
**RECONSTRUCTION OF GORONTALO CUSTOMARY ECOPHILOSOPHY:
CRITIQUE OF DEVELOPMENT ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND
REVITALIZATION OF LOCAL WISDOM IN ECOLOGICAL DISASTER
MITIGATION****Fadly Umadji¹, Mohamad Safaat², Usman Pakaya³**Gorontalo State University¹, University of Bina Mandiri Gorontalo², Gorontalo State University³Email : fadlyumadji@gmail.com¹, mohamadsafaat26@gmail.com², utenusman22@gmail.com³

Keywords:Environmental
Philosophy,
Gorontalo, Indigenous
Wisdom,
Anthropocentrism,
Khalifah, Ecological
Disaster.**ABSTRACT**

The ongoing environmental crisis, characterized by an increasing frequency of hydro-meteorological disasters and massive land conversion in Gorontalo, indicates a fundamental failure of the development paradigm dominated by instrumental anthropocentrism. This ethic ontologically reduces nature to an object of exploitation, contradicting the principles of sustainability. This research aims to philosophically examine the ethical framework of Gorontalo's indigenous wisdom as an alternative for ecological disaster mitigation and to reconstruct an ethical relationship between humans and forests. Using a qualitative method with a critical philosophical analysis approach and a comparative literature study against empirical disaster data in Gorontalo, it was found that Gorontalo's Indigenous Environmental Philosophy is based on Theocentrism as encapsulated in the Adati Hula-hula'a To Sara'a philosophy. This concept positions humans as Khalifah (trustees) who are obligated to maintain mizan (ecological balance), rejecting the claims of absolute ownership central to Anthropocentrism. Indigenous wisdom, such as the Molapo tradition and the Payu Limo lo Lipu principle, functionally represent a form of Practical Ecocentrism that provides moral boundaries (an ethic of self-restraint) and customary spatial regulation. The failure of disaster mitigation in Gorontalo stems from ethical decadence and the abandonment of customary authority for short-term economic interests. Therefore, this study recommends the philosophical reconstruction of regional policies by integrating the Indigenous Theocentric Ethic as the ontological basis for regulation. Revitalization of customary authority to enforce Molapo is necessary to restore the integrity of the upstream ecosystem and achieve sustainable, culturally-based disaster mitigation.

INTRODUCTION

The ecological crisis, manifested in hydrometeorological disasters, has become a real and recurring threat in Indonesia, with Gorontalo Province among the most affected areas. In the past five years (2020–2025), Gorontalo has consistently reported an increase in the frequency and intensity of flash floods and landslides, damaging infrastructure, disrupting economic life, and claiming lives, particularly in the areas around Lake Limboto and its watersheds (BNPB, 2024).

These recurring disasters, which should be mitigated through strict spatial planning, are instead exacerbated by exploitative development practices. Data shows a strong correlation between the increase in disasters and high rates of deforestation and land use

change. According to data from the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI) Gorontalo (2023), the focus of development on monocultures, such as the expansion of corn fields, has led to significant degradation of protected forests in the upstream area, eliminating their function as buffers and natural water absorbers. This expansion is a direct reflection of an economic paradigm dominated by instrumental anthropocentrism (Keraf, 2024). This ethic views nature—including Gorontalo's unique landscape—as merely a resource without intrinsic value that can be depleted for immediate economic gain. As a result, forests are converted into commodities, and their impact, which can result in ecological disasters, is considered a negligible risk.

Although technical and structural disaster mitigation interventions have been implemented, their continued failure suggests that the root cause is an ethical and ontological crisis. Modern policies tend to ignore local value systems that have proven effective in maintaining ecological balance. Numerous literature indicates that indigenous communities in Indonesia possess profound environmental philosophies, often grounded in Theocentrism or Ecocentrism, which emphasize harmony (Syafrudin & Susanto, 2022). Therefore, a shift in focus is needed from simply mitigating the impacts of disasters to analyzing the philosophical roots underlying environmental destruction.

The originality of this research lies in its attempt to conduct a critical philosophical analysis of Gorontalo traditional ethics, centered on the fundamental concept of *Adati Hula-hula'a To Sara'a* and the practice of *Molapo*. Our goal is to demonstrate that this local wisdom substantially rejects the logic of anthropocentrism and can be reconstructed as a strong ontological and ethical basis for sustainable ecological disaster mitigation in Gorontalo.

Based on the urgency of disaster data and the ethical vacuum mentioned above, this research aims to:

1. Critically analyze the failure of Anthropocentric development ethics, which is at the root of the ecological disaster crisis in Gorontalo.
2. Explore and reconstruct the concepts of Gorontalo Traditional Ecophilosophy as an alternative to ethics based on Theocentrism/Ecocentrism.
3. Offer a model for revitalizing local wisdom as an ontological basis for formulating sustainable disaster mitigation policies.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This research is qualitative in nature, employing a philosophical-critical approach to examine the shift in environmental paradigms in Gorontalo. The methodology is structured through the following stages:

1. Data Collection and Sources

The data utilized in this study consist of primary and secondary sources:

- a. Primary Philosophical Sources: These include local wisdom concepts embodied in the *Adati Hula-hula'a To Sara'a* philosophy, the *Payu Limo lo Lipu* principles, and the *Molapo* tradition, obtained through a review of regional customary documents and previous ethnographic studies.
- b. Secondary Empirical Data: To ground the philosophical analysis, this study

incorporates disaster reports from the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB, 2020–2024), land conversion data from WALHI Gorontalo, and environmental statistics from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS).

2. Philosophical Approach

To analyze the "Reconstruction of Ecophilosophy," three analytical lenses are applied:

- a. Ontological Analysis: Used to identify the fundamental nature of the human-forest relationship in both the Western Anthropocentric model and the Gorontalo Theocentric model.
- b. Ethical Critique: Using the framework of *Environmental Ethics* (referencing Arne Naess's Deep Ecology and Keraf's Ethics), the research critiques the instrumental treatment of nature in Gorontalo's development policies.
- c. Hermeneutics: This method is employed to interpret the symbolic meanings of traditional practices (e.g., *Molapo* and *Sombaon*) and translate them into modern regulatory concepts.

3. Data Analysis Technique

The analysis follows a dialectical procedure:

- a. Thesis: The current Anthropocentric development paradigm in Gorontalo.
- b. Antithesis: The ecological crisis and the marginalized indigenous wisdom (*Theocentrism*).
- c. Synthesis: The reconstruction of a new ethical framework that integrates indigenous ecological values into sustainable regional disaster mitigation policies.

IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Development Anthropocentrism and Gorontalo's Ecological Emergency

The recurring hydrometeorological disaster crisis in Gorontalo Province, characterized by annual flooding in the downstream areas and around Lake Limboto (BNPB, 2024), is not simply a matter of geographical fate. These disasters are the logical consequence of adopting a development ethic dominated by instrumental anthropocentrism. This ethic ontologically places humans at the center of universal values, reducing nature—including forests and watersheds—to passive objects valued solely on their exploitative potential for economic gain (Keraf, 2024). This view provides moral license for unlimited exploitation.

a. Forest Corporatization and Land Conversion as Manifestations of Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism in Gorontalo is concretely manifested in policies to accelerate the monoculture sector, particularly the massive expansion of corn fields, as well as large-scale mining projects. Data from the [Central Statistics Agency and the Gorontalo Agriculture Service, 2024] shows that over the past five years, there has been an increase in the conversion of forest land to agricultural areas, amounting to 15% of total forest cover, with a focus on corn plantations on steep slopes. WALHI Gorontalo (2023) specifically noted that corn field expansion often encroaches on areas that should function as protected forests upstream. This expansion in critical

areas eliminates the forest's ecological function as an erosion barrier and natural water reservoir.

Philosophically, this practice affirms Absolute Anthropocentrism. Gorontalo's forests, which are essentially the web of life, are positioned solely as reserve capital that must be sacrificed to meet human food and commodity market needs. There is no ethical consideration of the ecosystem's right to exist or the intrinsic value of the forest itself; forests are viewed as land that can be converted. This paradigm completely ignores the laws of ecology, placing human interests above the balance of the biosphere.

b. Disasters as Ethical Consequences (Facade)

The impact of this land conversion is clearly visible in data from the Gorontalo National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) (2024), which confirms that every year during the rainy season, there is a drastic increase in river overflows, causing flooding in lowland areas. From an environmental philosophy perspective, this flood disaster is not simply a technical failure, but rather an ecological punishment or logical consequence of human actions (facade) that violate the mizan (balance). The failure of structural mitigation indicates that what must be reformed is not infrastructure, but rather the worldview (Weltanschauung) of society and policymakers towards nature. The ecological crisis is a reflection of an ethical crisis.

2. Gorontalo Customary Ecophilosophy: Humans as Caliphs and the Traditional Principle of Hula-hula'a To Sara'a

To counter the destructive dominance of Anthropocentrism, a paradigm shift is needed to a deeper local Gorontalo philosophical foundation, namely Ecophilosophy centered on Theocentrism.

a. Theocentric Foundation: The Ethics of the Caliph and the Mizan

The Gorontalo people's philosophy of life, Adati Hula-hula'a To Sara'a, Sara'a Hula-hula'a To Kitabullah, provides a firm ontological foundation for the relationship between humans and nature. In the context of Sara'a (Islamic Sharia), humans are positioned as Caliphs (representatives or managers), not Maliks (absolute owners) (Al-Jufri, 2022). The Caliph's mandate is to maintain the mizan (balance, justice, and order) of the universe.

Rejection of Anthropocentrism: The concept of the Caliphate philosophically rejects the Anthropocentric claim that humans are free to exploit nature. Its duty is conservation. Violations of the mizan, such as deforestation that causes catastrophic flooding and erosion, are violations of the Sara'a mandate itself—an ethical sin with dual consequences: spiritual punishment and ecological collapse. The intrinsic value of nature is recognized because it is a manifestation of divine majesty, not because of its mere functional utility.

b. The Principles of Payu Limo lo Lipu and the Ethics of Limiting Use

The philosophy of Payu Limo lo Lipu (Five Principles of the Nation), particularly the pillar of Lipu' Pe'hulalo (Glorified Nation), emphasizes the necessity of honoring land and territory. This principle philosophically limits economic greed.

Ethics of Communal Ownership: Forest and land management in Gorontalo is traditionally governed by customary mechanisms with communal principles and use rights, which differ from the concept of absolute individual ownership adopted by the modern capitalist system. This principle serves to limit excessive accumulation and exploitation, ensuring that environmental sustainability is a communal priority, not private gain. This emphasizes that environmental ethics in Gorontalo must be collective and theocentric, rather than individualistic and anthropocentric.

3. Implementation of Practical Ecocentrism: Revitalizing Local Wisdom in Mitigation

Gorontalo's ecophilosophy is not merely a spiritual discourse, but is implemented through customary mechanisms that function as a non-structural disaster mitigation system.

a. Molapo: Anti-Exploitation and Self-Control Wisdom

Molapo is a tradition of tending gardens or fields based on the principles of boundaries and maintaining a spiritual connection with nature. Philosophical analysis shows that Molapo functions as a tool of Practical Ecocentrism that challenges the destructive logic of development:

Anti-Greed: Molapo teaches that resource utilization must be sufficient and measured, contrary to the logic of anthropocentrism, which demands unlimited maximum production (corn expansion). It is an ethic of self-control against market-driven exploitation (Syafudin & Susanto, 2022).

Customary Conservation Zones: Customary systems have functionally established no-exploitation zones (such as sombaon or sacred areas) in river headwaters. These zones, protected by taboo and spiritual values, ecologically constitute customary protected forests essential for maintaining water flow and preventing erosion. Thus, this wisdom is a disaster mitigation mechanism based on the recognition of the ecological and spiritual value of forests.

b. Ethical Decadence and the Collapse of Customary Authority

The ongoing ecological disasters in Gorontalo are evidence of ethical decadence, where the customary system and authority of the Adati Hula-hula'a To Sara'a have been undermined by market laws and weak bureaucracy. Husain & Makmur (2023) highlight that the weakening of Gorontalo's customary institutions has erased the moral boundaries of Molapo.

Argument: When communities ignore customary prohibitions for the short-term benefit of corn monoculture, they have philosophically chosen Anthropocentrism over Theocentrism. The failure of disaster mitigation lies in the failure to maintain a local ethical system that prohibits overexploitation, proving that disasters are the result of poor moral choices.

4. Philosophical Reconstruction and Implications for Sustainable Policy

To achieve sustainability and mitigate disasters in Gorontalo, a philosophical reconstruction must be undertaken that restores the essence of human-forest relations to the framework of Indigenous Theocentrism.

a. Ethical Paradigm Transition

An ethical transition is needed from economic anthropocentrism to practical theocentrism rooted in custom. This demands that every development policy be examined through an ethical lens: Does this action violate the Caliph's mandate and damage the Mizan? If a project (such as the expansion of corn fields upstream) is scientifically proven to damage the Mizan, then ethically (Sara'a) the project must be stopped.

b. Revitalizing Customary Law as the Basis for Environmental Regulation

Disaster mitigation must integrate local wisdom substantively, not merely symbolically. This implementation includes:

Strengthening Customary Institutions: Customary authority must be restored to determine no-exploitation zones and enforce customary/sharia sanctions against Molapo violators. This regulation serves as an ethical deterrent, stronger than government regulation alone.

Policy Basis: Regional regulations (Perda) related to environmental management must explicitly base themselves on the principles of Payu Limo lo Lipu (especially Lipu' Pe'hulalo) as a philosophical foundation. This will ensure that the upliftment of the land and ecosystem protection take precedence over financial gain.

CONCLUSION

The ongoing ecological disaster crisis plaguing Gorontalo Province, empirically proven to be correlated with the massive conversion of upstream forest land for monoculture and mining (BNPB, 2024; WALHI Gorontalo, 2023), is a clear manifestation of the failure of development ethics. Philosophical analysis shows that this failure is rooted in the dominance of Instrumental Anthropocentrism, which reduces forests to mere economic objects, ignoring the intrinsic value of nature.

This research confirms the existence of a strong and potent environmental ethical framework within Gorontalo traditional philosophy, namely Theocentric Ecophilosophy, based on Adati Hula-hula'a To Sara'a, Sara'a Hula-hula'a To Kitabullah. In this view, humans play the role of caliphs responsible for maintaining the balance of nature, not as exploitative owners (Al-Jufri, 2022). This concept fundamentally rejects Anthropocentrism.

In practice, local wisdom such as the Molapo tradition and the Payu Limo lo Lipu principles (particularly Lipu' Pe'hulalo) function as mechanisms of Practical Ecocentrism. Molapo teaches an ethic of self-control (sufficiency) against market-driven greed, while also establishing customary spatial boundaries (zona sombaon), which are functionally equivalent to conservation.

Disaster management failures stem from ethical decadence and the neglect of these customary systems for short-term economic interests (Husain & Makmur, 2023). Therefore, a philosophical reconstruction is needed to restore Indigenous Theocentric Ethics as the ontological foundation of environmental policy. A sustainable solution for Gorontalo is the revitalization of customary authority to enforce Molapo and the integration of the Payu Limo lo Lipu Principles into formal regulations, ensuring that sustainable development is also ethically sustainable.

Suggestions**Policy Recommendations (Philosophical and Practical Implications)**

1. Strengthening the Ontological Basis of Policy: The Gorontalo Regional Government must revise its Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW) to incorporate Adati Hula-hula'a To Sara'a as the philosophical foundation for forest and land management. The policy must explicitly prohibit land conversion in upstream areas that violate the Mizan principle and damage ecological functions as disaster buffers.
2. Ethical Transition of Development: Encourage a transition from development based on economic Anthropocentrism to development based on Practical Theocentrism. Every development project must undergo an ethical compliance test (Khalifah and Mizan tests) in addition to an economic feasibility test.
3. Strengthening Local Institutions: Reinforce the role of Gorontalo's customary institutions by providing formal legal authority to oversee forest utilization and enforce customary sanctions against Molapo violators, so that local wisdom becomes not merely discourse, but law that is obeyed.

Academic Suggestions and Further Research

1. Comparative Study: Further comparative empirical studies are needed to examine the effectiveness of Molapo-based forest management compared to modern forestry systems in preventing ecological disasters, using erosion and water management indicators.
2. Environmental Education: Integrating Gorontalo's Indigenous Ecophilosophy (Sara'a and Molapo) into formal and non-formal education curricula to foster collective ethical awareness from an early age.

REFERENCES

- Al-Jufri, H. (2022). Filsafat Lingkungan Islam: Etika Khalifah dan Konsep Mizan dalam Pembangunan Berkelanjutan. *Jurnal Studi Agama dan Masyarakat*, 18(1), 45-60.
- Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana (BNPB). (2024). Laporan Tren Bencana Hidrometeorologi Tahun 2020-2024 di Sulawesi: Studi Kasus Gorontalo.
- Husain, F., & Makmur, M. (2023). Dekadensi Adat dan Dampaknya terhadap Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Alam di Gorontalo. *Jurnal Hukum Adat*, 15(3), 110-125.
- Keraf, S. A. (2024). *Etika Lingkungan Hidup (Revisi dan Pemutakhiran)*. Jakarta: Penerbit Kompas.
- Leopold, A. (2023). *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There (Edisi Baru)*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Naess, A., & Sessions, G. (1995). *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, Publisher.
- Sartika, N. (2024). Analisis Spasial Kerentanan Bencana Banjir dan Longsor di Wilayah Hulu Sungai Provinsi Gorontalo. *Jurnal Geografi Indonesia*, 8(1), 12-25.

Syafrudin, M., & Susanto, R. (2022). Ekosentrisme Praktis dalam Kearifan Lokal Indonesia: Tinjauan Filosofis terhadap Hubungan Manusia dan Alam. *Jurnal Filsafat*, 32(2), 205-220.

Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI) Gorontalo. (2023). Jejak Alih Fungsi Lahan dan Dampaknya terhadap Kerusakan Lingkungan di Gorontalo: Kasus Ekspansi Pertanian Monokultur.