THE CONFLICT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CORRUPTION

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigates the complex relationship between environmental conservation and corruption, particularly focusing on how corrupt practices such as bribery undermine efforts to protect biodiversity, climate, and species survival in Malaysia. Despite the universal religious condemnation of corruption, it remains rampant, fueled by greed and often inadequately addressed by legal systems.

Method: Through an extensive literature review of journal articles, conference proceedings, books, and online sources, this paper illustrates specific cases where corruption has directly led to environmental degradation.

Research Findings and Discussions: The findings underscore the need for robust anti-corruption strategies that are informed by both environmental science and ethical considerations to effectively safeguard natural ecosystems. Research Implications: This study can help everyone realize that every negative activity, no matter how minor, has a significant influence on the ecosystem, which needs to be protected.

Originality/Value: Public awareness of the perils of corruption and its consequences for the environment is raised by this research. This explains why it is against religious law to engage in corruption and the need for numerous reforms to end this corrupt behaviour.

Keywords: Environmental Sustainability, Nature Conservation, Corruption Dynamics, Islamic Environmental Ethics, Asian Case Studies.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: Este estudo investiga a complexa relação entre a conservação ambiental e a corrupção, concentrando-se particularmente na forma como as práticas corruptas, como o suborno, prejudicam os esforços para proteger a biodiversidade, o clima e a sobrevivência das espécies na Malásia. Apesar da condenação religiosa universal da corrupção, esta continua a ser desenfreada, alimentada pela ganância e muitas vezes abordada de forma inadequada pelos sistemas jurídicos.

Método: Através de uma extensa revisão da literatura de artigos de revistas, anais de conferências, livros e fontes online, este artigo ilustra casos específicos em que a corrupção levou diretamente à degradação ambiental.

Resultados e discussões da investigação: Os resultados sublinham a necessidade de estratégias anticorrupção robustas que sejam informadas tanto pela ciência ambiental como por considerações éticas para salvaguardar eficazmente os ecossistemas naturais. Implicações de investigação: Este estudo pode ajudar todos a perceber que cada actividade negativa, por menor que seja, tem uma influência significativa no ecossistema, que precisa de ser protegido.

Originalidade/Valor: A consciência pública sobre os perigos da corrupção e as suas consequências para o ambiente é despertada por esta investigação. Isto explica por que é contra a lei religiosa envolver-se em corrupção e a necessidade de numerosas reformas para acabar com este comportamento corrupto.


EL CONFLICTO DE SOSTENIBILIDAD AMBIENTAL Y CORRUPCIÓN

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Este estudio investiga la compleja relación entre la conservación ambiental y la corrupción, enfocándose particularmente en cómo las prácticas corruptas como el soborno socavan los esfuerzos para proteger la biodiversidad, el clima y la supervivencia de las especies en Malasia. A pesar de la condena religiosa universal de la corrupción, ésta sigue siendo rampante, alimentada por la codicia y, a menudo, no abordada adecuadamente por los sistemas legales.

Método: A través de una extensa revisión bibliográfica de artículos de revistas, actas de congresos, libros y fuentes en línea, este artículo ilustra casos específicos en los que la corrupción ha conducido directamente a la degradación ambiental.

Hallazgos y debates de la investigación: Los hallazgos subrayan la necesidad de estrategias anticorrupción sólidas que se basen tanto en la ciencia ambiental como en consideraciones éticas para salvaguardar eficazmente los ecossistemas naturales. Implicaciones de la investigación: Este estudio puede ayudar a todos a darse cuenta de que cada actividad negativa, por menor que sea, tiene una influencia significativa en el ecosistema, que debe protegerse.

Originalidad/Valor: Esta investigación genera conciencia pública sobre los peligros de la corrupción y sus consecuencias para el medio ambiente. Esto explica por qué va contra la ley religiosa involucrarse en la corrupción y la necesidad de numerosas reformas para poner fin a este comportamiento corrupto.

Palabras clave: Sostenibilidad Ambiental, Conservación de la Naturaleza, Dinámica de la Corrupción, Ética Ambiental Islámica, Estudios de Casos Asiáticos.
INTRODUCTION

Nature, in all its vast diversity from the microscopic organisms to the majestic ecosystems, is a divine creation intended for the sustenance and well-being of all earth's inhabitants. Each element of the natural world, whether visible or hidden, carries inherent rights and is crucial for the health and survival of numerous species. This universal recognition is echoed across various religious doctrines, which unanimously encourage humans to cherish and preserve the environment's sanctity and purity (Okyere-Manu et al., 2022).

Religious teachings worldwide robustly advocate for environmental stewardship, proclaiming that humans are the custodians of the Earth. These doctrines articulate a shared ethical duty to protect nature, profoundly shaping cultural attitudes towards environmental conservation. For example, in Islam, the Quran frequently emphasizes the importance of maintaining the natural balance and respecting all life forms, a principle that resonates with similar teachings in Christianity and Buddhism.

Contrary to these teachings, human actions often lead to significant environmental harm. The extensive pollution of air, water, and soil starkly illustrates this neglect (Akhbari & Nejati, 2019; Sinha et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Industrial activities, unchecked urban development, and agricultural runoff contribute to a cycle of degradation that disrupts ecosystems and threatens species survival across the globe. This pattern of exploitation casts a long shadow over our ethical commitments to the planet.

This degradation is often exacerbated by corruption within key environmental governance bodies. For instance, bribery in regulatory agencies can lead to lax enforcement of pollution controls, resulting in severe environmental and public health disasters (Iheanachor et al., 2023; Akhbari & Nejati, 2019; Zhang et al., 2016). Such corruption directly undermines the integrity of policies meant to protect ecosystems, leading to widespread ecological damage and loss of biodiversity.

Leadership roles, particularly those in power, are crucial in combating or contributing to environmental corruption. High-ranking officials and policymakers sometimes abuse their positions for personal gain, neglecting their duty to enforce environmental protections (Hassan, 2021; Mian Yie & Abd. Rahman, 2018). This issue is prevalent in both affluent and developing nations, though the specific challenges and outcomes may vary, reflecting broader systemic governance issues.

Such failures in governance render environmental protection efforts ineffective.
Mismanagement leads to overexploitation of natural resources, habitat destruction, and widespread species extinction (Gandar, 2020). These issues are particularly acute in regions with rich biodiversity but weak regulatory frameworks, where corruption has a more pronounced impact on environmental degradation.

In tackling these challenges, different regions have adopted varied approaches. Many Western countries have stringent laws treating environmental corruption as a serious criminal offense, leading to robust legal proceedings against violators. However, in many developing countries, where corruption is more systemic, these legal frameworks are often insufficient to combat the pervasive issues effectively (Yan & Graycar, 2020; Graycar, 2016).

Nevertheless, global initiatives continue to fight corruption with a mix of international treaties, national policies, and grassroots campaigns aimed at fostering integrity and accountability in resource management. These efforts are vital for maintaining ecological balance and ensuring the sustainable use of the planet's resources. They highlight the need for a unified approach to governance that integrates ethical management with environmental conservation.

This article delves into these intricate dynamics, exploring how corruption intersects with environmental sustainability, with a focus on Islamic teachings and the context within Malaysia. Detailed case studies will illustrate the devastating impact of corrupt practices on the environment and propose effective strategies for enhancing governance transparency and accountability. Through this analysis, we aim to contribute to a more ethical and sustainable future.

2 METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach to delve into the nuanced interplay between environmental sustainability and corruption. By utilizing methods of documentation and observation, the study analyzes a variety of sources including policy documents, legislative texts, scholarly articles, and case studies relevant to Malaysia. This methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of how Islamic teachings and cultural contexts influence practices of corruption and environmental management.
3 LITERATURE REVIEW

In Arabic, the concept of "nature" is encapsulated in the term "al-ālam," which is broadly defined as the entirety of creation. This word is derived from the root "alm," meaning "sign," highlighting nature as a symbol of divine craftsmanship. The plural form of al-ālam is al-ālamūn. Its synonymous term, "alkhalq," also translates to "creation," further emphasizing the comprehensive scope of what nature encompasses.

Esteemed Islamic scholar Al-Ghazālī elaborates on this by defining nature as everything that exists ('maujud') apart from Allah SWT, portraying it as a vast tapestry of existence, all of which points back to its Creator (Al-Ghazali, 1988). This view aligns with the Qur'anic perspective, where nature is explicitly described as a creation of Allah SWT. This is articulated in Surah Al-Hajj (22:64), where it is stated:

لَّهُۥ مَا فِي ٱلسَّمََٰوََٰتِ وَمَا فِي ٱلۡأَرأضِِۚ وَإِنَّ ٱللَََّّ لَهُوَ ٱلأَغَنِيُّ ٱلأحَمِيدُ٥٤
Meaning: All that is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him and indeed Allah, He is also the Most Rich, the Most Praiseworthy.

From a scientific perspective, "nature" encompasses all that surrounds us and contributes to our environment, creating a unique atmosphere and setting (Mustafar et. al., 2020). This includes the biosphere, the earth itself, various ecosystems, and the natural resources essential for life, which together form the earth's environment and its airspace (Hasan, 2018). Importantly, these elements of nature are integral to human life and are interconnected with all creatures as created by Allah SWT ('Imaaduddin, A. H., & Noor Shakirah, 2016).

The Quran extensively discusses the universe, including natural phenomena such as the sun, stars, the life-sustaining systems of the earth, flora and fauna, and fundamental ecological processes like the water cycle and the maintenance of ecological balance. From an Islamic viewpoint, the natural world is seen as a comprehensive manifestation of Allah’s creations, categorized into different groups: humans, animals, plants, and minerals (Harris, 2022). The conservation of this natural environment is a significant duty for Muslims, underscored by the belief that Allah SWT designed the universe to reflect His greatness and appointed humans as stewards ('khalifah') on earth (Foltz, 2003).

Scholar R. Rizk emphasizes that Islam mandates its followers to protect and preserve the natural environment. This protection includes a wide range of responsibilities, from educating individuals about the value of all living beings to actively preventing
environmental damage through actions like avoiding deforestation and the irresponsible use of harmful chemicals, which are viewed as contrary to Islamic principles (R. Rizk, 2014).

Furthermore, Islam has a clear stance against corruption, including bribery, viewing it as a grave sin. The Quran and Hadith reinforce this prohibition; for example, Surah Al-Baqarah (188) explicitly condemns the act of consuming wealth through dishonest means as a corruption that undermines societal justice:

وَلَّتَ أَتََّكُلُوٓاْ أَمَوََٰلَكُم بِالَّٰبَطِلِ وَتُعَذَّبَنَّكُم بِهَآ إِلَى ٱلَّٰهِينَ لِتَأَتََّكُلُوٓاْ فَرِيقٗا مِن أَمَوََٰلِ ٱلَّٰهِينَ وَأَنتُمْ لَتَعْلَمُونَ

Meaning: And let not some of you eat of the wealth of others among you by means of unlawful means and (let not) you bring (the affairs) of the property to the judge, so that you may eat some of the property of others by (committing) sin, while you know.

This principle is underscored by the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), as narrated by Abu Hurairah RA, which explicitly states the severe consequences of corruption:

لعنةُ اللهِ على الرَّاشٰي و المُرتشي في الحكم

Meaning: Allah curses the giver and receiver of corruption in a ruling. (Narrated by Tarmizi and Ahmad).

Such a directive makes it unequivocally clear that for Muslims, engaging in bribery in any form is forbidden, underlined by its association with grave injustices and the unlawful appropriation of rights.

According to the esteemed Islamic scholar Al-Qardhawi, corruption is broadly defined as the illicit acquisition of another's property by deceitful means (Qaradhawi, 2007). This often manifests in scenarios where individuals bribe officials to secure favorable judgments, thereby undermining the legal and moral foundations of society. Al-Qardhawi emphasizes that such acts not only contravene Islamic doctrine but also erode the very identity and integrity of the person involved.

The fight against corruption is comprehensive, requiring active participation from all sectors of society, including individuals, communities, and governments. By fostering a culture of justice, integrity, and professionalism, it is possible to mitigate the harmful effects of corrupt practices. Islam advocates for balanced progress and cautions against unbridled development that may lead to environmental degradation.

Sustainability is a core component of this balance, essential for maintaining ecological equilibrium. It emphasizes not just economic advancement but also the imperative to preserve natural harmony, as detailed in the Quran (Mamat, 2009). Allah SWT commands
that humans carefully steward natural resources and avoid actions that could harm the environment. This stewardship is a shared duty among all creatures, not exclusive to humans, reflecting a universal ecological ethic:

In Surah Al-A'raf, verse 31, this ethos is articulated:

Meaning: O children of Adam! Wear your beautifully adorned garments whenever you go to the place of worship (or perform prayer) and eat and drink and do not exceed; surely Allah does not like those who exceed limits.

One of the commendable practices for conserving nature, as taught in Islam, is the planting of trees. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) fervently advocated for this activity, highlighting multiple benefits: trees not only provide food and strengthen flood defenses but also play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance. This practice is emblematic of a sustainable approach to environmental stewardship.

In Islamic teachings, planting trees is seen as an act of 'sadaqah jariyah' (continuing charity), which is a charity that provides ongoing benefits and accrues spiritual rewards for the giver even after their death. This concept is vividly illustrated in a hadith reported by Anas ibn Malik, where the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said:

Meaning: None of the Muslims planted a tree or sowed seed, and then birds or people or animals ate it, but it was regarded as charity. Narrated by al-Bukhari

This hadith underscores the enduring impact of such charitable acts, suggesting that the simple act of planting a tree can contribute to the welfare of many and offer lasting spiritual benefits.

Planting trees is thus not only an ecological act but also a spiritual investment. By aligning environmental conservation efforts with religious teachings, Islam fosters a holistic approach to the planet's health and encourages actions that benefit the environment and the community alike.

### 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Environmental preservation transcends simple moral obligations, representing a critical aspect of religious duty for many, particularly within the Muslim community.
Despite the significant religious implications, public attitude and awareness towards environmental issues like air pollution remain relatively subdued (Shafie & Mahmud, 2021). This discrepancy highlights a concerning gap between religious teachings and practical environmental engagement.

Forests play a crucial role in sustaining ecological balance by purifying air, regulating climate, filtering water, and fostering biodiversity (Jianping et al., 2014). They act as global assets in stabilizing environmental conditions. However, unchecked human activities such as illegal logging have increasingly threatened these vital ecosystems, directly impacting ecological stability worldwide.

Corruption significantly exacerbates environmental degradation by facilitating illegal land use and promoting unsustainable deforestation (Sahli & Rejeb, 2015). For example, in Malaysia, corrupt practices have contributed to widespread deforestation, leading to international trade repercussions, including restrictions imposed by the EU on Malaysian palm oil due to environmental concerns (Rozlan, 2023).

In Indonesia, rampant forest fires, often a result of peatland burning for agriculture, have severely degraded air quality and disrupted local ecosystems (Arum et al., 2021). These events underline the broader regional challenges of managing natural resources sustainably amidst socio-economic pressures.

Water pollution remains a pervasive threat globally, with untreated industrial waste and agricultural runoff contaminating water bodies (Breida et al., 2019; Tao & Xin, 2014; Azizulla et al., 2011). This pollution not only harms aquatic life but also compromises the quality of drinking water, posing severe health risks to populations dependent on these water sources.

Prof Datuk Ir Dr Wan Ramli Wan Daud from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia highlights how industrial activities in Pasir Gudang have led to significant soil and air pollution. Toxic residues from industrial processes have permeated soil layers, leading to hazardous air quality issues.

The disposal of plastics, particularly those that are non-degradable, poses another grave environmental challenge. Mismanaged plastic waste severely affects marine ecosystems and contributes to broader ecological disturbances. The failure to control such waste effectively can be attributed in part to corrupt practices in waste management sectors.

Despite clear evidence of environmental harm, there is often a lack of decisive action from authorities to tackle corruption and implement effective waste management policies. This inaction allows illegal dumping and other forms of environmental abuse to continue.
unabated, often with dire consequences for ecological and human health.

This analysis underscores the complex interplay between human activities, particularly corruption, and environmental degradation. It is imperative for global and regional policymakers to enforce stricter regulations and foster greater public awareness. Only through a concerted effort can the balance between development and ecological preservation be achieved, ensuring a sustainable environment for future generations.

4.1 PREVENTION STEPS

4.1.1 Introduction to Educational Strategies Against Corruption

Education is pivotal in tackling corruption. Deep, lasting awareness generated through educational programs can significantly deter corrupt practices. In Malaysia, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) prioritizes educational outreach, ensuring that the public, especially youths, understand and abhor the mechanics and consequences of corruption. This is executed under the guidelines of MACC Act, particularly Sections 7(f) and 7(g), which emphasize public education and support in combating corruption (Dato et al., 2020).

Broad educational campaigns extend beyond formal settings into community interactions. These initiatives aim to embed integrity and accountability in the cultural fabric, equipping citizens with the knowledge to identify and reject corruption. Emphasizing ethical leadership and personal responsibility, these programs foster a proactive attitude against corruption. Efforts include integrating corruption awareness into the national education syllabus as a fundamental topic of study (Mustafar et al., 2020).

Targeted training programs for civil servants and community leaders focus on principles of good governance and law enforcement. By enhancing competency and ethical standards, these initiatives help build a cadre of professionals who can act as role models in society, inspiring others to uphold similar values. Training modules are often developed in collaboration with various sectors to ensure a wide-reaching impact (Rekan et al., 2017).

Community involvement is crucial in the anti-corruption framework. Through workshops, forums, and collaborations with local organizations, individuals learn the importance of civic responsibility and are encouraged to participate actively in governance processes. These interactions are supported by technologies such as smartphone apps and interactive websites, which provide ongoing education and engagement opportunities.
Recognizing the link between environmental conservation and anti-corruption, environmental education is positioned as a key area for public instruction. Curriculum developments now include comprehensive environmental studies, focusing on sustainability and the ecological impacts of corruption, thus fostering a well-rounded understanding among students (Farhana et al., 2017).

Practical experiences, such as visits to natural reserves and participation in environmental conservation projects, help students appreciate the tangible benefits of preserving the environment. These activities, backed by educational research and policies, aim to instill a sense of responsibility towards natural resources and highlight the detrimental effects of exploitative practices (Sanusi & Ismail, 2016).

Various campaigns, such as beach clean-ups and tree planting events, serve to raise public awareness about environmental issues. Supported by digital platforms that provide accessible information on environmental protection strategies, these campaigns reach a broader audience and demonstrate the practical applications of environmental education (Dato et al., 2020).

Education about corruption and environmental protection starts at home. The influence of family is profound in shaping children's views on ethics and responsibilities. Discussions at home can foster an environment of accountability and respect for the law, setting a foundation for lifelong values against corruption (Dato et al., 2020).

Collectively, these educational and participatory approaches constitute a comprehensive strategy to combat corruption. They highlight the necessity of initiating anti-corruption measures from an early age and maintaining continuous public engagement. By fostering an informed and proactive citizenry, society can effectively counteract corruption and promote a culture of integrity and transparency.

4.1.2 Law enforcement

Islamic criminal law categorizes punishments into several types, with hudud being the most severe and fixed by Quranic text. Corruption, however, typically falls under ta’zir (discretionary) punishments, where the severity can vary widely depending on the judge's discretion and the specifics of the offense (Harun, 2017). This flexibility allows for a tailored response to corruption, reflecting the seriousness and circumstances of each case, emphasizing the adaptability and depth of Islamic legal principles in addressing modern-day
Malaysia has developed a comprehensive legal framework to combat corruption, highlighted by the Malaysian Corruption Prevention Act 2009. This pivotal legislation grants the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) broad powers to both investigate and prosecute corruption offenses, symbolizing the nation's strong stance on maintaining governmental and corporate integrity. Such laws are vital for upholding public trust and ensuring a fair economic playing field.

The Income Tax Act 1967 complements anti-corruption measures by empowering the Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia to pursue tax evasion charges related to corrupt income. This act targets corruption indirectly by penalizing the misreporting of incomes derived from corrupt practices, thus acting as a significant deterrent against the laundering of corrupt earnings.

The Companies Commission of Malaysia Act 2007 plays a critical role in extending anti-corruption efforts to the corporate sector. By empowering the Companies Commission of Malaysia (CCM) to investigate and prosecute corruption within business practices, the act ensures that corporations are also held to high standards of integrity, promoting ethical business practices across all levels of operation.

Under the Revenue Tax Act 1967 and the Goods and Services Excise Act 2014, individuals found guilty of bribery or other corrupt practices may face stringent tax penalties. These financial penalties serve as a strong deterrent against corruption by reducing the economic benefit of engaging in such illegal activities, thereby discouraging the initial temptation to act unethically.

Countries worldwide have recognized the need for stringent environmental laws to complement anti-corruption efforts. For instance, China's Circular Economy Promotion Law and Bangladesh's Environment Conservation Act aim to integrate sustainability into business practices by incentivizing the conservation of resources and penalizing actions that harm the environment (Keller & Zang, 2017). These laws represent a global shift towards environmental responsibility and sustainability.

However, legal strategies are sometimes criticized for their limited effectiveness in curbing pollution and corruption without robust enforcement (Wahab & Yaakob, 2014). Critics argue that without a comprehensive and enforced legal framework, laws may fail to achieve their intended impact, highlighting the need for continuous improvement and stringent enforcement to ensure compliance and effectiveness.

The use of environmental taxes, as defined by the Organization for Economic
Cooperation and Development (OECD), is an innovative strategy to enforce environmental standards. By financially penalizing businesses that exceed pollution thresholds, these taxes encourage industries to adopt cleaner practices and technologies, aiming to integrate economic costs into environmental conservation efforts.

In conclusion, while legal frameworks provide the necessary foundation for combating corruption and environmental damage, their effectiveness largely hinges on rigorous implementation and enforcement. The adoption of environmental taxes by countries like the United States, New Zealand, Canada, and others exemplifies a growing international commitment to leveraging legal tools for sustainable development. These efforts collectively underscore the pivotal role of law in shaping a more ethical and environmentally conscious global society.

5 CONCLUSION

Nature is a divine gift from Allah SWT, designed as the ideal habitat for humanity and all living beings. The Quran underscores that nothing within the heavens and the earth is created without purpose, highlighting the intrinsic value and utility of every element of Allah's creation. This sacred perspective frames our collective responsibility to cherish and protect our natural surroundings.

Currently, environmental degradation is a pressing concern globally, frequently dominating public discourse. The Quran explicitly criticizes the exploitation of nature for selfish ends, portraying such actions as a distortion of the divine balance intended for our planet.

Sustainable environmental management is crucial not only for maintaining ecological balance but also for supporting sustainable development. The natural resources we preserve today fuel the economic activities of tomorrow, making sustainability an indispensable strategy for long-term prosperity.

The destruction often associated with environmental degradation is closely linked to corrupt practices. As vividly depicted in the Quran, corruption leads to environmental injustice, disrupting the stewardship entrusted to us by Allah SWT. Effective environmental management must, therefore, integrate anti-corruption measures to be truly effective.

It is essential to adopt proactive strategies to combat corruption in environmental sectors. This includes rigorous enforcement of laws and regulations, promoting transparency, and fostering public accountability. Such initiatives are vital for safeguarding
environmental assets from exploitation and mismanagement.

Corruption not only harms the environment but also tarnishes the ethical image of societies, particularly in Muslim communities. It contradicts the teachings of Islam, which advocates for fairness, integrity, and respect for all forms of life. Therefore, combating corruption is also about preserving the moral fabric of our societies.

To mitigate the risks of corruption in environmental projects, it is critical to strengthen regulatory frameworks and institutional capacities. This includes enhancing the capabilities of organizations like the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) and environmental bodies to oversee and enforce compliance rigorously.

Increasing public awareness about the consequences of corruption and environmental neglect plays a pivotal role in cultivating a responsible society. Educational initiatives should aim to embed environmental consciousness and ethical standards from an early age, preparing a generation committed to sustainable development and integrity.

In conclusion, ensuring the sustainability of our environment is inherently linked to eradicating corruption. By aligning our actions with Islamic principles and strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, we can protect our natural heritage and build a sustainable legacy for future generations. The path forward requires a unified effort across all levels of society, from individual actions to global initiatives.

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