

Breaking Down The Categories Of Zakat Recipients In Our Times

■ MUSLIM MATTERS
by Dr. Aslam Abdullah

Sura Tawba in aya 50 explains the categories of recipients of Zakat.

“The offerings given for the sake of God are [meant] only for the poor and the needy, and those who are in charge thereof, and those whose hearts are to be won over, and for the freeing of human beings from bondage, and [for] those who are over burdened with debts, and [for every struggle] in God’s cause, and [for] the wayfarer: [this is] an ordinance from God – and God is all-knowing, wise.”

The Poor

The definition of poor would differ from place to place as well as on the size of a family. Some 767 million people in the world live on an earning less than 1.90 cents a day. In the US, the poverty line for a single person is about \$12,150 and for a family of 4 it is 25,100.

The Needy

The needy is defined as the one who is having difficulty in meeting his/her basic needs met properly. Basic needs include, food, clothing and a place to live as well as medicine if they are needed. It may also include transportation if the needy person require it for going to work. They may be earning over the poverty line but may not be in a position to take care of their medicine or food, transportation or clothing properly.

Those who are in charge thereof

It includes people who manage zakat funds whether in masjid or in other institutions. If an Imam is involved in collecting Zakat funds, he can be qualified to receive from such collections.

Those whose hearts have to be won over

It includes all those people who may not have heard about Islam or who may have a negative attitude towards Islam and Muslims. In this category are included individuals and groups involved in public relations work for Islam, Muslim groups engaged in interfaith and inter communal work, Muslim media that

is primarily devoted to promoting Islam, universities and colleges that are teaching Islam to non Muslims.

Freeing of human beings from bondage

There are 40 million people living in slavery in our world today. There are about 42 million girls, women, boys and transgender who are forced to sell their bodies to others because they have no other means to earn their livelihood. Also there are about one million families that due to poverty are forced to sell their children to others/

And [for] those who are over burdened with debts

Burdened by debts include those people who may be above the poverty line and whose basic needs may also be covered but who are burdened by debt to such an extent that they may not carry out their household responsibilities properly. and [for every struggle] in God's cause

It includes those who are out there to spread the word of God and who are standing up for social justice and equality and against oppression. [for] the wayfarer

Those who are travelers with little means or displaced people including refugees or even homeless.

The distribution is not confined to Muslims only. It is not limited to non relatives as relatives as well as family members who are in this situation may also be the recipient.

How should this distribution be done?

It can be done individually.

It can be done through organizations and Masjid who have expertise in this area. The ideal situation would be to have a central body in every state or city to collect zakat funds in a transparent manner. The collection groups and the individual should educate the community about centralizing the resources and then through consultation with the trusted people of the community distribute to the recipients in each category.

What is important to realize that if the zakat is distributed through agencies and masjid and institutions, then the community must be informed about its distribution. In other words, there must be absolute transparency in zakat collection and distribution.