, and eventually even people themselves as resources were depleted (M. bin Z. Mustafa n.d.:3260). After seven years, all assets in Egypt belonged to the government. However, Yusuf later advised the king to return the wealth to the people. His decision to free the people and restore community ownership demonstrates effective and ethical resource management, without exploiting the situation for personal or governmental gain (Amrullah 1990:3680).

This narrative highlights the value of social welfare principles based on justice, empowerment, and collaboration between government and society. In today's context, direct social assistance remains necessary, but it should be prioritized for emergencies such as war or disaster, when individuals are unable

to work. In normal circumstances, policy should focus on creating employment opportunities, allowing people to meet their needs independently.

Paul Spicker's social welfare theory sees assistance not just as charity, but as part of a reciprocal relationship between citizens and the state. Social assistance comes with both rights and obligations. Recipients are expected to actively seek improvement and contribute to their communities. Welfare, therefore, involves participation and shared responsibility. If someone does not fulfill their social responsibilities, their entitlement to aid may be reassessed, consistent with the principles of a fair and functional welfare system (Spicker 1988:24).

Promoting community independence is central to sustainable development. This requires equipping people with knowledge and skills tailored to local needs and labor markets (Hidayat and Syahid 2019:1). The state's obligation to fulfill citizens' basic rights, including decent work, can be realized through job creation programs, entrepreneurship training, and regionally adapted economic initiatives.

Social workers are essential partners in this process. Their roles go beyond facilitation; they help ensure that welfare programs genuinely address community needs. Through outreach, training, and ongoing mentoring, social workers support individuals and groups in understanding program goals, building confidence, and sustaining progress after interventions end. Such efforts lay the groundwork for lasting independence and resilience.

D. Conclusion

This study advances the development of a welfare policy framework that combines Qur'anic values—such as justice, ethical leadership, and social responsibility—with contemporary social welfare theory. The proposed model offers an alternative to secular approaches that often face limitations in addressing structural inequality and the risk of top-down administration. By emphasizing reciprocity, moral accountability, and community empowerment, this research aligns with Spicker's principles of egalitarian welfare and inclusive social membership.

On a practical level, the findings highlight the importance of integrating spiritual and ethical perspectives into welfare policy, particularly in multicultural contexts like Indonesia. Effective implementation requires strengthening the role of social workers as mediators between government and communities, supporting local knowledge, and promoting aid systems that protect dignity and reduce dependency.

The main limitation of this study lies in its focus on textual analysis, without empirical validation in real policy settings. As a result, further research should apply the proposed model to practical interventions in public health,

education, agricultural development, and disaster response. Comparative studies that examine similarities and differences between Islamic welfare concepts and those from other traditions would also help broaden the model's relevance and enhance its contribution to interdisciplinary social policy debates.

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