

Extrapolate Lessons from the Economic Philosophy of Ibn Khaldun to Better Fight COVID-19

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Abstract

Ibn Khaldun's economic philosophy represents an interesting explanation of the convergence of social, political and economic realms of human lives. In his theory, he provides insights into the requirements for achieving sustainable economic development. He reiterates several theories like the social theory that is effective in the quest for sustainable economic growth. This paper explores the various philosophies brought forth by Ibn Khaldun regarding economic development. The research is focused on the ways in which an economy can be managed in times of crisis. The crisis in this paper is the outbreak of epidemics, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic. The study assumes a qualitative approach of explaining concepts from information captured in previous researches in the area. The study revealed that Ibn Khaldun's ideologies have a specific application in the economic development process. It also realizes that the recommendations from his concepts can be utilized in the fight against the Coronavirus pandemic.

Key Words: COVID-19, Economic philosophy, Ibn Khaldun, economy in time of crisis, epidemics.

1. Introduction

Often, economic development has been impeded by the occurrence of natural disasters or happenings. Such events are beyond human control, and no measures can be applied to prevent them from occurring entirely. Pandemics form one of the most devastating natural disasters that adversely affect economies all over the world. The history of the world has been clouded with the occurrence of pandemics in various areas at different times. These events usually result in the suspension of activities in the affected region. Economic activities form this group leading to an immense loss in revenue income.

Prevention is better than cure is a common phrase that can be used in this case. The aftermath of such occurrences usually results in irreversible consequences. However, through the implementation of specific policies and strategies, regimes can always be prepared for such

happenings. Different scholars have brought forth ideas on economic development. Ibn Khaldun's work is the most profound owing to the scope of topics that it covered. He was focused on elucidating the critical aspects of the economic development process and emphasized the significance of adhering to these requirements (Demir, 2017). In his work, he addressed the following components; the significance of political stability, the importance of agriculture, the consequences of urban agglomeration, population growth, public finance and capital formation, the functions of money, production and consumption, the working mechanism of supply and demand, creation of added value, and the macroeconomic, regulatory system conditions as described in the contemporary structural adjustment programs.

Ibn Khaldun often mentioned the importance of cohesion and commitment to economic development. He emphasized this in most of his work as he believed that maximum participation of all the constituents would give maximum outputs (Ismail & Rahim, 2018). He also believed in the rewarding system and provision of economic incentives as motivation factors. Maintenance of an optimistic and motivated attitude is vital in the quest for economic development. He went ahead to mention several actions that would impede the objective of sustainable economic growth. He warned against the confiscatory policies and the use of interventionism by governments in the process of economic development (Mujahidin, 2018). Collectively, warnings and recommendations are vital for the implementation of contemporary economic policies.

Ibn Khaldun's works are still applicable in the current world. Born in the 13th century, it is incredible how most of his work has traversed time and geographical borders to find particular application in the current generation. Most of the scholars that came after him simply echoed what he had discovered already and only added some fine-tuning to the information to enhance originality. He witnessed the discord that was created in social and economic systems by the occurrence of pandemics. He lived through several circumstances such as the Mongol invasion, the Black Death which happened in Tunis in 1348-49, and the political and economic rise of Europe. These events had a significant impact on the formation of his theories on economic development. He recognized the effect of such happenings on the economy; hence, provided insights on how to manage the economy during these periods effectively. The current world is faced with similar problems, thus, finding the application of Ibn Khaldun's work necessary. This paper, in particular aims to explore the works of Khaldun and see its use to the current COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the whole world. Through the exploring of his ideas, the paper will suggest some policies that can be implemented by various governments to curb or minimize the impacts of the pandemic on economic development.

Numerous research papers have been written that include information on the philosophies of Ibn Khaldun on economic development. However, most of them have taken the historical approach, solely focusing on the application of the theories in the past. This paper presents a different perspective by not only describing the historical aspect but also explaining the application of the philosophy in the current world. Khaldun's concepts used historical happenings to explain how social and economic systems are transformed by different events in the world. The trends at the time have remained the same since making the theories more applicable.

The paper explores the theories by Khaldun and their corresponding application in the current world, more specifically, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the world with

surprise. The information revealed in this paper is essential not just for the current population but for generations to come also. Social and economic changes are everlasting and will continue to happen even in later times. As such, the recommendations that will be concluded in this paper will find particular application in the times to come.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, to this extent, affected several economies in the world. The illness has affected 188 out of 195 countries in the world, leading to the death of more than 420k people. This implies that more than 90% of the world's population has felt the impact of the illness (World Health Organization, 2020; Zheng et al., 2020; Covid, C. D. C., & Team, 2020). Undoubtedly, the illness has had a significant effect on the social and economic system. Through this paper, similar happenings in the past will be studied and the appropriate strategies conjured to deal with the aftermath of the pandemic. The suggestions given here will provide useful help for affected governments in eliminating the impacts on the economy.

In order to achieve the objective of the study, which is to explore the application of Khaldun's economic philosophy in the current COVID-19 situation in the world, the paper will start large then goes to be more narrow. Therefore the second part will be about the social system theory of Ibn Khaldun; Then, the third section will be about Ibn Khaldun's Insights on Economic Development; The fourth section is about the effect of the Muqaddima to Structural Adjustment Policies. The fifth section is about the perspective of Ibn Khaldun's on Epidemics. The last section is conclusion and implications, which will contain also some recommendations of policies to combat COVID-19.

2. Khaldun's Social Systems Theory

Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis, the northwestern part of Africa in 1332 (Ali, 2017). He was born into a member of one of the influential clans in the Islamic Spain region called at that time Al Andalus. The high status of their family allowed him to receive education from the most elite teachers in the Maghreb. He embarked on the study of logic, mathematics and philosophy (Zatari, 2019).

His first publication and the most renowned work, *Muqaddima*, was the introduction to his book, 'History of the World' (Ali, 2017; Zatari, 2019; Alatas, 2017). His publications outlined various historical happenings and the corresponding philosophies relating to the occurrences. He proceeded to publish a total of seven books that lingered around the subjects of history, sociology and economics.

Ibn Khaldun's background provided the perfect opportunity for him to combine his historical experience into a system of scientific concepts describing the rise and fall of social systems (Ali, 2017; Zatari, 2019; Alatas, 2017). His political career and the intense academic background, he had the expertise to come up with historical patterns that would facilitate the conversion of the ideas to scientific theories in explaining social systems. He focused on the introduction of a new science explaining the beginning and end of cultures. According to him, the science should consist of a subject matter and its problems which he described to be human society and social transformations respectively. In layman's terms, the science deals with events that occur in a cyclical manner and often in regular phases but will occasionally come across hindrances or ruptures that result in vital changes in the subject system. He had personally experienced this

from the occurrence of the Black Death epidemic in Tunis that claimed his parents' lives. He also witnessed ruptures to the system from the Mongol invasion and political and economic rise in Europe.

The *asabiyya*, which refers to a group feeling or social cohesion acts as the core principle in his proposed social theory (Bilal, 2017). He believes this to be the primary driving force in the quest to achieving civilization. This is true, in that, the achievement of the most advanced stage of social and cultural interaction requires a stronger social cohesion. The same concept can be used in the current situation to foster economic development. By enhancing cohesion in terms of the commitment by leaders towards this course and the motivation of the people, the objective can be achieved. The critical nature of this requirement in the development process is evident in the successes and failures experienced in the last four decades. The traditional economic categories such as labor, natural resources and capital have had minimal impact in this sector. According to Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyya* describes a relationship between people that share a mutual feeling of support towards one another (Wardak, 2017). The concept is fully experienced in relatives and tribes but can also be conjured in allies and clients where there is a mutual interest involved.

Cooperation is an essential aspect of any development process. It is achieved through group feeling, social cohesion and solidarity in objectives and core values in a group of people or an organization. This again implies how vital the concept of *asabiyya* is to the development process, including economic development. Efficient use of *asabiyya* can aid a Cooperation forms a vital part in the formation of effective social organizations; thus, plays an important role in the development process of a state. The variations in the quality of *asabiyya* lead to the different quality and size of civilization (Elbih, 2020). After the attainment of maximum *asabiyya*, the trait grows weaker, owing to a host of political, economic, social, and psychological factors. The aftermath activity represents a degradation process that is usually clouded with luxury leading to the reverse growth. In light of the decline of the old civilization, a new competing one often emerges at the opportune moment.

The insights by Ibn Khaldun are modern and applicable to the current world. Social theory has been proven to be successful in more than 150 countries. Four decades of economic development in these countries showed that social cohesion, coupled with the satisfaction of the population needs, contributed to the success of the endeavour. Appreciation of the population needs acts as a motivating factor to the participants in the development process (Bilal, 2017; Wardak, 2017; Elbih, 2020). Other factors that facilitate the same purpose is the commitment of the ruling leaders to the development process and the macroeconomic framework with suitable conditions.

3. Ibn Khaldun's Insights on Economic Development

The exposition of Ibn Khaldun on economic development still depicted the role of cooperation in the whole process. The necessity of the division of labour and the corresponding impact on the overall outcome was brought forth by Adam Smith in 1776 (Zin, Adnan, & Abdullah, 2017; Halim et al., 2018; Mohamed, 2017). He stated that the division of labour allowed employees to specialize more, leading to increased productivity of the lot. The concept was, however, not new as many thought being that Ibn Khaldun had stated an almost similar theory 400 years before that. The choice of words by Ibn Khaldun may have made it challenging to comprehend the connection of the concept of economic development.

In Ibn Khaldun's words, he stated that it is impossible for an individual human being to acquire all the necessities of life solely. He emphasizes that humans must cooperate to enhance civilization and aid in the acquisition of the necessities of life. He went ahead to explain that the outcomes of cooperation can serve the needs of more than one human. This, to him, was a greater achievement than the satisfaction of the necessity of just one human. For example, it is impossible for an individual to produce wheat that meets his food requirements. However, through the collaboration of six or more people constituting of a carpenter and a smith responsible for making tools, another person supplying oxen and accountable for ploughing and other people also taking different roles in the processes involved will result in the production of outcomes that will not only satisfy the needs of the individual but many others too. Despite the different specialities portrayed by the individual, a unity of purpose allows them to achieve more in comparison to the outcome by individual effort.

The need for cooperation becomes more evident in the higher stages of development. The increasingly complicated network in the latter stages is more prone to errors and risks; thus, requiring more sophisticated care and maintenance. The increase in wealth has facilitated the need for more differentiation in the products being produced, allowing for more opportunities for product specialization (Abdullah, 2018). This has increased the need for the application of science and technology in the production process. The enhancement of science and technology in tandem with the stimulation of supply and demand contributes to the development process. Ibn Khaldun was aware that supply and demand are determined by the prices and values (Alagha, 2017). He emphasized the influence of the market forces in enhancing the development process. Demand creates an opportunity for more profits and the enhancement of supply.

The needs of a population are usually not constant and keep changing as various changes also occur within the community. Ibn Khaldun stated that as population increases, the supply of labour also increased. As a result, more profit is realized, leading to increased needs for luxury. Luxury products are obtained from crafts which again lead to further benefits. This process serves to multiply the profits realized in a particular region. At this stage, the extra labour solely serves the purposes of wealth and luxury. This is growth from the previous step, where labour was meant for the purpose of fulfilling the necessities of life. Ibn Khaldun further emphasized labour as a source of added value. He states that profit is the result of human labour. He goes ahead to reiterate the importance of science and technology in fostering productivity (Elbih, 2020). The achievement of technical capacity attracts talent, which also boosts the labour force.

Ibn Khaldun recognized the need for a stable political framework and an able ruler in the process of economic development. He stated this to be a vital requirement in the achievement of this objective. The theory has been confirmed in recent times deriving from the experiences of various countries in economic development. He suggests a simple structure of administration that will focus on the critical roles like public finance, diplomacy, and defence (Abdullah, 2018; Alagha, 2017; Elbih, 2020). The administration should also facilitate the supervision of markets, enactment of regular financial transactions and the maintenance of buildings to preserve the safety of the inhabitants.

Ibn Khaldun defines a workable system to be one that ensures the balance of all entities in the subject system. In addition to wise leadership and public control, the system should ensure economic freedom free from overburden by heavy taxation, or monopolized trade system by the leaders as these impede the motivation to work. The system should limit the interventions from the administration. Provision of low purchasing prices by monopolies also serves to discourage the local producers. The system should be flooded with economic incentives that enhance the motivation of producers.

Ibn Khaldun also provided his ideas on the agglomeration of urban areas. Urban agglomeration describes the situation in which there is a concentration of economic activities in urban areas. These areas are overpopulated leading to increased purchasing power, the supply of labour and varying markets and opportunities. Ibn Khaldun explains a central place theory defines the reasons for the agglomeration in urban areas. It explains that in such regions, highly specialized crafts exist that are not found in the countryside (Safar et al., 2018). These areas, thus, play a vital role in the economic development process. As such, these areas should be protected at all expenses. They should be maintained in a state that will facilitate the startup of more economic activities.

A commonly neglected requirement in urban areas is the sanitary aspects. The increasing population in towns is irreversible, and the only remedy to it is to introduce proper planning that will ensure the conditions in the areas remain conducive. Ibn Khaldun associates the filthy nature of the urban regions to the increasing civilization and poor planning (2018; Fahlevi). He points out the need to have empty spaces and waste sections in towns to minimize air putrefaction. He attributes the regular occurrence of pestilences in these areas to the absence of fresh air. In his view, he considers a healthy environment as part of the objective to be achieved in attaining sustainable economic development. The planning suggestions will also facilitate a healthy population that is more productive in various economic activities.

The deterioration in the sanitary aspects of urban areas can lead to far more adverse effects. The poor sanitation in urban areas makes them more vulnerable to epidemics and diseases. As a result, major downfall in the economy may be realized (Caksu, 2017). A large portion of farmers usually leaves agriculture activities to venture into other sectors due to the high taxation rates. All these stem from the impacts of deterioration in urban areas. The decline is attributed to public finance since, in their last stages, they try to meet their demands by exploring the tax base.

4. Effect of the *Muqaddima* to Structural Adjustment Policies

The ideologies of Ibn Khaldun have a practical application in structural adjustment policies. The previous sections have revealed how he has comprehensively highlighted the components of the economic development process. He gives factors that will promote economic development, putting particular emphasis on commitment and social cohesions. He reiterates the responsibility of political and administrative leaders in fulfilling these needs in their respective systems to ensure economic development (Islam & Hossain, 2017). He emphasizes the need to include economic incentives that will promote more individuals to participate in economic activities. He proceeds to highlight the actions that should be shunned in the quest for economic development. The use of confiscatory laws and interventions from the government should be minimized as much as possible. The ideal system for achieving maximum growth should allow economic

freedom with balanced policies (Choudhury, 2016). These guidelines still have application in the current economic policies.

Several concepts proposed by Ibn Khaldun still deserve attention even in the current world. They include efficient government administration, political stability, science and technology, labour qualification, supply and demand, the role of *asabiyya*, environmental control, population pressure, urbanization, food prices and subsidies, sound public finance, and monetary stability. His insights on these areas are still applicable to the current world (Mie, 2020). As such, economic policies relating to these factors should be inclined towards his ideas.

The most profound discovery by Ibn Khaldun that is relative to the objective of this paper is the guidelines on how to manage an economy during times of crisis. His theory from the study of historical patterns describes processes that occur in a cyclical manner in typical phases but occasionally suffer from the interjection by an unusual happening that distorts the system in place. Pandemics are described as one of the unusual incidents that may lead to the disruption of systems (Safar et al., 2018; Fahlevi, 2019; Caksu, 2017). He, however, reiterates that these events do not occur by chance but are associated with certain happenings within the natural environment. According to him, the outbreak of epidemics is a result of the rise in civilization. The current pandemic represents a similar consequence as that by the outbreaks in the past. Ibn Khaldun's ideas were got from the effects of the Black Death epidemic. The patterns in the occurrence of both epidemics can be compared and used in coming up with appropriate strategies.

5. Ibn Khaldun's Perspective on Epidemics

Over time, the outbreak of epidemics has been associated with the conjuncture between chance and structure. Several aspects of the plagues can be described as chance occurrences. One of them is the fact that they usually arise from pathogenic microorganisms like protozoa, bacteria and viruses. Random genetic mutations may unknowingly enhance the transmission of an epidemic. In some instances, fortuitous interactions may align to foster the rapid spread of infectious diseases. As such, epidemics have often appeared to humans as natural occurrences with no defined cause associated (Reddy, 2020). These epidemics have led to the overthrowing of economies, decimating vast populations and destruction of empires. The effects are particularly more adverse when the occurrences coincide with other problems like climatic challenges and monetary crises.

Ibn Khaldun developed a theory of change that incorporated the social and political realms with the association to economic and demographic dynamics. He then provided a way in which the outbreak of epidemics will find its way into this. His existence during the emergence of the Black Death epidemic fostered these ideas and allowed him to come up with the philosophies (2020; Fernandes; 2020). He generated most of his ideas from the aftermath of the illness in the social and political factors at that time. He believed them to be brought about by the rise in civilization. He stated that the demographic upswing resulting from the increase in population would lead to the emergence of epidemic diseases and social disruption.

Ibn Khaldun foresaw that the occurrence of epidemics would have a significant impact on the political and social realms of human lives. The recommendations he suggested towards the

advancement of economic development were provided in light of these occurrences. As such, his philosophies have a specific application in the revival of economies in the occurrence of epidemics.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The paper has highlighted the various economic philosophies by Ibn Khaldun. Ibn Khaldun explains various theories that are imperative in the development process. The most profound idea in his social theory concept is the importance of social cohesion, also known as *asabiyya*. He states that although it is possible to meet specific needs at the individual level, the outcomes are much better when achieved from a group effort. He goes ahead to reiterate that it is impossible to meet all the requirements of life individually. This is reflected in the example of wheat production, which is easily achieved through the involvement of different individuals with varying skills set to work on the same. The same call for social cohesion would, later on, serve an important role in the discussion on the importance of the division of labour in the workplace. According to Adam Smith, division of labour facilitated the specialization of workers enhancing the productivity of the individuals (Zin, Adnan, & Abdullah, 2017; Halim et al., 2018; Mohamed, 2017). Through cooperation with one another, being unified by a common objective, individuals can accomplish tasks much faster and efficiently.

The paper has also highlighted the insights of Ibn Khaldun on the economic development process. He identifies several factors that are essential in the development process. The fulfilment of these factors facilitates the success of the process. Cooperation from the social theory is one of the aspects explained that has a significant impact on the economic development process. Collaboration facilitates enhanced performance and increased productivity in terms of the time taken to complete a task, and the quality of the product realized thereof. This should, therefore, form a core part of the economic development process to ensure high efficiency is maintained.

The political and administrative system of an area is part and parcel of the economic development process. They have an irresistible influence on the success of this objective. Different provisions given by these realms lead to varying impacts on the same. Ibn Khaldun came up with several suggestions that can be applied to any administrative system to facilitate higher productivity in terms of economic development. He implores the creation of a system with balanced economic factors (Islam & Hossain, 2017; Choudhury, 2016; Mie, 2020). This implies the absence of factors that place some participants of the same at a disadvantage. Such situations include the presence of monopolies in the trading system who may decide to inflate prices, making it difficult for the less fortunate to enjoy certain privileges. The political system should be stable. therefore, facilitating the success of the economic development process.

The paper also explores the ideas of Ibn Khaldun on the prevalence of epidemics and the corresponding effects on the various realms of human lives. This forms the basis of the research as the paper aims to identify ways of managing the economy in times of crisis relating to the emergence of epidemics. Despite the common belief that epidemics arise from chance and that they are naturally occurring phenomenon, Ibn Khaldun presents a different perspective stating that these occurrences have explanations attached to them (Abdullah, 2018; Alagha, 2017; Elbih, 2020). He explains that the appearance of epidemics is relative to the prevailing ecological conditions and the subject of the historical life of the population. Every outbreak is usually

unique to the characteristics of the subject generation. These findings can be used in the management of the economy and other related factors. This would imply that the same pattern of thinking should be applied to the current COVID-19 epidemic.

Deriving from the explanations of Ibn Khaldun, it is impossible to say that this infection began by chance. The virus was obtained through the proximity of humans to the particular bat species. This can be attributed to the civilization concerns explained by Ibn Khaldun. The rise in civilization has led to an increase in population, pushing people to occupy lands next to such dangerous creatures. The prolonged increase in population also resulted in the diminishing of food sources for human beings. As a result, humans have sort of exploring other types of meals. Such activities constitute the demographic dynamics explained by Ibn Khaldun. In their quest for survival, humans have ended up contracting deadly viruses leading to massive loss of lives.

He provides suggestions on ways to minimize the spread of epidemics in future generations. However, it is impossible to reverse the primary causes of infectious diseases as they result from the vital constituents of human lives.

6.1.Recommendations of Policies to Combat COVID-19

Several policies have already been enacted by different governments in the fight against COVID-19. The laws are aimed at minimizing the consequences of the epidemic on the economic and political aspects of human lives. Ibn Khaldun suggested several actions that can assist in the preservation of the economy in times of crisis. One of them was the need to maintain high levels of sanitary conditions in urban areas. He explained that the poor planning of the metropolitan regions by limiting spaces facilitates the spread of infectious diseases. This has been confirmed by the trend in the current COVID-19 cases. The most affected areas are the urban areas due to the agglomeration of these areas. The WHO suggested several recommendations that enhanced social distancing in these areas. However, this can only provide short-term aid. A long-lasting solution to this problem is the institution of policies to govern the construction of buildings in these places. Specific guidelines should be established to encourage the presence of spaces in urban areas.

One of the implications of COVID-19 is the lockdown of all business allowing only the operation of companies dealing in provision of essential services (World Health Organization, 2020; Zheng et al., 2020; Covid, C. D. C., & Team, 2020). As a result, many individuals have lost their income generating avenues. The income of economies all over the world has been affected. This makes it tougher for citizens to meet the tax requirements by the government. According to Ibn Khaldun, tax rates should be reduced or eliminated; Governments should, therefore, reduce the tax demands on their citizens and allow them to revive their businesses first. Some countries have adopted these strategies and are easing tax demands. In New Zealand, for example, the government has frozen the raising of renting rates and increased their protection tenants. The law is effective for six months and is expected to aid the citizens recuperate from the adverse effects of the pandemic (Berka, 2020; International Monetary Fund, 2020; Roy, 2020). They have also postponed the repayment of loans for a period of six months until normalcy is resumed. These policies reflect a sympathetic perspective of the government. More states should take this approach to prevent the economic situation from getting worse.

The Coronavirus pandemic has further impeded the supply of basic needs as most countries relied on imports and exports. For instance, New Zealand shared a relatively intimate trading relationship with China. 28% of their exports were all delivered to the country (Berka, 2020; International Monetary Fund, 2020; Roy, 2020). However, in light of the spread of the Coronavirus, the transactions were halted in adherence to social distancing rules. As a result, there has been a reduced supply of essential commodities in the country. In Ibn Khaldun's way of thinking, he suggested that food prices should be lower. However, this could only be facilitated by the implementation of initiatives by the government to this effect. Food is an essential commodity; hence, it should be availed at a subsidized cost owing to the diminishing global economy. Governments should implement this policy by not only reducing the purchasing price of the commodities but also subsidizing the production costs of the same. This can be concluded by lowering the taxes and levies placed on transportation and acquisition of raw materials for the production process. The rule can be implemented in the meantime, at least until the pandemic subsides.

7. References

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