UTILIZATION OF WAKAF FORESTS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF ENVIRONMENTALLY BASED ISLAMIC PHILANTHROPY: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF YPM WAKAF FORESTS, MOJOKERTO REGENCY

Roha Dewi Neta[a,b]
Siti Kalimah[a,b]
[a]UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya
[b] rohadewi25@gmail.com, siti.kalimah@uinsa.ac.id

Abstract

The environmental crisis characterized by deforestation, ecosystem damage, and climate change demands sustainable, religious-value-based solutions. In this context, waqf can transform into an instrument of environmentally-based Islamic philanthropy through the management of waqf forests. Waqf forests are defined as waqf land planted with trees and managed sustainably to provide ecological, social, economic, and spiritual benefits. This study aims to analyze the use of the Waqf Forest of the Ma'arif Education and Social Foundation (YPM) Mojokerto as an instrument of environmentally-based Islamic philanthropy using descriptive qualitative methods through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results show that this 1.6-hectare waqf forest is managed using a multi-strata agroforestry system, and from 2020 to 2025, 5,265 conservation and productive trees have been planted. From an ecological perspective, this forest functions to maintain water management, absorb carbon, and prevent flooding. From a social and economic perspective, the waqf forest encourages community participation while providing economic benefits from the harvest. From a spiritual perspective, waqf forest management is a form of ongoing charity, in line with the Islamic principle of khalifah fil ardh (vicegerent) . Thus, the YPM Waqf Forest serves as an innovative model of environmentally based Islamic philanthropy and a solution to the contemporary ecological crisis.

Keywords **:** *Waqf Forest, Islamic Philanthropy, Environment*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic philanthropy is a concept of generosity deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, emphasizing the importance of social awareness and economic justice in society (Madjakusumah & Saripudin, 2020). Philanthropy is generally understood as a voluntary act of helping others, but in Islam, such acts are not merely good deeds but rather acts of worship with spiritual and social dimensions (Haq & Rodiah, 2023). Philanthropic

activities in Islam are designed to strengthen social solidarity and create balance in community life, and are part of an integrated Islamic social financial system.

Forms of Islamic philanthropy include key instruments such as zakat, infaq, sadaqah, and waqf (Zulfikri et al., 2025). Zakat is an obligation that must be fulfilled by every able-bodied Muslim, while infaq and sadaqah are voluntary but highly encouraged. Among these forms, waqf holds a special position due to its sustainable nature, where the endowed assets are managed so that their benefits continue to flow to the beneficiaries (Uyun & Hamida, 2024). In a modern context, the concept of productive waqf even allows for the management of assets such as agricultural land, forests, or property, with the proceeds being used for socio-economic and environmental purposes (Munir, 2025).

The primary goal of implementing philanthropy in Islam is to achieve social justice, balance the distribution of wealth, and empower society(Putri Wulan Sahab & Fadhil Jibran Permana, 2025). It aims not only to directly assist those in need but also to create a system that encourages long-term independence and prosperity (Ratnasari et al., 2025). Furthermore, philanthropy also serves as a means to purify wealth and foster an awareness of social responsibility among Muslims (Al Mubarak, 2024).

The basic principles underlying Islamic philanthropy include ikhlas (charity for the sake of Allah), maslahat (prioritizing benefit), sustainability, social responsibility, and justice (Nurhasanah, 2024). These principles demonstrate that philanthropic activity is not merely an act of personal kindness, but rather a collective responsibility of the community in creating a just and balanced society. These values also distinguish Islamic philanthropy from secular philanthropy, which generally does not explicitly involve spiritual aspects. In current developments, Islamic philanthropy is increasingly relevant in supporting social development and environmental conservation. For example, waqf (endowments) managed in the form of waqf forests not only serve as spiritual instruments but also play a direct role in nature conservation, climate change mitigation, and community economic empowerment through agroforestry or ecotourism (Firdaus, 2024). This demonstrates that Islamic philanthropy can provide a solution to

contemporary challenges, both in social justice and ecological sustainability (Putri Wulan Sahab & Fadhil Jibran Permana, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Waqf And Productive Waqf

Waqf is a crucial instrument in the Islamic economic system, offering a philanthropic and sustainable character. Etymologically, waqf comes from the Arabic word "waqafa," which means to withhold or stop (Fardiansyah, 2023). In Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) terminology, waqf means to retain assets that can be utilized without reducing the substance of the assets, then distribute the benefits for public or specific interests in accordance with Islamic law (Az-Zuhaili, 2010). Waqf has both spiritual and social dimensions, as it is performed as a form of worship to Allah and to help meet the collective needs of society (Ridwansah, 2025).

Traditionally, waqf was often manifested in the form of land for mosques, madrasas, cemeteries, or other social facilities. However, with the development of the times and increasing societal needs, the idea of productive waqf emerged as an extension of conventional waqf. Productive waqf is a type of waqf in which the waqf assets are not simply left unused or used directly, but are instead economically managed to generate income, which is then used for social purposes (Astuti, 2022). Examples include the construction of shophouses from waqf funds that are rented out, waqf gardens whose produce is sold, or waqf forests whose ecosystems are protected while being used on a limited basis through agroforestry.

Productive waqf has advantages over traditional waqf because it offers broader and more flexible sustainability of benefits. In the context of social development and community empowerment, productive waqf can be an alternative source of funding for education, health, the economy, and even environmental conservation (Rahman, 2025). This potential has been recognized in public policy, as reflected in Law No. 41 of 2004 concerning Waqf in Indonesia, which opens up space for the productive management of waqf assets by professional nazhir (Syan, 2024). With proper management, waqf

becomes not only a symbol of spiritual generosity but also a tangible and measurable tool for socio-economic development.

Waqf Forests As An Instrument Of Philanthropy

Waqf forests are an innovative form of productive waqf that integrates Islamic values with environmental conservation efforts. This concept utilizes waqf land to establish forest areas, whether protected forests, plantations, or community forests, whose management is aimed at the ecological, social, and economic interests of the community. As part of Islamic philanthropy, waqf forests not only aim to preserve nature but also provide sustainable benefits to surrounding communities, such as providing clean water, protecting biodiversity, and even increasing income through ecotourism or agroforestry (Firdaus, 2024).

Conceptually, waqf forests align with the Islamic principle of waqf, which is to retain assets and distribute their benefits continuously (sadaqah jariyah). In practice, waqf land is not for sale but is managed sustainably to prevent ecological damage. The benefits of waqf forests include environmental functions such as carbon absorption, flood prevention, and spring protection, as well as social and economic functions, such as creating green jobs, providing sustainable raw materials, and serving as a means of environmentally-based education and preaching (Prabowo, 2022). Thus, waqf forests bridge Islamic spirituality, social generosity, and concern for the preservation of the earth.

As an instrument of Islamic philanthropy, waqf forests reflect the actualization of the values of khalifah (humans as stewards of the earth), amanah (responsibility for God's creation), and maslahah (public benefit) (Widiastuty & Anwar, 2025). Through this approach, Muslims are not only encouraged to give alms but also to participate in preserving and restoring ecosystems as a form of worship. This innovation also demonstrates that Islamic philanthropy is not static, but rather dynamic and contextual, capable of responding to contemporary challenges such as the climate crisis and environmental degradation. Therefore, waqf forests deserve to be positioned as part of a sustainable development strategy based on religious values.

An Islamic Perspective On Environmental Conservation

Islam views the environment as an integral part of God's creation, possessing intrinsic value and whose sustainability must be preserved. From an Islamic perspective, the universe is not a value-free entity, but rather a sign of God's power (the verses of kauniyah) that must be respected and protected by humans (Pudjiastuti, 2025). Numerous verses in the Quran describe the beauty, order, and ecological functions of nature as evidence of God's greatness. Therefore, preserving the environment is not merely a moral or social issue, but also an integral part of our devotion to God. The concept of the khalifah (leader or steward of the earth) is the primary foundation of the relationship between humans and the environment in Islam. In Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 30, humans are described as khalifahs entrusted with the responsibility to manage the earth with responsibility and wisdom (Rasyad, 2022). This mandate requires humans not to do facade (damage) on the face of the earth, as prohibited in Surah Al-A'raf verse 56 which reads

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوْا فِى الْاَرْضِ بَعْدَ اِصْلَاحِهَا وَادْعُوْهُ خَوْفًا وَّطَمَعًاۗ اِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللّٰهِ قَرِيْبٌ مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِيْنَ

which means *"And do not cause corruption on the earth after (Allah) has set it in order."* Thus, all forms of excessive exploitation, pollution, and destruction of ecosystems are violations of human spiritual responsibility as caliphs.

Apart from that, Islam also emphasizes the principle of mizan (balance) in the creation of nature, as stated in Surah Ar-Rahman verses 7-9 which reads

وَالسَّمَاۤءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيْزَانَۙ ۝٧ اَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِى الْمِيْزَانِ ۝٨ وَاَقِيْمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيْزَانَ ۝٩

Which means *"He has raised the heavens and created the scales (justice and balance). So that you do not transgress in the scales. Establish the scales with justice and do not reduce the scales."* This verse means that nature was created in balance, and humans are commanded to maintain this balance so that it is not disturbed. Environmental preservation in Islam is not only physical, but also ethical and spiritual, because an imbalance in nature will

impact human life and future generations. Therefore, ecological responsibility in Islam is holistic, encompassing dimensions of worship, ethics, social, and sustainability (Wulan, 2025). This perspective confirms that Islam has a strong theological foundation in supporting active and responsible environmental preservation efforts (Widiastuty & Anwar, 2025).

Based on the theoretical foundation of waqf and productive waqf, as well as previous studies highlighting the role of waqf forests in ecological preservation and community empowerment, this study assumes that waqf forests hold significant potential as a sustainable instrument of Islamic philanthropy. It is hypothesized that the YPM Waqf Forest in Mojokerto, through its integration of religious values with environmental conservation and socio-economic benefits, can serve as a best practice model in actualizing productive waqf to address contemporary ecological and social challenges.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, collecting data through interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with the Waqf Forest manager of the Ma'arif Education and Social Foundation (YPM) in Mojokerto Regency, East Java. In addition, this study utilized secondary data obtained from YPM Waqf Forest reports containing information related to conservation programs, community empowerment, and waqf asset management. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, source triangulation techniques were used, namely comparing and confirming data from various sources and documents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Waqf forests in Indonesia are still relatively(Rohmaningtyas, 2022), in East Java they are still only found in Mojokerto Regency, even though if evaluated, waqf forests have very high benefits. Ironically, the community is still unfamiliar with the concept of waqf forests, even what the community knows about waqf is only a concept of 3M (Mosque, Tomb, Madrasah). The YPM waqf forest in Mojokerto Regency adopts a

concept, namely Islamic philanthropy, philanthropy itself comes from two Greek words, namely philia (love) and anthrophos (human), which can generally be interpreted as a form of love for fellow human beings (Pertaminawati, 2025). Islam has a very comprehensive philanthropic system, where the charity system consists of many types with their own unique characteristics such as alms, waqf and zakat (Janah et al., 2021).

Utilization of the YPM Waqf Forest

Based on field observations and interviews with Mr. Agus Sugiarto, Head of the YPM Waqf Forest Management, it was discovered that the utilization of this forest is not merely a conventional conservation activity, but is based on social and sustainable intentions. The goal is to prioritize the welfare of the community, empower the community independently, and maintain ecological balance as a form of collective responsibility towards nature. This principle aligns with Islamic philanthropic values and teachings on environmental conservation as part of worship and ongoing charity (Sugiarto, 2025).

The YPM Waqf Forest, located in Ngembat Village, Gondang District, Mojokerto Regency, represents an innovative form of environmentally-based productive waqf. This initiative began in 2001 through a "crowd-funded" movement by YPM teachers to purchase land, which was then donated and permanently endowed to YPM Sepanjang, Sidoarjo, as the official nadzir. Its legality, registered with the Indonesian Waqf Board (BWI), makes this area the first legally recognized waqf forest in East Java. The 1,6 hectare area has been actively managed since 2021 and is now a model for environmental conservation based on Islamic values and community participation.

Figure 1

YPM Waqf Forest



The utilization activities carried out by the YPM Waqf Forest include environmental conservation, education, ecological character education, and community empowerment. From a conservation perspective, the approach used is a multi-strata agroforestry pattern, a layered planting system that includes pioneer vegetation (kaliandra, lamtoro), productive plants (durian, avocado, cardamom, coffee), and strengthening trees (mahogany, suren, gmelina) (Fikry & Wahyuningsih, 2024). This vegetation diversification not only strengthens ecological resilience, such as increasing soil fertility and carbon sequestration, but also strengthens the social and spiritual dimensions of the community (Elfis, 2024). Research by Rasyid (2024) confirms that agroforestry systems play a crucial role in providing ecosystem services such as increasing biodiversity, controlling erosion, and conserving water. In fact, research by Hartoyo et al. (2022) found that species diversity in agroforestry systems has a positive correlation with carbon stocks and soil quality.

Khuluq & Asmuni (2025) argue that environmental conservation is an integral part of the goals of Islamic law, particularly in addressing the global climate crisis. Therefore, reforestation activities in the YPM Waqf Forest are not merely ecological actions, but rather a form of social worship and ongoing charity, the rewards of which continue to flow.

Another important aspect of utilization is community education, which forms the foundation for program sustainability. YPM developed the Waqf Forest School program to introduce environmental education to students and the community through a hands-

on approach. This education focuses on three main dimensions: first, ecological knowledge, which raises awareness of the role of forests as life support and protectors of biodiversity; second, spiritual and philanthropic motivation, which emphasizes that protecting forests is an act of worship and a form of ongoing charity; and third, socio-economic awareness, which encourages communities to utilize agroforestry products without damaging the ecosystem (Ningrum et al., 2025). According to Ridwansah (2025), productive waqf is a strategic instrument that unites spiritual, social, and economic values within a framework of sustainable development. Similarly, studies by Nisa (2024) and Rahman (2023) also show that religious motivation in green waqf management encourages active community participation while strengthening social solidarity.

YPM's Waqf Forest also demonstrates a waqf approach that is not merely passive, but transformative. The harvest from this land, such as fruit and herbal plants, is managed collaboratively by the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) branch in Ngembat Village for the benefit of the community. This demonstrates how Islamic philanthropy through waqf can contribute ecologically, economically, and spiritually, providing benefits across generations.

Impact of YPM's Waqf Forest Utilization

The utilization of the YPM Waqf Forest has a broad and multidimensional impact on the surrounding community and environment. Forest management based on Islamic values, through an agroforestry approach and community involvement, makes this area not only an ecological green space but also a center for social, economic, educational, and spiritual activities.

In terms of social impact, the YPM Waqf Forest contributes significantly to community empowerment. Through active community involvement in planting, maintenance, and harvest distribution, surrounding villagers feel part of the process, not just beneficiaries. Programs such as the Waqf Forest School also expand access to environmental education and strengthen collective awareness of the importance of forest conservation. Mutual cooperation activities, product management, and participation in

educational programs strengthen social ties among residents while reinforcing Islamic values of solidarity in daily life.

In terms of economic impact, forest management through agroforestry systems has produced a number of productive commodities such as durian, avocado, coffee, and many more. These crops are not only economically valuable but are also collectively managed by community organizations such as the local Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) branch, so that the economic benefits can be directly felt by the community. Furthermore, the existence of this forest also creates indirect economic impacts, such as opening opportunities for environmentally friendly agricultural training, potential educational ecotourism, and increasing community capacity in sustainable natural resource management (Darmayasa et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, the environmental impact is the most tangible contribution of this waqf forest. Using a multi-strata agroforestry-based conservation approach, the YPM Waqf Forest area functions as a carbon sequestration area, prevents erosion, balances water systems, and provides habitat for various local species. Vegetation diversification from trees creates a balanced ecological system, increases soil fertility, and maintains biodiversity (Irwanto et al., 2024). Thus, this forest serves as a concrete example of how waqf management can significantly improve ecosystem quality.

In the long term, the YPM Waqf Forest reflects a sustainable model of Islamic philanthropy. Initially known as a passive instrument of worship, waqf has evolved into a vehicle for concrete social and ecological change. Communities are involved not only physically but also spiritually, understanding that environmental preservation is part of their worship and ongoing charity. This approach fosters collective concern for nature and fellow human beings, while strengthening Islam's role in addressing the challenges of the times, particularly the environmental crisis and social inequality (Febrianti, 2025). Thus, the YPM Waqf Forest demonstrates that Islamic philanthropy can be a concrete instrument for creating comprehensive ecological, social, and spiritual transformation.

Challenges in Utilizing the YPM Waqf Forest

In utilizing the Ma'arif Education and Social Foundation (YPM) Waqf Forest, several significant challenges must be addressed, both internally and externally. Internal challenges primarily relate to management and operational funding. Waqf forest management requires competent human resources and an effective management system for sustainable (Hasanah et al., 2021). However, based on interviews and observations with managers, limited managerial capacity and a lack of experts are key obstacles that require serious attention. Furthermore, the availability of adequate operational funds is also a significant obstacle, given that implementing conservation and community empowerment programs requires significant recurring costs. These limited funds have the potential to limit the scope and quality of activities that can be optimally implemented.

Meanwhile, external challenges also play a crucial role in the management of the YPM Waqf Forest. Complex and bureaucratic licensing processes and government regulations often hinder the smooth development and optimal utilization of the waqf forest. Furthermore, observations indicate that the level of awareness among local communities regarding the importance of environmental conservation and their active role in forest management remains relatively low. This situation has the potential to reduce active community participation in maintaining and sustainably utilizing forests. Therefore, ongoing education and outreach are strategic elements that must be implemented to increase community awareness and involvement (Alwi et al., 2025).

With a deep understanding of these challenges based on field data, YPM Waqf Forest can formulate appropriate strategies and solutions to improve management effectiveness. These strategies include strengthening managerial capacity, diversifying funding sources, improving coordination with the government, and empowering communities through education programs and active participation (Nurhayati et al., 2025). This approach is expected to ensure the sustainability of conservation programs while strengthening the role of Islamic philanthropy in environmental preservation and social empowerment.

Waqf Forest as a Practice of Islamic Philanthropy

The YPM Waqf Forest in Mojokerto not only serves as an ecological conservation space but also represents a concrete practice of Islamic philanthropy. As part of a productive waqf, its management goes beyond land maintenance but is directed towards providing social, economic, and spiritual benefits to the surrounding community. Thus, this waqf forest serves as an instrument of ongoing charity (sadaqah jariyah), the benefits of which continue to flow across generations.

The philanthropic dimension of the YPM Waqf Forest is evident in several aspects. *First,* community participation in the tree planting and maintenance process demonstrates that this waqf forest is managed with a collective generosity approach. The community is not positioned merely as beneficiaries but is actively involved in maintaining forest sustainability. *Second,* the harvest from productive crops is shared by the local village community. This model reflects Islamic philanthropy, which is not only charitable but also transformative, as it provides directly tangible economic benefits (Putri Wulan Sahab & Fadhil Jibran Permana, 2025).

Third, the YPM Waqf Forest provides green job opportunities and access to ecological education. The Waqf Forest School program, designed for students and the community, not only teaches the value of environmental conservation but also instills an awareness that protecting nature is part of worship. This aligns with the principles of Islamic philanthropy, which integrate social awareness with spiritual dimensions. By utilizing forests as a means of preaching and education, YPM has successfully developed a productive waqf model with a broader reach than traditional waqf.

Thus, the philanthropy within the YPM Waqf Forest lies not only in the provision of land as a charitable endowment, but also in its management system, which involves the community, provides economic benefits, strengthens social solidarity, and instills religious values through environmental education. This waqf forest demonstrates the ability of Islamic philanthropy to be implemented in innovative ways that address both ecological challenges and social needs.

Waqf Forests from an Environmental Conservation Perspective

The YPM Waqf Forest not only represents an instrument of Islamic philanthropy but also aligns with the concept of environmental conservation discussed in theoretical studies. Islam views humans as khalifah fil ardh (leaders on earth) with a moral and spiritual responsibility to preserve nature. This principle is enshrined in the Quran, particularly in Surah Al-A'raf, verse 56, which emphasizes the prohibition against causing damage to the earth after God has repaired it. Therefore, all efforts to maintain and reforest forests are part of practicing Islamic teachings in safeguarding the earth's trust.

An interview with Mr. Agus Sugiarto, Head of the YPM Waqf Forest Management, revealed that the waqf forest is projected as an ecological fortress for the surrounding community. According to him, planting conservation and productive trees not only improves air quality but also functions as a water balancer, minimizing the potential for flooding and landslides in the area (Sugiarto, 2025). This explanation aligns with field data showing that from 2020 to 2025, 5.265 trees of various species were planted across a 1,6 hectare area. Ecologically, these trees sequester carbon, maintain soil fertility, and preserve biodiversity within the waqf forest area.

With this waqf forest, Islam's role in environmental conservation is evident. Planting and caring for trees is not only an ecological act but also a form of worship with spiritual value. This emphasizes that the concept of khalifah fil ardh (vicegerent) does not stop at the normative level (Akbar, 2023), but is realized practically through environmentally based waqf management. Therefore, the YPM Waqf Forest can be positioned as a manifestation of the integration of religious teachings and modern conservation practices, while also serving as a concrete model for implementing the principle of balance (mīzān) in preserving the earth.

CONCLUSION

The utilization of the Waqf Forest of the Ma'arif Education and Social Foundation (YPM) in Mojokerto demonstrates that waqf can be an instrument of environmentally based Islamic philanthropy. Unlike traditional waqf, which tends to be

passive, this waqf forest is managed productively through a multi-strata agroforestry system that provides ecological, social, economic, and spiritual benefits.

Ecologically, the YPM Waqf Forest functions as a carbon sink, water protection, and biodiversity conservation. Field data shows that 5,265 trees have been planted across a 1.6-hectare area, which not only improves environmental quality but also plays a role in preventing flooding and erosion. Socially, the waqf forest strengthens community solidarity through collective participation in planting, maintenance, and harvest utilization. Economically, the presence of productive crops such as durian, coffee, and herbs adds value to community well-being.

The spiritual dimension also emphasizes the meaning of sustainable Islamic philanthropy. Waqf forests are a tangible manifestation of ongoing charity (al-mal jariyah) whose benefits continue to flow across generations, in line with Allah's commandment that humans act as khalifah fil ardh (vicegerents) who care for the earth (Quran, Al-A'raf: 56). Therefore, the YPM Waqf Forest can be positioned as a productive waqf model that not only addresses socio-economic needs but also provides solutions to environmental challenges.

Challenges still faced include limited management, funding, and community ecological awareness. Therefore, strengthening management capacity, diversifying funding sources, and providing ongoing education are crucial steps to optimize the role of waqf forests. If implemented consistently, the YPM Waqf Forest has the potential to become an inspiring example of environmentally-based Islamic philanthropy that can be replicated in various regions.

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