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Islamic environmental ethics and sustainable natural resource management: Principles, responsibilities and contemporary applications

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ABSTRACT

Interconnected pressures, including climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, waste generation, land degradation, freshwater stress and unsustainable extraction of natural resources, drive contemporary environmental degradation. Although environmental science, regulation and technology are indispensable to addressing these pressures, durable sustainability also depends on values that shape consumption, stewardship, accountability and collective action. This paper examines Islamic environmental ethics as a normative framework for sustainable natural resource management. Data for this study were gathered through a structured textual search and curation of primary Islamic scriptural sources, classical legal maxims, and contemporary peer-reviewed environmental literature. Using a qualitative documentary and conceptual review approach, the study synthesizes Qur'anic teachings, selected Prophetic traditions, Islamic ethical and legal concepts and recent environmental scholarship. The analysis argues that Islam permits legitimate resource use but rejects the conception of nature as an unrestricted storehouse for human consumption. Resource use is ethically bounded by moderation, prevention of harm, conservation, intergenerational responsibility and concern for collective welfare. The paper further connects these principles to pollution prevention, sustainable consumption, circular resource use, water conservation, biodiversity protection, climate action, ecosystem restoration and community-based governance. Particular attention is given to Nigeria, where mosques, Islamic schools, universities, scholars and community organizations can help translate religious values into practical environmental behaviour. The paper concludes that Islamic environmental ethics complement, rather than replace, environmental science, law and technology; its distinctive contribution lies in providing moral motivation, cultural legitimacy and community mechanisms for more responsible environmental governance.

Keywords: Islamic environmental ethics, sustainable natural resource management, environmental stewardship, environmental governance

Introduction

Natural resources constitute the material and ecological foundation of human societies. Water, soils, forests, grasslands, wildlife, fisheries, minerals, energy resources and atmospheric systems support food production, livelihoods, settlement, health and economic activity. Yet the contemporary relationship between society and nature is increasingly characterized by resource depletion, pollution, habitat transformation, biodiversity decline and climate-related disruption. The United Nations Environment Programme and International Resource Panel (UNEP & IRP) (2024) identify resource extraction and use as central drivers of multiple planetary pressures, while the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) emphasizes the close interaction among climate, ecosystems, biodiversity and human well-being. These conditions demonstrate that environmental management is not simply a technical problem; it is also a question of values, responsibility, restraint and justice.

Environmental science provides the evidence required to understand ecological processes, pollution pathways, carrying capacity, ecosystem services and restoration need. Environmental law provides standards and enforcement mechanisms, while technology can improve monitoring, efficiency and pollution control. Nevertheless, these approaches may be weakened when individuals and institutions continue to regard consumption as an unrestricted right or when environmental obligations are treated as external to moral and religious life. Recent scholarship on Muslim environmentalisms similarly emphasizes that Islamic environmental engagement can connect ecological responsibility with justice, rights and community action (Gade, 2023).

Islam provides a distinctive ethical vocabulary for addressing these concerns. Concepts such as *tawḥīd, khalīfah, amānah, mīzān* and *wasadiyyah* frame the human relationship with creation in terms of divine order, stewardship, trust, balance and moderation. The Qur'anic warning against fasād in the earth and against excessive consumption provides an ethical basis for pollution prevention and resource efficiency. Also, Prophetic traditions concerning water, trees, animals and land illustrate how moral principles can be connected to everyday environmental conduct. Recent scholarship has reinforced the contemporary relevance of these concepts to sustainability and environmental governance (Basri *et al.*, 2025; Azizi, 2026; ʿArafa, 2026).

Islamic environmental ethics is a normative framework grounded in Islamic theological and legal principles such as divine unity (tawḥīd), stewardship (khalīfah), trust (amānah), balance (mīzān) and moderation (wasadiyyah) that defines humanity's moral responsibility to respect, protect and preserve creation. Sustainable natural resource management pertaining to principles, responsibilities and contemporary applications refers to the ethical and operational practice of utilizing ecological assets (such as water, soil, forests and biodiversity) within their natural regenerative limits. Sustainability here connects core principles (such as avoiding harm and excess) with human duties (such as intergenerational equity and public welfare) to address modern environmental challenges - climate change, pollution and resource depletion - through integrated governance, scientific management and community action.

The central argument of this paper is that Islamic environmental ethics can strengthen sustainable natural resource management by linking environmental responsibility to religiously meaningful duties. Such an approach does not imply that Islamic teachings constitute a substitute for ecological science or public regulation. Rather, religious ethics can help motivate compliance, moderate consumption, strengthen community participation and broaden the moral basis for environmental protection. This is especially relevant in Muslim communities where religious institutions possess substantial social influence.

Statement of the problem

Persistent environmental degradation reveals a well-documented gap between knowledge of environmental problems and sustained changes in behavior (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; UNEP & IRP, 2024). Unsustainable harvesting, indiscriminate waste disposal, deforestation, overgrazing, destructive fishing, water contamination, soil degradation and excessive consumption continue in many settings despite the existence of environmental laws and technical solutions (UNEP & IRP, 2024). The problem is therefore partly institutional and behavioral. For Muslim communities, an additional challenge is that religious principles concerning stewardship are not always translated into systematic environmental practice (Fitroh *et al*., 2024; Gade, 2023). There is a need to consequently connect Islamic ethical teachings with contemporary management instruments, community participation and measurable environmental outcomes (Ahmad *et al*., 2026; Azizi, 2026).

Aim and objectives

This paper aims to examine Islamic environmental ethics and demonstrate their relevance to sustainable natural resource utilization, conservation and contemporary environmental governance.

This can be achieved through:

i) Examining Islamic teachings concerning human responsibility toward natural resources.
ii) Explaining major Islamic environmental principles and their ecological significance.
iii) Relating Islamic ethics to the sustainable use and conservation of water, land, vegetation, animals, fisheries and atmospheric resources
iv) Examining the relevance of Islamic principles to pollution, waste, climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation and wetland decline.
v) Proposing practical pathways for applying Islamic environmental ethics, with particular attention to Nigeria.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative documentary and conceptual review design. The paper is normative and analytical rather than empirical. The documentary base comprises the Qur'an, selected authenticated Prophetic traditions, Islamic ethical and legal concepts and contemporary published environmental literature. Recent scholarship was used to situate

classical Islamic principles within current debates on sustainability, environmental law, climate policy, resource management and community participation.

The analysis follows a thematic procedure. First, major Islamic concepts relevant to human-environment relations were identified. Second, their ethical meanings were interpreted in relation to natural resource management. Third, the principles were connected to contemporary environmental challenges and management approaches. Finally, the analysis considered institutional pathways through which Islamic ethics could contribute to environmental practice in Nigeria. Qur'anic and Prophetic sources are retained as primary religious foundations; recent academic sources are used to interpret and contextualize their contemporary significance.

Methodological constraints and scope limitations

To maintain analytical rigor, this paper explicitly acknowledges its methodological constraints. The review establishes normative and conceptual frameworks; it does not present empirical field survey measurements of environmental behavior. Religious ethical motivation is analyzed as a cultural and moral catalyst, not as a replacement for scientific data, environmental engineering or statutory enforcement.

Conceptual foundations of islamic environmental ethics

Tawhīd and the unity of creation

Tawhid, the affirmation of the absolute oneness of Allah, establishes the theological foundation of the Islamic worldview. Its environmental significance arises from the recognition that creation is neither accidental nor morally meaningless. The natural world is understood within a divinely ordered system in which human beings are participants rather than autonomous owners. This worldview discourages interpretation of nature as merely an assemblage of commodities whose value is exhausted by immediate economic utility.

An environmental reading of tawhid, therefore, encourages humility, interconnectedness and responsibility. It does not convert theology into ecological science, but it supplies a moral orientation within which environmental integrity becomes meaningful. Contemporary analyses of Islamic sustainability similarly emphasize that the unity of creation can support more integrated understandings of environmental responsibility (Azizi, 2026; Gade, 2023).

Khalīfah: Stewardship rather than unlimited dominion

The Qur'an describes humanity as khalifah on earth (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998 - Qur'an 2:30). In environmental ethics, khalifah is best understood as stewardship involving responsibility, rather than as a license for unlimited domination. The stewardship interpretation imposes duties to use resources responsibly, avoid unnecessary damage, protect ecological systems, consider vulnerable communities and preserve the capacity of natural systems to support future generations. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary Islamic environmental-law scholarship, which treats human stewardship as a basis for environmental governance and ecological preservation (ʿArafa, 2026). Stewardship,

however, becomes meaningful only when translated into institutional practices such as conservation rules, monitoring, restoration, community management and accountability.

Amānah: Natural resources as a trust

Amānah embodies the principles of trust and moral accountability. Within environmental management, this dictates that the privilege of accessing natural resources carries an inherent obligation to protect them and ensure their sustainable, responsible use. A river, grazing area, forest or wetland may provide private benefits to particular users, but its ecological functions often extend to entire communities. The trust principle therefore challenges practices that transfer environmental costs to others while retaining private benefits. Amanah also supports intergenerational responsibility. Current users should not exhaust resources or irreversibly damage ecological systems in ways that deprive future generations of legitimate opportunities. This ethical logic closely complements contemporary sustainability principles and environmental-justice approaches (Gade, 2023; Azizi, 2026).

Mīzān: Balance and ecological restraint

The Qur'an associates creation with measure and balance: "And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance" (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998 - Qur'an 55:7-9). Mizan should not be presented as a technical equivalent of ecological equilibrium; rather, it provides an ethical language of proportionality, restraint and respect for limits. Modern ecology demonstrates that ecosystems depend on complex relationships among species, nutrients, energy, water and physical processes. Human actions that exceed ecological thresholds can trigger cumulative and sometimes irreversible consequences. In practical terms, mizan supports sustainable harvesting, pollution prevention, soil conservation, water-use efficiency, biodiversity protection, responsible grazing and climate-sensitive development. Its importance is particularly evident where economic decisions must be reconciled with ecological limits (ʿArafa, 2026; IPCC, 2023).

Fasād: Environmental corruption and destructive disorder

The Qur'an repeatedly warns against *fasad* in the earth, including the instruction to do good and not seek corruption in the land (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998 - Qur'an 28:77). In environmental terms, *fasad* can serve as a moral lens for assessing activities that cause unjustified or avoidable ecological harm. Examples include deliberate pollution, destruction of habitats, illegal wildlife exploitation, irresponsible mining, severe land degradation and indiscriminate waste disposal. The concept should nevertheless be applied analytically rather than rhetorically. Not every environmental impact associated with human activity is necessarily *fasad*. The relevant questions concern the magnitude of harm, its avoidability, distribution, proportionality and consistency with legitimate human needs. This more careful approach allows Islamic ethics to contribute to environmental governance without treating every development activity as inherently unethical.

Isrāf, tabdhir and wasadiyyah: Restraint in consumption

The Qur'an instructs believers to eat and drink without excess (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998 - Qur'an 7:31). The related ethical ideas of israf (excess) and tabdhir (wasteful expenditure) are directly relevant to contemporary resource consumption. Excessive material use increases pressure on energy systems, water supplies, agricultural land, forests and mineral resources, while generating additional waste and pollution. UNEP & IRP (2024) report on continuing growth in global resource use and argue for structural changes toward more sustainable patterns of production and consumption.

Wasadiyyah, or moderation, provides the positive orientation for such restraint. It does not require rejection of development, technology or legitimate economic activity. Rather, it supports a sufficiency-oriented model in which human well-being is pursued without unnecessary ecological damage. Recent Islamic sustainability scholarship connects moderation and justice with responsible resource management and sustainable development (Azizi, 2026; Aboukhousa *et al*., 2025).

Ihsān and maslahah: Positive care and public benefit

Iḥsan extends environmental ethics beyond the avoidance of harm toward active benevolence and improvement. Tree planting, restoration of degraded land, animal welfare, rehabilitation of polluted ecosystems and environmental education can therefore be interpreted as forms of positive environmental conduct. This restorative dimension is important because conservation cannot be limited to preventing damage; many ecosystems already require recovery.

Maṣlaḥah, understood broadly as public welfare or collective benefit, provides a basis for balancing individual interests with community and ecological interests. Environmental decisions should therefore ask who gains, who bears the costs, whether benefits are short-lived or durable, and whether vulnerable groups experience disproportionate harm. This perspective connects Islamic ethics with environmental justice and public-interest governance (Gade, 2023; Ahmad *et al*., 2026).

Islamic principles of natural resource utilization

Islam does not prohibit the use of natural resources. The Qur'an repeatedly directs human attention to food, water, vegetation, animals and other provisions. The ethical issue is therefore not utilization versus non-utilization, but responsible utilization versus destructive exploitation. A useful formulation is that legitimate use, moderation, responsibility and conservation can guarantee ethical resource management. Qur'an 5:87 (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998) warns against transgression while recognizing what Allah has made lawful. This helps avoid the opposite extremes: unjustified restriction of legitimate resource use and unrestricted exploitation. Islamic environmental ethics instead encourages lawful, beneficial and proportionate use.

The legal maxim "*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*"- commonly rendered as the prohibition of causing harm or reciprocating harm - provides an especially important bridge between Islamic jurisprudence and environmental regulation. Activities that contaminate shared water, pollute air, degrade land or damage common ecological assets raise questions of rights,

public welfare and environmental justice. Contemporary Islamic environmental-law scholarship increasingly explores these principles as foundations for environmental governance (ʿArafa, 2026).

Conservation of major natural resources and environmental challenges

Water resources

Water occupies a particularly important position in Islamic thought. The Qur'an states that living things were made from water (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998 - Qur'an 21:30) and repeatedly associates rainfall with life, vegetation and provision for humans and animals (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998 - Qur'an 25:48 - 49). These teachings establish water as both a material necessity and a trust requiring responsible use.

Prophetic guidance concerning water use and contamination reinforces the duty to protect shared water sources. A Hadith supports this: "None of you should urinate in stagnant water that does not flow and then bathe in it." (Amir, 2026 -Al-Bukhari and Muslim). Contemporary applications in water resources include pollution prevention, groundwater protection, efficient irrigation, wastewater treatment, protection of rivers and wetlands, improved sanitation and equitable access to safe water. Islamic water ethics can thus complement modern integrated water resource management and water-governance institutions.

Air, atmospheric resources and climate change

Clean air is indispensable to human and ecosystem health. Although classical Islamic sources do not describe atmospheric pollution using modern scientific terminology, the general prohibition of avoidable harm provides an ethical basis for addressing emissions. Industrial pollution, vehicle exhaust, open burning, particulate matter and greenhouse gas emissions should therefore be assessed according to their effects on people and ecosystems. The climate dimension is especially significant. The IPCC (2023) demonstrates that climate change interacts with ecosystems, biodiversity and human well-being. Climate resilience and low-emission transition find direct justification in Islamic primary sources. Scriptural teachings frame environmental protection around vicegerency (khalīfah) and systemic equilibrium (mīzān) (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998 - Qur'an 2:30; 55:7–9), condemn wasteful resource use even during ritual practice (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998 – Qur'an 7:31; Sunnah.com, 2026a - Sunan Ibn Majah 425), and enforce the absolute prohibition of causing public harm (lā ḍarar) to protect frontline communities (Sunnah.com, 2026b - Sunan Ibn Majah 2340; IPCC, 2023)

Recent Islamic energy scholarship explicitly links stewardship with responsible energy choices and climate action (Catovic, 2026).

Land, Vegetation and biodiversity

Land provides the physical basis for agriculture, settlement, grazing and terrestrial ecosystems. Qur'anic references to the earth and its ordered measure can be interpreted as

encouraging responsible land use (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998 - Qur'an 15:19-20). Contemporary management implications include erosion control, sustainable agriculture, soil fertility maintenance, responsible mining, land rehabilitation, sustainable grazing and prevention of desertification. Islamic legal traditions also contain concepts relevant to land restoration. *Iḥyāʾ al-mawāt*, or revival of unproductive land, can be reconsidered within modern restoration frameworks, provided that contemporary land rights, ecological science and statutory law are respected. Likewise, the institution of *ḥimā* historically demonstrates that protected areas and regulated resource-use zones have precedents within Islamic legal thought (ʿArafa, 2026).

Vegetation contributes to soil stability, habitat provision, carbon storage, watershed regulation, climate moderation and livelihoods. Qur'anic passages draw human attention to crops, trees, fruits and plant life as forms of provision (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998 - Qur'an 80:24-32). Prophetic traditions also praise planting when humans and animals benefit from the resulting vegetation, such as "The world is sweet and green, and verily Allah is going to install you as vicegerents in it to see how you act." (Azman, 2026 - Sahih Muslim). These teachings support a restorative approach that combines tree planting with protection of existing ecosystems, watershed management and long-term ecological monitoring.

Islamic ethical concern extends to animals through requirements of humane treatment and avoidance of unnecessary suffering. In conservation terms, this supports sustainable hunting, responsible livestock management, habitat protection and prevention of destructive exploitation. The ethical value of animals should be considered alongside their ecological roles and the livelihood needs of communities. The Qur'an recognizes marine resources as benefits available to humanity (Al-Hilali & Khan, 1998 - Qur'an 16:14), but legitimate use does not imply unlimited extraction. Sustainable fisheries require protection of breeding areas, regulation of harvest, control of destructive practices, environmental pollution reduction and maintenance of aquatic habitats. Recent scholarship on Islamic environmental law also identifies marine and coastal resources as important areas of Islamic ecological governance (Khalilieh, 2026).

Islamic environmental ethics and contemporary environmental challenges

Pollution

Pollution represents a direct challenge to the ethical prohibition of destructive harm. Contamination of air, water, soil and food chains affects both humans and non-human life. An Islamic pollution ethic should therefore prioritize prevention at source, cleaner production, responsible waste handling and contaminated environment restoration. The Qur'an strongly discourages excessive consumption and waste (isrāf), as emphasised in several verses. In Surah Al-A'raf (7:31), believers are instructed to eat and drink without extravagance, as Allah does not approve of those who engage in wasteful practices. Similarly, Surah Al-Isra (17:27) describes those who squander resources as the brethren of the devils. Although these injunctions primarily address individual consumption and behaviour, their underlying principles can reasonably be extended to industrial and municipal waste

management, emphasizing the responsible use of resources and the prevention of unnecessary waste. The ethical principle is not simply to tolerate pollution and improve disposal afterward but to avoid preventable harm wherever technically and economically feasible.

Waste and circular resource use

Waste is closely associated with excessive consumption. The Qur'anic rejection of excess provides an ethical foundation for waste prevention, while contemporary circular-economy approaches offer practical mechanisms for maintaining materials in productive use. A coherent Islamic waste ethic should prioritize prevention, reduction, reuse, repair, recycling, recovery and environmentally safe disposal of residual waste. Recent research on Islamic value-based environmental literacy suggests that religious values can be integrated with community approaches to circular economy and sustainable waste management (Nurhayati *et al*., 2025). The practical challenge is to move beyond sermons about cleanliness toward measurable systems for segregation, collection, reuse, recycling and responsible disposal.

Climate change

Islamic environmental ethics does not provide a technical climate model, but it can contribute to the ethical evaluation of climate-related choices. *Khalīfah* implies responsibility; *amānah* implies accountability; *mīzān* implies respect for ecological limits; *isrāf* challenges excessive consumption; *maṣlaḥah* emphasizes collective welfare; and *iḥsān* supports constructive action. Together these principles can encourage renewable energy, energy efficiency, climate-resilient agriculture, sustainable transport, ecosystem restoration and support for vulnerable communities. The 2026 Cambridge Handbook of Islam and Environmental Law places Islamic stewardship, environmental justice, resource management and climate policy within contemporary environmental law debates (Ahmad *et al.*, 2026). This development suggests that Islamic environmental thought is increasingly being examined as a governance resource rather than merely as a theological commentary on nature.

Biodiversity loss

Biodiversity should not be valued solely according to immediate human utility. Other species form part of creation and contribute to ecosystem functioning. Habitat destruction and species loss can therefore be evaluated through *mīzān*, as disruption of ecological relationships; *amānah*, as failure of stewardship; *fasād*, as destructive degradation; *iḥsān*, as a duty of benevolent care; and *maṣlaḥah*, because biodiversity loss can undermine collective welfare.

Land degradation, desertification and wetland loss

Dryland degradation is especially relevant in regions where grazing pressure, deforestation, erosion, inappropriate cultivation and climatic variability interact. Islamic principles of moderation and stewardship support land-use systems that maintain productive capacity rather than treating soils and vegetation as expendable inputs. Wetlands deserve particular attention because they regulate floods, filter water, recharge groundwater, support

biodiversity and sustain fisheries, livestock and livelihoods. Their degradation creates both ecological and social losses. The principles of *amānah* and *maṣlaḥah* therefore support protection of wetlands as shared ecological assets, whilst contemporary environmental governance supplies the scientific tools required to identify ecological thresholds, monitor pollution and design restoration programmes.

Islamic principles versus sustainable environmental practice

The aspects of Islamic principles and sustainable practice were presented in Table 1, which shows that these principles are most effective when integrated with ecological science, environmental legislation, local knowledge, economic analysis and community participation. Religious ethics should not be used to displace scientific assessment. Instead, it can help answer a different but complementary question: why should individuals and institutions accept limits, comply with environmental rules and undertake restoration when doing so may involve short-term costs? Islamic principles also align conceptually with circular economy strategies. Avoiding unnecessary consumption, repairing useful goods, reusing materials and reducing pollution are practical expressions of moderation and responsible stewardship. Similarly, restoration can be interpreted through iḥsān and the broader obligation to repair rather than perpetuate environmental damage. The challenge is to convert these ethical orientations into measurable targets and institutional programmes.

Table 1: Islamic Principles and Sustainable Practice by Meaning and Implication

Islamic principle	Ethical meaning	Management implication
Tawḥīd	Unity and purposeful creation	Ecological integrity and interconnected planning
Khalīfah	Stewardship and responsibility	Accountable environmental governance
Amānah	Trust and accountability	Intergenerational resource management
Mīzān	Balance and proportionality	Ecological limits and sustainable extraction
Fasād	Destructive disorder	Pollution and degradation prevention
Isrāf/Tabdhīr	Excess and waste	Resource efficiency and waste prevention
Wasadiyyah	Moderation	Sustainable consumption
Iḥsān	Benevolent action	Restoration and animal welfare
Maṣlaḥah	Collective welfare	Environmental justice and public interest
Ḥimā	Protection/conservation	Protected areas and regulated use
Iḥyā' al-mawāt	Revival of degraded land	Ecological restoration

Islamic environmental advocacy in Nigeria

Nigeria provides an important context for applying Islamic environmental ethics because environmental pressures include flooding, water stress, deforestation, land degradation, waste accumulation, biodiversity loss and climate variability. In many northern communities, livelihoods depend strongly on land, water, grazing resources, forests and wetlands. Religious institutions therefore possess an opportunity to connect environmental responsibility with existing social networks.

Role of islamic scholars and mosques

Islamic scholars can incorporate environmental responsibility into Friday sermons, lectures, Qur'anic interpretation, religious publications and community campaigns. Environmental problems should be framed as matters of responsibility, justice and stewardship rather than as concerns external to religious life. Mosques can serve as practical centres for campaigns on water conservation, sanitation, waste reduction, tree planting, climate awareness and community clean-up activities.

Evidence from recent studies suggests that Islamic educational environments can support environmental awareness when ethical teaching is connected to concrete practice (Fitroh *et al.,* 2024). The implication for Nigeria is that environmental education should be experiential: communities should not only hear that waste is undesirable, but also receive systems for segregation, collection and recovery.

Schools, universities and interdisciplinary research

Islamic schools and universities can integrate environmental ethics with conservation biology, waste management, climate science, water management, environmental law, agriculture and environmental health. Universities can also support interdisciplinary research that examines whether faith-based interventions produce measurable changes in environmental behavior. This would move the discussion from normative claims toward evidence-based evaluation.

Faith-based community conservation

Potential initiatives include mosque-based tree planting linked to ecological restoration, community water protection committees, wetland stewardship groups, sustainable grazing awareness, wildlife education, plastic reduction programmes and youth environmental clubs. Such initiatives should be designed jointly with environmental scientists, local authorities and community leaders so that religious motivations are matched with appropriate technical standards.

Partnerships with environmental institutions

Religious institutions should work alongside universities, environmental agencies, local governments, traditional institutions, civil society organizations and development partners. Such collaboration can combine moral authority and community trust with scientific evidence, regulatory capacity and financial or technical resources. Recent Islamic environmental law scholarship similarly emphasizes the need to connect religious principles with contemporary governance institutions (Ahmad *et al.*, 2026).

Integrated islamic environmental stewardship framework

The framework proposed in this paper begins with *tawḥīd*, which establishes recognition of a purposeful and interconnected creation. *Tawḥīd* leads to *khalīfah* and *amānah*, which define human beings as responsible trustees. *Mīzān* and *wasatiyyah* then establish ecological restraint and moderation. These principles generate practical ethical priorities: prevention of harm, responsible consumption, conservation, restoration and concern for collective

welfare. These priorities should be operationalized through environmental practice and governance.

In conceptual form: *Tawḥīd* gives *Khalīfah* and *Amānah* that provide i) *Mīzān* and *Wasadiyyah*, which ensure the prevention of harm, sustainable consumption, conservation and ii) *iḥsān* that guarantee pollution prevention, restoration, biodiversity protection and climate action; together, they attract community participation, education, policy, science and religious advocacy, where at the end ecological integrity, human well-being, environmental justice and intergenerational equity were realized. This framework is intentionally complementary. Islamic principles supply ethical motivation and cultural legitimacy, environmental science supplies causal understanding, monitoring and technical standards, environmental law supplies enforceable rules and institutions supply coordination and accountability.

Discussion

The analysis indicates that Islamic environmental ethics provides a multidimensional account of the human-nature relationship. First, it recognizes human dependence on creation. Water, air, soils, vegetation, animals and ecosystems are conditions of human survival, which makes the idea of unlimited exploitation ethically and materially problematic. Second, Islamic ethics combines legitimate rights of use with corresponding duties. The permission to benefit from resources does not remove responsibility for consequences. Third, moderation is central. In a period of accelerating material consumption, *isrāf* and *wasadiyyah* provide a religiously meaningful language for resource efficiency. Fourth, *mīzān* encourages respect for ecological limits, while *fasād* provides a vocabulary for evaluating destructive environmental practices. Fifth, *amānah* introduces accountability, requiring environmental decisions to be assessed in terms of their consequences for people, ecosystems and future generations. Sixth, *maṣlaḥah* strengthens the link between environmental protection and social welfare.

Recent scholarship supports the continued development of these themes. *Gade (2023)* highlights justice, rights and multispecies perspectives within Muslim environmentalisms. Basri *et al.*, (2025) emphasize *khalīfah, amānah* and justice in sustainable resource management, while recent work on Islamic environmental law increasingly examines stewardship, conservation institutions, climate policy and community compliance (Ahmad *et al.*, 2026; ʿArafa, 2026). However, religious principles should not be romanticized. The existence of environmental teachings does not automatically produce environmentally responsible behaviour. Knowledge, values, incentives, infrastructure and institutions all influence behaviour. A mosque sermon cannot compensate for the absence of waste-collection services; a religious prohibition of pollution cannot replace industrial monitoring; and tree-planting campaigns cannot substitute for land-use planning. The strongest contribution of Islamic environmental ethics therefore emerges when moral motivation is integrated with effective governance and scientific management.

Conclusion

Islamic environmental ethics provides a coherent normative framework for responsible interaction with the natural world. *Tawḥīd* establishes the unity and purposeful order of creation; *khalīfah* frames humanity as steward rather than unrestricted owner; *amānah* establishes trust and accountability; *mīzān* emphasizes balance; *isrāf* and *wasadiyyah* restrain excess; *fasād* condemns destructive disorder; *iḥsān* encourages positive care and restoration; and *maṣlaḥah* directs attention toward collective welfare. These principles are relevant to contemporary natural resource management because environmental sustainability requires more than technological efficiency. It also requires individuals and institutions to recognize limits, accept responsibility for environmental consequences and protect shared ecological assets. Water conservation, pollution prevention, sustainable consumption, biodiversity protection, climate action, land restoration and wetland conservation can all be interpreted through the ethical vocabulary of Islamic stewardship.

In Nigeria, the practical potential of this framework lies in connecting Islamic moral teaching with environmental institutions. Mosques, Islamic schools, universities, scholars and community organizations can contribute to environmental education and mobilization, provided their efforts are supported by scientific evidence, appropriate regulation, infrastructure and monitoring. The objective is therefore not to replace environmental science or law with religious teaching, but to create a stronger ethical and social foundation for their implementation.

Ultimately, sustainable resource management requires a transformation in how natural resources are perceived. They are not merely commodities for immediate extraction and consumption; they are components of a larger creation entrusted to human beings. In this sense, environmental stewardship is simultaneously an ecological, social and ethical responsibility. Islamic environmental ethics can make a constructive contribution to this responsibility by linking sustainability with accountability, moderation, justice, conservation and care for future generations.

Recommendations

Based on the implications of this work, it is recommended that;

1. Environmental curricula in Muslim communities should integrate Islamic environmental ethics into environmental education with scientific concepts such as carrying capacity, ecosystem services, pollution pathways, resource efficiency and climate risk.
2. Governments and NGOs should promote sustainable resource consumption and water conservation. This way, the principle of avoiding excess should translate into reduced food, water, energy, material and plastic waste and religious teaching should be connected with leakage control, efficient irrigation, wastewater treatment, protection of rivers and wetlands, and prevention of dumping. Therefore, local users should participate in managing forests, wetlands, grazing lands, fisheries and other shared resources.

3. Governments should strengthen mosque-based environmental advocacy and develop faith-based restoration programmes. This can be achieved by incorporating environmental themes into sermons and community programmes, with practical actions and measurable local targets such as tree planting, prioritizing native species, survival monitoring, watershed protection and long-term maintenance.
4. Governments and NGOs are encouraged to support faith-based youth clubs in combining environmental learning with practical activities such as waste audits, tree care, biodiversity monitoring and community restoration. Therefore, institutionalizing partnerships among environmental agencies and universities is suggested. This will promote interdisciplinary research on whether faith-based interventions improve environmental knowledge, attitudes and measurable practices such as environmental education and compliance.

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