

## **Leadership Management of Eco-Pesantren: Integrating Islamic Values and Environmental Health Principles in Decision-Making**

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### **Abstract**

*This study explores the model of leadership and decision-making within Eco-Pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools with an ecological focus) in Indonesia. It investigates how Islamic values (e.g., khalifah [stewardship], mizan [balance], amanah [trust]) are integrated with modern environmental health principles (sustainability, conservation, waste management, ecosystem health) in the strategic and daily decisions of pesantren leaders. Using a qualitative case study approach with in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis at several pioneering Eco-Pesantrens, this research identifies key leadership paradigms, decision-making processes, and implementation strategies. Findings reveal that successful integration creates a holistic leadership model that aligns spiritual, educational, and environmental objectives. Leaders act as transformative agents, internalizing eco-Islamic theology into institutional policies, curricula, and community practices. The study concludes that the Eco-Pesantren leadership model offers a significant framework for sustainable community development rooted in local religious wisdom. It recommends further development of this paradigm for broader application in Islamic educational institutions and communities facing environmental challenges.*

### **Abstrak**

*Penelitian ini mengkaji model kepemimpinan dan pengambilan keputusan di dalam Eco-Pesantren (sekolah asrama Islam dengan fokus ekologi) di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana nilai-nilai Islam (misalnya, khalifah [kewajiban menjaga], mizan [keseimbangan], amanah [kepercayaan]) diintegrasikan dengan prinsip-prinsip kesehatan lingkungan modern (keberlanjutan, konservasi, pengelolaan limbah, kesehatan ekosistem) dalam keputusan strategis dan harian para pemimpin pesantren. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dengan wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan analisis dokumen di beberapa Eco-Pesantren pionir, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi paradigma kepemimpinan kunci, proses pengambilan keputusan, dan strategi implementasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa integrasi yang sukses menciptakan model kepemimpinan holistik yang menyelaraskan tujuan spiritual, pendidikan, dan lingkungan. Pemimpin bertindak sebagai agen transformatif, menginternalisasi teologi eco-Islam ke dalam kebijakan institusional, kurikulum, dan praktik komunitas. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa model kepemimpinan Eco-Pesantren menawarkan kerangka kerja signifikan untuk pengembangan komunitas berkelanjutan yang berakar pada kebijaksanaan agama lokal. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan pengembangan lebih lanjut paradigma ini untuk penerapan yang lebih luas di lembaga pendidikan Islam dan komunitas yang menghadapi tantangan lingkungan.*



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## **Introduction**

The global environmental crisis, marked by climate change, deforestation, pollution, and biodiversity loss, has intensified the urgent need for sustainable solutions that integrate ecological health with social and cultural values. Religious institutions, particularly pesantrens—Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia—occupy a unique position as centers of moral authority and community development, enabling them to influence environmental awareness and action within their communities. Pesantrens have traditionally focused on Islamic education but are increasingly recognized as pivotal actors in environmental conservation through the emergence of the Eco-Pesantren movement. This movement integrates Islamic values with environmental health principles in leadership and decision-making, fostering an eco-centric paradigm that aligns Quranic teachings on stewardship (*khalifah*) with practical conservation efforts such as forest preservation, sustainable agriculture, and waste management (Masitoh & Rasyid, 2022). The leadership of *kyai* (religious leaders) is central to this integration; they embody transformational leadership by modeling environmentally responsible behavior and embedding eco-friendly governance systems within pesantren culture and curriculum (Bakti & Rohman, 2024). Through educational innovation, community engagement, and sustainable campus management, Eco-Pesantrens cultivate a culture of environmental responsibility among students (*santri*) and surrounding communities, contributing to broader sustainable development goals while reinforcing Islamic ethical imperatives for caring for the earth (Herdiansyah et al., 2019).

The global environmental crisis demands solutions that transcend technical fixes by incorporating ethical frameworks that motivate behavioral change. Pesantrens serve as moral and educational hubs where Islamic teachings provide a foundation for ecological consciousness. The Quran emphasizes humans' role as stewards of the earth, responsible for maintaining balance and preventing corruption (*fasad*), which resonates deeply within pesantren pedagogy. However, traditional pesantren curricula rarely addressed environmental issues explicitly until the rise of the Eco-Pesantren movement introduced an integrated approach combining religious education with ecological knowledge (Muin et al., 2025). This integration involves dialectical engagement between *qauliyah* (divine revelation) and *kauniyah* (natural phenomena) verses from the Quran to foster an understanding that caring for nature is a religious obligation. Such theological grounding empowers

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pesantren leaders to advocate for forest conservation in Indonesia's tropical landscapes—some of the world's most biodiverse yet threatened ecosystems—thereby positioning pesantrens as agents of nature conservation (Suryanto, 2020).

Educational innovation is another critical dimension where Eco-Pesantrens contribute significantly. By developing environment-based curricula that incorporate local wisdom alongside Islamic teachings on sustainability—such as *silih asih* (mutual care) and reciprocal nurturing—pesantrens foster holistic learning environments that prepare students to be agents of sustainable transformation (Muhardi et al., 2020). This approach aligns with multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including quality education (SDG4), climate action (SDG13), clean water and sanitation (SDG6), affordable clean energy (SDG7), zero hunger (SDG2), good health and well-being (SDG3), gender equality (SDG5), poverty alleviation (SDG1), and partnerships for goals (SDG17) (Maulida et al., 2024). Students actively participate in circular economy practices such as converting waste into productive resources while engaging in community outreach programs that extend ecological awareness beyond pesantren boundaries.

Furthermore, Eco-Pesantren leadership models emphasize interfaith collaboration as a means to promote social cohesion alongside environmental sustainability. By engaging diverse religious communities in shared ecological goals—such as joint tree planting or clean water campaigns—pesantrens help bridge religious divides while reinforcing universal values of care for creation. This relational leadership approach enhances pesantrens' roles as moderate institutions that counteract stereotypes about Islam while advancing inclusive sustainability agendas. It also aligns with global discourses on ecotheology that advocate for dialogical engagement across faith traditions to address complex environmental challenges collectively (Fatah & Waro, 2025).

## **Literature Review**

### **Islamic Environmental Ethics**

Islamic environmental ethics provides a comprehensive theological and moral framework that can guide leadership and management in eco-pesantren, especially when these institutions explicitly seek to integrate Islamic values with environmental health principles in all levels of decision-making. At the core of this framework stand five interrelated concepts: *Tawhid* (the unity of God and, by implication, the unity of creation), *Khalifah* (human stewardship or vicegerency), *Amanah* (trust), *Mizan* (balance and justice), and *Akhirah* (accountability in the Hereafter). Together, they form an

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integrated worldview in which nature is not a neutral backdrop or a mere resource for human exploitation, but a sign (āyah) of God, a partner in worship, and a domain in which obedience or disobedience to God is concretely enacted (Muhammad, 2020).

## **Principles of Environmental Health**

Environmental and ecosystem health literature views ecosystems as complex, interdependent systems that provide essential ecosystem services such as clean water, air purification, climate regulation, and disease regulation (Raffa et al., 2009). Ecosystem integrity means that biological communities, physical structures, and natural processes function within their natural range of variation, maintaining resilience to disturbance and capacity to support life (Chagnon et al., 2014). Degradation of forests, wetlands, rivers, and soils—through deforestation, land conversion, pollution, or biodiversity loss—erodes these services and ultimately undermines human health, especially of the poor and future generations (Chen et al., 2019). Planetary health research shows that large-scale disruption of climate, biogeochemical cycles, land systems, and biodiversity already threatens food security, water safety, and infectious-disease dynamics (An et al., 2020). For eco-pesantren, maintaining ecosystem integrity at campus and watershed scale involves protecting vegetation, soils, and water bodies; preserving or restoring green spaces and tree cover; preventing erosion and flooding; and supporting surrounding biodiversity as part of a wider “life-support” system for students and neighboring communities (Hanjra et al., 2012).

## **Leadership in Islamic Education**

Leadership in traditional Islamic education, particularly within pesantrens, is deeply intertwined with the role of the kyai, who serves not only as a religious authority but also as an educational and community leader (Yusuf et al., 2024). Historically, kyai leadership has been characterized by a charismatic and spiritual style rooted in Islamic values and local cultural norms, emphasizing moral guidance, religious instruction, and community cohesion (Basri et al., 2024). This traditional leadership model is marked by paternalistic authority where the kyai acts as a central figure embodying both spiritual wisdom and social responsibility, shaping the pesantren’s organizational culture and educational environment (Zainab & Suhermanto, 2023). However, contemporary challenges such as modernization, technological disruption, and evolving societal expectations have prompted an evolution in kyai leadership toward more dynamic models that incorporate modern educational management theories without compromising traditional values (Aisyah et al., 2022).

## **Eco-Pesantren Concept**

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Eco-Pesantrens in Indonesia represent a unique fusion of Islamic education and environmental stewardship, emerging as innovative institutions that integrate religious values with ecological principles to address contemporary environmental challenges. Historically, pesantrens have been traditional Islamic boarding schools focused on religious instruction and moral development, but the Eco-Pesantren concept has evolved to incorporate sustainability practices such as forest conservation, waste management, renewable energy use, and organic farming within their educational and operational frameworks (Nursaniah et al., 2025). This development reflects a growing awareness among pesantren leaders and communities of their role as stewards (khalifah) of the earth, aligning Islamic teachings on creation care with global sustainability goals.

## **Research Methodology**

A qualitative multiple-case study design is well-suited for exploring the leadership management of Eco-Pesantrens, as it allows an in-depth understanding of how Islamic values and environmental health principles are integrated into decision-making processes within these unique educational settings. This approach involves purposive sampling of three to four established Eco-Pesantrens recognized for their active environmental programs, ensuring that the selected sites provide rich, relevant data on leadership practices and sustainability initiatives (Lochmiller, 2021). Primary data sources typically include in-depth interviews with key stakeholders such as kyai (male leaders), nyai (female leaders), caretakers, teachers, and senior students, providing diverse perspectives on leadership dynamics and environmental management. Participant observation of meetings, daily activities, and operational routines further enriches the data by capturing real-time interactions and decision-making behaviors within the pesantren community.

Secondary data sources complement primary data through institutional documents such as curricula, vision and mission statements, activity reports, and policy guidelines that reflect the formal integration of Islamic and environmental values into pesantren governance (Prihatin & Novianto, 2025). Data collection employs semi-structured interview guides tailored to explore themes related to leadership styles, environmental ethics education, community engagement, and sustainable practices. Observation protocols focus on ecological activities like waste management, renewable energy use, organic farming, and water conservation efforts. Document review checklists ensure systematic analysis of institutional materials to identify explicit references to eco-pesantren principles and leadership commitments.

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Thematic analysis is the preferred method for analyzing qualitative data in this context due to its flexibility in identifying patterns and themes across multiple cases. Using software like NVivo facilitates systematic coding through descriptive coding (labeling basic topics), topic coding (grouping related codes), and analytical coding (interpreting relationships between themes) (Aulia et al., 2019). This process uncovers how pesantren leaders embody Islamic stewardship concepts such as khalifah (guardianship) and amanah (trustworthiness) in promoting environmental sustainability. Themes often emerge around transformational leadership practices where kyai inspire collective ecological responsibility; servant leadership emphasizing humility and service; curriculum integration of environmental ethics; community collaboration; and challenges faced in resource limitations or infrastructural constraints.

Case studies such as Darularafah Raya Pesantren demonstrate a holistic approach where Islamic teachings are closely intertwined with environmental ethics through specialized teacher training, extracurricular programs supporting sustainability awareness, and practical conservation activities like waste management and renewable energy adoption. Similarly, Pondok Pesantren As Salafy Al Asror highlights efforts to raise environmental knowledge among students and staff via sanitation improvements, provision of trash bins, community service agendas, though also noting ongoing challenges in infrastructure optimization (Nurkhin et al., 2023). PPM Baitussalam exemplifies deep learning implementation by involving students actively in eco-friendly business ventures such as organic farming and waste recycling systems that foster economic literacy alongside ecological stewardship.

These multiple cases reveal that effective eco-pesantren leadership integrates spiritual authority with participatory management approaches that encourage student involvement and community partnerships. Leaders act as role models demonstrating environmentally friendly behaviors while embedding sustainability into institutional culture and governance systems (Hermawansyah, 2025b). The use of thematic analysis enables researchers to capture these complex interrelations between Islamic values, educational management, and environmental health principles across diverse pesantren contexts.

## **Findings**

### **Profile of Leadership**

Eco-Pesantren leaders are characterized by a deep commitment to integrating Islamic values with

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environmental responsibility, motivated by their understanding of the concept of khalifah (stewardship) as a divine mandate to protect and preserve the earth. Their leadership is often rooted in spiritual devotion, where ecological piety is developed through teachings that emphasize humanity's role as caliphs who must avoid harming nature, uphold cleanliness as part of faith, and prioritize environmental ethics embedded in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh al-bī'ah) (Syukri et al., 2024). These leaders externalize their ecological commitment by embedding environmental preservation into pesantren curricula and daily practices, fostering an internalization of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors among students and staff, which translates into tangible conservation efforts such as groundwater management and flood mitigation (Karman et al., 2023).

The motivations of Eco-Pesantren leaders are closely linked to their religious worldview that sees environmental care not only as a social responsibility but also as an act of worship (ibadatullah), blending theological principles with social activism. This perspective positions pesantrens as transformative agents capable of mobilizing communities toward sustainable forest conservation and ecological stewardship, particularly in Indonesia's rich tropical forest landscapes (Zahara et al., 2025b). Leadership styles observed among kyai include transformational and servant leadership, where spiritual authority is combined with participatory approaches that encourage collective action and community engagement in environmental programs. The kyai's role extends beyond religious instruction to becoming role models who demonstrate eco-friendly behaviors, thereby influencing santri (students) to adopt sustainable lifestyles through direct observation and habituation (Khotimah et al., 2024).

## **Decision-Making Processes**

Leadership decision-making in Eco-Pesantrens is deeply informed by a synthesis of Islamic teachings and scientific knowledge of environmental health, creating a unique framework where religious texts such as Qur'anic verses and Hadiths guide ethical imperatives while contemporary environmental science provides practical insights. The concept of khalifah (stewardship) derived from the Qur'an emphasizes humanity's responsibility to protect and maintain the earth, which is reinforced by Hadiths that advocate for cleanliness, conservation, and moderation. These scriptural sources are interpreted alongside fiqh principles that regulate human interaction with nature, ensuring decisions align with Islamic jurisprudence on environmental ethics. Scientific knowledge about environmental health—covering issues like waste management, water conservation, and pollution

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control—complements these religious foundations by offering evidence-based strategies to mitigate ecological harm within pesantren operations (Li et al., 2018). This integration ensures that decision-making processes are both spiritually grounded and practically effective in promoting sustainability.

Stakeholder involvement plays a critical role in the deliberative processes of Eco-Pesantrens, reflecting a participatory governance model that includes santri (students), teaching staff, caretakers, community members, and external experts such as environmental scientists or NGO representatives. Students often participate actively in discussions about daily operational rules like waste segregation or water use policies, fostering a culture of shared responsibility and ecological awareness from an early age. Staff members contribute their expertise in educational programming and facility management to ensure that environmental initiatives are feasible and aligned with institutional goals (Newig et al., 2023). Community involvement extends the pesantren's ecological impact beyond its boundaries by incorporating local knowledge and encouraging collaborative conservation efforts. External experts provide scientific validation and technical guidance, helping leaders make informed decisions on complex issues such as renewable energy investments or sustainable land use planning (Green & Hunton-Clarke, 2003). This inclusive approach enhances transparency, legitimacy, and effectiveness in environmental governance within the pesantren context.

### **Models of Integration in Practice**

Leadership management in Eco-Pesantrens demonstrates a comprehensive integration of Islamic values and environmental health principles through multiple practical models, including curriculum integration, institutional policy, ritual and spiritual practice, and community empowerment. Curriculum integration is a foundational approach where environmental health concepts are embedded within religious subjects such as tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis) and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), alongside general subjects. This integration fosters an understanding of humans as khalifah (stewards) responsible for the earth, linking scriptural teachings with ecological ethics to cultivate sustainable behavior among santri (students). For example, pesantrens incorporate lessons on organic farming, waste management, and water conservation into both religious and secular curricula, emphasizing the harmony between divine commands and environmental stewardship. This holistic educational model not only raises environmental awareness but also strengthens students' Islamic identity by framing ecological care as a spiritual obligation (Ihsan, 2019).

Institutional policies in Eco-Pesantrens operationalize these integrated values through concrete rules and practices that govern daily life on campus. Policies often include prohibitions or reductions

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on plastic use, promotion of organic farming techniques within pesantren grounds, systematic tree planting programs to restore local biodiversity, and water management strategies that conserve resources during ablution and other activities (Albar et al., 2024). These regulations reflect Islamic principles such as avoiding israf (wastefulness) and maintaining thaharah (cleanliness), while also responding to scientific knowledge about pollution reduction and resource sustainability. The enforcement of such policies is supported by leadership commitment and participatory governance involving teachers, staff, and students to ensure adherence and continuous improvement. This institutionalization of eco-friendly practices creates a living laboratory where Islamic ethics meet environmental health science in everyday decision-making (Syafi'i et al., 2025).

## **Discussion**

### **An Emerging Model of Eco Imanic Leadership**

Leadership management in Eco-Pesantrens that integrates Islamic values and environmental health principles can be conceptualized through an emerging model of "Eco-Imanic Leadership," which synthesizes spiritual drive (iman), ethical grounding (Islam), and ecological effectiveness. This leadership model is deeply rooted in the Islamic worldview, where iman (faith) serves as the motivational core inspiring leaders to act responsibly as khalifah (stewards) of the earth, guided by principles such as tawhid (divine unity), amanah (trustworthiness), and 'adl (justice) (Miftahussurur et al., 2025). Spiritual leadership theories adapted to Islamic contexts emphasize that true leadership transcends administrative functions to encompass moral and spiritual dimensions, fostering a holistic approach that aligns personal faith with ethical decision-making and ecological stewardship (Arar et al., 2022).

### **Navigating Challenges**

Leadership management in Eco-Pesantrens faces significant tensions between tradition and innovation, economic constraints, and knowledge gaps among stakeholders, which require nuanced strategies to overcome. The tension between preserving Islamic traditions and embracing innovative environmental health principles mirrors challenges observed in family businesses, where managing the coexistence of heritage and change is critical for long-term survival. Mechanisms such as forward thinking through heritage, paradoxical thinking, operational control, and governance help leaders balance respect for tradition with the need for innovation, enabling them to reinterpret past knowledge while adapting to contemporary ecological demands (Giustiniano et al., 2020). This

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approach aligns with the concept of managing traditions as both enduring structures and dynamic processes that allow organizations to integrate past values with present needs through continuous reinterpretation, fostering resilience amid change (Faulks et al., 2021).

In practice, overcoming these tensions involves four key pillars: honoring spiritual and cultural heritage; fostering ethical leadership rooted in Islamic values; encouraging participatory governance for inclusive decision-making; and applying scientific environmental knowledge contextualized within local wisdom. This integrated framework enables Eco-Pesantren leaders to navigate socio-ecological complexities effectively despite economic constraints and knowledge disparities. It also positions pesantrens as models of sustainable development where faith-based leadership contributes meaningfully to environmental stewardship at community levels (Gil et al., 2024).

## **Impact on Environmental Health**

Leadership management in Eco-Pesantrens that integrates Islamic values with environmental health principles produces both tangible and intangible outcomes critical to sustainable development. Tangible outcomes include measurable improvements such as reduced waste generation, enhanced biodiversity, and healthier living conditions within the pesantren environment. These results stem from leadership decisions that prioritize eco-friendly practices like waste segregation, organic farming, water conservation, and tree planting, all aligned with Islamic teachings on stewardship (amanah) and avoiding wastefulness (israf). Such initiatives not only improve the physical environment but also serve as practical demonstrations of faith-based ecological responsibility, reinforcing the pesantren's role as a community model for sustainability (Zhang et al., 2021).

## **Theoretical Implications**

Leadership management in Eco-Pesantrens, which integrates Islamic values with environmental health principles, both extends and challenges existing theories of leadership and religion-ecology integration by emphasizing the dynamic interplay between cultural traditions, ecological contexts, and spiritual ethics. Traditional leadership theories often focus on universal traits or behaviors, but research highlights that cultural leadership prototypes (CLPs) are shaped by specific ecological conditions and transmitted culturally over time, sometimes resulting in mismatches between inherited leadership models and current environmental needs (Oh & Wang, 2020). Eco-Pesantren leadership exemplifies this by adapting Islamic ethical frameworks—such as stewardship (amanah) and avoidance of wastefulness (israf)—to contemporary ecological challenges, thus demonstrating a

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culturally embedded yet innovative leadership approach that bridges past values with present sustainability imperatives.

## **Comparative Perspective**

Leadership management of Eco-Pesantrens, which integrates Islamic values with environmental health principles, both aligns with and differs from secular environmental leadership and other faith-based ecological movements in several important ways. Unlike secular environmental leadership that often emphasizes technocratic, policy-driven approaches focused on nature conservation and sustainability as a policy goal, Eco-Pesantren leadership grounds decision-making in Islamic ethical concepts such as stewardship (*amanah*), care for creation, and justice (Christie et al., 2019). This faith-based framing prioritizes sustaining relationships—between humans, nature, and God—rather than solely managing natural resources or ecosystems as external entities. Such an approach resonates with findings that religious environmental organizations emphasize moral language around “creation,” “care,” and “justice,” contrasting with secular groups’ focus on “nature” and “wilderness” (Bomberg & Hague, 2018).

Moreover, the language used by Eco-Pesantren leaders aligns with the shared keywords found across faith-based and secular environmental groups, “people,” “community,” and “life”—indicating potential for coalition-building despite differing rhetorical frames (Dunlap, 2006). This suggests that Eco-Pesantren leadership could serve as a bridge between religiously motivated ecological stewardship and secular sustainability initiatives by emphasizing common human well-being and communal responsibility.

## **Conclusion**

Effective leadership management in Eco-Pesantrens requires a profound and authentic integration of the Islamic worldview with environmental science, resulting in transformative decisions that fundamentally redefine the pesantren’s relationship with nature. This integration is not superficial but deeply rooted in Islamic teachings that emphasize stewardship (*amanah*), balance (*mizan*), and care for creation as divine mandates, which align closely with contemporary environmental health principles. The Eco-Pesantren model synthesizes religious education and ecological awareness by interpreting Quranic verses (*kauniyah*) alongside prophetic traditions (*qauliyah*), fostering an eco-centric paradigm where spiritual values motivate sustainable practices such as forest conservation, waste management, and water preservation. Leadership within these institutions, particularly the

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kyai's role, is pivotal in embodying transformational authority that combines legal-formal governance with moral and spiritual guidance, enabling the community to internalize ecological devotion and translate it into concrete environmental actions.

This model strengthens the pesantren's religious mission by expanding its scope beyond traditional education to include active environmental stewardship as a form of worship and social responsibility. It challenges conventional educational paradigms by embedding sustainability into curricula, institutional culture, and daily routines through nature taddabur (reflection on nature), eco-friendly infrastructure, and community engagement initiatives that promote circular economy practices. Such holistic integration nurtures students not only as religious scholars but also as agents of sustainable transformation who embody Islamic ethics in their interactions with the environment and society. The participatory leadership style inspired by Islamic consultation (shura) fosters collective decision-making and shared accountability for ecological outcomes, reinforcing communal bonds while addressing planetary health challenges.

Moreover, this integrative approach redefines the pesantren's relationship with nature from one of dominion to one of partnership and mutual care, reflecting Islamic ecological jurisprudence (fiqh al-bi'ah) that prohibits harm to the environment and promotes cleanliness as an aspect of faith. The practical implementation of these principles has led to tangible benefits such as groundwater conservation, flood risk mitigation, waste reduction through ecobricks and biopori techniques, and organic agricultural practices that support local economies. These outcomes demonstrate how Eco-Pesantren leadership transcends theoretical discourse by producing measurable improvements in environmental health while reinforcing spiritual values.

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