Environmental Development Communication and Social Impact from an Islamic Perspective

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Abstract. Many environmental development programs generate various social impacts, including social conflict, inequality, and low public awareness of environmental risks. These problems often arise due to weak development communication practices that are still dominated by top-down approaches and limited community participation. Therefore, effective development communication is needed to build public awareness, participation, and responsibility in environmental management. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with development practitioners, community members, religious leaders, and academics, supported by observation and literature review. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of communication in environmental development, the resulting social impacts, and the integration of Islamic values in development communication practices. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, techniques, and theoretical perspectives. The results show that weak and non-participatory development communication can increase social vulnerability, reduce community preparedness in facing environmental risks, and potentially create social tensions within communities. In contrast, communication that is participatory, dialogical, and transparent can strengthen public understanding, increase community involvement, and support the sustainability of environmental development programs. From an Islamic perspective, environmental development communication is not only a technical process of information dissemination but also a moral responsibility related to the human role as *khalifah fi al-ardh*.

Keywords: Development Communication, Environmental Development, Social Impact, Islamic Perspective.

1. Introduction

Environmental development has become a central issue in contemporary development discourse due to increasing environmental degradation and its social consequences (Bombiak, 2022; Keser et al., 2025; Lindawati et al., 2023; Shahzad & Miao, 2025). Sustainable development requires not only technological and economic solutions

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but also effective communication processes that encourage public participation and environmental awareness. Communication plays a crucial role in shaping community attitudes, values, and behaviors toward environmental sustainability. According to Howaldt et al. (2025), development communication is a planned process of social change that aims to improve the quality of life of communities through participation and collective action. In the context of environmental development, communication is expected to facilitate dialogue between governments, development actors, and communities so that development policies are socially accepted and environmentally responsible (Lee, 2024).

In the broader discourse of environmental communication, scholars emphasize that communication is not merely a tool for information dissemination but also a process that constructs public understanding of environmental issues. Cox (2010) explains that environmental communication functions both pragmatically and constitutively. Pragmatically, it helps solve environmental problems through education and public engagement, while constitutively it shapes how society interprets and responds to environmental challenges. Similarly, Servaes (2008) argues that development communication must be participatory and culturally sensitive to ensure that communities become active actors rather than passive recipients of development programs.

In practice, however, environmental development communication often fails to achieve these ideals. Many development initiatives are still dominated by top-down communication models that limit community participation and overlook local knowledge. As a result, development projects sometimes generate unintended social consequences such as conflicts over natural resources, social inequality, and declining trust in government institutions. These problems indicate that environmental development cannot rely solely on technical planning but must also consider social communication processes that build shared understanding and cooperation among stakeholders.

Empirical studies show that weak communication in development programs can significantly influence social outcomes. Research by Mefalopulos (2008) highlights that participatory communication strategies can increase community ownership and reduce resistance to development initiatives. Similarly, studies on environmental governance reveal that inclusive communication improves transparency, trust, and collaboration between policymakers and communities (Albitar et al., 2023; Bennett & Satterfield, 2018; Morrison et al., 2019; Salihi et al., 2024). These findings demonstrate that communication is a strategic element in achieving sustainable environmental development.

In addition, several studies have explored the relationship between communication and ethical values in development. For example, Yudaningsih et al. (2025) explains that environmental communication in Islamic contexts often incorporates religious values to encourage environmental responsibility and collective awareness. Other scholars also argue that religious perspectives can strengthen environmental ethics and motivate communities to protect nature as a moral obligation (Keong, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2025; Wardrope, 2019). These perspectives indicate that integrating ethical and cultural values into development communication can enhance its effectiveness.

Despite these contributions, previous studies tend to examine environmental communication, social impacts, or Islamic perspectives separately. Most research focuses either on the technical aspects of development communication or on normative religious teachings without integrating these dimensions into a comprehensive analytical framework. Consequently, there remains a limited understanding of how environmental

development communication interacts with social impacts while simultaneously being guided by Islamic ethical principles.

This gap highlights the importance of developing an integrative perspective that connects communication theory, social impact analysis, and Islamic ethical values. Such an approach is particularly relevant in Muslim-majority societies where religious values play a significant role in shaping public attitudes and behaviors. By incorporating Islamic principles such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *'adl* (justice), *shura* (deliberation), and *maslahah* (public welfare), environmental development communication can function not only as a technical instrument but also as a moral framework that guides sustainable and socially responsible development practices (Rafiki & Wahab, 2014).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze environmental development communication and its social impacts while examining these practices from an Islamic perspective. Specifically, the research seeks to explore how communication patterns influence social outcomes in environmental development and how Islamic ethical principles can provide a normative foundation for participatory and sustainable communication practices. Through this approach, the study contributes to the development of a more comprehensive framework for understanding environmental development communication in the context of social sustainability and Islamic values.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to explore environmental development communication and its social impacts from an Islamic perspective. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows researchers to understand complex social phenomena and communication processes within their real-life contexts. According to Creswell (2003), qualitative research is useful for exploring meanings, experiences, and interactions that shape social behavior. In this research, the case study method is used to analyze how communication practices in environmental development influence social dynamics within communities and how Islamic ethical values are reflected in these practices.

Data were collected through several techniques, namely in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants consisting of environmental development practitioners, community leaders, religious scholars, academics, and community members affected by environmental development programs. These interviews aimed to gather insights into communication practices, community participation, and the perceived social impacts of development activities. Field observations were conducted to directly examine communication interactions between development actors and community members during the implementation of environmental programs. In addition, document analysis was carried out by reviewing policy documents, program reports, and relevant academic literature related to development communication and environmental communication.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of environmental development communication, the resulting social impacts, and the integration of Islamic values within communication practices. The analysis followed several stages, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing as suggested by Ridder et al. (2014). To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, the study applied data triangulation, including triangulation of sources, methods, and theoretical perspectives. This process helps strengthen the reliability of the research

results and provides a comprehensive understanding of environmental development communication within its social and religious context.

Table 1 Research Method Procedure

Research Stage	Data Collection Technique	Data Sources	Purpose
Problem identification	Literature review	Books, journals, research reports	To understand theories of development communication and environmental communication
Field data collection	In-depth interviews	Development practitioners, religious leaders, academics, community members	To explore experiences and perceptions regarding environmental development communication
Field observation	Participatory observation	Environmental development activities and community interactions	To observe communication practices directly
Data analysis	Thematic analysis	Interview transcripts, observation notes, documents	To identify communication patterns and social impacts
Data validation	Triangulation of sources, methods, and theories	Informants, documents, academic literature	To ensure data credibility and reliability

Table 1 illustrates the main stages of the research process, beginning with problem identification and ending with data validation. The study initially conducted a literature review to establish a theoretical foundation related to development communication and environmental communication. Subsequently, field data were collected through in-depth interviews with various stakeholders involved in environmental development programs. Observations were also carried out to obtain direct insights into communication interactions between development actors and community members. The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of communication and the resulting social impacts. Finally, data validation was ensured through triangulation of sources, methods, and theoretical perspectives, which strengthens the credibility of the research findings and provides a comprehensive understanding of environmental development communication from both social and Islamic perspectives.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Environmental Development Communication Practices

Environmental development communication has become a critical component in ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of development programs. In theory, communication in development is expected to function as a participatory process that involves dialogue between development actors and the community. Lee (2024) explains that development communication should encourage community participation in planning,

implementation, and evaluation stages so that development outcomes reflect the needs and aspirations of society. However, in many contexts, environmental development communication still follows a top-down model, where government institutions or project implementers mainly disseminate information to communities without involving them in decision-making processes. This condition often reduces the sense of ownership among communities and limits the effectiveness of environmental initiatives.

Empirical data show that limited public participation remains a significant challenge in environmental development programs. According to the Kar (2023), only about 32% of environmental development projects in developing countries involve meaningful community participation in the planning stage. Similarly, a report by UNDP (2022) indicates that participatory communication mechanisms are still weak in many environmental governance programs, particularly in rural and disaster-prone areas. These findings suggest that the absence of inclusive communication processes often leads to low community engagement and limited awareness regarding environmental sustainability.

In Indonesia, similar patterns can also be observed. Research conducted Inocencio (2023) and Phuong et al. (2020) on community-based environmental development programs shows that many development initiatives still rely heavily on centralized decision-making processes. As a result, community participation is often limited to the implementation stage rather than the planning stage. Data from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of Indonesia (Adib et al., 2024; Nugroho et al., 2025) show that although more than 3,000 community-based environmental programs have been implemented across Indonesia, only about 45% of these programs involve community consultation during the planning phase. This situation demonstrates that communication practices in environmental development still require significant improvement to ensure broader public participation.

Field findings in this study also reveal similar communication patterns. Interviews with community members and local stakeholders indicate that information about environmental development programs is often delivered through one-way communication channels, such as official announcements, socialization meetings, or written notices. Approximately 60% of the interviewed participants reported that they received information about environmental development projects only after the implementation stage had already begun. Consequently, communities had limited opportunities to express their concerns or contribute their local knowledge during the planning process. This communication gap reduces public trust and weakens the sustainability of environmental development programs.

However, the study also finds that environmental development programs that implement participatory communication approaches tend to produce more positive outcomes. For example, community-based environmental initiatives that involve regular dialogue, consultation meetings, and collaborative planning processes show higher levels of public participation. Research by Servaes (2008) emphasizes that participatory communication increases community empowerment and strengthens collective responsibility in development programs. In addition, Cox (2010)argues that effective environmental communication not only disseminates information but also shapes environmental awareness and encourages social engagement in environmental protection efforts.

Furthermore, participatory environmental communication can enhance collaboration between development actors and communities. Programs that involve community

members in environmental monitoring, decision-making forums, and educational campaigns demonstrate stronger environmental awareness and collective action. For instance, a study by Davari et al. (2025) and Byrnes et al. (2023) on environmental communication for sustainable development found that projects incorporating participatory communication strategies experienced up to a 40% increase in community engagement and environmental stewardship activities. These findings highlight that effective environmental development communication should prioritize dialogue, transparency, and collaboration to achieve sustainable environmental outcomes.

Table 2 Patterns of Environmental Development Communication

Communication Aspect	Top-Down Communication	Participatory Communication
Community involvement	Limited involvement in planning	Active involvement in planning and decision making
Communication flow	One-way information dissemination	Two-way dialogue and consultation
Public awareness	Relatively low environmental awareness	Higher environmental awareness
Community trust	Lower trust in development programs	Higher trust and cooperation
Sustainability of programs	Often short-term or less effective	More sustainable and community supported

Table 2 illustrates two dominant patterns of environmental development communication, namely top-down communication and participatory communication. Top-down communication is characterized by one-way information dissemination from development actors to the community, resulting in limited community involvement and lower levels of public trust. In contrast, participatory communication emphasizes dialogue, consultation, and collaboration between stakeholders. This approach allows communities to contribute local knowledge and actively participate in environmental decision-making processes. As shown in the table, participatory communication tends to produce higher environmental awareness, stronger community trust, and more sustainable development outcomes. Therefore, improving communication practices toward a more participatory model is essential for achieving effective and socially inclusive environmental development.

3.2. Social Impacts of Environmental Development

Environmental development programs often generate significant social consequences, particularly when communication and participation mechanisms are weak. One of the most frequently reported impacts is the emergence of social tension and conflict related to natural resource management and development policies. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (Ivanova, 2007), approximately 40% of internal conflicts worldwide during the last six decades have been associated with disputes over natural resources, including land, water, forests, and minerals. In many cases, environmental development projects such as infrastructure expansion, land conversion, and natural resource exploitation affect the livelihoods of local communities, especially those dependent on agriculture, fisheries, or forest resources. When

communities perceive that their interests are ignored in the decision-making process, social resistance and conflicts tend to emerge.

In the Indonesian context, data from the Consortium for Agrarian Reform (Budiono et al., 2023) recorded 241 agrarian conflicts across Indonesia in 2022, affecting more than 87,000 households and approximately 710,000 hectares of land. Many of these conflicts were linked to environmental development activities such as plantation expansion, infrastructure development, and mining operations. Scholars argue that such conflicts often arise not only because of land ownership disputes but also because development communication fails to involve communities transparently (Budiono et al., 2023; Kannengießer, 2023). Without adequate consultation and dialogue, development policies are frequently perceived as unilateral decisions imposed by external actors.

Another significant social impact relates to community vulnerability and limited preparedness for environmental risks, particularly in disaster-prone regions. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDP, 2024), more than 3.6 billion people worldwide live in areas highly vulnerable to climate-related disasters. Effective risk communication plays a crucial role in preparing communities to face environmental threats such as floods, landslides, and extreme weather events. However, when communication regarding disaster mitigation and environmental management is weak, communities often lack the knowledge and preparedness needed to respond effectively to environmental hazards.

Indonesia also illustrates the importance of environmental communication in disaster preparedness. Data from the Indonesian National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB, 2023) show that over 3,500 natural disasters occurred in Indonesia in 2022, including floods, landslides, and storms. These disasters affected more than 6 million people, causing displacement, infrastructure damage, and economic losses. Studies on disaster risk communication indicate that communities with limited access to environmental information tend to experience higher levels of social vulnerability and slower recovery processes after disasters (Mefalopulos, 2008). This situation highlights the importance of effective communication in strengthening community resilience.

Despite these challenges, environmental development communication can also generate positive social impacts when implemented through participatory and transparent approaches. Research by Servaes (2008) demonstrates that participatory communication strategies increase community engagement and collective responsibility in development initiatives. Similarly, Cox (2010) argues that environmental communication has the capacity to shape public understanding of environmental issues and encourage collective environmental action. Communities that actively participate in environmental planning and monitoring processes tend to develop stronger environmental awareness and social cooperation.

Furthermore, participatory communication can improve social cohesion and community resilience in environmental management. Programs that incorporate dialogue forums, community education, and collaborative environmental initiatives often lead to stronger community networks and collective problem-solving capacities. A study conducted by the World Bank (2015) shows that environmental projects involving community participation can increase local environmental stewardship by up to 35–40%. These findings indicate that effective communication is not only a tool for information dissemination but also a strategic mechanism for strengthening social stability and sustainable environmental governance.

Table 3 Social Impacts of Environmental Development Communication

Social Impact Aspect	Weak Communication Approach	Participatory Communication Approach
Community involvement	Limited participation in planning and decision making	Active participation in consultation and decision making
Social conflict	Higher potential for conflict over land and natural resources	Reduced conflict due to transparent communication
Disaster preparedness	Low awareness and limited preparedness for environmental risks	Increased preparedness through environmental education
Social cohesion	Fragmented relationships between stakeholders	Stronger collaboration and community networks
Environmental responsibility	Low community engagement in environmental protection	Higher community participation in sustainability initiatives

Table 3 illustrates how different communication approaches influence the social impacts of environmental development. When development communication is weak and dominated by top-down information dissemination, communities tend to have limited participation in decision-making processes. This condition often results in social tension, limited environmental awareness, and low disaster preparedness. Conversely, participatory communication encourages dialogue, consultation, and transparency among stakeholders. Such an approach enables communities to contribute their knowledge and perspectives to environmental decision-making, thereby reducing potential conflicts and strengthening collective responsibility for environmental sustainability. As shown in the table, participatory communication not only improves environmental awareness but also enhances social cohesion and community resilience in responding to environmental challenges.

3.3. Islamic Ethical Perspective in Environmental Development Communication

The findings of this study also reveal that Islamic ethical values play an important role in shaping environmental responsibility and development communication practices within Muslim communities. In Islamic teachings, humans are entrusted with the role of *khalifah fi al-ardh*, meaning stewards of the earth responsible for maintaining environmental balance and social harmony. This concept is emphasized in the Qur'an (Sarah Dalila Fitri et al., 2024), which describes humanity as responsible for managing the earth in a just and responsible manner. Scholars argue that this concept forms the foundation of Islamic environmental ethics and encourages Muslims to treat environmental protection as both a moral and spiritual responsibility (Sholihin et al., 2024)

Islamic teachings also emphasize ethical principles that are highly relevant to development communication. One of these principles is *amanah* (trustworthiness), which refers to the responsibility to manage resources and authority with integrity. In the context of environmental development communication, *amanah* implies that development actors must convey information transparently and responsibly. Another important principle is *'adl* (justice), which requires fairness in decision-making and resource distribution. When environmental policies are developed without considering social

justice, marginalized communities often experience negative social impacts. Therefore, justice becomes a central ethical foundation in sustainable development practices (Haris et al., 2024).

The principle of shura (deliberation or consultation) also has significant implications for participatory development communication. Shura encourages collective discussion and decision-making processes that involve the community. This principle aligns closely with participatory communication theory, which emphasizes dialogue and community involvement in development programs. Studies on Islamic governance suggest that decision-making processes based on consultation tend to strengthen public trust and legitimacy in development initiatives (Rohman & Ibrahim, 2022). Through shura, environmental development policies can incorporate community perspectives and local knowledge more effectively.

Another important concept is *maslahah* (public welfare), which refers to the pursuit of collective benefit and the prevention of harm in society (Nisa et al., 2025). In environmental management, maslahah encourages policies that balance ecological sustainability, economic development, and social well-being. According to Suliswanto et al. (2024), the concept of *maslahah* plays a key role in Islamic economic and environmental ethics because it prioritizes long-term societal welfare over short-term interests. Integrating *maslahah* into development communication means that environmental policies should aim to benefit society broadly while protecting ecological balance.

Empirical studies also indicate that religious values can significantly influence environmental behavior. Research conducted by Arfian Suryasuciramdhan et al. (2024) found that religious teachings can motivate communities to adopt environmentally responsible behaviors and participate in conservation programs. In Muslim societies, environmental awareness campaigns that incorporate Islamic teachings have been shown to increase community engagement in environmental protection activities. These findings suggest that integrating religious values into environmental communication strategies can enhance both ethical awareness and practical environmental action.

Therefore, incorporating Islamic ethical values into environmental development communication strengthens both the moral and social dimensions of development practices. Communication that reflects principles such as *amanah, 'adl, shura*, and *maslahah* not only promotes transparency and fairness but also encourages collective responsibility for environmental stewardship. By integrating these ethical principles with participatory communication approaches, environmental development programs can achieve greater legitimacy, stronger community engagement, and more sustainable environmental outcomes.

Table 4 Islamic Ethical Principles in Environmental Development Communication

Islamic Ethical Principle	Meaning	Implication for Environmental Communication
Amanah	Trustworthiness and responsibility	Transparent communication and accountable resource management
'Adl	Justice and fairness	Inclusive policies that consider community rights
Shura	Deliberation and consultation	Participatory dialogue in environmental decision making

| *Maslahah* | Public welfare and collective benefit | Sustainable policies that protect environment and society |

Table 4 summarizes four major Islamic ethical principles that provide a normative foundation for environmental development communication. Each principle contributes to strengthening communication practices in development programs. Amanah emphasizes transparency and accountability, ensuring that environmental information is communicated honestly. *'Adl* ensures fairness in environmental decision-making and resource distribution. *Shura* promotes participatory dialogue between development actors and communities, which is essential for inclusive communication. Finally, *maslahah* highlights the importance of prioritizing collective welfare and environmental sustainability. Together, these principles form an ethical framework that supports participatory, responsible, and sustainable environmental development communication.

3.4. Integrating Development Communication Theory and Islamic Environmental Ethics

The findings of this study confirm that environmental development communication plays a crucial role in determining the social outcomes of development programs. The results show that weak communication and limited community participation tend to increase social tensions, reduce public trust, and weaken environmental awareness. These findings support the argument of Howaldt et al. (2025) who explains that development communication functions as a process that facilitates social change through the dissemination of information, innovation diffusion, and community participation. When communication processes are dominated by a top-down approach, communities often become passive recipients of development policies rather than active actors in development processes. Consequently, the lack of participatory communication may reduce the effectiveness and sustainability of environmental development programs.

The results of this study are also consistent with the participatory communication model proposed by Servaes (2008). Servaes argues that development communication should emphasize dialogue, participation, and empowerment rather than one-way information transfer. In this research, communities that were involved in consultation meetings and participatory discussions demonstrated higher levels of environmental awareness and stronger engagement in environmental protection activities. This finding reinforces Servaes' perspective that participatory communication enables communities to share local knowledge, identify environmental challenges, and develop collective solutions that are more sustainable.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the relationship between environmental communication and social conflict related to natural resource management. Environmental development projects that neglect community consultation often lead to tensions between development actors and local communities. This observation is consistent with the analysis of Cox (2010), who states that environmental communication plays both a pragmatic and constitutive role. Pragmatically, communication can facilitate environmental problem-solving through education and public engagement. Constitutively, communication shapes the way society perceives environmental issues and development policies. When communication fails to involve communities transparently, environmental policies may be interpreted as threats to local livelihoods, thereby increasing the likelihood of social resistance.

Another important aspect identified in this research is the relationship between communication and community resilience in facing environmental risks. The study

indicates that weak communication regarding environmental risks and disaster mitigation reduces community preparedness. This finding aligns with the perspective of Mefalopulos (2008) who emphasizes that development communication is essential in building public awareness and strengthening community capacity to respond to environmental challenges. Through effective communication strategies, communities can better understand environmental risks, adopt preventive behaviors, and participate in collective disaster preparedness efforts.

In addition, the findings demonstrate that integrating ethical values into environmental communication can enhance the effectiveness of development programs. In Muslim communities, Islamic ethical principles such as *amanah, 'adl, shura*, and *maslahah* provide a strong normative foundation for participatory communication practices. This result is consistent with the argument of Muhajirin et al. (2025) who explain that Islamic teachings emphasize environmental stewardship and social responsibility as part of human duties as khalifah on earth. These ethical principles encourage transparency, justice, and collective participation in environmental governance, which are essential for sustainable development.

The findings of this study suggest that environmental development communication should not be understood merely as a technical instrument for disseminating information. Instead, communication must be viewed as a strategic and ethical process that shapes social relationships, environmental awareness, and community participation. Integrating participatory communication theories with ethical frameworks such as Islamic environmental ethics can strengthen the effectiveness of development programs and promote more sustainable environmental governance. Therefore, development actors should prioritize inclusive communication strategies that involve communities as active partners in environmental decision-making processes.

4. Conclusion

This study examined environmental development communication and its social impacts while incorporating an Islamic ethical perspective. The findings indicate that communication plays a fundamental role in shaping community participation, environmental awareness, and the sustainability of development programs. In many cases, environmental development communication still follows a top-down approach where information is mainly disseminated by development actors without sufficient community involvement in planning and decision-making processes. As a result, communities often experience limited participation and reduced ownership of environmental programs. However, the findings also show that participatory communication practices involving dialogue, consultation, and collaboration significantly improve community engagement and environmental awareness.

The discussion of the findings confirms the relevance of several theoretical perspectives in development communication. The results support Rogers' theory of development communication, which emphasizes communication as a driver of social change through participation and information exchange. The findings also align with Servaes' participatory communication model that highlights dialogue and community empowerment as essential elements of sustainable development. In addition, the study confirms Cox's environmental communication framework, which explains that communication not only delivers information but also shapes public understanding and responses to environmental issues. Integrating these theoretical perspectives with Islamic

ethical principles such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *'adl* (justice), *shura* (deliberation), and *maslahah* (public welfare) strengthens the moral and social foundations of environmental development communication.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. The research relies primarily on qualitative data from a limited number of informants, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research is therefore encouraged to employ mixed-method approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative analysis to provide a broader understanding of environmental development communication practices. In addition, further studies could explore comparative perspectives across different socio-cultural contexts and examine the role of digital communication platforms in promoting community participation and environmental awareness in sustainable development initiatives.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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