

## **Strengthening Local Wisdom in Coastal Climate Resilience in Southeast Asia**

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**ABSTRACT:** The resilience of coastal communities in the Global South, including in Southeast Asia, in facing the impacts of climate change requires a responsive and adaptive environmental legal framework. Local wisdom serves as a strategic element in safeguarding the rights of coastal communities and enhancing their capacity to withstand environmental threats. This study examines how integrating local wisdom into environmental law can contribute to strengthening coastal climate resilience, particularly within the context of Indonesia and comparable jurisdictions in Asia. Employing normative legal research, this study adopts conceptual, legislative, and comparative approaches to highlight best practices and theoretical reflections. The findings demonstrate that policies recognizing and incorporating local knowledge into environmental law hold significant potential to support effective adaptation and mitigation



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efforts in coastal areas. Comparative analysis of policies across different countries in the region shows that embracing local wisdom can foster a more context-sensitive and sustainable legal framework. Accordingly, this study proposes that legal frameworks in developing countries should integrate local wisdom as an integral element of environmental law reform to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable coastal communities. The implications suggest that such integration is not only relevant for climate change adaptation but also for building more responsive, participatory, and effective environmental governance in the developing world.

**KEYWORDS:** climate change; local wisdom; coastal communities;

## I. INTRODUCTION

Climate change has become a global challenge that significantly impacts communities in various regions, especially coastal communities vulnerable to environmental threats such as sea level rise, extreme weather, and ecosystem change.<sup>1</sup> This condition causes coastal communities to face complex health, livelihood, and survival risks. Protecting their basic rights to live in a healthy environment requires a comprehensive and responsive legal approach in the face of rapid change. Thus, attention to environmental law as a regulatory framework adaptive to this challenge becomes urgent.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Toimil, Antonio, Inigo J. Losada, Robert J. Nicholls, Robert A. Dalrymple, and Marcel J. F. Stive, "Addressing the Challenges of Climate Change Risks and Adaptation in Coastal Areas: A Review," *Coastal Engineering* 156 (2020): 103611, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.coastaleng.2019.103611>; Vasseur, Liette. "How Ecosystem-Based Adaptation to Climate Change Can Help Coastal Communities through a Participatory Approach," *Sustainability* 13, no. 4 (2021): Article 4, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13042344>.

<sup>2</sup> Su, Peng, Muhammad Imran, Muhammad Nadeem, and Shahbaz ul Haq, "The Role of Environmental Law in Farmers' Environment-Protecting Intentions and Behavior Based on Their Legal Cognition: A Case Study of Jiangxi Province, China," *A Multidisciplinary Approach to Sustainability*, n.d., <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15118571>; Yuan, Baoling, and Yuxin Zhang, "Flexible Environmental Policy, Technological Innovation and Sustainable Development of China's Industry: The Moderating Effect of Environment Regulatory Enforcement," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 243 (2020): 118543, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.118543>; Zhu, Dan, Chenyang Liu, Yuxiang Dong, and Jiajun Hua, "The Effect of Environmental Regulation on Corporate Environmental Governance Behavior and Its Mechanisms," *Sustainability* 14, no. 15 (2022): Article 15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14159050>.

Amid this threat, the local wisdom of coastal communities that has been inherited from generation to generation plays a crucial role. Local practices that prioritize harmony with nature, such as sustainable resource management and adaptation to climate change, show high effectiveness in maintaining environmental balance.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, this local wisdom is still often marginalized in legal policies that prioritize a modern approach. Therefore, an in-depth study of the potential integration of local wisdom in environmental law is needed to ensure sustainable and adaptive protection for coastal communities.

As an archipelagic country with a long coastline, Indonesia faces major challenges in maintaining coastal communities' resilience to climate change's impacts, especially related to natural resources such as water and marine ecosystems. As a mitigation effort, local wisdom that has been rooted in coastal community practices is an important component in supporting this resilience. However, the integration of local wisdom into environmental policies still faces various structural obstacles, especially in terms of harmonization with national regulations. For example, Law No. 32 of 2009 on Environmental Protection and Management mentions the importance of local wisdom as one of the principles of environmental management, but its implementation is often constrained by policies that are still top-down. The recognition of local wisdom in this law actually provides an opportunity for coastal areas to use their traditional knowledge in responding to climate change.

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<sup>3</sup> Karen E. McNamara et al., "An Assessment of Community-Based Adaptation Initiatives in the Pacific Islands," *Nature Climate Change* 10, no. 7 (2020): 628–639, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0813-1>; Nathalie Seddon et al., "Getting the Message Right on Nature-Based Solutions to Climate Change," *Global Change Biology* 27, no. 8 (2021): 1518–1546, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.15513>; Jonathan W. Moore and Daniel E. Schindler, "Getting Ahead of Climate Change for Ecological Adaptation and Resilience," *Science* 376, no. 6600 (2022): 1421–1426, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abo3608>.

Various other regulations have also supported community-based environmental protection. For example, Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages authorizes village governments to manage the environment independently, while Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry No. P.39 of 2017 explicitly affirms the role of indigenous and local peoples in maintaining environmental ecosystems. Through this legal instrument, coastal communities are expected to actively participate in maintaining their ecosystems' resilience through local wisdom passed down from generation to generation. While regulations already accommodate the role of indigenous peoples, challenges remain in their implementation, especially in ensuring that they translate into relevant policies at the local level and can respond to dynamic climate change.

Environmental law aims to protect the environment while accommodating the social, economic, and cultural needs of the community. However, in its implementation, there are still shortcomings in accommodating local uniqueness and wisdom as part of the protection of human rights for coastal communities.<sup>4</sup> In the context of climate change, responsive and adaptive environmental laws will be very effective if they are able to integrate relevant local values and are based on the traditional practices of coastal

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<sup>4</sup> Etty, T., Suryandari, R. S., & Wardhana, A. A. (2022). Perlindungan Hukum atas Lingkungan Hidup dalam Pembangunan Berkelanjutan. *Jurnal Hukum Lingkungan*, 20(1); Martín, A. M., Rosales, C., & Hernández, B. (2023). Conservation Officers' Perceptions of Their Working Conditions and Their Enforcement of Environmental Law in a Territory of High Environmental Protection. *Sustainability*, 15(17), Article 17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151713014>; Su, P., Imran, M., Nadeem, M., & ul Haq, S. (n.d.). The Role of Environmental Law in Farmers' Environment-Protecting Intentions and Behavior Based on Their Legal Cognition: A Case Study of Jiangxi Province, China. *Sustainability*, 15(11), 8571. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15118571>; Zhu, D., Liu, C., Dong, Y., & Hua, J. (2022). The Effect of Environmental Regulation on Corporate Environmental Governance Behavior and Its Mechanisms. *Sustainability*, 14(15), Article 15. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14159050>.

communities. This integration is believed to be a more sustainable solution in addressing the impacts of climate change.

The main challenge faced today is the lack of recognition and application of local wisdom in formal regulations.<sup>5</sup> Prevailing policies often overlook traditional practices that are highly relevant in the context of climate change. As a result, the environmental policies implemented are sometimes not fully in accordance with the social and cultural conditions of coastal communities, so that the effectiveness of protection is less than optimal. This condition shows the need for a more inclusive legal approach by respecting local values that have proven effective in adapting to environmental changes.

In various literature, the role of local wisdom in environmental law is still often ignored or considered as an additional component that is not the main one.<sup>6</sup> In fact, many studies show that local wisdom plays an important role in building community resilience to climate change. Several previous studies, such as those conducted by the United Nations Agency for Environment and Climate, show that indigenous peoples with their local wisdom are often more resilient in the face of

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<sup>5</sup> Abas, A., Wee, S.-Y., Yusup, Y., & Choy, E. A. (2022). "Integrating Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Change Adaptation: Perspectives from Malaysian Coastal Communities." *Sustainability*, 14(3): Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031425>; Guibrunet, L., de la Maza, F., & Mendez-Lemus, Y. (2021). "Local Knowledge for Adaptation: Insights from Urban and Peri-Urban Communities in Mexico." *Sustainability*, 13(17): Article 17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13179888>; Yulius Kurniawan Susanto, Anton Rudyanto, and Dwi Agustina Rahayuningsih, "Redefining the Concept of Local Wisdom-Based CSR and Its Practice," *Sustainability* 14, no. 19 (2022): Article 19, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141912069>.

<sup>6</sup> Dorothee Hanschel et al., "The Role of Legal Frameworks in Governing Ecosystem Services: Lessons from European Water Governance," *Ecosystem Services* 54 (2022): 101416, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoser.2021.101416>; Yulius Kurniawan Susanto, Anton Rudyanto, and Dwi Agustina Rahayuningsih, "Redefining the Concept of Local Wisdom-Based CSR and Its Practice," *Sustainability* 14, no. 19 (2022): Article 12069, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141912069>; Lian Yang, "Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Environmental Governance: A Case Study from Southwest China," *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 64, no. 2 (2021): 312–331, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2020.1726936>.

environmental change than those who do not adopt local wisdom.<sup>7</sup> Thus, this study highlights the importance of integrating local wisdom as a key element in adaptive environmental law.

A number of previous studies have also examined aspects of environmental law and local wisdom separately, but rarely have they specifically integrated the two as solutions to climate change. For example, one study found that locally controlled conservation with the leading role of indigenous peoples and local communities will result in more effective biodiversity conservation in the long term.<sup>8</sup> In line with previous research, this study also emphasizes that the local wisdom of indigenous peoples in nature conservation can include forest management, flora and fauna conservation, food security, water management, land management, and weather forecasting.<sup>9</sup> This study shows that policies based on local wisdom can increase people's resilience to climate change. Unfortunately, there is a gap in the literature on how this local wisdom can be effectively integrated into the environmental law framework.

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<sup>7</sup> Abas, A., Wee, S.-Y., Yusup, Y., & Choy, E. A., "Integrating Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Change Adaptation: Perspectives from Malaysian Coastal Communities," *Sustainability* 14, no. 3 (2022): Article 31425, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031425>; Bauer, A., Haalboom, B., & Redvers, N., "Indigenous Leadership in Climate Change Adaptation: Community-Driven Processes from the Canadian North," *Climate and Development* 14, no. 5 (2022): 401–414, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2021.1906205>; Bayrak, M. M., & Marafa, L. M., "Ten Years of REDD+: A Critical Review of the Impact of REDD+ on Forest-Dependent Communities," *Sustainability* 13, no. 2 (2021): Article 631, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13020631>; Bayrak, M. M., & Marafa, L. M., "Local Perceptions of REDD+ Projects in Southeast Asia: A Meta-Synthesis," *Forest Policy and Economics* 121 (2021): 102293, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2020.102293>; Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2020); Mohamed Shaffril, H. A., Krauss, S. E., Samsuddin, S. F., & Ismail, I. A., "The Use of Local Wisdom in Climate Change Adaptation: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 258 (2020): 120595, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.120595>.

<sup>8</sup> Neil M. Dawson et al., "The Role of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Effective and Equitable Conservation," *Ecology and Society* 26, no. 3 (2021): Article 19, <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-12625-260319>.

<sup>9</sup> Abas, A., Wee, S.-Y., Yusup, Y., & Choy, E. A., "Integrating Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Change Adaptation: Perspectives from Malaysian Coastal Communities," *Sustainability* 14, no. 3 (2022): Article 31425, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031425>.

Given the gaps identified in previous studies, this research aims to explore more deeply the integration of local wisdom into environmental law to enhance the resilience of coastal communities to climate change. Existing literature shows a lack of research that directly links local wisdom with environmental law in the context of climate change. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of comparative studies across countries to identify best practices in integrating local knowledge into environmental governance. The limited responsiveness of environmental policies to local values also highlights the need for a comprehensive examination of how such values can be incorporated as part of broader human rights protections. Several countries provide relevant examples of this integration. In the Philippines, the *bantay dagat* (sea guard) system, rooted in local wisdom, is institutionalized through the Philippine Fisheries Code, which recognizes the role of local communities in marine ecosystem protection and has strengthened community-based conservation efforts.<sup>10</sup> In Australia, particularly along the northern coast, the government incorporates Indigenous practices such as ‘caring for country’ into environmental policies and monitoring systems, which are formalized through both state and federal regulations and supported by local government programs.<sup>11</sup>

In Samoa, the practice of *fa’a Samoa*, which regulates the community’s relationship with nature, is recognized through the Community-Based Fisheries Management Program, enabling participatory governance in coastal resource management and

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<sup>10</sup> Fadhil, M. "Bantay Dagat: Integrasi Pengetahuan Lokal dalam Tata Kelola Perikanan Berkelanjutan di Filipina." *Jurnal Hukum dan Lingkungan* 15, no. 1 (2024): 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/jhl.2024.15.1.45>.

<sup>11</sup> Elrick-Barr, Carmen E., and Timothy F. Smith. "Caring for Country and Climate Change: Lessons from Indigenous Adaptation Strategies in Northern Australia." *Environmental Science & Policy* 123 (2021): 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.05.007>.

improving ecological resilience.<sup>12</sup> Ecuador offers another compelling example, where the constitution acknowledges the rights of nature and Indigenous cultural values, leading to the legal recognition of traditional methods of coastal resource management. In Norway, the rights of the Indigenous Sami people to manage marine ecosystems in accordance with local traditions are protected by national environmental policies, reinforcing sustainable coastal governance amid changing climatic conditions. These international experiences illustrate the significance of integrating local wisdom into environmental legal frameworks as a strategy for adaptation and resilience, offering valuable insights that are highly relevant to Indonesia's environmental and socio-legal context.

The formulation of the research problems addressed in this study is as follows: (1) How can the integration of local wisdom into environmental law enhance the resilience of coastal communities to climate change? (2) How can environmental laws be implemented in a way that incorporates local wisdom within the context of climate change adaptation in different countries? By addressing these two questions, this study aims to contribute to the development of more adaptive and human rights-oriented environmental law policies, while also enhancing the resilience of coastal communities, particularly in Indonesia, Southeast Asia, and other developing regions, in the face of the ongoing challenges posed by climate change.

The main contribution or novelty of this research lies in an interdisciplinary approach that combines local wisdom and environmental law in the framework of human rights-based climate

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<sup>12</sup> Ariu, Lefaoali'i Unutoa Auelua-Fonoti. "Community-Based Fisheries Management and the Practice of *Fa'a Samoa* in Coastal Resource Governance." *Journal of Pacific Studies* 43, no. 1 (2023): 23–39. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/jps.2023.43.1.23>.



resilience. In contrast to previous studies that tend to see local wisdom and environmental law as separate entities, this study offers an integrative perspective that emphasizes the importance of local values as part of legal regulation. This approach is expected to be able to answer the challenge of climate change in a way that is more in line with the needs of coastal communities, considering that local wisdom is an adaptation mechanism that has been tested naturally and passed down from generation to generation.

In addition, this study makes a significant contribution by raising comparative studies that identify best practices from different countries in integrating local wisdom into the environmental legal framework. Thus, this study not only provides new insights for the development of legal policies in Indonesia but also offers environmental law models that have the potential to be applied in various other coastal areas in the world. The implications of these findings could pave the way for developing more responsive and contextual environmental laws, strengthening coastal communities' resilience, and providing more effective human rights protections in the face of the global climate crisis.

## II. METHODS

This study uses a normative law research method that focuses on the analysis of legal concepts and documents to understand the integration of local wisdom in environmental law in order to increase the resilience of coastal communities to climate change. The approaches used in this study include conceptual approaches, legislative approaches, and comparative approaches. A conceptual approach is used to identify and understand the concepts of local wisdom and environmental law and their relevance in the context of

human rights and climate change. The legislative approach is applied to analyze the regulations governing environmental law and local wisdom in Indonesia, while the comparative approach is used to compare best practices from several other countries that have similar policies in integrating local wisdom into environmental law.

The sources of legal materials used in this study include primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials. Primary legal materials consist of laws and regulations related to environmental law and policies that regulate the protection of human rights and local wisdom in Indonesia. Secondary legal materials include books, scientific journals, research reports, and other documents that discuss theories and concepts of environmental law as well as local wisdom in the context of climate change. Tertiary legal resources include legal dictionaries, encyclopedias, and legal guides that provide additional explanations of relevant terms and concepts. The collection of legal materials is carried out through literature studies, which involve accessing national and international legal databases, including digital libraries and Scopus-indexed journals, to ensure that the data used is valid and up-to-date.

The location of this research is focused on the coastal areas of Indonesia, on the grounds that Indonesia has a rich diversity of local wisdom and coastal communities that are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The selection of this location is based on the relevance of the research context, because coastal areas in Indonesia often have a strong link between local wisdom and adaptation to dynamic environmental conditions. The data technique used is qualitative analysis with a descriptive-analytical method. The data is analyzed through the stages of identification, classification, interpretation, and evaluation of the legal materials obtained. The results of this analysis are expected to provide a clear picture of the

potential integration of local wisdom in environmental law and its implications in strengthening the resilience of coastal communities in Indonesia and, more broadly, for the formation of adaptive legal models for climate change at the global level.

### III. LOCAL WISDOM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA PERSPECTIVES

The study of local wisdom in environmental law, particularly as an effort to protect the human rights of coastal communities in Southeast Asia and other developing regions, has a strong theoretical foundation, especially within the broader context of climate change adaptation and mitigation.<sup>13</sup> One relevant perspective is the ecological adaptation theory, which explains that human communities possess the capacity to adapt to their natural environment through behavioral, cultural, and institutional transformations. As highlighted in recent research, the concept of nature's contribution to adaptation can enable transformative pathways by uncovering ecosystem traits that are critical for sustaining future livelihoods, countering climate-related despair, and fostering participatory learning and co-production of locally appropriate adaptation strategies. This theoretical perspective offers a valuable conceptual framework for understanding how the local wisdom of coastal communities—often embedded in a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment—can be meaningfully integrated into national and regional environmental law and policy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew J. Colloff, Russell M. Wise, Ignacio Palomo, Sandra Lavorel, and Unai Pascual, "Nature's Contribution to Adaptation: Insights from Examples of the Transformation of Social-Ecological Systems," *Ecosystems and People* 16, no.1 (2020): 137–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/26395916.2020.1754919>.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Adams, "The Pragmatic Holism of Social-Ecological Systems Theory: Explaining Adaptive Capacity in a Changing Climate," *Progress in Human Geography* 45, no. 6 (2021): 1580–1600, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325211016072>; James H. Jones, Elspeth Ready, and Anne C. Pisor, "Want Climate-Change Adaptation? Evolutionary Theory Can Help," *American*

In this regard, ecological adaptation theory underscores that locally grounded adaptation mechanisms are not only ecologically effective but also sustainable, as they harmonize human needs with the surrounding ecosystems.

Furthermore, the responsive legal theory introduced by Nonet and Selznick (1978) is highly relevant to this study, as it emphasizes the importance of legal flexibility and adaptability in responding to social and ecological change.<sup>15</sup> According to this theory, the law must remain sensitive to the evolving needs of dynamic societies and rapidly changing environmental conditions—such as the vulnerable coastal zones increasingly impacted by climate change across Southeast Asia. Applying responsive legal theory to environmental governance implies that effective environmental laws should recognize and accommodate local values, traditional knowledge, and customary practices that have long served as communities' intrinsic means of adapting to environmental stressors.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, the responsive law perspective supports the notion that environmental legal frameworks that integrate local wisdom will be more contextually grounded and effective in strengthening the resilience of coastal communities in the region.

Climate resilience theory also provides a vital conceptual underpinning for this research. According to the Intergovernmental

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*Journal of Human Biology* 33, no. 4 (2021): e23539, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajhb.23539>.researchgate.net+3pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov+3pure.psu.edu+; Diego Salgueiro-Otero and Elena Ojea, "A Better Understanding of Social-Ecological Systems Is Needed for Adapting Fisheries to Climate Change," *Marine Policy* 122 (2020): 104123, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2020.104123>.

<sup>15</sup> Robin K. Craig, J.B. Ruhl, and Melinda Harm Benson, "The Adaptive Water Governance Project: Assessing Law, Resilience, and Governance in Regional Socio-Ecological Water Systems Facing Climate Change," *West Virginia Law Review* 123, no. 3 (2020): 759–806.

<sup>16</sup> Erin O'Donnell, *Legal Rights for Rivers: Competition, Collaboration and Water Governance* (New York: Routledge, 2021); Jake B. Lau, Rachel Kelly, and Natalie C. Ban, "Indigenous Governance for Conservation: Insights from Indigenous-Led Marine Protected Areas in Canada," *Marine Policy* 129 (2021): 104564, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104564>.

Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), climate resilience refers to the capacity of individuals and communities to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and recover from the adverse impacts of climate change.<sup>17</sup> In coastal communities throughout Southeast Asia and other parts of the Global South, this resilience is often rooted in time-tested local knowledge and practices that have proven adaptive under fluctuating and extreme environmental conditions.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the integration of local wisdom into environmental law and policy can strengthen community resilience by building on locally established, socially accepted mechanisms. The climate resilience perspective thus reinforces the view that local wisdom is a critical resource for climate adaptation and should be recognized as an integral part of rights-based, environmentally sound policymaking.<sup>19</sup>

A review of the broader literature on local wisdom shows that it represents a complex and dynamic knowledge system that evolves through the ongoing interaction between communities and their environments. Local wisdom entails a deep, place-based understanding of local ecosystems and adaptive methods that enable communities to live in harmony with nature. For instance, recent studies emphasize that local ecological knowledge systems—when combined with scientific knowledge—shape community perceptions

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<sup>17</sup> Nadine Rölfer, Felix Rauschmayer, and Karen O'Brien, "A Framework for Transformative Change: Integrating Transformative Capacities, Agency and Environmental Governance," *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 42 (2022): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2021.11.003>.

<sup>18</sup> Donna Green, David Karoly, and Annette Cowie, "Foundations for Climate Resilient Development in the Pacific," *Climate and Development* 13, no. 10 (2021): 875–887, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2020.1867043>; Ava J. Sanson and Ann S. Masten, "Resilience and Climate Change: Adaptation, Transformation, and Hope," *Annual Review of Psychology* 75 (2024): 181–205, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-031623-014100>.

<sup>19</sup> Monica Garcia, Gonzalo Lizarralde, and Colin Davidson, "Sociocultural Factors and Climate Change Resilience in Coastal Communities," *Sustainability* 14, no. 8 (2022): 4567, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14084567>; Luna Khirfan and Nour El-Shayeb, "The Resilience of Urban Heritage under Climate Change: The Case of Alexandria," *Cities* 97 (2020): 102500, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2019.102500>.

of protected areas and influence the governance and sustainability of these landscapes.<sup>20</sup> In Southeast Asia's coastal regions, local wisdom is often embodied in sustainable practices such as coral reef conservation, mangrove forest protection, and environmentally responsible fishing techniques. Berkes has stressed that local wisdom is not merely a static cultural artifact but a living, adaptive system capable of responding to emerging environmental challenges, including climate change.

Equally important is the human rights-based approach to environmental law, which underpins this study's normative perspective. This approach affirms that every individual has the fundamental right to live in a healthy, safe, and sustainable environment, and that states bear the responsibility to protect and fulfill these rights through effective and inclusive legal and policy measures.<sup>21</sup> Recognizing and integrating local wisdom within environmental law can thus be seen as part of the state's obligation to respect and protect the rights of coastal communities that are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis.<sup>22</sup> In this context, a human rights-based approach supports the creation of legal frameworks that are inclusive, participatory, and responsive to local

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<sup>20</sup> Mary C. Colloff et al., "Adapting Transformation: Climate Change and the Human Future," *Nature Climate Change* 10, no. 10 (2020): 874–882, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0887-9>; M. Cebrián-Piqueras et al., "Local Ecological Knowledge Systems and Ecosystem Services: The Role of Knowledge Diversity in Shaping Landscape Values," *People and Nature* 2, no. 4 (2020): 1129–1143, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10148>.

<sup>21</sup> Casey Rea and Scott Frickel, "The Human Right to a Healthy Environment: Origins, Debates, and Promises," *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 19 (2023): 345–365, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-031720-031958>.

<sup>22</sup> Dennis Patterson, *The New Human Rights Movement and Environmental Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Nicolás Gasparri et al., "Territoriality and the Politics of Agribusiness Expansion in Argentina: Human Rights, Land and Environmental Governance," *Geoforum* 131 (2022): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2022.04.014>.

knowledge systems, as a means of fulfilling communities' rights to environmental security and social well-being.<sup>23</sup>

Overall, the theoretical foundations discussed—ecological adaptation theory, responsive legal theory, the climate resilience concept, and the human rights-based approach—complement each other in providing a robust conceptual basis for this research. Through this integrated approach, the study aspires to contribute to the development of adaptive, context-sensitive, and rights-oriented environmental law and policy, which not only safeguard ecosystems but also protect the rights and livelihoods of coastal communities across Southeast Asia and other developing regions that are most vulnerable to the escalating impacts of climate change.

#### IV. INTEGRATION OF LOCAL WISDOM IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE: LESSON FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA

This study finds that integrating local wisdom into environmental law offers a strategic, adaptive, and culturally rooted approach to strengthening the resilience of coastal communities in the face of accelerating climate change, particularly in Indonesia, Southeast Asia, and other parts of the developing world.<sup>24</sup> In many coastal regions across the Indonesian archipelago and Southeast Asia, traditional ecological knowledge and customary practices function

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<sup>23</sup> Sébastien Jodoin et al., "Human Rights and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change: A Reappraisal," *Yearbook of International Environmental Law* 31 (2021): 3–23, <https://doi.org/10.1093/yiel/yvab003>; Jonathan Lau et al., "Integrating Human Rights and Environmental Governance: A Pathway to Environmental Justice," *Sustainability* 13, no. 9 (2021): 5045, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13095045>; L. Buse et al., "Human Rights and Environmental Change: Protecting the Vulnerable," *Global Environmental Change* 69 (2021): 102276, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102276>.

<sup>24</sup> Jabalnur, M. H., Idrus, N. I., Musyahidah, M., & Asriani, A. "Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Coastal Governance: The Role of *Pemali* in Mangrove Conservation in Indonesia." *Marine Policy* 149 (2023): 105465. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2023.105465>.

not only as tools for environmental stewardship but also as frameworks for community-based governance that respond organically to local environmental threats. For example, in coastal areas of Sumatra and Sulawesi, the tradition of pemali—a customary prohibition rooted in spiritual and ecological values—operates as an informal regulatory system that forbids the indiscriminate cutting of mangrove forests. This normative system, maintained across generations, is not merely symbolic; it embodies a locally legitimate environmental ethic that directly safeguards fragile coastal ecosystems, including mangrove belts that serve as natural buffers against storm surges, tidal floods, and saltwater intrusion—climate impacts increasingly threatening Southeast Asia’s coastal zones.

Beyond its ecological utility, pemali strengthens social cohesion and local accountability. It fosters a collective environmental consciousness that links ecosystem preservation with community well-being, spiritual balance, and intergenerational justice.<sup>25</sup> By operating through shared cultural values and informal institutions, pemali achieves levels of compliance and legitimacy that often surpass those of top-down, bureaucratic environmental policies. In this sense, local wisdom represents a form of vernacular law—an unwritten but binding normative order that governs behavior, regulates resource access, and shapes collective responses to ecological risks. Similar examples are found in other Southeast Asian

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<sup>25</sup> Anderson, K., Campling, L., & Smith, A. “Rethinking Adaptation: A Political Ecology of Climate Change in Southeast Asia.” *Environmental Politics* 29, no. 4 (2020): 663–684. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2020.1735227>; Eales, R., Adger, W. N., & Dessai, S. “Cultural Values and Climate Change Adaptation: Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Evidence in Policy Evaluation.” *Environmental Science & Policy* 115 (2021): 38–46. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2020.10.003>; Shusheng, L., Huang, Y., & Lin, H. “Technocratic Governance and the Challenges of Local Adaptation: Evidence from Coastal Cities in China.” *Sustainability* 15, no. 5 (2023): Article 4183. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15054183>; Yoshioka, A., Araki, R., & Kuriyama, K. “Community-Based Approaches to Environmental Governance in Japan: Revitalizing Traditional Knowledge Systems.” *Ecological Economics* 186 (2021): 107065. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2021.107065>.



contexts, where customary marine tenure systems or sacred forest regulations provide community-driven mechanisms for sustainable resource use.

A comparative review of existing literature underscores how such culturally embedded systems of environmental governance remain underutilized across much of Asia and the wider developing world. Numerous studies show that environmental regulation in the region continues to be dominated by technocratic, centralized approaches that prioritize standardized, technology-based solutions while sidelining local actors and context-specific knowledge systems. As a result, national climate adaptation policies—though scientifically rigorous—often fail to resonate with the lived realities and adaptive capacities of coastal communities. In contrast, this study demonstrates that indigenous and community-based traditions, when recognized and integrated into formal legal frameworks, can deliver more sustainable, participatory, and contextually grounded outcomes.<sup>26</sup> Especially in societies where the human-nature relationship is historically and spiritually embedded, legal models that incorporate local wisdom tend to generate greater legitimacy, local ownership, and compliance.

In the Indonesian context, the practical success of integrating local wisdom into environmental law depends heavily on the extent of institutional recognition and operational support, particularly at the local government level. Local governments and non-state actors, including civil society organizations and customary councils, play a pivotal role in sustaining community-based environmental governance. However, this study identifies a regulatory and

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<sup>26</sup> Atahau, A. D. R., Rachmawati, D., Widuri, R., & Widyastuti, T. "Local Wisdom-Based Adaptation to Climate Change: The Role of *Subak Laut* in Bali Coastal Areas." *Sustainability* 14, no. 5 (2022): 2743. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14052743>.

institutional gap: while legal instruments such as Indonesia's Law No. 32 of 2009 on Environmental Protection and Management and the Village Law (Law No. 6 of 2014) provide a formal basis for incorporating local practices, their implementation remains fragmented and procedurally ambiguous. These frameworks, though supportive in principle of local participation, have not yet been fully operationalized to empower village-level institutions and customary authorities. The absence of clear legal mandates, dedicated funding mechanisms, and adequate capacity-building has limited the ability of local actors to embed traditional knowledge systems within formal environmental governance.

Importantly, this study shows that local wisdom does not merely function as a static legacy of past practices but rather as a dynamic system of social innovation and adaptation. For instance, in coastal areas of Bali, the subak laut system—an extension of the traditional subak water management network—has evolved to regulate coastal water flows and mitigate climate risks such as erosion and seawater intrusion. Such practices exemplify an endogenous form of climate adaptation that combines environmental monitoring with community governance. In this regard, the study aligns with global research highlighting the effectiveness of community-based adaptation strategies. Yet, unlike many externally funded or technocratic climate programs, systems like subak laut derive legitimacy and resilience from embedded socio-cultural institutions, rendering them more locally acceptable and self-sustaining.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Karjanto, J. "Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Climate Resilience in Indonesia: A Study on Coastal and Agricultural Practices." *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning* 24, no. 1 (2022): 115–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2021.1996253>; McNamara, Karen E., Rebecca Clissold, Rebecca Westoby, Alison E. Piggott-McKellar, Rachna Kumar, Thilina Clarke, Filomena Namoumou, et al. "An Assessment of Community-Based Adaptation Initiatives in the Pacific Islands." *Nature Climate Change* 10, no. 7 (2020): 628–639. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0813-1>.

The implications of these findings challenge dominant paradigms of environmental governance in Asia and beyond, which rely heavily on legal formalism, technical expertise, and centralized state control. By contrast, legal frameworks that meaningfully integrate local wisdom often produce more enduring outcomes, particularly in coastal resource management. For example, community compliance with mangrove conservation is markedly higher when regulations align with customary norms and are enforced through local institutions. Conversely, externally imposed regulations that disregard local cultural dimensions often encounter resistance, erode trust, and deliver suboptimal outcomes. This reinforces the argument that environmental law should not be seen merely as a top-down legal instrument but rather as a socio-legal process that accommodates pluralistic epistemologies and governance traditions.

Despite signs of progress, the institutionalization of local wisdom within Indonesia's environmental legal architecture—and in other Southeast Asian jurisdictions—remains partial and inconsistent. Regulations such as the Minister of Environment and Forestry Regulation No. P.39/2017, which formally recognizes the role of indigenous and local communities in environmental protection, often face bureaucratic hurdles and limited political will at the local level. Implementation is frequently constrained by administrative complexity, poor inter-agency coordination, and limited legal literacy among local officials and community members. These shortcomings underscore the need for a more coherent and integrated legal strategy—one that goes beyond symbolic recognition and establishes enforceable rights and responsibilities for local communities as co-authors of environmental law and climate adaptation governance.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the wider discourse on climate justice and environmental law by demonstrating that the integration

of local wisdom into environmental governance is not only feasible but essential for building climate resilience in Southeast Asia and the Global South more broadly. It calls for a paradigmatic shift away from technocratic, one-size-fits-all regulatory models toward inclusive, culturally contextualized legal frameworks that value the epistemic legitimacy and adaptive capacity of local knowledge systems. Such an approach offers a viable pathway to develop environmental law that is socially legitimate, ecologically grounded, and politically empowering. For Indonesia and its Southeast Asian neighbors—archipelagic and coastal regions profoundly vulnerable to climate impacts—embedding local wisdom into legal frameworks holds transformative potential. By anchoring environmental policy in the lived experiences and normative traditions of coastal communities, these countries can forge more just, effective, and sustainable responses to the climate crisis, strengthening both the rights and the resilience of their people.

## **V. INTEGRATING LOCAL WISDOM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA'S CLIMATE RESPONSE**

### **A. Potential for Southeast Asia: Lessons from Indonesia**

Local wisdom, as a form of embodied cultural knowledge developed through generations of interaction with nature, offers a vital foundation for pursuing just and context-sensitive environmental law reform—especially in Southeast Asia and the wider Global South. In the midst of a global climate crisis, universal solutions often fail to capture the socio-ecological diversity of affected communities. Integrating local wisdom, therefore, represents a necessary paradigm shift away from technocratic, top-down governance models toward

more pluralistic and democratic approaches to environmental law.<sup>28</sup> Far from being a mere cultural relic, local wisdom embodies ecological intelligence—insights into sustainability, social justice, and community resilience—dimensions frequently diluted in mainstream legal frameworks dominated by centralized institutions and market-driven instruments.

The urgency to recalibrate environmental law becomes clear when examining the limitations of prevailing legal regimes in addressing climate change impacts equitably. Many existing frameworks—whether in the Global North or South—prioritize conservation through control, commodification, and exclusion, often marginalizing the very communities most dependent on healthy ecosystems. This has produced a legal landscape in which those most vulnerable to environmental degradation are least empowered to participate in environmental governance. By contrast, law reform grounded in local wisdom foregrounds the agency of these communities, recognizing them as co-creators of governance rather than passive beneficiaries.<sup>29</sup>

In Indonesia and many Southeast Asian states, the climate crisis disproportionately affects coastal and indigenous communities whose livelihoods are deeply intertwined with fragile ecosystems. Yet these same communities are routinely excluded from formal legal processes and subjected to environmental policies that are culturally incongruent and ecologically unsuitable. Such disjuncture highlights

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<sup>28</sup> Anderson, B., E. Smith, and M. Liu. “Decentralizing Environmental Governance: Local Wisdom and Sustainability in Asia.” *Environmental Policy and Governance* 30, no. 2 (2020): 85–97. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1880>.

<sup>29</sup> Buse, K., M. Shaw, and S. Miller. “Human Rights and Environmental Justice: Rethinking Legal Frameworks.” *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 13, no. 1 (2021): 24–41. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huaa036>.

the structural injustice embedded in current legal systems.<sup>30</sup> Integrating local wisdom into environmental law offers a corrective to this imbalance by aligning legal norms with lived practices, restoring coherence between legal authority and ecological legitimacy.

A core reason why local wisdom holds transformative potential is its relational worldview. While modern legal systems often rest on an extractive logic and a human-nature dualism, local wisdom generally sees the environment as a living entity, with which humans maintain reciprocal, interdependent relationships. This relational ontology generates duties of care, restraint, and intergenerational responsibility—values frequently absent in positivist legal traditions. Embedding these values within law opens pathways for governance that move beyond narrow resource extraction toward an ethic of co-existence, tuned to both planetary limits and local realities.

Local wisdom also expands the scope for legal pluralism, providing complementary frameworks that can coexist with state law and enrich environmental regulation through more localized, adaptive governance. Practices such as *sasi* in Maluku or *awig-awig* in Bali illustrate indigenous legal systems that govern fisheries, forest use, and land management with locally grounded legitimacy and precision. These systems function as proto-legal regimes with their own norms, sanctions, dispute resolution mechanisms, and moral authorities.<sup>31</sup> Recognizing such arrangements within formal law nurtures a more decentralized, polycentric model of environmental

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<sup>30</sup> Carrard, N., C. Ross, and H. Thompson. "Community Participation and Environmental Law Reform." *Environmental Politics* 29, no. 5 (2020): 863–882. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2020.1785103>.

<sup>31</sup> Cebrián-Piqueras, M., D. Hunter, R. M. Ferreira, et al. "Local Ecological Knowledge and Protected Area Management: A Synthesis." *Conservation Science and Practice* 2, no. 8 (2020): e190. <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.190>.

governance—one that mirrors the ecological and cultural complexity of archipelagic and coastal regions in Southeast Asia.

The integration of local wisdom also enhances legal effectiveness through its social legitimacy. Norms embedded in local culture are more likely to be internalized, respected, and enforced by the community. This endogenous compliance contrasts with externally imposed rules that often suffer from weak implementation and community resistance. For example, mangrove conservation measures that align with pemali taboos in Sulawesi achieve higher compliance and better ecological results than externally driven projects. Thus, environmental justice requires not only equitable outcomes but also legitimacy in governance processes.

Beyond substantive justice, local wisdom advances procedural justice by expanding whose voices shape environmental decision-making. Conventional reform processes often privilege state experts and technocrats, sidelining the situated knowledge of local communities. Integrating local wisdom challenges this exclusion by recognizing the epistemic authority of indigenous and coastal peoples as co-authors of legal norms. This inclusion ensures that environmental law reform is both substantively and socially relevant, rooted in diverse ecological knowledge systems and ethical worldviews.<sup>32</sup>

Crucially, local wisdom's adaptive character addresses one of the greatest weaknesses of rigid statutory law in the face of climate change: inflexibility. Local customs evolve through collective deliberation, allowing communities to adjust norms in response to shifting ecological realities. Such flexibility is indispensable for navigating the uncertainties of a rapidly changing climate. By

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<sup>32</sup> Gasparri, N. I., G. Zanin, and C. L. León. "Environmental Justice and Coastal Communities: Rights and Risks." *Journal of Environmental Law* 34, no. 1 (2022): 54–76. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jel/eqab021>.

institutionalizing this adaptive governance capacity, environmental law can remain dynamic and responsive while safeguarding cultural identity.

From a distributive justice perspective, local wisdom helps to counteract the inequities produced by market-based environmental instruments.<sup>33</sup> Many indigenous knowledge systems emphasize collective ownership and reciprocal obligations, resisting the privatization and commodification of nature. Traditional irrigation systems like subak in Bali, for instance, are based on egalitarian principles that prioritize community well-being over individual gain. Embedding such norms into formal law can mitigate the social inequalities that market-based mechanisms—such as carbon trading or green land concessions—often exacerbate.

Furthermore, local wisdom anchors environmental rights within broader cultural and spiritual frameworks. For many communities, the environment is not merely an economic resource but a sacred domain infused with spiritual meaning. Legal recognition of this dimension affirms cultural rights and prevents the cultural erasure that can accompany top-down conservation or development projects. This link between environmental and cultural rights situates local wisdom squarely within a human rights-based approach to law reform.

Equally important is the temporal justice inherent in local wisdom. Many customary systems operate on intergenerational timeframes, prioritizing the duty to maintain ecological integrity for future generations. While the discourse of sustainable development often invokes intergenerational equity in abstract terms, local wisdom

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<sup>33</sup> Gray, K., L. Beattie, and S. Miller. "Recognizing Rights and Resilience: Coastal Communities in Climate Policy." *Climate Policy* 22, no. 7 (2022): 819–836. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2021.1951834>.



embodies this principle through concrete norms and daily practice. Embedding this ethic into formal law counteracts the short-termism of electoral cycles and development agendas.

The global climate crisis demands legal responses that are not only swift but substantively just. International treaties and national legislation provide important standards but risk failure if they are divorced from the cultural and ecological contexts in which they are applied. Precisely because local wisdom emerges from the everyday life of communities, it serves as a practical and moral compass for implementing environmental law that is both effective and fair. For Indonesia and Southeast Asia—regions rich in cultural diversity and deeply exposed to climate risks—recognizing and institutionalizing local wisdom can be transformative. However, realizing this potential requires more than rhetorical endorsement; it demands legal pluralism, decentralized authority, and genuine power-sharing with local communities as co-governors of their environment.

In sum, integrating local wisdom into environmental law reform is not simply a matter of adding local color to existing frameworks. It is a justice project that redefines who has the right to interpret and enforce environmental norms and whose knowledge is valued in the making of climate policy. In this sense, local wisdom is not a vestige of the past but a generative force for building just, resilient, and culturally attuned environmental governance in the era of the climate crisis.

### B. Challenges for Southeast Asia Countries

Integrating local wisdom into environmental law reform is increasingly recognized as a crucial pathway to achieving environmental justice and ecological resilience, particularly in Southeast Asia and other parts of the Global South that are

disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. Yet despite its normative appeal, the actual incorporation of local knowledge and practices into formal legal systems faces complex and multi-layered challenges.<sup>34</sup> These challenges arise not only from institutional and regulatory barriers but also from deep-seated epistemological divides, political dynamics, and socio-cultural transformations that shape the ways in which law and local knowledge interact. Understanding these barriers is vital for advancing an inclusive, context-sensitive, and adaptive model of environmental governance.

One of the most persistent obstacles is the epistemological gap between the positivist foundations of formal environmental law and the relational, dynamic nature of local wisdom. In many states, including those in Southeast Asia, environmental regulation is deeply rooted in codified, expert-driven, and technocratic legal traditions that privilege standardized knowledge.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, local wisdom is often oral, fluid, and embedded in cultural practices that resist formal codification or quantification. This creates a fundamental tension: how can a state's legal system that demands precision, uniformity, and enforceability meaningfully accommodate forms of knowledge that are context-dependent and situational?

This epistemological tension is reinforced by the dominance of legal formalism in many regulatory frameworks. In countries like Indonesia, for instance, environmental governance continues to rely on written laws, ministerial decrees, and rigid administrative procedures that leave little room for interpretive flexibility. Even when local wisdom is nominally recognized in environmental

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<sup>34</sup> Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>35</sup> Sally Engle Merry, "Legal Pluralism," *Law & Society Review* 22, no. 5 (2010): 869–96; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

statutes, it often remains peripheral—symbolically acknowledged but practically marginalized as a secondary or supplementary norm rather than a legitimate source of law.

A further institutional challenge stems from the centralized nature of environmental policymaking in much of Southeast Asia. Policies are typically designed at the national level with minimal consultation with local communities, resulting in uniform rules that neglect regional ecological diversity and cultural specificity.<sup>36</sup> This centralization often limits the legal and administrative space needed for local governments and customary institutions to exercise real autonomy in managing their environments.

Another barrier lies in the legal ambiguity surrounding customary institutions. In many jurisdictions, the legal status of adat (customary) communities and their governance systems remains precarious or only partially protected. Without clear legal recognition and enforceable authority, customary leaders and councils struggle to uphold local environmental norms and resolve disputes effectively. This legal uncertainty makes local wisdom especially vulnerable to marginalization or co-optation by more powerful state or private actors.

The trend toward the commodification of nature under neoliberal environmental governance presents an additional structural obstacle. Instruments like carbon offsetting, payment for ecosystem services, and large-scale green investment projects often impose external market logics onto ecosystems that local communities regard as communal and spiritually significant. Such approaches can erode the

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<sup>36</sup> Bernadette P. Resurrección, "The Politics of Local Environmental Governance in Southeast Asia," *Asian Studies Review* 42, no. 4 (2018): 588–605, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2018.1481457>.

relational ties that underlie local wisdom, disincentivizing the maintenance of customary practices and knowledge.

At the same time, rapid cultural change driven by globalization, urbanization, and changing labor patterns threatens the transmission of local wisdom across generations.<sup>37</sup> Many young people in rural or indigenous communities are becoming increasingly disconnected from traditional knowledge systems. This cultural erosion fragments the collective memory that sustains local wisdom, complicating efforts to embed it within formal law. Legal reform must therefore contend with the fact that local wisdom is dynamic and, in some cases, endangered.

Diversity and contestation within local wisdom itself also pose a challenge. Local wisdom is not monolithic—it varies greatly between communities, even within the same ecological region. Moreover, some customary norms may conflict with broader principles of human rights and social equity, such as gender equality or the rights of marginalized groups within indigenous societies. This raises normative questions about how to balance cultural specificity with universal human rights obligations.

Political-economic forces further complicate the picture. In resource-rich regions, state and corporate interests often prioritize extractive industries such as mining, plantations, and coastal tourism over local environmental stewardship.<sup>38</sup> Local governments may be pressured—sometimes through corruption or clientelism—to overlook or override customary norms for economic gain. This

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<sup>37</sup> James M. Lindsay, “Indonesia’s Forest Laws, Legal Institutions, and Indigenous Communities,” *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 43, no. 1 (2011): 111–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07329113.2011.10756681>.

<sup>38</sup> Bram Büscher and Robert Fletcher, “The Conservation Industry: Critical Perspectives on Privatization and Neoliberalism,” *Critical Social Policy* 36, no. 3 (2016): 464–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018315619578>.

political economy of extraction frequently undermines genuine efforts to integrate local wisdom into environmental law.

Even when legal frameworks formally recognize the role of local wisdom, meaningful participation by communities is often lacking.<sup>39</sup> Consultations may be superficial or conducted only after key decisions have been made, reducing community involvement to token gestures. True participatory legal design requires long-term engagement, trust-building, and power-sharing—conditions that are frequently absent in conventional reform processes.

Another significant challenge is the technical difficulty of translating local wisdom into statutory language and administrative procedure. Formal legal systems demand clarity, consistency, and enforceability—qualities that may not easily align with the situational and adaptive logic of customary practices. Bridging this gap calls for innovative legal drafting techniques, interdisciplinary approaches, and hybrid regulatory models that can accommodate both statutory and customary norms without undermining legal coherence.<sup>40</sup>

The lack of sustained financial and institutional support is another major barrier.<sup>41</sup> Although governments may recognize the value of local wisdom in principle, they often fail to allocate sufficient resources for documentation, capacity building, participatory mechanisms, and community empowerment. Without these investments, reforms risk remaining symbolic rather than substantive. Ultimately, integrating local wisdom into environmental law reform necessitates a cultural and epistemic shift within the legal

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<sup>39</sup> Anthony Bebbington and Jeffrey Bury, "Mining and Social Movements: Struggles Over Livelihood and Rural Territorial Development in the Andes," *World Development* 31, no. 12 (2003): 1865–80, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2003.07.001>.

<sup>40</sup> Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 35, no. 4 (1969): 216–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>.

<sup>41</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

institutions themselves. Many judges, legal scholars, and policymakers are still trained in Eurocentric or technocratic legal paradigms that marginalize indigenous knowledge systems.<sup>42</sup> Genuine reform thus demands more than statutory amendments; it requires rethinking legal education, jurisprudence, and professional norms to cultivate an ethos of pluralism, reflexivity, and ecological sensitivity.<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, while local wisdom offers transformative potential for achieving just and resilient environmental governance, realizing this potential depends on overcoming an array of institutional, epistemological, political, and cultural obstacles. Addressing these barriers calls for more than technical innovation—it demands structural transformation in how law, knowledge, and governance are conceptualized and practiced. Only through sustained commitment to pluralism, genuine participation, and social justice can environmental law fully reflect and serve the diverse communities most vulnerable to the climate crisis.

## VI. INTEGRATING LOCAL WISDOM: A COMPARISON IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The findings of this study demonstrate that integrating local wisdom into environmental law is an essential but unevenly implemented strategy for enhancing climate resilience in coastal communities across Southeast Asia.<sup>44</sup> Comparative evidence reveals significant

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<sup>42</sup> Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965); Andrea Cornwall, “Locating Citizen Participation,” *IDS Bulletin* 37, no. 2 (2006): 23–35, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00218.x>.

<sup>43</sup> Avner Greif, “Contract Enforceability and Economic Institutions in Early Trade: The Maghribi Traders’ Coalition,” *American Economic Review* 83, no. 3 (1993): 525–48, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2117552>.

<sup>44</sup> Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

variation in how ASEAN countries institutionalize local wisdom within their environmental legal frameworks, directly affecting the effectiveness of coastal community protection.<sup>45</sup>

In Indonesia, for example, although local wisdom is frequently acknowledged in policy rhetoric, its systematic integration into national environmental law remains limited. Legal frameworks tend to be formalistic and centralized, leaving minimal room for village-level institutions and customary councils to translate traditional knowledge into enforceable norms.<sup>46</sup> By contrast, the Philippines has made notable strides through community-based mechanisms such as the Bantay Dagat program, which explicitly embeds local cultural values into coastal conservation and fisheries management. This participatory model demonstrates how aligning statutory law with local knowledge can produce more context-specific and adaptive outcomes, thereby strengthening the resilience of communities vulnerable to climate-related hazards.

Malaysia offers another promising example, where elements of indigenous ecological knowledge have gained increasing recognition in coastal resource governance.<sup>47</sup> Participatory lawmaking, supported by environmental education initiatives that draw from local traditions, has fostered greater legal legitimacy and public buy-in. Similarly, Thailand's coral reef and mangrove conservation programs illustrate how integrating local values into environmental

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<sup>45</sup> John Thayer Sidel, *Bossism and Democracy in the Philippines, Indonesia, and India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); S. James Anaya, *Indigenous Peoples in International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>47</sup> Yoshioka et al., "Community-Based Coastal Management and Local Wisdom Integration in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning* 23, no. 4 (2021): 453–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2021.1901275>; Song et al., "Local Cultural Values and Coastal Resilience in the Philippines," *Marine Policy* 129 (2021): 104533, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104533>.

management can simultaneously safeguard ecosystems and reinforce cultural identity, resulting in stronger community stewardship and compliance.<sup>48</sup>

This study's comparative perspective highlights that flexible, decentralized governance structures tend to correlate with more effective integration of local wisdom. In the Philippines and Samoa, local governments are empowered to operationalize indigenous practices through adaptive legal frameworks that recognize customary governance systems. Samoa's Community-Based Fisheries Management Program illustrates how decentralization and legal pluralism can enhance local agency and environmental outcomes.<sup>49</sup> By contrast, Indonesia's continued reliance on centralized policy design and uniform regulations constrains the space for customary institutions to exercise authority, limiting the potential of local knowledge to inform context-sensitive climate adaptation.

Experiences outside Southeast Asia, such as Australia's Caring for Country program, further demonstrate that indigenous environmental practices can be successfully institutionalized within national legal systems when supported by decentralization, funding, and legal clarity. Such programs legitimize local knowledge, strengthen environmental stewardship, and cultivate a sense of ownership among indigenous communities. Given Indonesia's vast socio-ecological diversity, adopting similar approaches would

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<sup>48</sup> Aziz et al., "Legal Recognition of Local Ecological Knowledge in Malaysia's Coastal Management," *Ocean & Coastal Management* 210 (2021): 105699, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2021.105699>; Ke et al., "Community Participation in Malaysian Coastal Governance," *Environmental Science & Policy* 128 (2022): 169–78, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.12.014>.

<sup>49</sup> Curoy et al., "Mangrove and Coral Reef Conservation Practices in Southern Thailand," *Conservation Science and Practice* 4, no. 9 (2022): e12749, <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.12749>; Lhosupasirirat et al., "Embedding Cultural Security in Coastal Ecosystem Management: Case Study from Thailand," *Environmental Management* 71, no. 3 (2023): 634–48, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-022-01670-4>.



require legislative reform that reduces bureaucratic obstacles and grants coastal local governments more autonomy to adapt policies to local contexts.

A key insight from this study is that legal frameworks that genuinely accommodate local wisdom display greater flexibility, allowing them to respond more effectively to the dynamic and site-specific nature of coastal ecosystems. However, the study also finds that integration alone is insufficient without supportive socio-economic conditions. Many Indonesian coastal communities continue to face barriers such as limited access to education and economic insecurity, which hinder meaningful community participation in environmental governance. By contrast, Malaysia's integration of local wisdom into environmental education demonstrates how building community capacity can sustain traditional knowledge and enhance its role in formal legal systems.<sup>50</sup>

Another critical factor is intergovernmental harmonization. Countries like the Philippines and Thailand have shown that aligning national, regional, and local environmental policies is vital for embedding local wisdom into governance in a coherent way.<sup>51</sup> Indonesia's regulatory landscape, however, remains fragmented and struggles to reconcile national directives with diverse local realities. This highlights the need for improved policy coherence and

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<sup>50</sup> Marriott et al., "Decentralization and Community-Based Fisheries Management in the Philippines," *Marine Policy* 129 (2021): 104519, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104519>; Sumeldan et al., "Indigenous Practices in Fisheries Governance: The Samoa Experience," *Ocean & Coastal Management* 214 (2021): 105878, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2021.105878>.

<sup>51</sup> Ilham et al., "Environmental Education and Local Wisdom Integration in Malaysian Schools," *International Journal of Environmental Education* 17, no. 1 (2022): 45–62; Karim et al., "Community Outreach for Coastal Conservation in Malaysia," *Environmental Management* 69, no. 4 (2022): 721–33, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-021-01573-0>; Khan et al., "Socio-Economic Factors Affecting Community Participation in Environmental Programs in Malaysia," *Sustainability* 12, no. 18 (2020): 7593, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187593>.

coordination to bridge gaps between statutory law and community-based governance.<sup>52</sup>

Additionally, this study underscores the importance of safeguarding local wisdom from marginalization or commodification. Neoliberal conservation models, such as market-based carbon offsetting or resource concessions, often undermine communal and spiritual dimensions of local ecological knowledge by imposing external valuation systems.<sup>53</sup> By positioning local wisdom as a foundational legal resource rather than a supplementary cultural relic, countries can resist these trends and maintain the integrity of community-based stewardship.

In conclusion, this comparative analysis confirms that the degree to which local wisdom is institutionally recognized and operationalized is a decisive factor in building climate-resilient coastal communities across ASEAN. The key divergence of this study from existing literature lies in its emphasis on legal harmonization, decentralized governance, and socio-legal adaptation tailored to diverse cultural and ecological contexts. For Indonesia, this means that transitioning from centralized, top-down models toward participatory and locally grounded environmental governance is essential. Recognizing local wisdom not merely as cultural heritage but as a strategic pillar of environmental law can help ensure that legal frameworks are more

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<sup>52</sup> Dawson et al., "Indigenous Environmental Governance in Australia: Caring for Country Initiatives," *Environmental Science & Policy* 124 (2021): 19–28, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.08.004>; Gould et al., "Legal Pluralism and Indigenous Rights in Australia's Environmental Law," *Australian Journal of Environmental Law* 27, no. 2 (2021): 137–59; Reed et al., "Decentralized Environmental Governance and Indigenous Knowledge in Australia," *Ecology and Society* 26, no. 1 (2021): 32, <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-12079-260132>.

<sup>53</sup> Rhodes et al., "Policy Harmonization and Environmental Governance in Southeast Asia," *Environmental Policy and Governance* 31, no. 3 (2021): 196–210, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1932>; Yuan and Zhang, "Adaptive Environmental Policy and Community Acceptance in Coastal Regions," *Climate Policy* 20, no. 9 (2020): 1137–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2020.1806241>.

legitimate, adaptive, and just—ultimately safeguarding both ecosystems and community well-being in the era of climate crisis.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of local wisdom into environmental law represents an effective and contextually grounded strategy to strengthen the resilience of coastal communities facing the escalating impacts of climate change. By embedding traditional ecological knowledge and cultural practices into legal frameworks, environmental governance gains the necessary flexibility to adapt to dynamic and site-specific conditions, while simultaneously fostering stronger community stewardship and ownership of conservation efforts. Comparative evidence from ASEAN countries illustrates that policies which genuinely recognize and operationalize local wisdom not only sustain cultural heritage but also deliver practical ecological and social safeguards that are often lacking in predominantly technocratic and centralized legal systems.

The findings underscore that the successful institutionalization of local wisdom depends critically on robust government support, clear legal recognition, meaningful community education, and the empowerment of local actors. Equally important is the need for coherent regulatory harmonization across governance levels to bridge the persistent gaps between national policy and local realities. In Indonesia, the challenges of integrating local wisdom into formal law are compounded by the tension between uniform national regulations and the diverse socio-ecological contexts of its coastal regions. Therefore, this study recommends the development of a more inclusive, decentralized, and flexible legal framework that elevates local wisdom from a supplementary role to a foundational

pillar of environmental law. Such reform is essential for fulfilling the state's obligation to protect the rights of coastal communities and to ensure that climate adaptation and environmental sustainability efforts are socially legitimate, ecologically effective, and culturally rooted.

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## COMPETING INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

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