

## Toward Interfaith Ecological Ethics: Synergizing Religious Eco-Theology and Local Cultural Wisdom for Environmental Governance in Indonesia

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### Abstract

Environmental degradation represents not only a physical crisis but also a profound spiritual and ethical disconnect between humanity and nature. This study aims to analyze the synergy between eco-theology and local cultural wisdom in constructing a contextual interfaith ecological ethics framework in Indonesia. Using a qualitative literature-based approach, this research examines eco-theological constructions within Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indigenous Beliefs, alongside manifestations of local wisdom in conservation practices such as Subak, Sasi, and Leuweung Larangan. The findings reveal that integrating spiritual principles with cultural practices enriches the moral dimension of environmental conservation and significantly enhances community participation. The study concludes that the ecological crisis is fundamentally a crisis of values, requiring a holistic approach that integrates theological insights with cultural practice. The resulting "Interfaith Ecological Ethics" framework offers a transformative pathway for sustainable development in Indonesia, rooted in society's spiritual and cultural values, while challenging dominant secular-anthropocentric environmental paradigms.

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### Introduction

Environmental degradation and the global ecological crisis currently gripping the world reveal a profound disharmony between humans and the universe (Insan Ali, 2024; Kumar et al., 2025). The aspiration to build a balanced and mutually sustaining relationship between humanity and the environment appears increasingly distant from reality (Paswan et al., 2017). The exploitative nature of the global economic order and the consumptive lifestyle of modern society have accelerated the destruction of ecosystems, the very foundation of life (Hemp et al., 2025; Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, Mexico & Adekanbi, 2024). Development paradigms oriented toward limitless growth

often neglect ecological balance, positioning nature as an object to be dominated and exploited for human interests (Zhu et al., 2024).

At the same time, green technological solutions and environmental policies imported from the West are frequently perceived as incompatible with the spiritual values and local wisdom of societies, making them difficult to implement effectively (Sen et al., 2024). Modernity, built upon an anthropocentric worldview, often conflicts with religious and local cultural values that are ecocentric or theocentric, placing God or nature at the center of existence (Behnken et al., 2016). As a result, top-down environmental policies frequently fail because communities lack the structural and cultural readiness to adopt them (Azad et al., 2019). Ecological literacy grounded in local values also remains weak, preventing environmental preservation from becoming an integral part of collective identity and spirituality (Souther et al., 2023). These dynamics illustrate that many contemporary environmental approaches remain incompatible with the character of the communities that should serve as active agents of environmental stewardship (Selfa & Endter-Wada, 2008). A new perspective is needed, one that is not merely technocratic, but holistic and rooted in religious and cultural values, so that true harmony between humans and nature can be realized.

Environmental studies thus far have tended to be trapped within secular and anthropocentric paradigms that provide insufficient space for integrating religion and culture as ethical foundations for environmental awareness, especially in Indonesia, a multicultural and multireligious society (Hamzani et al., 2025). Many studies focus on technical, economic, or policy aspects, but fail to explore the spiritual and cultural dimensions that fundamentally shape human-nature relationships. A review of the literature reveals three dominant tendencies. First, research that concentrates on eco-theological analysis within a single religion, such as Islam or Christianity, without opening space for interreligious dialogue, thereby leaving universal values that could serve as shared ethical foundations only partially identified (De Wit, 2013; Silitonga, 2025). Second, research that examines the ecological wisdom of Indigenous communities in isolation from the theology of major religions (Keegan, 2022; Krishna Pasupuleti, 2024). This approach often treats local wisdom as a cultural phenomenon detached from religious frameworks, even though the two frequently intertwine in the Indonesian context. Third, research that analyzes government environmental policies without addressing the religious and cultural values that ultimately determine policy implementation success (Wong, 2025; Zarb & Taylor, 2023). Consequently, synergy between interreligious eco-theological principles and local cultural practices in shaping “Interfaith

Ecological Ethics” has not yet been discussed in an integrative and systematic manner. In fact, collaborative potential between religion and culture could serve as a powerful collective moral foundation for addressing the ecological crisis, particularly in Indonesia, a nation rich in spiritual and cultural heritage. This scholarly gap is what the present study seeks to address.

This article aims to complement previous studies by conducting an in-depth analysis of how eco-theology and cultural wisdom can synergize to build a strong, contextual, and socially relevant ecological ethic for Indonesian society. In a religious and plural nation like Indonesia, a community’s ability to respond to ecological crises is shaped by the strength of its living spiritual and cultural values (Irham Multazam et al., 2025; Nur & Yasir, 2025). Societal perceptions of nature as sacred and spiritually significant form a crucial foundation for cultivating sustainable ecological behavior (Gautam, 2025; Zulaika et al., 2025). Guided by this framework, the study poses three central research questions. First, how do eco-theological principles within Indonesia’s major religions, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indigenous Beliefs, define the human-nature relationship and ecological responsibilities? Second, how is cultural wisdom manifested in environmental conservation practices across various Nusantara communities, whether through rituals, knowledge systems, or social norms? Third, where do eco-theology and cultural wisdom converge or diverge, and how can these intersections shape an inclusive and contextual framework of “Interfaith Ecological Ethics” for Indonesia? Answers to these questions are expected to produce a comprehensive knowledge map that can inform effective environmental policymaking, value-based ecological education, and spiritually rooted socio-environmental movements. Thus, this study is not merely conceptual but strives to provide practical foundations for sustainable ecological transformation in Indonesia.

The core argument underpinning this research is that the ecological resilience of a society cannot be separated from the strength of its ethical foundations, particularly those grounded in religion (eco-theology) and culture (cultural wisdom) (Abdullah et al., 2024; “Exploring the Interplay Between Culture and Religion in African Countries,” 2023). In Indonesia, where social and spiritual life are deeply intertwined, worldviews about nature extend beyond utilitarian logic and enter moral and transcendental realms (Bhattacharjee, 2025; Jiarui Jiang, 2025). Nature is perceived as a divine trust and a partner whose balance must be protected (Robina Ramírez & Pulido Fernández, 2018). Western environmental paradigms, often secular and anthropocentric, tend to overlook this spiritual dimension (Ogwu & Ojo, 2025). Eco-theology offers a normative

framework rooted in revelation and religious teachings, providing a theological basis for human ecological responsibility.

Meanwhile, cultural wisdom offers lived practices and historical experiences demonstrating how communities maintain environmental balance through rituals, customs, and value systems. Integrating the two produces an ecological ethic that is not only rational and scientific, but also emotional and spiritual, thereby fostering broader community engagement. Indonesia's social structure, grounded in religious and traditional cultural values, already constitutes a social infrastructure capable of adopting conservation paradigms aligned with its identity (Silalahi & Purwanto, 2025; Wohangara et al., 2023). Therefore, building ecological resilience in Indonesia requires strategic integration of top-down wisdom (religion) and bottom-up wisdom (culture) (Ward et al., 2020). This synergy provides a pathway toward a holistic, inclusive, and sustainable environmental paradigm, one that not only protects nature but also strengthens the nation's spiritual and cultural identity (Argumedo et al., 2021).

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative approach through a literature-based inquiry grounded in a constructivist perspective. This methodological choice enables an interpretive deepening of interfaith and intercultural constructions of ecological ethics in Indonesia (Creswell, John W., CreswellJ. David, n.d.). Unlike a systematic review that focuses on data aggregation, this approach emphasizes thematic synthesis and critical interpretation of subjective meanings, values, and socio-cultural contexts within academic discourse (Norman K. Denzin; Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2005). The research centers on the constellation of cross-religious ecological ethics in Indonesia, encompassing two primary domains: eco-theological narratives within major religious traditions, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indigenous Beliefs, and local wisdom practices such as the Subak irrigation system in Bali, sasi in Maluku, and leuweung larangan in Sundanese communities.

The data are derived from secondary academic sources selected purposively based on conceptual relevance and analytical depth (Bryman, A., 2016)b. The data analysis process follows a thematic model consisting of data reduction, thematic organization, and interpretive synthesis (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J., 2014). Through close reading of selected texts, the study identifies recurring patterns of meaning that represent the "lived" values of society (Geertz, C., 1973). This qualitative approach does not merely compile information but instead offers a comprehensive contextual

understanding of the dynamic synergy between spirituality, cultural wisdom, and environmental ethics within the Indonesian setting. Thus, this literature study successfully constructs a holistic understanding of how the relationship between humans and the environment is interpreted through diverse spiritual and cultural perspectives across the Indonesian archipelago.

### **Human–Nature Relations in Indonesia: Between Spirituality and Ecological Crisis**

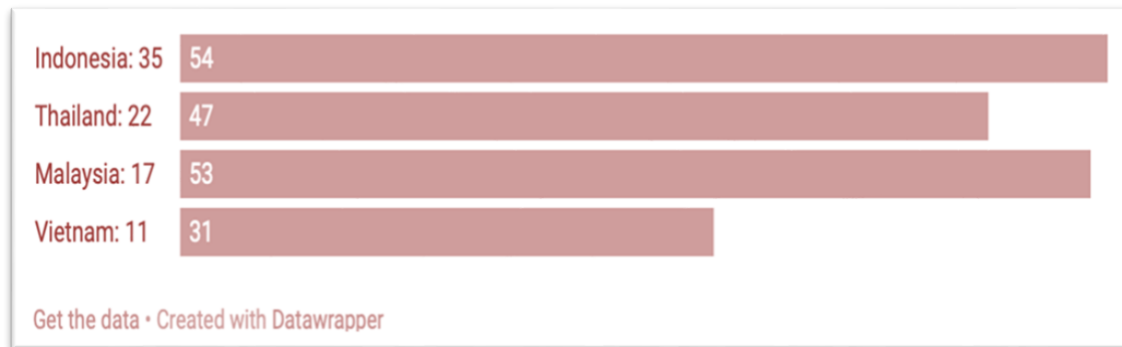
The relationship between humans and the environment in Indonesia reveals a profound paradox: on one hand, there exists a deep spiritual awareness regarding the sacredness of nature, yet on the other hand, societal ecological practices often demonstrate destructive tendencies. This paradox reflects a significant gap between religious values and actual behavior in environmental management. Historically, Indonesians are known as a religious society that upholds strong spiritual values. Across various traditions, whether rooted in major world religions or indigenous belief systems, nature is perceived as an integral part of human spiritual life. This worldview manifests as an ecocentric perspective, one that regards nature as a living entity possessing intrinsic value, rather than merely an economic object or resource (Rudnycky, 2014).

In Islamic teachings, for instance, the concept of *Rahmatan lil-alamin* emphasizes that all of God's creations possess the right to be respected and protected. Nature represents an expression of divine compassion, requiring equilibrium and human responsibility as stewards (*khalifah*) on earth (Imran Hayat Et Al., 2023). This doctrine positions humans not as rulers, but as guardians of cosmic harmony. Similar values appear in other religions in Indonesia. In Hindu tradition, the principle of *Tri Hita Karana* teaches the importance of harmony between humans, nature, and God. Meanwhile, in local belief systems, such as among Dayak, Bali Aga, and Maluku communities, nature is treated as a sacred entity inhabited by ancestral and guardian spirits. Such spiritual awareness affirms that the human–environment relationship is not only material, but also moral and metaphysical. However, these noble values now face growing challenges posed by modernization, capitalism, and massive urbanization. A rising consumerist lifestyle in major cities has significantly altered ecological behavior. The pursuit of economic growth and infrastructure development often disregards principles of environmental sustainability, resulting in widespread ecological degradation.

Environmental data indicates that in 2013, Indonesia contributed approximately 35.54% of total carbon emissions in the ASEAN region (Ilham, 2018). This figure not only reflects the scale of national industrial and economic

activities, but also demonstrates a discrepancy between spiritual awareness and environmental action. The tension between Indonesia's spiritual reverence for nature and its tangible environmental impact is visualized in Figure 1. The data reveal a significant contradiction: despite widespread cultural and religious values that sanctify the natural world, Indonesia remains a major contributor to regional ecological degradation:

**Figure 1**  
Indonesia's Share of Total ASEAN Carbon Emissions (2013)



Source: Compiled from Ilham (2018), *Economic Development and Environmental Degradation in ASEAN*.

Figure 1 illustrates Indonesia's disproportionate contribution to total carbon emissions within the ASEAN region. Although Indonesia is home to diverse religious and cultural traditions that emphasize the sacredness of nature, stewardship, and moral responsibility toward the environment, its development model has been predominantly shaped by extractive economic practices and carbon-intensive land use. Accounting for approximately 35.54% of ASEAN's total carbon emissions, Indonesia emerges as the region's largest emitter, a position that reflects structural patterns rather than isolated environmental failures. This concentration of emissions is closely linked to deforestation, peatland conversion, and resource-oriented development policies that prioritize economic expansion over ecological sustainability. The figure thus functions not merely as a representation of emission shares, but as visual evidence of a deeper disconnect between normative environmental ethics and institutionalized economic behavior. In this context, Indonesia's ecological challenges should be understood not only as technical or regulatory shortcomings, but as manifestations of a broader value disjunction, where theological and cultural commitments to environmental stewardship remain insufficiently translated into environmental governance and policy practice.

Industrial policies that rely heavily on fossil fuels and uncontrolled resource extraction are among the primary causes of ecological damage.

(Rudnyckyj, 2014) asserts that industrialization in Indonesia is frequently framed within the moral narrative of Islamic economics, emphasizing hard work and efficiency, yet rarely integrates ecological responsibility. Thus, a contradiction emerges between spiritual principles demanding ethical stewardship of the earth and economic practices that tend to be exploitative.

The erosion of ecocentric values is also evident in the increasing exploitation of natural resources. Activities such as illegal logging, unregulated mining, and habitat destruction for agricultural expansion demonstrate that sacred views of nature are becoming marginalized (Pranyoto et al., 2024). In many cases, local communities that once lived in harmony with nature are now displaced by economic pressures and top-down development policies. Yet, traditional ecological systems such as *sasi* in Maluku or *leuweung larangan* in Sundanese communities have proven for centuries to preserve environmental balance through spiritually and morally grounded communal regulations.

This crisis also exposes inconsistencies between religious ethics and economic behavior. Many individuals and business actors claim to operate based on Islamic economic principles, emphasizing justice, responsibility, and social welfare, but in practice neglect environmental concerns (Alwi et al., 2021). This indicates that the internalization of spiritual values in economic action remains symbolic rather than manifesting as concrete ecological awareness. As a result, profit-driven economic practices often sacrifice environmental sustainability. To address this contradiction, an integrative approach connecting eco-theology and cultural wisdom is urgently needed. Eco-theology, as a theological reflection on human–nature relations, can help reclaim the sacredness of nature eroded by modernity (Rudnyckyj, 2014). Meanwhile, local wisdom rooted in tradition and spirituality offers contextually grounded and sustainable ecological practices. The integration of both perspectives has the potential to produce a new environmental ethic relevant to Indonesia’s social reality, one that not only regulates human behavior toward nature, but also cultivates a deep sense of ecological spirituality.

In this context, community-based movements play a crucial role. Numerous local initiatives are now attempting to reintegrate traditional ecological values into modern life. In Bali, for instance, *subak*, a collective irrigation system infused with spiritual and social dimensions, serves as a model for value-based environmental governance. Likewise, Indigenous communities in Kalimantan and Papua increasingly combine ritual traditions with environmental advocacy to protect their forests. These examples show that when spirituality and cultural wisdom form the foundation of ecological action, public participation in environmental conservation significantly increases. The greatest

challenge ahead is how to redirect national development so that it prioritizes not only economic growth, but also ecological sustainability rooted in the nation's spiritual values. The anthropocentric development model must shift toward an ecocentric paradigm, one that views humans as part of the web of life, not its master. To achieve this, the state, religious institutions, and civil society must collaborate in creating interfaith and intercultural environmental dialogues aimed at formulating an Interfaith Ecological Ethics suited to Indonesia's context. Such ethics could serve as a collective moral foundation for environmental policy, education, and ecological social movements.

Ultimately, the paradox between spiritual awareness and ecological practice in Indonesia indicates that the environmental crisis is not merely technical, but fundamentally a crisis of values. Indonesians actually possess rich spiritual and cultural resources capable of fostering a strong ecological ethic. However, these values must be revitalized in modern life through the integration of theology, culture, and public policy. Thus, development should not be measured solely by economic growth, but also by the nation's capacity to live harmoniously with nature. As (Rudnyckyj, 2014) argues, spirituality can serve as a moral force shaping an ecologically just developmental ethos. With its cultural and religious diversity, Indonesia holds immense potential to become a global pioneer of sustainable development grounded in spirituality and local wisdom.

### **Principles of Eco-Theology in Major Religions in Indonesia**

The relationship between humans and nature is a universal theme that has long been addressed by religions and traditions across the world. In Indonesia, a nation characterized by profound religious diversity, human-environment relations are reflected in the teachings of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and various local belief systems. Each tradition carries its own theological and ethical framework, emphasizing that humans hold moral and spiritual responsibility toward nature. This awareness positions humans not as absolute rulers, but as caretakers and integral parts of an interdependent web of life. Such a perspective is highly relevant in the face of global environmental crises, such as climate change, deforestation, and ecosystem degradation, because religious ethics can provide both moral grounding and spiritual motivation for environmental protection.

To systematically map the eco-theological principles within Indonesia's major faiths, Table 1 provides a comparative overview of key concepts, ethical tenets, practical manifestations, and supporting academic references. This table is designed to offer an accessible visual synthesis, highlighting how each

religious tradition provides a moral and spiritual foundation for environmental stewardship:

**Table 1**

Eco-Theological Principles in Indonesia's Major Religions and Belief Systems

Religion / Belief System	Key Eco-Theological Concept	Core Ethical Principle	Practical Manifestation in Indonesia	Citation Reference
Islam	<i>Khalifah fil ardh</i> (God's vicegerent on earth), <i>Amanah</i> (trust), <i>Mizan</i> (balance)	Human responsibility to maintain ecological balance; prohibition of <i>fasad</i> (corruption/destruction) on earth.	Environmental education in <i>pesantren</i> ; eco-mosque initiatives; integration of Islamic values into energy policy.	Rohmatulloh et al. (2023); Prianto et al. (2021); Imran Hayat et al. (2023)
Christianity	Stewardship, <i>Imago Dei</i> (Image of God)	Humans as caretakers of God's creation; moral accountability for nature.	Church-led reforestation drives; waste management campaigns; faith-based ecological education.	Ruhlessin & Parihala (2021); Reuter (2015); Silitonga (2025)
Hinduism	<i>Tri Hita Karana</i> (harmony among people, nature, God), <i>Tat Tvam Asi</i> (You are that)	Nature as a manifestation of Brahman; reverence for all life.	The <i>Subak</i> irrigation system in Bali; rituals for sacred rivers and forests; community-based conservation.	Krapchunov (2021); Zagonari (2020); Windia et al. (2018)
Buddhism	<i>Ahimsa</i> (non-violence), <i>Pratityasamutpada</i> (interdependent origination)	Simple living, compassion for all beings, ecological mindfulness.	Nature meditation retreats; low-carbon lifestyle movements; conservation education in temples.	Intan (2023); Zagonari (2020)
Indigenous Belief Systems	Animism, sacredness of nature, spiritual kinship with ancestral and natural spirits.	Taboos against exploitation in sacred sites; respect for nature's guardians.	<i>Sasi</i> harvesting prohibitions in Maluku; <i>Leuweung Larangan</i> (forbidden forests) in Sunda; customary forests of Dayak communities.	Smith (2018); Muslih et al. (2023); Amelia et al. (2018)

Source: Developed by the author based on literature synthesis

Table 1 confirms that despite their distinct theological origins, all major religions and belief systems in Indonesia espouse ecological principles emphasizing moral responsibility, reverence for nature, and cosmic balance. Islam and Christianity stress the concept of stewardship (*khalifah/stewardship*), while Hinduism and Buddhism offer holistic visions of human-nature unity. Indigenous belief systems complement this discourse with sacred and communal conservation

practices. The convergence of these values opens significant avenues for interfaith dialogue in constructing an inclusive ecological ethic. For instance, the Hindu principle of Tri Hita Karana aligns with the spirit of khalifah in Islam and stewardship in Christianity. Simultaneously, practices like *sasi* and *leuweung larangan* demonstrate how sacred values are translated into sustainable resource management mechanisms. Therefore, integrating theological insights with local wisdom is not only possible but essential for addressing the multidimensional ecological crisis.

In Islam, the human-nature relationship is expressed through the concepts of *khalifah fil ardh* and *amanah*. The idea of *khalifah* portrays humans as God's representatives entrusted with managing the earth, while *amanah* refers to the responsibility to maintain ecological balance and sustainability. The Qur'an teaches that humans must preserve *mizan* (balance) and avoid *fasad* (destruction) on earth, meaning excessive exploitation of nature contradicts Islamic teachings. Studies demonstrate that these principles encourage environmental conservation and energy-saving behavior. (Rohmatulloh et al., 2023) highlight the importance of integrating Islamic values into education to cultivate energy-conscious behavior, while (Prianto et al., 2021) emphasize the role of Islamic ethics in sustainability efforts related to climate change. As a Muslim-majority country, Indonesia has tremendous potential to build environmentally responsible cultural practices rooted in Islamic teachings. Mosques, *pesantren*, and religious institutions can function as centers of eco-theological education, where environmental preservation becomes part of worship and gratitude to God.

In Christian tradition, the human-nature relationship is expressed through the concept of stewardship, responsibility to care for and manage God's creation. This teaching is rooted in the Book of Genesis, where humans are instructed to "till and keep the garden" (Genesis 2:15). The concept positions humans not as owners, but as guardians of nature, while emphasizing love and respect for all creation. (Ruhlessin & Parihala, 2021) suggest that Christian theology in Indonesia has developed within the national context, where environmental concern is viewed as a moral responsibility of citizens. (Reuter, 2015) notes the emergence of eco-theological movements promoting harmony between faith and ecology through social action and environmental education. Churches and Christian communities can serve as agents of change, encouraging concrete initiatives such as reforestation, waste management, and environmental awareness campaigns.

Hinduism views nature as a manifestation of Brahman, the supreme reality encompassing all existence. This worldview fosters deep reverence for all

elements of nature because every entity is considered sacred. The principle *Tat Tvam Asi* ("You are that") affirms the interconnectedness of all beings within Brahman, making environmental destruction equivalent to harming oneself. (Krapchunov, 2021) argues that ecological consciousness in Hinduism arises from the belief in living harmoniously with nature. (Zagonari, 2020) adds that Hindu ethics provide guidance for sustainable development by balancing human needs with environmental preservation. In Indonesia, such principles are reflected in Bali's concept of *Tri Hita Karana*, which promotes harmony among humans, God, and nature as the foundation of sustainable development.

Buddhism offers an ecological perspective grounded in the principle of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and the concept of *pratityasamutpada* (interdependence), which emphasizes that all living beings are mutually connected. This philosophy teaches that human actions toward nature carry moral and spiritual consequences, making environmental mindfulness essential. (Intan, 2023; Zagonari, 2020) note that Buddhist teachings encourage sustainable living, reduced consumerism, and ecological compassion. In practice, Buddhists in Indonesia are encouraged to view nature as part of a shared community of life that must be respected and protected, rather than exploited merely as a resource. Local belief systems in Indonesia also significantly contribute to environmental ethics. Worldviews characterized by animism and dynamism often perceive nature as spiritually inhabited by ancestral forces or sacred beings. Trees, mountains, rivers, and stones are regarded as sacred, meaning interactions with nature must be grounded in respect. (Smith, 2018) notes that many Indigenous communities in Indonesia have long implemented traditional conservation practices, including restrictions on logging or hunting in certain areas. (Muslih et al., 2023) add that such local values align with religious moderation and interfaith dialogue, forming a shared foundation for sustainable development. These holistic local ethics show that sustainability can be achieved through cultural practices, tradition, and collective responsibility, without relying solely on modern approaches.

Overall, all religions and belief systems in Indonesia affirm human responsibility toward nature. Islam emphasizes *khalifah* and *amanah*, Christianity stresses stewardship, Hinduism promotes harmony with Brahman, Buddhism highlights ecological awareness and interdependence, and Indigenous beliefs uphold respect for nature as a spiritual entity. These shared values affirm humanity's moral duty, across faith traditions, to protect ecological balance and environmental sustainability. In the context of global environmental crises, religious values serve as essential moral and spiritual motivators for concrete ecological action. Religious education, communities, and institutions

can play central roles in building environmental consciousness, from small acts like conserving energy to broader efforts such as urban greening and forest protection. The diversity of religious ethics demonstrates that caring for the earth is both an expression of worship and a responsibility toward all creation.

Sustainability does not rely solely on technology or policy, but also on society's moral and spiritual awareness. Teachings across religions and local traditions show that humans must live in harmony with nature, respect all forms of life, and act wisely toward the earth's resources. By integrating religious values with social practice, Indonesia has the potential to become a global model of sustainability rooted in spiritual wisdom. Caring for the earth is a calling of faith, a humanitarian duty, and an interreligious legacy that must be protected together. Amid global environmental challenges, shared religious values of honoring and protecting nature form a crucial foundation for building a just, sustainable, and harmonious future for all creation.

### Manifestations of Local Cultural Wisdom in Environmental Conservation Practices

Local cultural wisdom plays a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance across the Indonesian archipelago. In this context, traditional practices passed down through generations are not merely cultural or customary activities, but also carry deep spiritual and ethical values. To provide a systematic overview of local cultural wisdom practices in environmental conservation across Indonesia, Table 2 outlines three representative traditional systems, Subak, Sasi, and Leuweung Larangan. The table details their geographical origins, core principles, conservation mechanisms, and associated ecological and social benefits, supported by relevant academic references.

**Table 2**

Local Cultural Wisdom Systems for Environmental Conservation in Indonesia

Wisdom System & Location	Core Principle & Philosophy	Conservation Mechanism	Ecological & Social Benefits	Citation Reference
Subak (Bali)	<i>Tri Hita Karana</i> : Harmony among humans ( <i>pawongan</i> ), nature ( <i>palemahan</i> ), and God ( <i>parhyangan</i> ). Water is sacred ( <i>tirta</i> ).	Collective and democratic water management for rice terraces; ritual-based agricultural calendar; social sanctions for non-compliance.	Maintains soil fertility and biodiversity; ensures equitable water distribution; strengthens social cohesion and shared responsibility.	Risna et al. (2022); Suasih et al. (2024); Windia et al. (2018)

Sasi (Maluku, Papua)	Temporal prohibition ( <i>sasi</i> ) based on customary law; respect for natural cycles and regeneration periods.	Community-enforced bans on harvesting specific marine or forest resources; rituals to open and close <i>sasi</i> periods; customary fines for violations.	Prevents overexploitation; allows resource regeneration; reinforces community solidarity and ecological awareness.	Amelia et al. (2018); I Gusti Agung Ayu Rai Asmiwyati et al. (2015)
Leuweung Larangan (Sundanese Regions, West Java)	Forest as sacred ( <i>larangan</i> ) space inhabited by ancestral spirits ( <i>karuhun</i> ); nature possesses intrinsic spiritual value.	Designation of certain forest areas as off-limits to logging or hunting; rituals to honor forest spirits; community-led guardianship.	Protects biodiversity and watersheds; preserves cultural and spiritual identity; serves as a carbon sink and climate buffer.	Adhyaksari et al. (2023); Hutasoit & Wau (2017); Satrio & Kusumah (2022)

Source: Developed by the author based on literature synthesis

Table 2 illustrates how local wisdom systems in Indonesia operate through holistic frameworks that integrate spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions. Although originating from distinct cultural contexts, the three systems, Subak, Sasi, and Leuweung Larangan, share common emphasis on collective governance, respect for natural cycles, and socio-spiritual sanctions as enforcement mechanisms. Ecologically, these systems have proven effective in maintaining biodiversity, regulating resource use, and enhancing environmental resilience. Socially, they reinforce community identity, group cohesion, and intergenerational transmission of values. The convergence of these principles with religious teachings, such as Tri Hita Karana in Hinduism or the concept of amanah (trust) in Islam, provides a robust foundation for developing applied, grassroots-level intercultural and interfaith ecological ethics.

The symbiotic relationship between humans and nature reflected in these practices demonstrates how local communities understand the importance of environmental preservation. This phenomenon can be observed in various traditional agricultural and conservation systems that have developed in different regions of Indonesia, such as subak in Bali, sasi in Maluku, and leuweung larangan in Sundanese territories. These systems are not only practical forms of environmental conservation but also serve as expressions of moral and cosmological beliefs embedded in the cultural identity of local communities.

The subak system in Bali, for example, is a concrete illustration of how agriculture can harmoniously integrate with spiritual values. Subak is a traditional irrigation system recognized as a UNESCO world cultural heritage. It is rooted in the philosophy of Tri Hita Karana, which emphasizes balance and

harmony between humans, nature, and God. Through this philosophy, Balinese people perceive agriculture not only as an economic activity but also as a spiritual responsibility. Water management in the subak system is carried out with great care, prioritizing principles of fair and sustainable distribution. In addition, subak fosters strong communal cooperation since irrigation and water regulation are managed collectively. This approach not only enhances soil fertility and preserves biodiversity but also strengthens social cohesion, cultivates shared environmental responsibility, and teaches younger generations ecological ethics (Risna et al., 2022; Suasih et al., 2024; Windia et al., 2018).

Beyond subak, the sasi system in Maluku illustrates how local traditions regulate the sustainable use of natural resources. Sasi is a temporary prohibition on harvesting certain marine or forest resources, based on customary law and community agreement. This restriction is usually enforced during specific seasons or when certain resources need time to regenerate. The practice reflects community awareness of nature's limitations and the need to maintain ecological balance. Through sasi, people learn to use natural resources wisely, respect natural cycles, and integrate local ecological knowledge with social ethical principles. The concept of sasi emphasizes collective responsibility, strengthens community solidarity, and fosters reverence for nature while supporting broader ecological sustainability goals (Amelia et al., 2018; I Gusti Agung Ayu Rai Asmiwyati et al., 2015).

Sundanese communities also possess a unique form of local wisdom through the practice of leuweung larangan, or forbidden forests, areas where exploitation is strictly prohibited. These forests are believed to hold sacred value and are revered by local people. Designating certain areas as leuweung larangan not only aims to protect flora and fauna but also represents respect for nature and the spiritual forces believed to inhabit the land. By preserving these sacred spaces, communities ensure the continuity of biodiversity while maintaining a cultural identity that values ecological integrity. The practice of leuweung larangan demonstrates that local wisdom contains conservation mechanisms intertwined with spiritual beliefs, forming ecological ethics aligned with the social and cultural values of the community (Adhyaksari et al., 2023; Hutasoit & Wau, 2017; Satrio & Kusumah, 2022).

These three local practices, subak, sasi, and leuweung larangan, reveal a holistic ecological worldview among Indigenous Indonesian communities. The spiritual dimensions within these practices are not merely ritualistic or symbolic, but serve real functions in natural resource management. Tri Hita Karana in Bali emphasizes harmonious relationships between humans, nature, and God; sasi in Maluku regulates resource use to ensure regeneration; and leuweung larangan

in Sunda preserves forests and biodiversity as part of spiritual heritage. Thus, ecological ethics in local wisdom are inseparable from the social and cultural life of the community, embedded in everyday activities, customary laws, and religious practices.

Moreover, local wisdom also highlights a collective approach to environmental management. Local communities do not perceive nature as an individual possession to be exploited but as part of a living system that must be protected together. This perspective is reflected in water management in subak, implementation of *sasi* prohibitions, and preservation of sacred forests through *leuweung larangan*. Such collective responsibility cultivates environmental awareness while strengthening social cohesion. These practices demonstrate that ecological sustainability can be achieved not only through formal regulations or technological interventions but also through cultural traditions that honor nature. Beyond ecological benefits, these practices also contribute positively to human well-being. The subak system increases agricultural productivity while maintaining soil fertility and ecosystem balance. *Sasi* enables communities to access sufficient natural resources without damaging habitats, supporting food security and collective welfare. *Leuweung larangan* protects biodiversity while preserving the cultural and spiritual identity of Sundanese communities. Therefore, local wisdom offers a sustainable approach that integrates human well-being with environmental preservation.

Local wisdom in Indonesia also remains highly relevant in addressing today's global environmental challenges. Climate change, forest degradation, and biodiversity loss require solutions that are not only technical but also social and cultural. Traditional practices rooted in local wisdom provide valuable insights into how humans can live in harmony with nature, maintain ecological balance, and internalize environmental ethics. Integrating local wisdom into modern environmental policies can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of natural resource management strategies. From a broader perspective, these practices show that sustainability cannot be separated from cultural, spiritual, and social values. Nature is viewed as an entity with inherent rights to protection, and humans bear moral responsibility to maintain ecological balance. These values are embedded within social systems and rituals, making ecological sustainability an integral part of everyday community life. Such a holistic approach is essential in conservation programs and sustainable development initiatives, as it emphasizes reciprocal relationships between humans and nature.

Overall, Indonesia's local cultural wisdom, exemplified through subak, *sasi*, and *leuweung larangan*, illustrates a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, emphasizing ecological ethics, community solidarity, and

spiritual responsibility. These practices form a strong foundation for sustainable ecosystem management, reminding us that environmental preservation is not only the responsibility of individuals or governments, but also part of cultural identity and collective communal duty. By recognizing, respecting, and integrating local wisdom into modern environmental strategies, Indonesia holds significant potential to achieve balanced ecological sustainability, ensuring that the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature is preserved for present and future generations (Adnyani & Purnamawati, 2020; Tjokorda Gde Agung Wijaya Kesuma Suryawan et al., 2024). Thus, local cultural wisdom is not merely traditional heritage but a vital resource for addressing global environmental challenges. These practices demonstrate that sustainable development can be realized through reverence for cultural values, spirituality, and ecological ethics, enabling societies to live harmoniously with nature and safeguard environmental sustainability for the future.

### **Convergence and Divergence between Eco-Theology and Cultural Wisdom: Toward an “Interfaith Ecological Ethics” Framework**

Discourse on eco-theology and cultural wisdom in Indonesia highlights the profound interconnection between spiritual and ecological perspectives in human life. Indonesia, as an archipelagic nation marked by ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, offers a rich social laboratory for examining how humans understand, value, and protect nature. Both frameworks, eco-theology and cultural wisdom, emphasize the sacredness of nature, positioning it not merely as an economic resource but as a sacred entity requiring reverence, protection, and preservation. This understanding forms an important foundation for developing an integrative framework of “Interfaith Ecological Ethics” that remains relevant within Indonesia’s multicultural context. Through both theological and cultural lenses, this discourse asserts humanity’s moral responsibility to care for creation, reflecting religious traditions that emphasize the human role as steward and guardian of the natural world.

Differences in theological interpretations and ritual practices inevitably emerge across religions and cultures. In Islam, eco-theology emphasizes the concept of *khalīfah*, which positions humans as God’s representatives on earth. Mustofa et al. and Nur & Yasir affirm that this concept entails an ethical obligation to maintain ecological balance (*mīzān*) and prevent destruction (*fasād*) (Mustofa et al., 2025; Nur & Yasir, 2025). This perspective highlights that environmental responsibility is not only a social duty but also a religious mandate inherent in the human role as *khalīfah*. In Christianity, a similar principle exists within the doctrine of *Imago Dei*, where humans, created in

God's image, hold moral accountability for safeguarding creation. This concept encourages Christians to emulate divine stewardship by protecting nature as part of their service to God (Silitonga, 2025).

Beyond formal religious teachings, local cultural wisdom adds another vital dimension to ecological understanding. For instance, cultural expressions such as the Moyo Dance embody symbolism that emphasizes harmony between humans and the natural environment. Through movement, ritual, and narrative, this dance symbolically instills ecological awareness while simultaneously strengthening social cohesion and community identity. Such narratives enrich interfaith dialogue because they combine spiritual values with ecological responsibility, forming the basis of a holistic environmental ethic (Zalukhu, 2025). Although theological and symbolic approaches may differ, universal ethical principles emerge as points of convergence, love, balance, simplicity, and intergenerational responsibility. These shared values may serve as a foundation for an interfaith ecological ethics framework. (Purnomo, 2023) demonstrates how artistic expressions, particularly ecomusic, function as effective tools for fostering ecological awareness and interreligious unity. Music inspired by nature does not merely convey messages of environmental care but also builds a collective identity as a community concerned with the earth. This affirms that art and culture can become powerful media for uniting diverse theological perspectives around shared ecological goals.

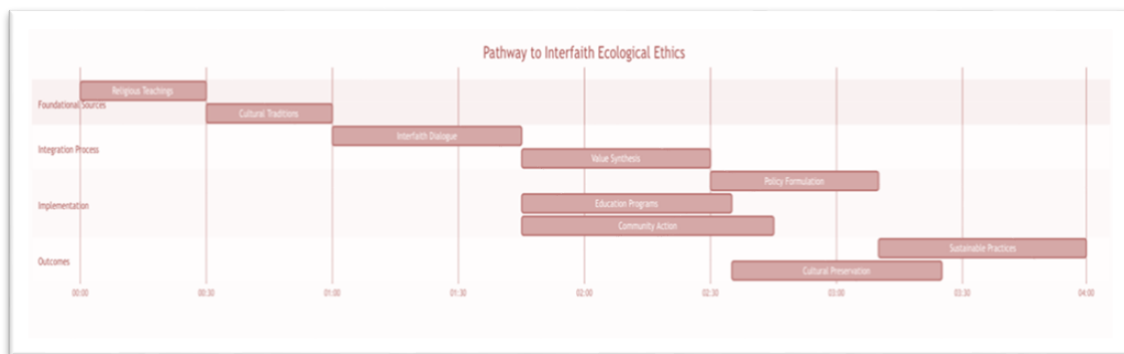
The "Interfaith Ecological Ethics" framework, derived from theological thought and local cultural wisdom, can be applied across various social and environmental movements in Indonesia. One notable example is the role of Muhammadiyah, which integrates ecological ethics into broader sociopolitical contexts, including advocacy for legal reform and improved environmental governance (Setiawan, 2023). Additionally, interfaith dialogues emerging throughout the country aim to cultivate grassroots movements focused on environmental sustainability. These collaborations are not merely symbolic; they involve concrete initiatives such as waste management, marine and forest conservation, and ecological education in schools and community settings. The principles of eco-theology and cultural wisdom also align with long-standing traditional practices in Indonesia, including the Subak system in Bali, Sasi in Maluku, and Leuweung Larangan in Sunda. The Subak system, recognized by UNESCO as a world cultural heritage site, demonstrates how the philosophy of Tri Hita Karana, harmony among humans, nature, and the divine, encourages sustainable agricultural practices. Collective irrigation management within Subak communities not only enhances soil fertility and biodiversity but also

strengthens social bonds and moral responsibility toward water resources (Risna et al., 2022; Suasih et al., 2024; Windia et al., 2018).

Similarly, the Sasi tradition in Maluku, which temporarily restricts the extraction of marine and forest resources, reflects ecological awareness embedded in local culture. By regulating when and how resources may be utilized, Sasi promotes natural regeneration and sustainable use. This concept emphasizes collective responsibility and reinforces community relations while aligning with broader ecological sustainability goals (Amelia et al., 2018; I Gusti Agung Ayu Rai Asmiwyati et al., 2015). In Sundanese communities, Leuweung Larangan marks certain forests as sacred zones that must not be exploited, thereby protecting biodiversity while preserving cultural identity. These protected spaces demonstrate how spiritual values can serve as effective environmental conservation mechanisms (Adhyaksari et al., 2023; Hutasoit & Wau, 2017).

As a culmination of the preceding analysis, Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework for developing Interfaith Ecological Ethics in Indonesia. This visualization encapsulates the dynamic relationship between theological foundations, cultural wisdom, and practical implementation pathways:

**Figure 2**  
Conceptual Framework for Interfaith Ecological Ethics in Indonesia: Integrating Eco-Theology and Local Wisdom



Source: Developed by the author based on synthesis of eco-theological principles (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Indigenous Beliefs) and local wisdom systems (Subak, Sasi, Leuweung Larangan) as analyzed in this study.

The framework depicted in Figure 2 operationalizes the theoretical synergy discussed in this section. Several key insights emerge from this model: *First*, the framework confirms that eco-theology and local wisdom are mutually reinforcing rather than competing domains. Religious principles provide the normative 'why' for environmental protection (e.g., humans as khalifah or

stewards), while local practices offer the contextual ‘how’ through systems like Subak and Sasi. Their integration addresses both the motivational and practical dimensions of ecological ethics. *Second*, the model highlights three critical mediation pathways, policy, education, and community movements, that translate integrated values into tangible outcomes. This addresses a significant gap in environmental governance where values often remain abstract rather than actionable. *Third*, the framework emphasizes cyclical reinforcement: successful implementation of ecological ethics through these pathways ultimately strengthens the original spiritual and cultural foundations. This creates a virtuous cycle where environmental conservation revitalizes cultural identity, which in turn deepens ecological commitment. *Fourth*, the model is intentionally context-sensitive yet adaptable. While specifically designed for Indonesia’s multireligious and multicultural context, its core logic of integrating universal spiritual values with localized practices offers transferable insights for other plural societies facing similar ecological challenges. Ultimately, this framework moves beyond theoretical propositions to offer a practical roadmap for various stakeholders, policymakers can see entry points for value-based regulations, educators can identify opportunities for curriculum integration, and community leaders can recognize how to leverage existing spiritual and cultural resources for environmental action.”

The synergy between religious teachings, cultural expression, and traditional environmental practices illustrates that ecological ethics are not merely theoretical but can be applied pragmatically. The “Interfaith Ecological Ethics” framework integrates universal principles with local values, creating a contextually relevant yet widely applicable approach capable of inspiring broader collective action. In doing so, communities can maintain ecological balance while reinforcing the social and spiritual values that bind them together. Furthermore, this approach underscores the need for value-based ecological education. Integrating eco-theology and cultural wisdom into school curricula, community programs, and public campaigns can build environmental awareness among younger generations. Such education not only teaches natural sciences but also instills moral values, social responsibility, and ecological spirituality, shaping environmentally conscious and ethically grounded citizens.

Beyond education, the application of Interfaith Ecological Ethics is also relevant for public policy. Local and national governments may formulate environmental policies that incorporate theological principles and local cultural knowledge. For example, forest protection, water resource management, and biodiversity conservation programs can be implemented by engaging local communities as strategic partners. This participatory approach ensures that

environmental policies are not only technically effective but also socially and culturally accepted, making them sustainable in the long term. Ultimately, constructing an ecological paradigm grounded in Indonesia's spiritual and cultural richness offers a visionary and comprehensive way to confront environmental crises. By harmonizing theological insights, local cultural wisdom, and traditional practices, the Interfaith Ecological Ethics framework highlights the need for cross-sector collaboration, among communities, religious organizations, governments, and academic institutions. This framework strengthens ecological resilience while reinforcing social and spiritual bonds, reminding humans of the interconnectedness of all creation and affirming collective moral responsibility for the earth we share.

Overall, the integration of eco-theology, cultural wisdom, and local practices forms a strong foundation for environmental ethics. Universal values such as love, harmony, and intergenerational responsibility can be locally expressed through agricultural systems, customary rituals, education, arts, and public policy. This approach demonstrates that environmental preservation is not an individual or sectoral endeavor but a collective effort requiring synergy between spirituality, culture, knowledge, and concrete action. Thus, Interfaith Ecological Ethics emerges as an innovative and contextually relevant model for Indonesia, while also offering inspiration to global communities striving to build societies that are sustainable, just, and harmonious with nature.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the in-depth analysis conducted, this study concludes that the synergy between eco-theology and local cultural wisdom forms a contextual and transformative foundation for ecological ethics in Indonesian society. The most significant finding reveals that the ecological crisis is fundamentally a crisis of values and spirituality, in which the integration of spiritual principles from major religions with local wisdom practices not only enriches the moral dimension of environmental conservation but also enhances genuine community participation. This synergy successfully addresses the shortcomings of the secular-anthropocentric paradigm through a holistic approach that views environmental preservation as an integral part of spiritual and cultural identity. The scholarly contribution of this study lies in expanding environmental discourse beyond technocratic approaches by mapping the intersections between theology and local wisdom into an applicable framework of "Interfaith Ecological Ethics."

This framework not only strengthens the intellectual repertoire of ecotheology and cultural studies but also opens pathways for interdisciplinary

approaches that integrate religious studies, anthropology, and environmental policy. However, as a literature-based study, it has limitations regarding the scope of primary empirical data, and thus its findings should be regarded as a theoretical foundation requiring further verification.

For future development, in-depth empirical research is highly recommended to examine the practical effectiveness of the interfaith ethical framework, investigate the strategic role of religious organizations as agents of change, and explore models for integrating it into public policy and environmental education. In this way, Indonesia's spiritual and cultural wisdom can be meaningfully actualized in responding to the challenges of the global ecological crisis, while simultaneously strengthening the nation's cultural identity amid the currents of modernization.

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