

Religious Leaders' Responses to Government Political Policies Following Flood and Landslide Disasters in Barumon, Padang Lawas, North Sumatra

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ABSTRACT

Flood and landslide disasters in Barumon, Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, have caused significant social, economic, and environmental impacts. Beyond damaging infrastructure, agricultural land, and places of worship, these disasters have raised concerns regarding environmental degradation and the effectiveness of government recovery policies. In this context, religious leaders play an important role as moral authorities and community mediators in strengthening public resilience and responding to government initiatives. This study aims to examine the role of religious leaders in environmental conservation, their responses to environmental policies, and their perspectives on post-disaster recovery programs. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving twenty religious leaders, consisting of fifteen Muslim and five Christian leaders. The findings reveal that religious leaders contribute significantly to preventing environmental degradation by promoting religious values that encourage environmental stewardship. They also respond positively to government policies on forest conservation, illegal logging prevention, and reforestation. Furthermore, religious leaders strongly support post-disaster recovery programs, including the rehabilitation of places of worship, river restoration, economic recovery, and housing reconstruction. The study concludes that religious leaders are influential actors in promoting environmental awareness, supporting public policies, and strengthening community resilience in post-disaster settings.

Keywords: *Religious Leaders, Political Policy, Disaster Recovery, Flood and Landslide Disasters, Environmental Conservation, Community Resilience*

Introduction

Floods and landslides that struck Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra at the end of 2025 caused severe humanitarian, social, and economic consequences. The disasters resulted in substantial loss of life, widespread infrastructure damage, disruption of livelihoods, and significant environmental degradation. Despite the magnitude of the disaster, affected communities demonstrated remarkable resilience through mutual cooperation, social solidarity, and collective action, which became important social capital in maintaining community cohesion during the recovery process (Medan, 2025).

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Amid the suffering caused by the loss of family members, homes, and sources of income, affected communities maintained optimism through the support provided by government institutions, humanitarian organizations, and civil society groups. Government assistance programs and rapid humanitarian responses contributed significantly to strengthening community resilience and reducing the psychological burden experienced by disaster victims (Observation, 2025). Such solidarity reflects the continuing strength of social cohesion and national identity in Indonesia, where collective action often emerges in response to humanitarian crises.

Disasters frequently reveal not only environmental vulnerabilities but also social strengths. The flow of assistance from different regions of Indonesia to disaster-affected communities demonstrates the enduring values of humanity, empathy, and mutual support. Beyond material aid, these responses provide emotional reassurance and encourage communities to rebuild their lives after experiencing profound losses.

Among the disaster-affected areas in Sumatra, Barumun in Padang Lawas Regency, North Sumatra, represents a significant case for investigation. The region experienced extensive damage to agricultural land, plantations, residential areas, roads, bridges, and religious facilities. Local residents suffered severe psychological trauma as a consequence of the disaster (Simatupang, 2025). Community members, religious leaders, and customary leaders widely perceived that the disaster was exacerbated by long-term environmental degradation caused by irresponsible exploitation of forest resources. This perception is consistent with the environmental perspective reflected in the Qur'an (Ar-Rum: 41), which emphasizes that environmental destruction originates from human actions.

Three major rivers—the Barumun River, Aek Jorbing River, and Sosa River—play a vital role in supporting local livelihoods through agriculture and fisheries. However, prolonged deforestation in upstream areas has increased environmental vulnerability, contributing to severe flooding and landslides. The disaster damaged agricultural land, destroyed houses along riverbanks, and affected important religious facilities. For example, the Miftahul Ghufon Mosque in Siraisan Village suffered substantial damage due to flooding and landslides, disrupting congregational prayers and Qur'anic learning activities for children (H. D. Nasution, 2025).

Similarly, the HKBP Church in Sosa Village experienced significant structural damage caused by flooding, landslides, and drifting logs. As a result, the congregation was unable to celebrate Christmas in 2025 at their local church and was forced to conduct religious services at another church approximately 50 kilometers away. During this difficult period, religious leaders played a crucial role in providing spiritual support and strengthening community resilience. Through effective communication, they encouraged patience, reinforced faith, and fostered confidence that government institutions would respond appropriately to community needs (Simbolon, 2025).

Government agencies, including central and local governments, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and various humanitarian organizations, provided assistance during the post-disaster recovery period. Through constructive communication between public authorities and religious leaders, support was mobilized for the rehabilitation of damaged mosques and churches. Gradually, communities began to adapt to post-disaster conditions and rebuild their lives despite ongoing challenges resulting from the floods and landslides.

Demographically, the population of Barumun is predominantly composed of Mandailing and Angkola Batak ethnic groups, with smaller populations of Minangkabau, Malay, and Javanese communities. Approximately 95 percent of residents are Muslim, while the remaining population is Christian. Social harmony is maintained through strong kinship networks and the Batak cultural philosophy of *Daliha Na Tolu*, which emphasizes mutual respect and social balance. These cultural values contribute significantly to peaceful interreligious relations and social cohesion within the region (Hasibuan, 2025).

Religious organizations, including Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, Al-Washliyah, and the HKBP Church, maintain active communication and cooperation in promoting social harmony. Following the disaster, religious leaders became important actors in fostering stability and reducing social tensions. Through religious messages and community engagement, they helped transform public anger and disappointment into constructive efforts toward recovery and reconciliation (D. Nasution, 2025).

This study is grounded in Response Theory, which explains how individuals or social groups react to particular stimuli, events, or policies (Subandi, 1995). Responses are generally manifested through cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions that reflect individuals' understanding, attitudes, and actions toward a given issue (Rakhmat, 1998). In the context of this study, the theory is used to analyze how religious leaders perceive, evaluate, and respond to government environmental and post-disaster recovery policies in Barumon, Padang Lawas. To strengthen this analysis, the study also adopts Deborah Norden's perspective on societal responses to government policies, which categorizes responses into collusive, competitive, and combative patterns, depending on the degree of support or criticism expressed toward public policies.

The concept of religious leadership is equally important in understanding the role of religious leaders within disaster-affected communities (Furchan & Maimun, 2005). Religious leaders are widely recognized as moral authorities who possess religious knowledge, social legitimacy, and the ability to influence public attitudes and behavior (Lubis, 2007). Beyond their spiritual functions, they often act as mediators between communities and government institutions, particularly during periods of crisis (Williams, 2011). Previous studies have demonstrated that religious leaders contribute significantly to social cohesion, emotional recovery, and community resilience by providing moral guidance, strengthening collective solidarity, and encouraging public participation in recovery efforts (Effendy, 2013).

This study also draws on public policy theory, which views policy as a series of governmental decisions and actions intended to address public problems and promote collective welfare (Marzali, 2012). According to Dye, (1992), public policy encompasses both actions taken and actions deliberately not taken by government institutions. In post-disaster contexts, environmental protection, forest conservation, disaster mitigation, and recovery programs constitute important policy instruments for rebuilding affected communities. Therefore, examining religious leaders' responses to these policies provides valuable insights into the relationship between public policy implementation, community acceptance, and social resilience in disaster-prone areas (Wahab, 2008).

Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions: What roles do religious leaders play in preventing environmental degradation in Barumon, Padang Lawas? How do religious leaders respond to government environmental policies in Barumon, Padang Lawas? and How do religious leaders respond to government post-disaster recovery policies following the floods and landslides in Barumon, Padang Lawas, North Sumatra?

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design to explore religious leaders' responses to government political policies following the flood and landslide disasters in Barumon, Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, an approach considered appropriate given that the phenomenon under investigation is interpretive and context-dependent in nature (Bungin, 2016). Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: recognized religious leadership status within a mosque, church, pesantren, majelis taklim, or religious organization operating in the disaster-affected sub-districts of Barumon; direct involvement in or firsthand observation of community responses to the 2025 flood and landslide disaster; and willingness to participate, with initial informants identified through Forum Kerukunan Umat

Beragama (FKUB) Padang Lawas documentation and subsequently expanded through snowball referrals until data saturation was reached. A total of twenty informants participated, comprising fifteen Muslim religious leaders drawn from pesantren, majelis taklim, and MUI leadership, and five Christian religious leaders from HKBP congregations, a proportion broadly reflecting the religious composition of Barumun society and enabling meaningful comparison between the two communities' responses; all informants gave their consent to participate and to be identified by name and position, consistent with their standing as public religious figures. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews guided by a protocol addressing perceptions of environmental degradation, evaluations of government environmental policy, and evaluations of post-disaster recovery programs, complemented by direct field observation of disaster-affected sites and analysis of FKUB and local government documentation (Moleong, 2015). The collected data were analyzed through a thematic procedure involving data reduction, open coding of recurring concepts, categorization of codes into themes aligned with the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of Response Theory and Norden's typology of societal responses, and interpretation cross-checked against observational and documentary data to strengthen credibility through triangulation (Sugiyono, 2017), enabling a comprehensive understanding of religious leaders' responses to government policies and their roles in supporting environmental protection and post-disaster recovery in Barumun, Padang Lawas.

Literature Review

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of religion and community leadership in disaster contexts. Hakkim & Deb, (2022). Found that religious meaning-making strengthens prosocial behavior and enhances community resilience among disaster response volunteers. Christia et al., (2026). Demonstrated that collaboration between religious leaders and local communities can improve disaster preparedness by integrating religious beliefs into risk management strategies. Likewise, Salsabilah, (2023) reported that religious commitment contributes positively to economic resilience and collective recovery after flood disasters. From a governance perspective, Hutagalung, (2025) highlighted the importance of adaptive governance in disaster risk reduction, while et al, (2025) emphasized the integration of scientific and religious perspectives in disaster mitigation efforts within Muslim communities.

Beyond the Indonesian context, an expanding body of international scholarship has examined the intersection between religion and disaster governance more broadly. Aksa (2020) argued that Islamic teachings do not sanction fatalism in disaster contexts but instead encourage knowledge-seeking, effort, and preparedness as expressions of faith, offering a theological foundation for proactive disaster risk reduction. Similarly, Joakim & White (2015), in a comparative Indonesian case study published internationally, demonstrated that religious beliefs, leadership structures, and faith-based social networks substantially shape the speed and quality of disaster response and recovery, functioning as informal governance mechanisms that complement formal state institutions. Baidhawry (2015) further showed, through the experience of Muhammadiyah, how faith-based organizations can operate as structured actors in disaster management and mitigation, translating religious values into organized humanitarian action. Collectively, these studies point to a growing international interest in faith-based disaster risk reduction and collaborative governance, in which religious actors are positioned not merely as sources of psychological or spiritual comfort, but as legitimate partners in policy implementation.

This international literature also intersects with an emerging discourse on environmental theology and religiously grounded ecological stewardship. Sukiyawati & Majid (2024) demonstrated that local Islamic legal reasoning (*al-'urf al-shahih*) can legitimize customary conservation practices, as shown in their study of the *ka'ombo* tradition safeguarding the Lambusango Forest in Buton, illustrating how Islamic normative frameworks and local ecological wisdom can reinforce one another in protecting natural resources. In a related vein, Alfarizi (2024)

found that religiosity and da'wah-based communication significantly shape environmentally conscious consumption behavior among Indonesian Muslim millennials, suggesting that religious authority can be mobilized not only in the aftermath of disaster but also in shaping everyday environmental behavior in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. Taken together, these studies suggest that religious leadership operates along a continuum—from doctrinal legitimation of environmental practice, to organized disaster response, to individual behavioral change—yet few studies have examined how this continuum plays out when religious leaders must simultaneously respond to environmental degradation, disaster recovery, and government policy within a single, geographically bounded post-disaster setting.

Building on this literature, the present study addresses this gap by explicitly situating religious leaders' responses to environmental and post-disaster recovery policy within the broader international discourse on faith-based disaster risk reduction, environmental theology, and collaborative governance, rather than treating them as an isolated, locally contextual phenomenon. While previous Indonesian studies have examined religion, disaster resilience, environmental awareness, and disaster governance largely as separate domains, and international studies have tended to examine faith-based disaster response and religiously grounded environmental behavior separately, little attention has been given to how religious leaders in a single interreligious, culturally distinctive community simultaneously interpret, evaluate, and respond to government environmental conservation policy and post-disaster recovery policy. This study contributes to the literature by examining the intersection of religious leadership, environmental governance, and disaster recovery in Barumon, Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, a region characterized by strong religious authority and Batak cultural traditions—thereby extending faith-based disaster governance scholarship beyond single-policy or single-religion case studies toward a more integrated, comparative Muslim–Christian setting.

Result and Discussion

The Role of Religious Leaders in Preventing Environmental Degradation

Religious Leaders as Opinion Leaders

Religious leaders in Barumon, Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, play a significant role in various aspects of community life. As a predominantly religious society, the people of Barumon regard religious leaders as moral guardians and highly respected figures within the social structure. Their strategic position is closely associated with their responsibility to provide religious guidance, spiritual counseling, and moral education to the community (Abdul Wahab, Barumon community leader, personal communication, December 18, 2025). Through religious sermons, social outreach activities, and community engagement programs, religious leaders contribute significantly to enhancing public awareness and social development. Consequently, they function as opinion leaders who help interpret contemporary social issues and provide ethical perspectives on matters affecting the community. Their extensive knowledge and moral authority make them trusted sources of guidance, not only in religious matters but also in social and political affairs.

Environmental degradation caused by illegal logging and the expansion of oil palm plantations has long been a major concern among religious leaders in Barumon (H. Sarjana Syakir Nasution, Barumon religious figure, personal communication, December 17, 2025). For decades, they have consistently delivered religious messages emphasizing the importance of environmental conservation and warning against actions that cause ecological destruction. These messages are communicated through sermons in mosques, churches, and various religious gatherings. Religious leaders believe that strengthening environmental awareness through religious teachings is essential for preventing environmental degradation because individuals who adhere faithfully to religious values are expected to refrain from activities that damage nature and disrupt ecological balance.

Both Islamic and Christian teachings emphasize that environmental destruction contradicts religious principles and moral obligations. Consequently, environmental degradation is viewed as a collective concern that requires joint action from all members of society (Tigor Simatupang, Barumun Christian figure, personal communication, December 19, 2025). Nevertheless, religious leaders have faced substantial challenges in addressing forest destruction caused by illegal business actors and, in some cases, individuals associated with governmental and security institutions. Despite continuous efforts to promote environmental stewardship, their messages were frequently ignored, contributing to severe environmental consequences that culminated in the devastating floods and landslides that affected Barumun in late 2025.

Table 1.

List Of Religious Figures In Barumun Who Actively Preach To Prevent Environmental Damage In 2025/2026

No	Name	Information
1	Drs. H. Syafaruddin Hasibuan, MA	Pesantren Aek Hayuara
2	H. Sarjana Syakir Nasution, S.Ag	Majalis Taklim Sibuhuan Julu
3	H. Nawawi Daulay, S.Ag	Majelis Taklim Sosa
4	H. Mujahid Harahap, S.Ag	Majelis Taklim Tandihat
5	Drs. H. Rohyan Hasibuan, M.A	Pesanten al Hakimiyah
6	H. Ismail Nasution, Lc. M.Th.	MUI Padang Lawas
7	Drs. H. Damanhuri Rangkuti	MUI Ulu Barumun
8	Pdt. Drs. Tigor Simatupang	Gereja HKBP Sosa Julu
9	Pdt. Parulian Simanjuntak, M.A.	Gereja HKBP Sosa Jae
10	Pdt. Luhut Pardomuan Tarigan	Gereja HKBP desa Rumbao

Source: Documentation of FKUB Padanglawas North Sumatra 2025

Religious leaders in Barumun deserve recognition for their consistent commitment to promoting environmental awareness and conservation. Although most of them do not possess formal educational backgrounds in forestry or environmental sciences, they draw upon religious teachings that strongly advocate environmental protection. In Islam, for example, environmental stewardship is closely linked to the Qur'anic principle articulated in Surah Ar-Rum (30:41), which warns that environmental damage results from human actions. These religious perspectives have enabled religious leaders to become influential advocates for environmental responsibility within their communities.

Among the regions affected by floods and landslides in Sumatra, Barumun, Padang Lawas, became the primary focus of this study due to the scale of destruction experienced by local communities. In addition to psychological trauma, residents faced numerous social and economic consequences, including loss of life, destruction of housing, damage to agricultural land, disruption of livelihoods, and deterioration of public infrastructure. Government records documented substantial impacts on local communities, including fatalities, displaced families, damaged religious facilities, destroyed bridges, and extensive losses in agriculture and livestock. These impacts illustrate the multidimensional consequences of environmental degradation and natural disasters on community well-being.

Table 2.

The Impact of Floods and Landslides in Barumun, Padanglawas, North Sumatra in 2025

No	Disaster Impact	Description
1	Residents swept away	There were 18 residents swept away in the Barumun River and Sosa River

No	Disaster Impact	Description
2	Fatalities	Two people died due to a landslide in Siraisan Ulu Barumun village.
3	The house is washed away	There are 20 floating houses located on the banks of the Sosa River and the Barumun River.
4	Agricultural land is damaged	More than 300 hectares of residents' agricultural land were damaged due to floods and landslides.
5	Damaged mosque	There were 3 mosques damaged in Ulu Barumun due to floods and landslides
6	Damaged Church	There is 1 damaged church in the sosa area due to floods and landslides
7	Damages bridges	There are 3 damaged bridges over the Barumun River and 2 bridges over the Sosa River
8	Evacuated residents	There are 16 families displaced from their homes along the banks of the sosa and Barumun Rivers
9	Traumatized residents	Thousands of Barumun residents are traumatized by the 2025 flood and landslide disasters
10	Jobless residents	Hundreds of residents lost their jobs due to the destruction of agricultural land and plantations
11	Livestock swept away and missing	Hundreds of livestock were swept away and went missing during the 2025 flood disaster

Source: Documentation of Padanglawas December 2025

Despite these challenges, disaster response efforts were implemented collaboratively by central and local governments, humanitarian organizations, community groups, and religious institutions. Assistance from various regions of Indonesia reflected strong social solidarity and national unity (H. Rohyan, Barumun religious figure, personal communication, December 22, 2025). Religious leaders actively participated alongside government agencies and local communities in providing humanitarian assistance, supporting reconstruction efforts, and encouraging collective action. Through these collaborative initiatives, the people of Barumun gradually began to recover from the disaster and rebuild their social and economic lives.

This pattern of influence corresponds closely to Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) two-step flow model of communication, which posits that mass-mediated or institutional messages rarely persuade communities directly but instead pass through socially trusted intermediaries who interpret and re-transmit them through interpersonal channels. In Barumun, religious leaders occupy precisely this intermediary position: government environmental and disaster policy does not reach residents as abstract regulation but as sermon-mediated moral guidance, filtered through religious leaders' interpretive authority before being accepted or contested by the community. This explains why, throughout the findings, community trust in government policy consistently tracks religious leaders' endorsement rather than the technical content of the policy itself—positioning religious leaders not merely as communicators of policy, but as its *de facto* legitimizing authority at the local level.

Religious Leaders' Responses to Government Political Policies on Forest Conservation

Forest Conservation Regulations

In principle, government policies concerning forest protection and conservation in Indonesia have been relatively comprehensive and oriented toward public welfare. The legal framework governing forest management is primarily based on Law No. 41 of 1999 on Forestry and Law No. 18 of 2013 on the Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction. These regulations

emphasize ecosystem preservation and sustainable forest management through forest zoning systems, including protected, conservation, and production forests. Government policies also include moratoriums on new permits for primary forests and peatlands, reforestation and ecosystem restoration programs, forest patrols conducted by Forest Management Units (FMUs), and strict legal measures against illegal logging activities. In addition, social forestry initiatives and the recognition of customary forest rights have been introduced to encourage community participation in forest conservation (Law No. 41 of 1999; Law No. 18 of 2013 [P3H Law]).

According to religious leaders in Barumun, the existing regulatory framework demonstrates the government's commitment to environmental protection and sustainable natural resource management. Forests, water resources, and other environmental assets are regarded as essential foundations of community well-being and should therefore be preserved collectively. Religious leaders generally acknowledge that government regulations are designed to ensure environmental sustainability and intergenerational justice. However, they also emphasize that the effectiveness of these policies depends largely on their implementation and enforcement at the local level.

Despite the existence of comprehensive regulations, many religious leaders perceive a significant gap between policy formulation and practical implementation. Illegal logging, forest encroachment, and the conversion of forest areas into oil palm plantations continue to occur in many parts of Barumun. Informants argued that environmental destruction is often tolerated due to weak law enforcement and the involvement of certain business actors who prioritize short-term economic gains over long-term environmental sustainability. Some respondents also expressed concerns regarding alleged collusion between illegal logging operators and individuals within government or security institutions. Consequently, local communities often perceive that environmental regulations are not enforced consistently, thereby reducing public trust in government environmental policies.

This perceived gap between well-designed regulation and weak local implementation reflects what public policy scholars term the “implementation gap”—the divergence between policy as formally enacted and policy as it is actually enforced at the street level. What is analytically significant in Barumun is that religious leaders, lacking formal regulatory authority, nonetheless functioned as informal monitors of this gap, using sermons and public forums to hold local officials morally accountable in the absence of effective administrative oversight. This positions religious leadership as a form of societal accountability mechanism that partially substitutes for weak bureaucratic enforcement, a dynamic with particular relevance for disaster-prone regions where formal monitoring capacity is often limited.

Preventing Illegal Logging

Religious leaders in Barumun demonstrated a strong understanding of government environmental policies, particularly those related to forest conservation. While they generally supported the objectives of existing regulations, they consistently highlighted discrepancies between policy intentions and realities on the ground. Forested areas that were once characterized by dense vegetation and ecological richness in regions such as the Bukit Barisan Mountains, Simartolu Hills, and Ulu Barumun have gradually been transformed into degraded landscapes and oil palm plantations. According to religious leaders, these environmental changes have significantly increased the vulnerability of local communities to floods and landslides.

For more than two decades, religious leaders have repeatedly warned communities and government authorities about the environmental risks associated with illegal logging. Through sermons, religious gatherings, and public discussions, they emphasized the importance of environmental stewardship and criticized the exploitation of forest resources for short-term economic interests (Pdt. Luhut Pardomuan Tarigan, Barumun Christian figure, personal communication, December 21, 2025). However, many of these warnings received limited attention from policymakers and local stakeholders. Although the consequences of deforestation

were not immediately visible, the devastating floods and landslides that occurred in late 2025 revealed the long-term environmental impacts of unsustainable forest management practices (H. Ismail Nasution, Barumun religious figure, personal communication, December 22, 2025).

The responses of religious leaders to weak forest governance can be categorized as constructive and critical. They consistently referred to religious teachings, including the Qur'anic principle that environmental destruction results from human actions (Qur'an, Ar-Rum 30:41), to encourage greater accountability among government officials and community members. Religious leaders argued that effective environmental governance requires not only strong regulations but also integrity, transparency, and commitment from public officials responsible for implementing those policies. In their view, corruption and collusion remain major obstacles to successful environmental protection efforts.

Religious leaders also recognized that local communities themselves sometimes contribute to environmental degradation. Economic incentives offered by logging companies often encourage residents to participate in activities that damage forests. While these activities may provide temporary financial benefits, they ultimately generate severe environmental and social consequences for future generations. Consequently, religious leaders have continuously promoted environmental ethics through religious education, emphasizing the concept of *hablum minal alam* (the relationship between humans and nature), which encourages Muslims to protect and preserve natural resources as part of their religious obligations (H. Sarjana Syakir Nasution, Barumun religious figure, personal communication, December 19, 2025).

Long before the floods and landslides occurred, religious leaders had regularly reminded village, sub-district, and district government officials about the importance of protecting forests and water resources in Barumun. During large religious gatherings attended by public officials, they frequently urged government authorities to uphold environmental regulations honestly and consistently (Observation, Pondok Al Hakimiyah Barumun religious study session, December 21, 2025). According to the participants, environmental degradation in Barumun was not merely the result of inadequate regulations but rather the consequence of weak governance and insufficient commitment to law enforcement. They argued that only a small number of individuals benefited from forest exploitation, while the broader community suffered the consequences through environmental disasters and economic losses.

These findings are consistent with what Aksa (2020) describes as the Islamic principles of *al-'ilmu* (knowledge), *ikhtiar* (effort), and *tawakkul* (trust in God)—a theological framework in which environmental stewardship is understood not as passive acceptance of disaster but as an active religious obligation. Religious leaders' repeated warnings prior to the 2025 disaster illustrate this proactive theological orientation in practice. However, the fact that these warnings went largely unheeded for over two decades also reveals an important limitation of religious authority as a governance mechanism: moral suasion alone, however theologically grounded, cannot substitute for formal enforcement power when confronted with entrenched economic interests. This finding qualifies Baidhawry (2015) more optimistic account of faith-based organizational influence in disaster mitigation, suggesting that religious leaders' effectiveness is contingent on—and in this case constrained by—their lack of formal regulatory or economic leverage over illegal logging actors.

Reforestation Policies

Although religious leaders were critical of weaknesses in forest governance, they did not reject government policies altogether. Instead, they adopted an objective and balanced position by supporting policies they considered beneficial to society while criticizing those they viewed as ineffective or harmful. Following the floods and landslides of late 2025, religious leaders strongly supported reforestation initiatives launched by village, sub-district, and district governments. These programs encouraged communities to plant trees along riverbanks and upstream

watershed areas surrounding the Barumun River, Aek Jorbing River, and Sosa River (Observation, Sibual-buali Barumun religious study gathering, December 23, 2025).

Religious leaders actively promoted these initiatives through sermons and religious gatherings, encouraging community participation in tree-planting campaigns as part of both environmental conservation and disaster mitigation efforts. They viewed reforestation as a practical strategy for restoring ecological balance and reducing the risk of future flooding. One religious leader, Syafaruddin Hasibuan, emphasized that successful environmental policies require not only effective regulations but also serious commitment to implementation. According to him, the tree-planting movement represented a positive collaboration between government institutions, religious leaders, and local communities in addressing environmental degradation and preventing future disasters (H. Syafaruddin Hasibuan, Barumun religious figure, personal communication, December 17, 2025).

The strong endorsement of reforestation programs by religious leaders can be understood through the lens of collaborative governance, which posits that policy effectiveness increases when state actors share implementation responsibility with trusted non-state intermediaries. In Barumun, religious leaders functioned as such intermediaries: their authority did not derive from formal administrative appointment but from what Weber terms traditional-charismatic legitimacy—a form of moral capital accumulated through decades of sermon-based environmental advocacy prior to the disaster. This finding parallels Baidhawya's (2015) account of Muhammadiyah's role in disaster mitigation, where religious organizations translated theological commitments into organized action, and extends Sukiyawati and Majid's (2024) argument that Islamic legal reasoning can legitimize environmental practice; in Barumun, however, this legitimation operated across two religious traditions simultaneously (Islam and Christianity), suggesting that interreligious moral consensus—rather than doctrine from a single tradition—may be a distinct mechanism through which collaborative environmental governance is achieved in religiously plural, disaster-affected settings.

The following data shows community support in various villages in the Barumun area for the tree-planting movement in the upper and lower reaches of the river:

Table 3.

Tree-Planting Movement In The Upper and Downstream of The Barumun River In 2026

No	Village	Number of Trees
1	Sosopan	10
2	Aek Bargot	10
3	Ulu Aer	10
4	Pagarambira	10
5	Siundol	10
6	Siraisan	10
7	Parambatu	10
8	Tanjung	10
9	Tandihat	10
10	Sipege julu	10
11	Sabarimba	10
12	Aek nabara	10
	Jumlah	120

Source: Padanglawas Regional Government documentation, 2026

Table 4.

Tree Planting Initiative in The Upstream and Downstream Areas of The Aek Jorbing River In 2026

No	Villages	Number of Trees
1	Paringgonan Julu	10
2	Paringgonan Jae	10
3	Pasaripuh	10
4	Matondang	10
5	Simanuldang Jae	10
6	Simanuldang Julu	10
7	Sibulussalam	10
8	Pintupadang	10
9	Sigorbus	10
10	Mompang	10
	Jumlah	100

Source: Padanglawas Regional Government documentation, 2026

Table 5.

Tree Planting Initiative in the Upstream and Downstream Areas of the Sosa River (2026)

No	Villages	Number of Trees
1	Sibuhuan	10
2	Janji Lobi	10
3	Kampung Saroha	10
4	Tanjung Botung	10
5	Hapung	10
6	Batu Gajah	10
7	Bonan dolok	10
8	Handio	10
9	Harang jae	10
10	Harang julu	10
11	Pasir jae	10
12	Rumbao	10
13	Ujung batu	10
	Jumlah	130

Source: Documentation of Padang Lawas, January 2026

The findings indicate that community participation in reforestation programs was substantial. Villages located along the Barumon, Aek Jorbing, and Sosa river systems actively contributed to tree-planting initiatives organized by local authorities (Observation, Aek Jorbing River, Barumon, January 2026). Religious leaders played a significant role in mobilizing public support through persuasive communication and community engagement. This collaboration between religious institutions, government agencies, and local residents demonstrates the importance of social capital and collective action in environmental restoration efforts (H. Mujahid Harahap, personal communication, December 23, 2026).

In addition to government-led programs, environmental initiatives were also promoted through religious institutions. The Office of Religious Affairs in several sub-districts introduced a policy requiring Muslim couples to plant at least one tree before receiving marriage documentation. Trees could be planted in family-owned land or in designated areas along

the Barumun, Aek Jorbing, and Sosa rivers. This initiative reflects an innovative integration of environmental responsibility into religious and social practices, reinforcing the role of religious institutions in promoting sustainable environmental stewardship within local communities (Khoiruddin, personal communication, December 18, 2026).

Religious Leaders' Responses to Post-Disaster Recovery Policies

Government policies aimed at post-disaster recovery in Barumun, Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, received highly positive responses from religious leaders. The rapid emergency response implemented by government institutions, together with support from humanitarian organizations and social foundations, significantly alleviated the suffering of communities affected by floods and landslides. Assistance in the form of food supplies, clean water, medicines, blankets, and financial aid helped reduce the immediate hardships faced by disaster victims. Religious leaders not only expressed support for these recovery programs through sermons and public appeals but also actively participated in community-based recovery efforts, including distributing aid and mobilizing collective action to rebuild damaged facilities.

For the people of Barumun, the arrival of assistance from various regions of Indonesia and from different social organizations represented more than material support. It demonstrated the strength of national solidarity and humanitarian concern for fellow citizens affected by disaster. These forms of assistance helped communities overcome immediate challenges such as food insecurity and health risks while also restoring optimism and social cohesion. Religious leaders consistently encouraged communities to remain patient, resilient, and united during the recovery process, reinforcing the importance of mutual cooperation and social solidarity.

Beyond emergency relief, long-term recovery required the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure, including roads, bridges, agricultural land, residential areas, mosques, and churches. In addition, environmental restoration through reforestation and forest rehabilitation became a crucial component of recovery efforts. Religious leaders strongly supported government initiatives aimed at rebuilding physical infrastructure and restoring environmental sustainability. Their endorsement and active participation increased community trust in government programs and contributed to the successful implementation of post-disaster recovery policies (H. Sarjana Syakir Nasution, personal communication, December 17, 2025).

Responses to the Rehabilitation of Religious Facilities

Among the facilities damaged by floods and landslides in Barumun were three mosques and one church. The damaged mosques were located in Pagarambira, Siraisan, and Tanjung villages within Ulu Barumun District, while the affected church was located in Rumbao Village, Sosa Jae District (Observation, Barumun, Padang Lawas, December 17, 2025). To support recovery efforts, the Padang Lawas Regional Government allocated IDR 20 million to each damaged house of worship, while the Ministry of Religious Affairs provided an additional IDR 10 million per facility. In total, the four religious institutions received IDR 120 million in rehabilitation assistance (H. Achmad Fauzan Nasution, personal communication, December 18, 2025).

Religious leaders and local communities welcomed this support positively. Although the funding was insufficient to cover all reconstruction costs, it was viewed as evidence of government concern for the religious needs of disaster-affected communities. Additional financial resources were obtained through donations from social organizations, private donors, and community fundraising initiatives. Community members also participated voluntarily in mutual cooperation activities to repair damaged mosques and churches, reflecting strong social solidarity and interfaith cooperation during the recovery period.

The assistance provided by the government, amounting to IDR 20 million from the local government and IDR 10 million from the Ministry of Religious Affairs for each damaged

house of worship, is highly commendable. Considering the extensive costs required to restore various damaged facilities, this support demonstrates the government's concern for religious communities. It reflects the responsiveness of government institutions to the religious needs of society. In addition to government assistance, funds for the rehabilitation of mosques and churches were also obtained from other donors, including social organizations and individual contributors. Therefore, the reconstruction of religious facilities following the floods and landslides has not encountered significant financial obstacles (H. Damanhuri Rangkuti, personal communication, December 23, 2025).

We are deeply grateful for the assistance of IDR 30 million provided by the government through the local administration and the Ministry of Religious Affairs for the rehabilitation of the church in Rumbao Village. For us, the significance of this support lies not merely in the amount of funding received, but in the government's genuine concern for the religious life of the community. When religious facilities are supported during a period of disaster, it contributes to strengthening public morale. Moral and spiritual reinforcement is particularly important when communities are facing hardship. Since the people of Barumun are highly religious, faith-based approaches play a crucial role in helping them recover from adversity and rebuild their lives (Pdt. Parulian Simanjuntak, personal communication, December 23, 2025).

The positive response of religious leaders toward these rehabilitation programs reflects the harmonious relationship between government institutions and faith-based communities in Barumun. Effective communication and cooperation between public authorities and religious leaders have strengthened public trust and facilitated the implementation of recovery programs. Such collaboration contributes not only to the reconstruction of physical infrastructure but also to the restoration of spiritual well-being and social stability within affected communities (Pdt. Tigor Simatupang, personal communication, December 23, 2025).

Beyond its material value, government funding for the reconstruction of mosques and churches carried significant symbolic weight. Drawing on the concept of religious environmental and social ethics, the restoration of houses of worship can be read as a form of what might be termed *moral infrastructure repair*: because religious buildings function simultaneously as spiritual, educational, and community-organizing spaces, their rehabilitation signaled government recognition of religious leaders as legitimate stakeholders rather than passive recipients of aid. This helps explain why informants across both religious communities interpreted a relatively modest sum (IDR 20–30 million per facility) as evidence of substantive government concern rather than measuring the policy's success primarily in monetary terms. This dynamic echoes Joakim and White's (2015) finding that religious institutions in Indonesia function as informal governance nodes that shape how communities interpret and evaluate government performance—the perceived adequacy of a policy response is filtered through religious leaders' interpretive authority before it is transmitted to the wider community, which in turn illustrates why religious leaders' endorsement (or criticism) of a policy can carry more weight for community trust than the policy's technical or financial merits alone.

Responses to River Rehabilitation Policies

The rehabilitation of river systems constituted another important aspect of post-disaster recovery. Severe flooding altered river channels and deposited large quantities of rocks, sand, and timber on agricultural land. These environmental changes reduced agricultural productivity and threatened the livelihoods of local residents. Consequently, restoring river channels became a priority for both government agencies and local communities.

Religious leaders responded positively to river rehabilitation initiatives and actively encouraged community participation through religious gatherings and public meetings. They emphasized the importance of collective responsibility in restoring environmental conditions and protecting local livelihoods. In addition to providing moral encouragement, many religious

leaders directly participated in community-based rehabilitation activities alongside local residents.

The collaboration among religious leaders, community members, and government authorities significantly accelerated river restoration efforts. Their collective involvement strengthened social cohesion and demonstrated how religious leadership can contribute to environmental recovery and community resilience following natural disasters (Observation, Matondang and Siraisan villages, December 29, 2025).

The relatively rapid mobilization of community labor for river restoration—achieved largely through religious leaders' calls for collective participation rather than through formal disaster-response chains of command—illustrates a key mechanism of community resilience identified in the disaster literature: pre-existing social trust, embedded in religious networks, can be converted into rapid collective action during recovery. In Barumun, this bonding social capital was activated specifically through religious authority rather than through customary (adat) or purely administrative channels, suggesting that in religiously plural but socially cohesive settings such as Barumun—where interfaith cooperation through Dalihan Na Tolu already underpins social organization—religious leadership and customary social structures may operate as complementary, rather than competing, sources of resilience.

Responses to Community Economic Recovery Policies

The economic consequences of the floods and landslides severely affected the livelihoods of Barumun residents, particularly those dependent on agriculture and plantations. Religious leaders strongly supported government policies designed to strengthen local economic recovery. Through coordinated efforts at village, subdistrict, and district levels, assistance was distributed to affected households in the form of food supplies, financial aid, livestock, agricultural inputs, and fishery resources.

Government support included rice, cooking oil, eggs, cash assistance, cattle, goats, fish fingerlings, and various fruit tree seedlings such as banana, coconut, durian, orange, and duku trees. In addition, government agencies provided technical assistance and equipment to rehabilitate agricultural land damaged by flooding, including the removal of rocks, debris, and timber deposits. Religious leaders welcomed these initiatives and encouraged communities to participate actively in recovery programs (Taufik Hasibuan, personal communication, December 30, 2025).

The following are the types of assistance provided by the Padanglawas local government:

Table 6.
Policy For Strengthening The Economy of Residents Following The 2026 Barumun Flood Disaster

No	Type of Assistance	Description
1	Rice	30 kg per affected resident
2	Cooking oil	5 kg per affected resident
3	Eggs	3 kg per affected resident
4	Cattle (Cows)	4 heads per village
5	Goats	8 heads per village
6	Money / Cash	IDR 1,000,000 per affected resident
7	Banana tree seedlings	50 seedlings per village
8	Durian tree seedlings	50 seedlings per village
9	Coconut tree seedlings	50 seedlings per village
10	Citrus/Orange tree seedlings	50 seedlings per village
11	Duku tree seedlings	50 seedlings per village

No	Type of Assistance	Description
12	Fish fingerlings / Fish seeds	100 per village
13	Rehabilitating damaged agricultural land	Deploying equipment and labor to clear rocks and wood from the agricultural land

Source: Documentation of Padanglawas, Januari 2026

Beyond supporting government assistance, religious leaders promoted values of charity (*sadaqah*), mutual assistance, and social responsibility through religious teachings. They encouraged wealthier community members to assist vulnerable households and emphasized the importance of solidarity during times of hardship. These religious messages strengthened community resilience and complemented formal government recovery programs. As a result, economic recovery efforts were supported not only by public policies but also by community-based social and religious networks (H. Ismail Nasution, MUI Padang Lawas, personal communication, January 4, 2026).

This pattern illustrates the complementary interaction between different forms of social capital identified by Aldrich and Meyer (2015). Government-distributed aid—livestock, seedlings, cash assistance—represents a form of *linking* social capital, connecting the community vertically to formal state resources, while religious leaders' promotion of *sadaqah* and mutual assistance mobilizes *bonding* social capital, the tight, emotionally close networks within the community itself. The findings suggest that economic recovery in Barumun was most effective where these two forms of capital operated in tandem: government assistance provided material resources at scale, while religious networks ensured equitable redistribution to the most vulnerable households and sustained morale during the recovery process—a combination that neither state policy nor religious mobilization alone would likely have achieved.

Responses to Housing Rehabilitation Policies

Religious leaders also expressed strong support for government policies aimed at rehabilitating and relocating damaged housing. Numerous homes located along riverbanks and mountain slopes were either destroyed or severely damaged by floods and landslides. To reduce future disaster risks, some households were relocated to safer areas away from vulnerable locations (Observation, Paringgonan Village, December 29, 2025).

The government provided housing rehabilitation subsidies of approximately IDR 10 million per household. Although this amount covered only a portion of reconstruction costs, it provided important financial assistance to affected families. Religious leaders and community leaders encouraged collective action and mutual cooperation to supplement government support and reduce rebuilding expenses (Muhammad Syahwil, personal communication, December 30, 2025).

Community members responded positively to these appeals and actively participated in rebuilding damaged houses through voluntary labor and local fundraising initiatives. The involvement of religious leaders in mobilizing community support strengthened social solidarity and demonstrated the important role of faith-based leadership in post-disaster recovery. Their efforts helped ensure that vulnerable households received both material assistance and moral support, thereby facilitating the broader process of social and economic recovery in Barumun.

This hybrid pattern—partial government subsidy supplemented by community-mobilized voluntary labor—echoes what international disaster-recovery scholarship terms “owner-driven” or “community-driven” reconstruction, in which affected households retain substantial agency over rebuilding rather than relying solely on top-down state provision. In Barumun, religious leaders served as the organizing node that converted a modest cash subsidy (IDR 10 million per household) into a functioning reconstruction process by mobilizing collective labor and local fundraising. This suggests that the perceived success of housing recovery policy in Barumun

cannot be attributed to the subsidy amount alone, but to religious leaders' capacity to convert limited state resources into community-scale collective action—again underscoring their role as intermediaries who translate formal policy into locally legitimate, actionable recovery.

Taken together, these findings across environmental conservation and post-disaster recovery domains reveal a consistent pattern: religious leaders in Barumun function neither as passive recipients of government policy nor as independent power centers, but as interpretive intermediaries who translate, legitimize, and locally enforce policy through pre-existing moral and social authority. This positions the case of Barumun as an instructive addition to the international literature on faith-based disaster governance. Where Joakim and White (2015) demonstrate that religious networks shape disaster response and recovery in general terms, and Sukiyawati and Majid (2024) show that Islamic legal reasoning can legitimize environmental practice within a single-faith community, Barumun extends this scholarship by demonstrating how such intermediary authority operates across two religious traditions simultaneously, within a single collaborative governance arrangement spanning environmental regulation, disaster relief, and infrastructure recovery. At the same time, the limits of this authority—illustrated most clearly by religious leaders' unheeded warnings about deforestation prior to the disaster—suggest that moral and religious legitimacy, while a powerful complement to formal governance, cannot substitute for enforceable regulatory capacity, a nuance that qualifies more optimistic accounts of faith-based disaster governance in the existing literature.

Conclusion

This study examined how religious leaders in Barumun, Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, responded to government environmental and post-disaster recovery policies following the 2025 floods and landslides. The findings show that religious leaders function as moral authorities who actively shape environmental awareness, respond selectively rather than uniformly to government policy—supporting reforestation while criticizing weak enforcement against illegal logging—and play a central mobilizing role in post-disaster recovery across religious facility rehabilitation, river restoration, economic recovery, and housing reconstruction.

Theoretically, this study extends the literature on faith-based disaster governance by demonstrating that religious leaders act as interpretive intermediaries who translate, legitimize, and locally enforce public policy through pre-existing moral and social authority—a role that, in Barumun, operates simultaneously across two religious traditions and three policy domains, while also revealing its limits: moral appeals alone proved insufficient to change enforcement outcomes on illegal logging, qualifying more optimistic accounts of faith-based influence. Practically, the findings suggest that disaster and environmental agencies would benefit from formally involving religious leaders early in policy design, since programs combining state resources with religion-based social mobilization—as seen in Barumun's housing and economic recovery—appear more effective than either approach alone.

As a single-site qualitative study, these findings are context-specific to Barumun's religious and cultural composition. Future research should therefore pursue comparative studies across regions with different religious compositions, disaster types, and national contexts to determine whether the interpretive-intermediary role of religious leaders identified here reflects a broader pattern in faith-based disaster governance.

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