

The Expansion of Oil Palm Plantations and Ecological Degradation in Borneo: A Thematic (Maudhu'i) Exegetical Analysis of Qur'anic Verses on the Environment

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Abstract: The expansion of oil palm plantations in the Borneo region over the past few decades has generated intense debate concerning its ecological impacts, including deforestation, biodiversity loss, forest fires, and land-use change. This article aims to analyze this phenomenon through a thematic (maudhu'i) exegetical approach to Qur'anic verses related to the environment, particularly the concepts of fasād fī al-arḍ (corruption on earth), the mandate of human vicegerency (amānah al-khilāfah), and the principle of balance (mīzān). This study employs a qualitative library-based research design using thematic exegesis by collecting relevant verses, examining their asbāb al-nuzūl (occasions of revelation) and munāsabah (textual coherence), and analyzing them through the lens of Islamic ecotheology and contemporary literature on ecological crisis. The findings indicate that the Qur'an normatively prohibits all forms of exploitation that result in systemic damage to ecosystems. The concept of fasād encompasses not only moral corruption but also ecological destruction caused by human excess and transgression (isrāf and ṭughyān). In the context of Borneo, oil palm expansion becomes problematic when its practices disregard principles of sustainability, ecological justice, and the ethical responsibility inherent in human vicegerency. Nevertheless, the Qur'an does not categorically reject economic activity; rather, it emphasizes maintaining a balance between resource utilization and environmental preservation. This study contributes to the advancement of Islamic ecotheological discourse by positioning thematic exegesis as a normative framework for assessing natural resource-based development practices. The findings underscore the urgency of integrating Qur'anic ethics into oil palm plantation management policies to ensure alignment with sustainability principles and ecological responsibility.

Keywords: Oil Palm, Ecological Degradation, Borneo, Thematic (Maudhu'i) Exegesis, Islamic Ecotheology.

Introduction

Oil palm plantations have become a strategic sector for Indonesia, particularly on the island of Borneo (Kalimantan), which is widely recognized as one of the world's "lungs" and one of the regions with the highest levels of biodiversity in Southeast Asia. Over the past several decades, Borneo has experienced highly intensive expansion of oil palm plantations, making it one of the regions with the fastest rates of forest conversion in Southeast Asia. Based on satellite imagery analyses, between 2000 and 2017 Kalimantan lost millions of hectares of natural forest cover, much of which was converted into industrial-scale oil palm plantations.¹ Large-scale land clearing for oil palm cultivation has resulted in extensive deforestation, loss of biodiversity, soil degradation, and the release of substantial amounts of carbon emissions, thereby exacerbating the global climate crisis.²

Environmental issues in Borneo have become increasingly complex as oil palm expansion encroaches upon peatland ecosystems. Research by McCalmont et al. indicates that the drainage and conversion of peatlands for oil palm cultivation release extremely high levels of carbon emissions and significantly increase the risk of peatland fires.³ Recurrent land fires in Kalimantan not only threaten the health of local communities but also generate transboundary haze that affects neighboring countries. The accumulation of these emissions places the oil palm sector among the major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions in Southeast Asia.⁴

On the other hand, several studies have also shown that the expansion of oil palm plantations has triggered agrarian conflicts involving land acquisition, cooperation with customary leaders, and even practices of land grabbing. This situation has had serious consequences for local communities, who often lose their land, experience forced

¹ David L.A. Gaveau dkk., "Rise and fall of forest loss and industrial plantations in Borneo (2000 - 2017)," *WILEY*, no. June 2018 (2019): 1-8, <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12622>.

² Erik Meijaard dkk., *The environmental impacts of palm oil in context*, 2020, 1-20.

³ Jon McCalmont dkk., "Short- and Long-Term Carbon Emissions from Oil Palm Plantations Converted from Logged Tropical Peat Swamp Forest," *Global Change Biology* 27, no. 11 (2021): 2361-76, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.15544>.

⁴ Andhika Ivan Putra Pamungkas dkk., "Efek Kebakaran Hutan Kalimantan Pada Hukum Internasional," *JURNAL HUKUM, POLITIK DAN ILMU SOSIAL* 3, no. 2 (2024): 179-90, <https://doi.org/10.55606/jhpis.v3i2.3741>.

displacement, become trapped in poverty, and ultimately engage in various forms of resistance.⁵ These dynamics demonstrate that the issue of oil palm expansion is not merely an economic matter but also involves questions of social justice and environmental law.

From a biodiversity perspective, Borneo is home to rare species such as orangutans, clouded leopards, and various endemic bird species. Research by Voigt et al. demonstrates that the conversion of forests into oil palm plantations has drastically reduced orangutan populations due to habitat loss and forest fragmentation. The loss of forest cover deprives wildlife of safe migration corridors, thereby increasing the risk of human-wildlife conflict. This ecological degradation reinforces the view that oil palm expansion, in the absence of strict regulation, has the potential to profoundly damage the ecological structure of Borneo.⁶

Nevertheless, existing studies do not portray oil palm solely in negative terms. A number of studies highlight its positive aspects. Among them are findings indicating that the rate of deforestation in Indonesia has tended to decline following the implementation of a moratorium on new oil palm plantation permits, as well as increasing international pressure on unsustainable natural resource exploitation practices.⁷ This suggests that oil palm cultivation is not inherently destructive to nature; rather, it can become a source of benefit if managed responsibly and sustainably.

Considering these scientific findings, a complex question arises: does oil palm truly damage the land of Borneo? The answer to this question is not singular, as oil palm brings both benefits and harms. Therefore, a critical analysis from multiple disciplinary perspectives is necessary—not only from ecological and economic viewpoints but also from a religious perspective, particularly for Muslim communities who constitute the majority of the population in Borneo. At this point, Islamic law can provide a strong ethical and normative foundation for developing a paradigm of natural resource management that is both just and sustainable.

⁵ Radiatul Adawiyah dkk., “Perampasan Tanah Dan Perlawanan Petani: Dampak Perkebunan Sawit Terhadap Kehidupan Masyarakat Di Pasaman Barat Tahun 1980-2022,” *ETNOREFLIKA: Jurnal Sosial Dan Budaya* 13, no. 1 (2024): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.33772/etnoreflika.v13i1.2429>.

⁶ Maria Voigt dkk., “Global Demand for Natural Resources Eliminated More Than 100,000 Bornean Orangutans,” *Current Biology: CB* 28, no. 5 (2018): 761-769.e5, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2018.01.053>.

⁷ David L A Gaveau, “Slowing deforestation in Indonesia follows declining oil palm expansion and lower oil prices,” *PLOS One*, 2022, 1–13.

In this context, the tafsir maudhu'i (thematic interpretation of the Qur'an) approach becomes particularly relevant. Tafsir maudhu'i directs researchers to compile Qur'anic verses that address a particular theme.⁸ Environmental destruction (fasād) constitutes the central theme of this study, which will be analyzed to construct a comprehensive normative understanding for assessing whether the practices of oil palm expansion in Borneo are consistent with Islamic values or instead contradict them. This approach is considered effective for addressing contemporary issues that are not explicitly discussed in classical Qur'anic exegesis.

Literature Review

Scientific studies that integrate empirical analyses of the impacts of oil palm cultivation with the tafsir maudhu'i approach remain very limited, particularly in the context of Borneo. To date, research on oil palm has largely been discussed from the perspectives of economics, public policy, and environmental studies, while its normative-religious dimension has rarely been addressed in a systematic methodological framework. For example, from an environmental perspective, a study by Widiyanto and Adji (2025) concludes that the expansion of oil palm plantations provides economic benefits, such as increasing community income; however, it also generates serious ecological impacts, including deforestation, declining biodiversity, and the degradation of soil and water resources.⁹

Another example can be found in the economic perspective, such as the study entitled "The Impact of Implementing ISPO Policy on Increasing the Income of Independent Oil Palm Farmers," which reports that the implementation of the Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil (ISPO) standard has significantly improved the income of independent oil palm farmers. This improvement occurs because production quality becomes more stable, market access expands, and farmers benefit from more favorable selling prices.¹⁰ Meanwhile, from the perspective of public

⁸ Imam Muslim Amin dkk., "Tafsir Maudhu'i: Menelisik Sejarah, Metode, Dan Signifikansinya Dalam Pemikiran Tafsir Kontemporer," *JURNAL SYNTAX IMPERATIF: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Pendidikan* 5, no. 6 (2025): 1330-39, <https://doi.org/10.36418/syntaximperatif.v5i6.569>.

⁹ *Dampak Ekspansi Kelapa Sawit Terhadap Perubahan Ekonomi Dan Lingkungan / Journal of Management and Bussines (JOMB)*, t.t., diakses 16 November 2025, <https://journal.ipm2kpe.or.id/index.php/JOMB/article/view/8106>.

¹⁰ Dwi Nurul Amalia, "DAMPAK KEBIJAKAN ISPO (INDONESIAN SUSTAINABLE PALM OIL) TERHADAP PENINGKATAN PENDAPATAN PETANI KELAPA SAWIT SWADAYA," *Jurnal Ilmiah Sosio-Ekonomika Bisnis* 26, no. 02 (2023): 15-26,

policy, research by Nur Rani concludes that stricter regulatory policies are necessary in the management of oil palm plantations in order to prevent the negative impacts that may arise. Such policies include greater transparency and the active involvement of local communities in sustainable economic practices.¹¹

Within the framework of Islamic law, environmental issues constitute an essential aspect of human responsibility toward the Earth, as emphasized in the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Accordingly, this study seeks to bridge two domains of knowledge: the empirical findings of environmental studies and the normative foundations derived from Qur'anic texts. This integration is intended to address the central question of this research: whether oil palm cultivation truly damages the land of Borneo.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative method based on library research using the thematic (maudhu'i) interpretation approach introduced by al-Farmawy, which seeks to examine Qur'anic evidence by organizing verses according to a predetermined topic.¹² The tafsir maudhu'i approach is considered particularly appropriate for examining specific issues—such as ecological concerns—from a Qur'anic perspective.¹³ The primary data source is the text of the Qur'an, especially verses that emphasize the prohibition of environmental destruction. Secondary data are derived from classical and contemporary tafsir literature, recent scholarly journal articles, and research reports on the condition of oil palm plantations in Borneo. In addition, the study incorporates interview data from relevant informants, including oil palm plantation workers and local community members.

The research proceeds through several stages. First, a central theme is established—in this case, environmental destruction. Second,

<https://doi.org/10.22437/jiseb.v26i02.27004>.

¹¹ Nur Rani, "THE IMPACT OF PALM OIL ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC POLICY," *Jurnal Governansi* 11, no. 1 (2025): 73–82, <https://doi.org/10.30997/jgs.v11i1.16314>.

¹² Anandita Yahya dkk., *Metode Tafsir (al-Tafsir al-Tahlili, al-Ijmali, al-Muqaran Dan al-Mawdu'i)* / PALAPA, 21 Mei 2022, <https://ejournal.stitpn.ac.id/index.php/palapa/article/view/1629>.

¹³ Mohammad Taufiq Rahman dan Paelani Setia, *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas*, Vol 1, No 3, 2021 (Prodi S2 Studi Agama-Agama UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2021), 374.

Qur'anic verses relevant to this theme are collected and examined. Third, the underlying principles contained within these verses are identified. Fourth, a synthetic analysis is conducted to explore the interconnections among the verses.¹⁴ Finally, the interpretive conclusions are correlated with empirical findings derived from the collected data, particularly regarding the realities of oil palm plantation management in Borneo. This process emphasizes the importance of contextualization and the social relevance of thematic Qur'anic studies.¹⁵

Results and Discussions

The Ecological, Social, and Economic Conditions Resulting from the Expansion of Oil Palm Plantations in Borneo

Indonesia, particularly the Kalimantan region, is one of the world's leading producers of palm oil. This commodity receives significant attention due to its role as a major economic driver that provides substantial benefits to the national economy. Nevertheless, behind these various advantages, issues related to the management of oil palm plantations cannot be overlooked.¹⁶

One of the most pressing problems is the high rate of deforestation. The expansion of oil palm plantations has led to significant deforestation and a decline in ecosystem quality.¹⁷ To open land for plantation expansion, hundreds of thousands of hectares of forest areas in Kalimantan have been converted. This conversion has reduced the natural habitats of various protected wildlife species, including the increasingly shrinking population of Bornean orangutans. Such conditions have raised serious concerns among environmental observers and conservation organizations.¹⁸ One study indicates that patron-client

¹⁴ Nanang Ardiansyah Lubis dan Milhan Milhan, "ANALYSIS OF MAUDHUIY'S TAFSIR METHOD: A THEMATIC APPROACH IN INTERPRETING THE QUR'AN," *SYAHADAT: Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 3 (2024): 81-87, <https://doi.org/10.70489/3fajzp54>.

¹⁵ Fauzan Fauzan dkk., "Metode Tafsir Maudu'Ī (Tematik): Kajian Ayat Ekologi," *Al-Dzikra: Jurnal Studi Ilmu al-Qur'an Dan al-Hadits* 13, no. 2 (2019): 195-228, <https://doi.org/10.24042/al-dzikra.v13i2.4168>.

¹⁶ Idum Santi dkk., "KEANEKARAGAMAN SERANGGA PERKEBUNAN KELAPA SAWIT DI PROVINSI KALIMANTAN TENGAH," *Jurnal Ilmiah Hijau Cendekia* 8, no. 1 (2023): 45-52, <https://doi.org/10.32503/hijau.v8i1.2917>.

¹⁷ Rizka Amalia dkk., "Perubahan Tutupan Lahan Akibat Ekspansi Perkebunan Kelapa Sawit: Dampak Sosial, Ekonomi dan Ekologi," *Jurnal Ilmu Lingkungan* 17, no. 1 (2019): 130-39, <https://doi.org/10.14710/jil.17.1.130-139>.

¹⁸ Maria Voigt dkk., "Deforestation projections imply range-wide population decline for critically endangered Bornean orangutan," *Perspectives in Ecology and*

political mechanisms and investor pressures have driven large-scale land clearing, resulting in forest cover loss, soil erosion, and a decline in biodiversity.¹⁹

The conversion of forests into oil palm plantations not only reduces the overall extent of plant communities but also weakens the benefits provided by healthy ecosystems. Research by Amalia et al. shows that land cover changes caused by oil palm cultivation reduce the ecosystem's capacity to absorb carbon,²⁰ padahal fungsi-fungsi ini sangat penting agar lanskap Borneo tetap tangguh menghadapi perubahan iklim dan gangguan alam lainnya. Selain itu, salah satu penelitian di Kalimantan Barat juga mengemukakan bahwa pembukaan lahan sawit menjadi penyebab utama kebakaran hutan yang menimbulkan pencemaran udara (kabut asap) dan kerusakan lingkungan regulate the water cycle, and maintain soil stability. These ecological functions are crucial for ensuring that the Borneo landscape remains resilient in the face of climate change and other natural disturbances. Furthermore, a study conducted in West Kalimantan reveals that land clearing for oil palm plantations has become a major cause of forest fires, which in turn generate air pollution in the form of transboundary haze and cause severe environmental damage.²¹ The study reports that the conversion of 156,742 hectares of peatland for oil palm plantations in West Kalimantan between 2000 and 2020 triggered extremely high carbon emissions, reaching approximately 42.3 million tons of CO₂ annually. This figure far exceeds the region's natural carbon absorption capacity.²²

The ecological impacts of oil palm expansion are also reflected in land degradation and pollution. In a study conducted in Central Kalimantan, Ayu highlights that plantation activities have caused water

Conservation 20, no. 3 (2022): 240–48, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pecon.2022.06.001>.

¹⁹ Katriani Puspita Ayu, "EKSPANSI PERKEBUNAN KELAPA SAWIT DI KALIMANTAN TENGAH: MEKANISME POLITIK DI BALIK KERUSAKAN EKOLOGI," *Journal SOSIOLOGI* 4, no. 2 (2021): 61–71, <https://doi.org/10.59700/jsos.v4i2.4175>.

²⁰ Amalia dkk., "Perubahan Tutupan Lahan Akibat Ekspansi Perkebunan Kelapa Sawit."

²¹ Muhammad Fachrurrozi Bafadal dan Adila Puspa Hestiantini, "Kebijakan Pemerintah Kalimantan Barat Dalam Isu Lingkungan Kebakaran Hutan Dan Lahan (Karhutla) Tahun 2023," *Innovative: Journal Of Social Science Research* 3, no. 6 (2023): 4528–38, <https://j-innovative.org/index.php/Innovative/article/view/6785>.

²² Fazli Aminudin dkk., "LARANGAN ISRAF (BERLEBIHAN) DALAM ISLAM DAN RELEVANSINYA TERHADAP EKSPLOITASI LAHAN GAMBUT UNTUK PERKEBUNAN KELAPA SAWIT DI KALIMANTAN BARAT," *Jurnal Inovasi Manajemen dan Akuntansi Berkelanjutan* 6, no. 3 (2025), <https://ejournals.com/ojs/index.php/jima/article/view/3038>.

contamination due to the intensive use of fertilizers and pesticides, as well as soil erosion exacerbated by the loss of protective vegetation cover.²³ These conditions increase the risk of long-term land degradation, which can ultimately reduce land productivity and undermine ecosystem quality. Land conversion, erosion, and changes in nutrient cycles may diminish long-term land productivity, thereby affecting local food security as well as broader ecological stability.²⁴

Another issue that emerges is the social dimension of oil palm plantation management. The social aspects of oil palm expansion are highly complex. Many indigenous communities have lost access to land that has long served as their primary source of livelihood due to land conversion by plantation companies. This situation has triggered prolonged conflicts between indigenous communities holding customary land rights (*hak ulayat*) and large-scale plantation corporations. Social conflicts arise between local communities and companies partly because certification systems—such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and the Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil (ISPO)—have not been sufficiently effective in protecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.²⁵ Land conflicts also occur due to weak legal protection of customary lands and the lack of clarity in agrarian regulations.²⁶ As a result, local communities often feel marginalized or receive unfair compensation for lands that have been taken over.

In Pangkalan Lada, Central Kalimantan, many residents have expressed grievances over the loss of their farmland, which once served as their main source of livelihood. According to the testimony of one local resident, before the arrival of oil palm plantation companies, the community's primary income came from cultivating pepper. When pepper crops eventually failed and could no longer be developed, plantation companies moved in and displaced the farmers from their fields, claiming that the land belonged to the company.²⁷ Even when community members attempt to purchase farmland, the available plots are often located far from their residences and are priced well beyond

²³ Ayu, "EKSPANSI PERKEBUNAN KELAPA SAWIT DI KALIMANTAN TENGAH."

²⁴ Meijaard dkk., *The environmental impacts of palm oil in context*.

²⁵ Amalia dkk., "Perubahan Tutupan Lahan Akibat Ekspansi Perkebunan Kelapa Sawit."

²⁶ Leon L dkk., "Konflik Agraria Dan Ketimpangan Struktur Kepemilikan Tanah: Studi Kasus Perkebunan Sawit Di Kalimantan Tengah," *Media Hukum Indonesia (MHI)* 3, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15486117>.

²⁷ Wagiman, "Wawancara dengan Buruh Harian Lepas di Pangkalan Lada," 6 November 2025.

their financial capacity.²⁸

Such mismanagement of land has generated social tensions and reduced community access to natural resources that traditionally supported their livelihoods. Discrimination and the criminalization of communities defending their land rights are further exacerbated by weak law enforcement, creating protracted conflicts that negatively affect both the social and environmental conditions of the region.

From a legal perspective, the existence of regulatory frameworks such as ISPO and RSPO is nominally intended to ensure sustainability. However, in practice, their implementation remains weak. Inconsistent monitoring and enforcement have allowed the continued clearing of forest and peatland areas. Unresolved issues regarding land legality have also contributed to conflicts between plantation companies and indigenous communities that have lost their customary land rights. This legal uncertainty worsens socio-economic and environmental conditions, restricts community access to natural resources, and deepens social tensions and conflicts.²⁹

For example, a case study conducted in Bengkayang Regency, West Kalimantan, confirms the negative socio-economic impacts of oil palm plantation expansion on local communities. Oil palm companies have caused significant changes in the agrarian structure and socio-economic conditions of the community. Although there has been some increase in income through plantation employment or related economic activities, land conflicts and the dispossession of customary land have created uncertainty, reduced community access to natural resources, and triggered processes of social marginalization. These social impacts include the erosion of local wisdom, disruption of traditional governance systems and customary practices, and rising social tensions that often culminate in the criminalization of communities who struggle to defend their land rights.³⁰

Other socio-cultural issues have also emerged. Several studies have documented shifts in local values, such as the decline of the tradition of gotong royong (mutual cooperation), the weakening of customary practices, and the potential for conflict between communities

²⁸ Asringah, "Wawancara dengan Petani di Pangkalan Lada," 5 November 2025.

²⁹ Tungkot Sipayung, "Kerugian Ekonomi Ketidakpastian Hukum dan Legalitas Perkebunan Sawit," *Palmoilina.asia*, 2024, 1–13.

³⁰ Kabupaten Bengkayang dkk., "Dampak Perkebunan Kelapa Sawit Terhadap Masyarakat di Kabupaten Bengkayang Kalimantan Barat," *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Seminar Akademik Tahunan Ilmu Ekonomi dan Studi Pembangunan 6* (2023): 330–39.

and plantation companies regarding unfulfilled plasma partnership commitments. On the other hand, although communities may receive certain economic benefits, improvements in welfare are not experienced equally across all social groups. Employment opportunities remain limited and often favor migrant workers from outside the region. In some cases, changes in local cultural patterns and the potential for multicultural conflicts have also arisen due to land conversion and air pollution caused by emissions from empty fruit bunch (EFB) waste processing.³¹

Despite the problems outlined above, it is undeniable that oil palm plantations in Borneo play a strategic role in Indonesia. Their significance extends beyond the plantation sector, contributing to the national macroeconomic structure, as palm oil has become a key commodity capable of generating substantial state revenue. As the world's largest producer and exporter of palm oil, Indonesia obtains considerable foreign exchange through the export of crude palm oil (CPO) and its derivative products to international markets. Furthermore, the sector serves as a major source of livelihood for communities in production centers, particularly for smallholder farmers participating in plasma schemes and workers involved in plantation activities.³²

In addition to generating foreign exchange earnings, the palm oil industry also absorbs a very large labor force. Employment is created both directly through plantation operations and processing facilities, and indirectly through supporting sectors such as transportation, services, and trade. The presence of the palm oil industry has opened employment opportunities, provided livelihoods for many families in various regions, and stimulated economic growth in remote areas.³³ The development of the palm oil sector has also encouraged the growth of downstream industries, including oleochemical production, biodiesel utilization, and various derivative products with high added value. These developments contribute to strengthening the national economic structure while enhancing the competitiveness of export commodities. Moreover, the government utilizes the palm oil industry as a significant source of tax

³¹ Widia Putri Febriani dkk., "Kajian Literatur: Dampak Perkebunan Kelapa Sawit Terhadap Lingkungan dalam Perspektif AMDAL," *HIRADIKA* 2, no. 1 (2025): 50–55.

³² Codingest, "Kontribusi Signifikan Perkebunan Sawit Rakyat Terhadap Ekonomi Makro Negara," BPDP, 3 Juni 2025, <http://www.bpdp.or.id/kontribusi-signifikan-perkebunan-sawit-rakyat-terhadap-ekonomi-makro-negara>.

³³ Ir Irwantha Sihombing M.P S. P. , M. M. , M. Sc , MBA , CHCO , CPS , C. Ctr , CITAP , CHRMP Prof Dr Ir Teguh Soedarto, *SUMBER DAYA LAHAN DI PERKEBUNAN KELAPA SAWIT* (Penerbit Kbm Indonesia, 2025).

revenue to support national development financing.³⁴

PASPI (2025) explains that smallholder oil palm plantations make tangible contributions to regional economies through several aspects:

1. Source of farmers' income. Smallholder oil palm farmers earn income from the sale of fresh fruit bunches (FFB), which serve as the primary raw material for crude palm oil (CPO) production. This income plays an important role in meeting daily household needs and improving family welfare.
2. Stimulating supporting businesses. Activities in smallholder oil palm plantations encourage the growth of related business sectors, such as the supply of production equipment, transportation services, and processing services for plantation products.
3. Circulation of local investment. Income generated from oil palm plantations is often reinvested in local economic activities, thereby strengthening regional economic dynamics and growth.
4. Contribution to regional revenue. The existence of smallholder oil palm plantations also contributes to regional original revenue (Pendapatan Asli Daerah / PAD) through taxes and levies arising from plantation-related activities.

From the perspective of regeneration and sustainability, oil palm replanting (replanting or *peremajaan kebun*) also demonstrates significant ecological and economic potential. A study conducted in Ketapang, West Kalimantan, by Rosyadi (Tanjungpura University) shows that biomass waste from replanting activities—such as oil palm trunks—can be processed into wood pellets that are carbon-neutral, offering high economic value while simultaneously reducing the carbon footprint.³⁵ This finding opens opportunities for developing more environmentally sustainable models of oil palm management.

Unfortunately, although the expansion of oil palm plantations in Kalimantan has shown positive impacts on regional economic growth, it does not necessarily benefit all segments of society. A study by Barkah and Rojali indicates that the area of oil palm plantations is positively

³⁴ "Industri Kelapa Sawit Berperan Strategis bagi Perekonomian Indonesia," diakses 23 November 2025, <https://www.kemenkeu.go.id/informasi-publik/publikasi/berita-utama/Peran-Strategis-Industri-Kelapa-Sawit>.

³⁵ Rosyadi Rosyadi, "The Economic & Ecological Potentials of Palm Oil Replanting in West Kalimantan: Case Study Ketapang Regency," *Jurnal Social Economic of Agriculture* 12, no. 2 (2023): 88–93, <https://doi.org/10.26418/j.sea.v12i2.60394>.

correlated with economic growth in Kalimantan; however, this increase does not always translate proportionally into poverty reduction.³⁶ In another study, the same authors conclude that while oil palm plantations increase per capita income in Kalimantan, they have not been effective in reducing unemployment rates. The economic impacts are more strongly felt in areas where plantation activities are highly intensive. This finding suggests that the economic benefits of oil palm are concentrated and unevenly distributed.³⁷

This reality is further supported by the findings of Sudrajat, who argues that oil palm expansion has transformed regional economic structures and improved certain welfare indicators, yet it has not resolved economic inequality or the vulnerability of lower-income communities.³⁸ Similarly, Julia concludes in her research that although oil palm cultivation increases community income, the distribution of these benefits remains unequal. Farmers participating in plasma schemes tend to gain advantages, while independent farmers or plantation laborers often experience exploitation.³⁹

Testimonies from local residents also illustrate this condition. One resident stated that in Pangkalan Lada, including the areas of Sungai Melawe and surrounding villages, since the arrival of oil palm plantation companies, these companies have tended to employ more workers from outside the region rather than local residents. As a result, local communities face greater difficulty in finding employment and are sometimes forced to migrate elsewhere in search of work, even though they live near the plantations. Ideally, local residents—especially those with limited formal education—could be employed as harvesters or daily laborers. However, many companies recruit workers from Sulawesi and other regions, leaving local communities with limited economic

³⁶ Januar Barkah dan Muhammad Rojali, "The Impact of Oil Palm Plantations on Economic Growth in Kalimantan and Its Effect on Poverty," *Jurnal Impresi Indonesia* 3, no. 12 (2024): 916–23, <https://doi.org/10.58344/jii.v3i12.5730>.

³⁷ Januar Barkah dkk., "The Impact of Palm Oil Plantations on Per Capita Income in Kalimantan and Its Effect on Unemployment.," *Journal of Syntax Transformation* 5, no. 11 (2024): 1273, <https://doi.org/10.46799/jst.v5i11.1021>.

³⁸ Jajat Sudrajat, "Economic Structure and Welfare Indicator Changes in West Kalimantan after Oil Palm Expansion," *Jurnal Ekonomi Kuantitatif Terapan*, 4 Februari 2019, 87–96, <https://doi.org/10.24843/JEKT.2019.v12.i01.p09>.

³⁹ Julia Julia dkk., "DAMPAK KEBERADAAN PERKEBUNAN KELAPA SAWIT PT KALIMANTAN AGRO PUSAKA TERHADAP PENDAPATAN DAN DISTRIBUSI PENDAPATAN MASYARAKAT DI KABUPATEN KAYONG UTARA," *Jurnal Sains Pertanian Equator* 9, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.26418/jspe.v9i1.36586>.

opportunities⁴⁰ In addition, many oil palm companies rely on outsourcing services, whereby external labor providers take over part or all of the company's operational work. Through this system, workers are formally employed by the outsourcing agency rather than the plantation company itself. According to workers, the wages they receive are often far below the regional minimum wage (UMR). For example, one harvester reported receiving only 25,000 rupiah per day—an amount that is clearly disproportionate to the physically demanding nature of the work, which often involves operating in difficult and steep terrain.⁴¹

Thematic (Tafsir Maudhu'i) Interpretation in Assessing the Reality of Oil Palm Plantation Conditions in Borneo

The Qur'an clearly states that the destruction occurring on Earth is largely the result of human actions. This is expressed in Qur'an 30:41 (Ar-Rum), which reads:

"ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ"

"Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what people's hands have earned, so that He may let them taste part of the consequences of their deeds, that perhaps they may return (to the right path)."

Most classical exegetes interpreted the term fasād in this verse within a relatively limited scope, such as the killing of Abel by Cain, acts of polytheism, various forms of sin, and social or spiritual corruption. Such interpretations can be found in the works of Ibn Kathir.⁴² In contrast, several contemporary scholars—including Yusuf al-Qaradawi—interpret fasād more broadly by relating it to contemporary environmental crises.⁴³ According to this perspective, corruption on Earth manifests in various global challenges such as food crises, scarcity of natural resources, lack of clean water, the spread of disease, and environmental pollution that disrupts ecological balance and threatens all living beings on the planet.

The mention of land and sea in this verse, according to Quraish

⁴⁰ Siti Nurjanah, "Wawancara dengan Petani di Kotawaringin Barat," 6 November 2025.

⁴¹ Slamet Triyadi, "Wawancara dengan Buruh Sawit di Sungai Rangi Jaya," 5 November 2025.

⁴² Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azhim* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1419H).

⁴³ Ahmad Sarip Saputra dkk., "Hifdh Al-Bī'ah as part of Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah: Yūsuf Al-Qarḍāwī's perspective on the environment in Ri'āyat al-Bī'ah fi Sharī'ah al-Islām book," *AIP Conference Proceedings* 2353, no. 1 (2021): 030106, <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0052768>.

Shihab, indicates that both realms can become sites of various forms of destruction, including acts of violence and robbery. At the same time, the phrase may also signify that both terrestrial and marine environments have experienced a decline in function, reduced benefits, and a disturbance of natural equilibrium. Contemporary scholars explain that such imbalance is evident, for instance, in polluted seas that lead to the death of marine organisms and declining fish catches, as well as in land areas becoming increasingly dry and hot, resulting in prolonged droughts. Quraish Shihab further suggests that the absence of explicit reference to air in the verse may relate to the word *zahara* (“has appeared” or “become visible”), implying that the verse highlights forms of damage that are visibly observable, whereas human knowledge at the time of revelation had not yet encompassed atmospheric issues such as air pollution.⁴⁴ In line with this interpretation, Ibn ‘Ashur emphasizes that the universe was created with a harmonious system designed to sustain human life. However, the destructive behavior of many human beings has disrupted this order, creating imbalance and disturbing the harmony of nature.⁴⁵

Another passage, Surah At-Tin, also indicates that destruction caused by human actions can ultimately result in severe consequences. Nevertheless, divine mercy continues to encompass humanity, so the punishments experienced in this world serve mainly as warnings rather than complete retribution. What humans experience is only a small portion of the consequences of their deeds, while other sins may be forgiven or their punishment deferred. Such acts of destruction disturb the balance of nature—both on land and at sea—and ultimately bring harm back to human beings themselves.

The Qur’an clearly emphasizes the prohibition of causing corruption on Earth. This is explicitly stated in Qur’an 2:11–12 (Al-Baqarah):

"وَأَذًا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَكِنْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ"

“And when it is said to them, ‘Do not cause corruption on the earth,’ they say, ‘We are only reformers.’ Indeed, it is they who are the corrupters, but they do not perceive it.”

According to Quraish Shihab, corruption (*fasād*) in this verse

⁴⁴ M Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah, Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Alquran* (Lentera Hati, 2002).

⁴⁵ Muhammad Tahir Ibn Asyur, *Maqāṣid al-Syarī‘ah al-Islāmiyyah*, IV (Dār Suhnun lī al-Nasyr wa al-Tauzī’, 2013).

refers to any action that diminishes or eliminates the value and function of something that was originally beneficial and operating optimally. The verse therefore contains an implicit command for human beings to preserve and maintain such values so that they continue to function and provide benefit. The term *muṣliḥ* refers to individuals who strive to repair something that has been damaged or whose usefulness has declined so that it regains its value and function. An even higher level of reform is achieved by those who are able to increase the beneficial value of something that was already useful. Hypocrites, however, falsely assume that they occupy this position. In reality, the verse asserts that they are the true agents of corruption, since they persist in destructive actions while refusing to pursue genuine reform. Such corruption may take the form of destructive social behaviors, including the spread of hatred, discrimination, and social division. For this reason, the prohibition “do not cause corruption on Earth” is emphasized explicitly, highlighting the severity of the consequences of such behavior, which—if left unchecked—may spread widely throughout the environment and ultimately harm humanity itself. In accordance with a fundamental Qur’anic principle, the removal of harm must precede the attainment of benefit.⁴⁶

A similar prohibition appears in Qur’an 7:56 (Al-A’raf), which also instructs humanity not to cause corruption on Earth. This verse underscores that destructive behavior constitutes a form of transgression beyond proper limits. God created the universe in a state of balance and harmony in order to sustain human life. Accordingly, the Qur’an not only forbids destruction but also encourages acts of restoration and improvement. The verse further emphasizes that damaging something that has already been repaired or improved is even more reprehensible than destroying something that was already in a state of ruin—although any action that worsens conditions or disrupts an orderly system remains blameworthy.

Another related passage appears in Qur’an 2:60 (Al-Baqarah), which states:

“Eat and drink from the provision of Allah, and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption.”

The earlier part of this verse recounts one of the miracles granted to the Prophet Moses, when water gushed forth from a rock after he struck it with his staff. The concluding message of the verse reminds

⁴⁶ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah, Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Alquran*.

humanity to enjoy the sustenance provided by God without engaging in destructive actions on Earth. The verse thus encourages the preservation of nature, the protection of environmental cleanliness, and the responsible use of natural resources—including water—without excess. It also serves as a warning that human beings must not fall into arrogance or transgression, especially when the blessings granted by God lead them to negligence and ingratitude.

Similarly, Qur'an 28:77 (Al-Qasas) states that "Allah does not love those who cause corruption." According to Quraish Shihab, this verse contains at least three important messages. First, Islam views worldly life and the hereafter as an inseparable continuum: the world is the field of action, while the hereafter is the place where the results are reaped. Second, the Qur'an provides guidance that worldly life should be utilized as a means to achieve success in the hereafter. Third, the verse emphasizes the importance of earnest effort in striving for ultimate happiness in the life to come. Embedded within this guidance is also a clear warning against destructive behavior on Earth.⁴⁷

Based on the explanations above, the concept of fasād in the Qur'an can be understood as any form of destruction occurring on Earth as a result of human actions, whether ecological or social. The Qur'an strongly condemns environmental destruction, as reflected in Qur'an 2:11, Qur'an 7:56, and Qur'an 30:41. Environmental degradation resulting from uncontrolled oil palm expansion may therefore be categorized as a form of fasād, as it produces ecological damage, biodiversity loss, and disruption of ecosystem balance. Such damage is further intensified by land conversion practices that ignore environmental carrying capacity and long-term sustainability.

The reality of oil palm plantations in Borneo illustrates significant environmental pressure resulting from deforestation and peatland conversion, leading to the loss of forest functions, declining wildlife populations, deteriorating ecosystem quality, soil erosion, and forest fires. Plantation activities have also contributed to water contamination, which ultimately affects food security. These conditions closely correspond to the message of Qur'an 30:41, which states that corruption on land and sea arises from human actions. Empirical findings further reveal that the conversion of 156,742 hectares of peatland for oil palm plantations in West Kalimantan between 2000 and 2020 has produced carbon emissions reaching approximately 42.3 million tons of CO₂ per

⁴⁷ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah, Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Alquran*. Vol X.

year—far exceeding the region’s natural carbon absorption capacity.⁴⁸ Such practices can clearly be categorized as *fasād* because they disrupt the natural balance of the environment.

An important principle derived from the explanation of Qur’an 2:11–12 is that preventing harm must take precedence over obtaining benefit. This principle reinforces the idea that although oil palm plays a significant role in economic development, human beings must prioritize avoiding activities that generate environmental damage or social harm. The destruction occurring in Borneo does not only affect the natural environment but also threatens the livelihoods of surrounding communities. Conflicts between companies and local populations who lose access to land—their primary source of livelihood—as well as discrimination against local residents in employment opportunities, represent forms of *fasād* that must be avoided.

The prohibition of *fasād* in the Qur’anic verses discussed above indicates that ecological degradation in Kalimantan originally affected environments that once possessed great value and benefit. However, due to excessive exploitation, their value and benefits have diminished. The term *muṣliḥ* in Qur’an 2:11 therefore implies that human beings must actively strive to restore what has been damaged or diminished so that it may regain its value. This is consistent with the message of Qur’an 7:56, which not only prohibits destruction but also encourages restoration and improvement. The natural environment granted by God must be preserved and protected, as emphasized in Qur’an 2:60, which warns humanity against transgression that leads to environmental degradation. The more extensive the destruction inflicted upon nature, the greater the negative consequences that humanity itself will ultimately bear. Likewise, the more numerous and severe the violations committed, the greater the environmental damage that will arise as a consequence.

Conclusion

In principle, Islam does not prohibit the utilization of natural resources such as oil palm, provided that their management is conducted responsibly and generates public benefit (*maṣlaḥah*) without causing environmental harm. Oil palm plantation activities may therefore be considered *mubāḥ* (permissible) if they demonstrably contribute to poverty alleviation, create employment opportunities, and stimulate

⁴⁸ Aminudin dkk., “LARANGAN ISRAF (BERLEBIHAN) DALAM ISLAM DAN RELEVANSINYA TERHADAP EKSPLOITASI LAHAN GAMBUT UNTUK PERKEBUNAN KELAPA SAWIT DI KALIMANTAN BARAT.”

regional economic development. However, based on the realities observed in Borneo, although oil palm expansion has produced significant economic contributions, its management practices frequently fail to adhere to principles of sustainability. As a result, they often generate serious ecological and social consequences, including deforestation, peatland degradation, biodiversity loss, water pollution, and agrarian conflicts arising from weak legal oversight and unclear land tenure.

From the perspective of tafsir maudhu'ī, such conditions can be understood as a form of fasād (corruption or destruction on earth) and constitute a violation of the Islamic legal maxim that “preventing harm takes precedence over obtaining benefit.” Accordingly, both empirically and normatively, it can be concluded that unsustainable oil palm management practices in Borneo indeed contribute to environmental degradation and contradict Islamic teachings regarding ecological responsibility.

On this basis, the management of oil palm plantations should be directed toward sustainable practices by strengthening the enforcement of regulatory frameworks such as ISPO and RSPO, protecting the rights of indigenous communities, adopting environmentally friendly technologies, and improving agrarian governance. Education and public dissemination of Islamic values concerning ecological responsibility should also be enhanced in order to build greater societal awareness. Collaboration among the government, oil palm companies, and local communities is essential in formulating policies that are scientifically grounded, socially just, and ethically responsible. Environmental rehabilitation efforts—such as reforestation and the reduction of hazardous chemical use—must be prioritized so that economic activities do not continue to compromise ecological sustainability. Ultimately, sustainability must become a shared vision to safeguard the ecological future of Borneo and the livelihoods of communities that depend on its environment.

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