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A Sustainable Model for Environmental Preservation and the Realization of Civil Society

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ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation and deforestation have become critical global issues that challenge the Islamic moral framework of human responsibility as khalifah fil ardh (steward of the earth). Within this context, the concept of forest waqf—an Islamic endowment dedicated to environmental preservation—embodies the principles of Islamic eco-theology, integrating faith-based ethics with sustainability efforts. This study aims to analyze the theological foundation and sustainability potential of forest waqf as a model for ecological conservation and civil society development. Using a qualitative-descriptive method through literature review and analysis of existing eco-waqf practices in Indonesia, the study identifies that forest waqf reflects the values of amanah (trust), maslahah (public good), and social justice. The results indicate that forest waqf contributes to ecological balance while empowering local communities. The study concludes that forest waqf represents a holistic Islamic framework linking theology, social empowerment, and ecological ethics, offering a sustainable path toward realizing a just and environmentally conscious madani (civilized) society.

INTRODUCTION

The climate crisis and global warming have reached alarming levels. The impact is natural disasters occurring in various parts of the world, declining food production due to unpredictable weather, triggering famine and difficulty in accessing food. This condition is largely influenced by low ecological awareness, where for the sake of short-term development and economic interests, many forests are cut down without careful consideration.

In Indonesia, the conversion of forests into palm oil plantations and the burning of forests to clear new land without considering environmental aspects not only affects local habitats and climate, but also impacts the livelihoods of local communities or communities living near forests. However, weak public awareness is not the only factor causing environmental damage. There are various structural factors such as economic and political interests, resource exploitation policies, investment, and weak land management. Therefore, forest destruction cannot be resolved solely through a moral approach without the support of a strong institutional system.

From an Islamic perspective, this certainly contradicts the concept of humans as caliphs who have the duty to manage and preserve the earth. Humans occupy the position of khalifah fil ard. This means that as God's representatives on earth, humans are entrusted with the responsibility of protecting and prospering everything on earth. This implies that in managing the earth, humans must not only act for economic gain, but also for worship and moral responsibility by applying Islamic environmental ethics. Studies on Islamic ethics emphasize that humans must act as stewards, not as rulers of nature who act arbitrarily and cause destruction (Habib and Saeed 2025).

Given these conditions, a theological approach is needed that is not only normative but also capable of addressing the structural issues of ecological damage. This approach combines Islamic values such as amanah, mizan, and 'adl with environmental management practices. One of the instruments that can be used is forest waqf, which is a concept of waqf that has been expanded from its traditional function to the environmental sector. As part of the Islamic economy, waqf has great potential that must be managed properly to support conservation and community empowerment (Irfany et al. 2023).

However, previous studies on environmental waqf have generally focused on philanthropic aspects, conservative techniques, or the economic potential of agroforestry,

and have not been able to critically integrate theological perspectives with the political economy and institutional governance contexts in the development of forest waqf. As shown in the study (Rahayu and Irfany 2022), which indicates a trend in environmental waqf research since 2015 that has moved into the realm of green philanthropy and social financing. Similarly, the study (Fahrezi 2025) has not been linked to the issue of forestry political economy as the root cause of deforestation.

Given the gap between the ideal teachings of Islamic eco-theology and the empirical reality of deforestation influenced by economic, political, and institutional factors, forest waqf needs to be examined not only as a moral act of conservation, but as a strategic model capable of addressing structural issues in forest management. This study seeks to examine the theological basis of forest waqf from the perspective of Islamic eco-theology. It also examines how forest waqf can play a role in preserving the environment while empowering civil society with ecological civility. In addition, this study aims to analyze the theological principles and values of sustainability in the concept of forest waqf, as well as to identify the contribution of forest waqf to ecological aspects and community empowerment.

Unlike previous studies that placed environmental waqf within a philanthropic or conservative framework, this study offers a new perspective by integrating Islamic eco-theology, institutional governance, and forestry economic-political analysis as a strategic model for forest waqf to respond to the structural problems of deforestation. Thus, forest waqf is not only understood as a moral act of conservation, but as a strategic instrument of eco-governance capable of producing institutional change and sustainable community empowerment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive method through literature review and analysis of eco-waqf practices, namely the forest waqf model in Indonesia, from a theological perspective and its ecological impact. This study uses the literature study technique, which is research that focuses on the study and analysis of literature materials such as books, reports, research, and so on (Ibrahim 2015).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Concept and Implementation of Forest Waqf

Humans in Islamic studies have a central role on earth, not only as creatures who have the privilege of enjoying natural resources, but also as khalifah (God's representatives). This means that humans are not absolute rulers who are free to exploit natural resources, but rather bear the responsibility of khalifah, which contains spiritual and social values to manage the earth while preserving its sustainability (Alfiyah et al. 2024).

The responsibility of the caliphate as a manifestation of the concept of amanah emphasizes that everything created by Allah on this earth is a trust that must be safeguarded. This shows that amanah is not only a vertical bond between humans and God, but also demonstrates ecological awareness, meaning that every human action towards the environment is a manifestation of the integrity of their faith. (Sadali 2023).

Regarding the relationship between humans and nature, Islamic ethics teaches principles that must be used as a foundation, namely justice ('adl) and balance (mizan). These two values require humans to manage and utilize resources properly and avoid wastefulness (israf) and excess (tabzir) (Rahmat et al. 2025). Thus, the ethical boundaries determined by religious teachings in preserving the environment must be followed in economic activities, agriculture, and daily consumption.

The crucial nature of human actions towards the environment emphasizes that the modern ecological crisis is caused by humanity's failure to understand nature as a sacred entity. In theological terms, nature is God's verses (ayat kauniyah) that have moral and spiritual value. Furthermore, the destruction that has occurred on earth is the result of humanity's neglect of its position as caliph (Rahmat et al. 2025). This means that ecological awareness in Islam must be restored to its theological basis, which places nature as part of worship.

The term fasad in the Qur'an can be understood as any form of action that disturbs Allah's creation, whether through environmental pollution, excessive exploitation, or policies that are unfair to the preservation of resources. In fact, nature conservation is an integral part of maqashid sharia, which aims to preserve life (hifdzu al-nafs) and maintain the sustainability of the earth for future generations. (Firmansyah et al. 2024). This means

that the prohibition of fasad fil ard is one of the important messages of the Qur'an to humans regarding their responsibility to protect nature.

In a theological dimension, the prohibition of fasad fil ard is a manifestation of human responsibility towards God's creation. This means that verses such as QS. Al-A'raf: 56 and QS Ar-Rum: 41 indicate that environmental damage is not only caused by unethical human actions, but also an indicator of the weakness of human awareness of monotheism and trust. This shows that protecting nature also means maintaining the balance of God's creation and reviving Islamic spiritual values that support nature conservation and sustainability (Nur et al. 2025). This means that the prohibition of fasad fil ard is not only an ecological prohibition but also a theological commandment that forms the basis of nature conservation in Islam.

Dimensions of Forest Waqf Sustainability

The dimensions of forest waqf sustainability are not limited to ecological aspects alone, but also reflect the integration of environmental, social, and spiritual values within the framework of Islamic sustainability. As a model of productive waqf with an ecological perspective, forest waqf synergizes economic functions with human responsibility as caliphs. This means that forest conservation efforts are not only understood as ecological actions, but also as the application of the values of justice, balance, and trustworthiness that are taught in Islam.

From an ecological perspective, forest waqf plays an important role in maintaining the sustainability of natural functions through conservation, reforestation, and deforestation mitigation. Waqf forests themselves have proven capable of rehabilitating critical land through productive and environmentally-friendly agroforestry (Jannah et al. 2021). This approach not only adds economic value to waqf assets, but also has a positive impact on the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystem balance.

The ecological function of waqf forests is considered to contribute to global climate change mitigation efforts. This can be seen from the potential of waqf forests as a means of carbon sequestration and a medium for environmental education based on sharia principles (Ali et al. 2025). This means that forest waqf not only serves as an ecology-based philanthropic practice, but can also be an adaptive and mitigative strategy against climate change that is in line with the Islamic values of rahmatan lil'alamin.

The next aspect of sustainability lies in the social dimension, where forest waqf serves as a means of empowerment for local communities through the strengthening of the green economy and community participation. This can be seen from the tangible impact of waqf forest management in Bogor on the surrounding community, through the creation of job opportunities and the availability of clean water in line with sustainable development goals (Fathurrahman 2023). Through active community involvement, waqf management not only contributes to environmental sustainability, but also fosters collective awareness among the community in preserving the environment.

In addition to serving as a means of empowerment, forest waqf also encourages the realization of a green economy based on community participation. This is because the integration of agroforestry practices and waqf asset management has great potential to generate sustainable income without causing environmental damage (Jannah et al. 2021). In addition to serving as a means of empowerment, forest waqf also encourages the realization of a green economy based on community participation. This is because the integration of agroforestry practices and waqf asset management has great potential to generate sustainable income without causing environmental damage.

The final dimension is the spiritual aspect. This aspect is the main foundation for strengthening all forest waqf sustainability practices. Islam views efforts to preserve the environment as an integral part of worship and the value of monotheism in everyday life. This shows that ecological awareness must grow as a manifestation of human spirituality, whereby nature is no longer seen merely as an object of exploitation, but as verses of God that must be preserved and respected (Nurholis 2025).

Furthermore, the spiritual aspect of forest waqf gives rise to eco-spirituality, which is the awareness that preserving forests is a tangible way of safeguarding God's trust. In addition, the management of waqf forests can be a medium for preaching and a means of self-purification (tazkiyah al-nafs), because it embodies the values of asceticism, gratitude, and moral responsibility towards nature (Abubakar 2025). Thus, forest waqf not only plays a role in maintaining ecological sustainability and social welfare, but also strengthens the spiritual dimension of humans as caliphs tasked with caring for the earth.

Forest Waqf and Civil Society Development

Forest waqf not only plays a role in preserving nature, but also in building a civil society that upholds social justice, has ecological ethics, and is based on Islamic values.

In this context, forest waqf becomes a means of translating Islamic teachings on collective responsibility and social justice, which are realized through sustainable development practices based on spirituality and social participation.

Waqf, social justice, and collective responsibility are interrelated and form an important basis for creating an inclusive and civilized society. This can be seen from the strategic role of waqf in the redistribution of wealth and the creation of socio-economic balance through the application of the principle of distributive justice. Waqf assets managed using the principles of transparency and productivity have proven to be capable of reducing social inequality while strengthening solidarity among people (Darajat 2025). Thus, the issues of poverty and environmental degradation can be effectively resolved through the realization of collective awareness via a model of waqf management that is fair, participatory, and upholds the values of sustainability.

The relationship between social justice and natural resource management is evident in the implementation of forest waqf. As seen in the management of waqf forests in Bogor, which not only play a role in maintaining ecosystem balance, but also empower local communities by providing access to clean water and developing a green economy (Fathurrahman 2023). The involvement of local communities in managing waqf forests demonstrates the tangible representation of Islamic social ethics, which unite human welfare with environmental sustainability.

From a social ethics perspective, forest waqf plays an important role in fostering ecological awareness rooted in Islamic values. The concept of environmentally friendly waqf not only has an impact on sustainable economics, but also builds ecological solidarity in the form of collective empathy towards nature, which has moral and spiritual value. (Mahardika and Tanweer 2025). In this context, forest waqf introduces a new ethic in the relationship between humans and their environment, namely that protecting nature is a form of spiritual devotion and worship to Allah.

In addition, the integration of maslahah and 'adl values further reinforces the orientation of forest waqf as one of the pillars of civil society development with ecological civility. This can be seen from the management of waqf, which is able to make a significant contribution to social forestry with the aim of improving community welfare without neglecting environmental sustainability (Ali et al. 2021). The value of maslahah that arises in this context is not only in terms of economic orientation, but also includes

ecosystem sustainability and intergenerational justice.

The implementation of these values can be effective if the community plays an active role in waqf management. This active role can be seen in the forest waqf model, which encourages the direct involvement of the surrounding community in preserving, managing, and obtaining social and economic benefits from waqf forests. This, in turn, has an impact on strengthening the sense of ownership of the environment and fostering ecological awareness and responsibility in preserving nature (Sup 2021). This means that civil society formed through forest waqf is not merely a religious community, but also an ecological community that balances spiritual, social, and environmental sustainability dimensions.

Ultimately, waqf plays a strategic role in promoting sustainable development through the integration of social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The concept of forest waqf emphasizes that the development of civil society must be based on the values of maslahah and 'adl. With the harmonious implementation of these two values, a just and prosperous society with ecological civility will be formed (Sasiaji and Syafi'i 2025). That is, a society that views nature conservation as a form of worship and a form of human responsibility towards God's creation.

Challenges in Implementing Forest Waqf

Institutional and regulatory challenges are among the key issues in the development of environmental waqf such as forest waqf. Although Indonesia already has a fairly clear legal framework through the Indonesian Waqf Board (BWI) and Law No. 41 of 2004, there are still overlapping regulations, weak supervision, and low professionalism among nazhir, resulting in suboptimal waqf management (Purkon 2022). This raises concerns that waqf assets may not be utilized properly and may instead be neglected.

This institutional weakness will have a direct impact on the effectiveness of waqf management. Weak regulations lead to legal uncertainty, lack of transparency, and limited innovation in managing waqf assets. This occurs because waqf institutions are not yet fully integrated into the Islamic financial ecosystem, and existing regulations are not yet able to accommodate innovations such as environmental waqf. (Lubis and Marpaung 2025). As a result, the implementation of forest waqf has been hampered by bureaucracy and the "death" of waqf assets because nazhir are unable to manage them properly. This

condition emphasizes the importance of strengthening institutions, improving regulations, and increasing the capacity of nazhir.

In addition, another important challenge lies in public awareness and eco-theological education. Although the concept of humans as caliphs and stewards of nature has been widely discussed, public literacy regarding environmental waqf remains low. This is due to a lack of public understanding of environmental waqf and its benefits, as well as public skepticism regarding the professionalism of nazhir (Wadi and Nurzaman 2020). Without adequate education about ecological values and social responsibility for the community and nazhir, the idea of forest waqf will struggle to reach its full potential.

The lack of public literacy, which is linked to low public awareness of environmental waqf, is caused by the lack of integration of environmental education in religious institutions and waqf institutions. Many institutions focus on socio-economic aspects without fully incorporating ecological and spiritual dimensions. However, technology and digitization in waqf management will not be effective without a paradigm shift and holistic education on waqf values (Maisyarah and Hadi 2024). This means that an important step that must be taken is to encourage social and ecological transformation at the community, Islamic boarding school, and general public levels.

On the other hand, there have been various innovations arising from the digitization of waqf and cross-sector collaboration between the government, religious scholars, waqf institutions, and community organizations. Digital waqf innovations utilizing applications, crowdfunding, and fintech technology can open up opportunities to increase transparency, expand public participation, and accelerate the utilization of waqf assets. This will broaden community involvement and make waqf management more accountable (Aisyah et al. 2025).

Furthermore, this opportunity for innovation also allows for the development of more adaptive and inclusive waqf management models, as well as collaborative models between nazhir, academics, local communities, and the private sector. By utilizing digitalization, building waqf literacy, and strengthening regulations and institutions, the challenges of forest waqf management can be turned into strategic opportunities for preserving the environment and building a civil society.

CONCLUSION

Forest waqf is an integrative model that connects ecological sustainability, social justice, and Islamic spiritual practices, which are incorporated into the concept of human responsibility as caliphs. It also serves as an instrument for preserving the environment while building a civil society that adheres to the values of maslahah and 'adl. However, this study has limitations because it is still conceptual in nature and further research is needed to explore institutional innovation, nazhir professionalism, and the use of waqf digitalization to increase public participation in the waqf movement. Thus, forest waqf can become a model of Islamic philanthropy that has a strategic role in realizing a civil society.

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