

Environmental Communication of Baduy Luar Indigenous Resource Management

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the environmental communication practices of the Outer Baduy indigenous community in managing natural resources through an ethnoecological approach. This research is important because indigenous communities are often overlooked in discussions of sustainable resource management, yet they preserve local wisdom that supports ecological balance. A qualitative method with an ethnological approach was used. Data were collected through field observations, in-depth interviews with indigenous leaders and residents, and documentation, and then analyzed using social construction theory and cultural ecology theory. The findings reveal that the Outer Baduy community implements natural resource management based on local wisdom, including a huma-based agricultural system, pikukuh rules that limit overexploitation, and the use of traditional technology. Environmental communication is carried out orally through deliberation, religious rituals, and the intergenerational transmission of values. These practices form a pattern of ecological adaptation that maintains environmental sustainability while strengthening cultural identity. In conclusion, the environmental communication practices of the Outer Baduy indigenous community play a crucial role in preserving human-nature relationships and provide an ethical ecological framework that can inspire sustainable resource management in the wider community.

Keywords: *Environmental Communication, Indigenous Communities, Ethnoecological, Natural Resources, Baduy Luar*

INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation has become a critical global concern, especially in developing countries such as Indonesia, which possesses one of the largest tropical forest areas in the world. Deforestation, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources have created ecological imbalance and social vulnerability. According to Forest Watch Indonesia (2018), the country lost over 5.7 million hectares of forest between 2013 and 2017. This phenomenon not only threatens ecological stability but also jeopardizes the livelihood of communities living in or near forests. The urgency of adopting sustainable resource management strategies has never been greater.

Indigenous communities play a vital role in offering alternative solutions to this crisis. Their cultural traditions, local wisdom, and ecological ethics have historically sustained balanced relationships between humans and nature. Among these communities, the Baduy people in Banten Province stand out as a unique case. Divided into Baduy Dalam and Baduy

Luar, the latter maintain interactions with outsiders while still preserving strong adherence to traditional rules known as *pikukuh*. These rules strictly prohibit destructive exploitation of natural resources, framing the environment as a sacred entity to be respected and preserved.

The problem that this research addresses is the lack of academic exploration of environmental communication within indigenous contexts. While prior studies have highlighted the importance of indigenous knowledge in ecological conservation (Arifah et al., 2019; Sari et al., 2020), less attention has been paid to the communicative processes through which such knowledge is created, shared, and reinforced across generations. The Baduy Luar demonstrate that communication practices—rituals, deliberations, storytelling, and oral traditions—play a central role in maintaining ecological wisdom and in shaping their adaptive strategies toward sustainability.

This study is important for two main reasons. First, it situates environmental communication within the ethnoecological framework, which emphasizes the relationship between human culture and ecosystems. Such an approach allows for a more integrative understanding of how cultural practices operate as adaptive strategies to ecological challenges. Second, it expands the scope of environmental communication scholarship by incorporating indigenous perspectives, which have been underrepresented in mainstream research dominated by modern or Western paradigms.

The state-of-the-art in this study is built upon two theoretical perspectives. The first is social construction theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), which explains how reality is continuously created and sustained through communication and social interaction. This framework is used to understand how the Baduy Luar socially construct their relationship with the environment through language, symbols, and rituals. The second is cultural ecology theory (Steward, 1955), which explores how human cultural systems adapt to ecological conditions. This theory allows for an analysis of how the Baduy Luar's practices—such as shifting cultivation (*huma*), forest conservation, and traditional agricultural technologies—represent adaptive ecological strategies rooted in cultural values.

The novelty of this research lies in combining environmental communication and ethnoecology to examine an indigenous community. Previous studies often treated indigenous knowledge as static traditions; however, this study positions it as a dynamic communicative process that continuously reproduces ecological ethics. The originality of this approach is in framing communication not only as an instrumental tool for transferring

information but also as a constitutive process that builds collective ecological identity and sustains long-term resource management.

Methodologically, the research employed a qualitative approach with an ethnoecological orientation. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with indigenous leaders and residents, and documentation of cultural practices. The analysis was conducted by integrating field data with theoretical frameworks to uncover how communication practices function as both ecological adaptation and cultural preservation.

The urgency of this study lies in its potential contributions. Academically, it enriches the body of knowledge in environmental communication by integrating indigenous perspectives and demonstrating their relevance to contemporary ecological challenges. Practically, it provides lessons for policymakers, NGOs, and environmental practitioners seeking culturally grounded strategies for sustainable natural resource management. The Baduy Luar community demonstrates that communication rooted in cultural values can play a decisive role in ecological conservation.

In sum, this research provides an in-depth exploration of how the Baduy Luar employ communication practices to manage natural resources sustainably through an ethnoecological lens. It highlights the importance of recognizing indigenous communication systems as valid and effective models for environmental management. By situating this research within broader debates on sustainability, the study offers new insights and originality, showing that indigenous ecological wisdom is not merely a relic of tradition but a living system with valuable contributions to global environmental governance.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative paradigm with an *ethnoecological* approach to explore the relationship between environmental communication and natural resource management within the Baduy Luar community. The qualitative design was chosen to capture the meanings, values, and cultural practices constructed and maintained through communication.

Data were collected through field observations, in-depth interviews with indigenous leaders and community members, and documentation of traditional practices. These

techniques enabled the researcher to understand both the symbolic and practical dimensions of environmental communication, such as oral traditions, rituals, and deliberative forums.

The unit of analysis was the communication practices of the Baduy Luar related to sustainable management of natural resources. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation of sources and methods was applied to ensure validity and reliability of findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the Baduy Luar community maintains a unique system of environmental communication and natural resource management that integrates local wisdom, spiritual values, and ecological adaptation. The results are presented in four main themes: (1) natural resource management practices, (2) local wisdom values, (3) communication patterns, and (4) ecological adaptation.

Natural Resource Management Practices

The Baduy Luar apply traditional methods in cultivating land, most notably the *huma* system (shifting cultivation), which allows soil to recover naturally after use. Agricultural activities are supported by simple tools such as *golok*, *etem*, and *kored*, avoiding mechanized technologies that may harm the ecosystem. In addition, the community manages *leuit* (traditional rice barns) as food storage that ensures sustainability across seasons. These practices demonstrate a balance between fulfilling human needs and preserving ecological integrity.



Figure 1. *Leuit* or Traditional Rice Barn of the Baduy Luar
Source: Author's analysis, field documentation (2025)

Local Wisdom Values

The foundation of resource management is the *pikukuh*, a customary law that prohibits excessive exploitation and promotes harmonious relations with nature. This philosophy is strongly tied to the Baduy's spiritual belief system, *Sunda Wiwitan*, which views nature as sacred and inhabited by ancestral spirits. The value system instills ecological ethics that regulate daily behavior, from farming techniques to forest use. Such wisdom reflects a social construction in which reality is shaped through cultural rules and spiritual principles.

Environmental Communication Practices

Environmental communication within the Baduy Luar community is largely oral and collective. Communication occurs through *musyawarah adat* (deliberative meetings), religious rituals, and intergenerational storytelling. These practices function not only as information exchange but also as symbolic actions that reinforce ecological norms. For instance, communal rituals before planting season serve both spiritual and ecological functions by reminding the community of their obligations to nature. Through these communication processes, ecological knowledge is transmitted, preserved, and legitimized across generations.

Ecological Adaptation

The Baduy Luar's ecological adaptation can be understood through cultural ecology theory. Their lifestyle—simple housing, limited interaction with modern technology, and strict adherence to customary rules—represents a sustainable adaptation strategy. These practices prevent ecological degradation while strengthening cultural identity. The adaptation is not static but dynamic, as the community negotiates external pressures such as tourism and modernization while maintaining their ecological values. The findings demonstrate that communication plays a central role in sustaining ecological practices. In line with Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory, the Baduy Luar construct their ecological reality through shared language, rituals, and symbolic actions that give meaning to nature. Environmental communication is not limited to pragmatic functions such as delivering instructions but extends to constitutive functions that define collective identity and ecological ethics.

From an ethnoecological perspective, the Baduy Luar illustrate how human culture and ecology interact dynamically. Their agricultural system and resource management are not merely economic activities but are embedded within cultural and spiritual frameworks. This

supports Steward's cultural ecology theory, which highlights the adaptive relationship between human culture and the environment.

The originality of this study lies in identifying environmental communication as a core mechanism of indigenous sustainability. While previous studies have emphasized indigenous ecological knowledge, this research highlights communication as the medium through which such knowledge is created, shared, and preserved. This offers new insights for environmental communication scholarship, suggesting that traditional oral and ritual-based communication can serve as models for contemporary sustainability initiatives.

Discussion

The Baduy Luar provide valuable lessons for broader society. Their reliance on symbolic communication, customary laws, and collective rituals demonstrates that ecological sustainability is not only a matter of policy and technology but also of cultural meaning and communication. Recognizing and respecting indigenous communication systems thus becomes essential for designing sustainable resource management strategies that are inclusive and culturally grounded.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the Baduy Luar community integrates environmental communication with local wisdom in managing natural resources sustainably. Through *pikukuh* rules, oral traditions, rituals, and intergenerational storytelling, ecological values are preserved and transmitted, reinforcing both cultural identity and ecological balance.

The findings highlight that communication plays a constitutive role in shaping ecological ethics, not only as a means of information sharing but as a cultural process that sustains adaptation and resilience. These insights contribute to environmental communication studies and provide practical implications for developing sustainability models inspired by indigenous communities.

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