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The Philosophy of the Three Furnace Stones: Transformation of Service and Contextual Education Through Environmental Empowerment at GKII Alor

I Made Suardana[1], Ezra Tari[2], Fenetson Pairikas[3], Naomi Akanfani[4]
[1,2,3,4]Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Kupang, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the ecological wisdom embedded in the Alorese philosophy of Tiga Batu Tungku (Three Hearthstones), a local symbol of balance among religion, tradition, and community, can inform the transformation of ministry (pelayanan) and contextual Christian education through environmental empowerment within the Gereja Kemah Injil Indonesia (GKII) in Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews and observation involving purposively selected informants: shepherds and workers of several GKII congregations spread across Alor's coastal, highland, and urban areas, members of local church boards, Sunday school and youth workers, women's fellowship members, and a community partner engaged in mangrove restoration. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, with credibility secured through source-and-technique triangulation and member checking. The findings show that ministry and education in GKII Alor have not yet fully empowered environmental action, revealing a persistent gap between theological awareness and ecological praxis: congregations affirm the creation-care mandate of Genesis 2:15, yet its implementation remains sporadic and largely ceremonial. Interviews across congregations converge on four recurring themes: an interdependent view of humanity and nature rooted in ancestral wisdom; worsening ecological conditions; coastal abrasion, upland erosion, shrinking water debit, and declining fish and forest cover driven largely by economic necessity; emerging yet still limited church-initiated environmental programs such as tree planting, mangrove restoration, and sermons; and a shared congregational hope that the church institutionalize ecological teaching, worship, and stewardship habits. The study proposes a three-stage transformative cycle critical consciousness, collaborative action, and theological reflection as a contextual model for integrating ecotheology into GKII Alor's liturgy, pedagogy, and social action, contributing to practical theology and offering a replicable framework for churches in ecologically vulnerable regions of eastern Indonesia.

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Corresponding Author:

I Made Suardana
Doctor of Theology, Post Graduate Program, Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Kupang, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia
Email: madeintoraja@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Gereja Kemah Injil Indonesia (GKII) di Alor, East Nusa Tenggara, is situated amidst a unique and challenging socio-ecological reality. This archipelagic region, characterised by hilly terrain, a dry climate, and limited access to infrastructure, has long shaped the way of life of communities that depend on natural resources. The expansion of innovations in food systems and livelihoods in this archipelagic region cannot be realised because of the complexity of socio-ecological conditions, driven by stark climatic differences and a high degree of natural and cultural diversity [1]. These geographical conditions create both vulnerability and resilience; on the one hand, the congregation struggles with barren land and prolonged drought. The existing model of church ministry tends to be centralised and ritualistic, failing to address the root causes of the congregation's day-to-day problems. Worship and ministry centre on the church building, with a focus on Sunday liturgy detached from the realities of life [2]. The services provided take the form of catechism, Sunday school and congregational guidance, but are dominated by a rigid doctrinal approach with no real connection to the environment or the economic struggles of local people. Runtuwene emphasises that Christian educators and church leaders are uniquely positioned to influence the community by developing and teaching values and practices that promote creation care [3]. An ecological spirituality that balances reflective theology on the interdependence between God and God's creation with liturgical practice and transformative environmental advocacy. The environmental challenges faced by other indigenous communities in eastern Indonesia demonstrate the need for a transformative approach that integrates local ecological knowledge with spiritual perspectives [4]. Empirical evidence shows that community commitment to sustainability initiatives increases when ecological knowledge and skills are developed collectively through mobilisation and awareness-raising

The historical roots of this disparity warrant exploration. The inherited model of ministry tends to emphasise the salvation of individual souls and pays insufficient attention to the socio-ecological dimensions of the Gospel. This legacy becomes less relevant when applied in Alor, in an ecological context vastly different from its region of origin. A decolonial theological approach enables church leaders to integrate local values such as mutual aid and consensus-building into their leadership practices, making them more responsive to local socio-cultural challenges [5]. The absence of local values and ecological elements in the curriculum of Christian institutions in Indonesia has contributed to the erosion of local wisdom. For GKII Alor, a decolonial approach means freeing itself from a uniform model of ministry and daring to be rooted in Alor's reality: arid land, maritime culture, and local wisdom in managing nature. Upon closer inspection, the environment surrounding the GKII Alor congregation actually offers extraordinary potential. Yard plots that have long been left untended can be turned into family gardens using agroecological practices adapted to the dry climate; springs scattered across various locations can be managed collectively through community-based conservation systems; and local cultural traditions such as the practice of 'sasi' (a customary prohibition on harvesting natural resources during certain periods) can be integrated. These constitute

ecological wisdom that aligns with the theology of caring for creation. The concept of transformational ecotheology, developed from research into the Akit people on Karimun Island, integrates indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) with Christian theological discourse to address contemporary environmental challenges [4].

A framework that is highly relevant to the context of Alor because the local philosophy of Tiga Batu Tungku—which asserts that the three elements (in Alor commonly understood as the unity of religion, custom and government, or more broadly, between people, fellow human beings, and nature) can only function when all three stand and work together—remains alive in the collective memory of the community as a metaphor for the harmonious relationship between human beings and their fellow human beings, and with the created natural world. The transformation required is paradigmatic and comprehensive. Ecomissiology understands God's mission as reconciliation at all levels within a reality characterised by relationships and interdependence, calling for the pursuit of ecological justice (ecojustice), ecological practice (ecopraxis), and ecological spirituality (ecospirituality) [6].

A vision underpinned by the proposal for 'ecomissiological pneumatology' as a holistic approach to mission informed by the Holy Spirit, which unites ecological concern and spiritual transformation, and positions ecojustice and spiritual renewal as inseparable dimensions of God's redemptive mission [7]. From a pedagogical perspective, this transformation of ministry also calls for a shift from ecclesia docens (a church that teaches in a one-way manner) towards ecclesia discernens (a church that learns together), where farmers who understand the growing seasons, fishermen who read the ocean currents, and housewives who manage kitchen waste are recognised as 'field theologians' whose knowledge is on a par with the academic knowledge of church leaders [8], [9]. This aligns with contextual teaching and learning (CTL), rooted in John Dewey's pragmatism and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, which emphasise that authentic environmental education must be dialogical, problem-based, and critical rather than indoctrination.

Based on the above, the main issue addressed in this study is: how can the ministry and education of GKII Alor be transformed to become more contextual through community empowerment, using the 'Three Stones of the Hearth' philosophy as a lens of local wisdom that links faith, community and nature? This question is broken down into three sub-issues: first, why have the ministry and education currently practised at GKII Alor not yet optimally empowered the environment; second, which aspects of the environment can serve as means for the transformation of ministry and education; and third, what practical models of environmental empowerment can be integrated into the church's liturgy, teaching and social action. Theoretically, this research enriches practical theology rooted in eco-theology and contextual education; practically, the findings are expected to be implemented directly by the congregation council, pastors, and Sunday school teachers at GKII Alor, and replicated in other churches in eastern Indonesia facing similar ecological vulnerabilities.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive approach, aiming to provide a systematic and factual description of the socio-cultural phenomenon under investigation without manipulating variables [10]. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning, value, and practice of environmental empowerment as a means of transforming contextual ministry and education at GKII Alor, using the 'Three Stones of the Hearth' philosophy as a framework for local wisdom. The research was conducted within the GKII Alor community in East Nusa Tenggara Province, covering congregations in coastal, mountainous, and urban areas, given that Alor is a region characterised by high religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity and possesses a heritage of local wisdom that the community still practises.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, comprising pastors and church workers from several GKII congregations across the Alor region—including the GKII pastor in Petleng Village, GKII staff in Welai Barat Sub-district, the GKII pastor of Olindou, and the leadership of the GKII Sion Kamengtaha congregation—as well as Sunday School and youth workers, women's groups, church partners (including representatives from the Ministry of Religious Affairs), and external partners involved in environmental conservation programmes, such as representatives of non-governmental organisations driving mangrove revitalisation efforts. The selection of informants followed principles of data adequacy and depth; the number of informants increased as required until data saturation was reached. Data collection was carried out through interviews and observation.

The interviews used open-ended, semi-structured methods and followed the procedures below. These included identifying informants, determining the interview type, recording questions and responses, selecting a quiet location, seeking consent to participate, remaining flexible with the interview plan, using probing questions to obtain additional information, and maintaining a polite and professional attitude. Some interviews were conducted in person and recorded or noted down on written interview sheets, whilst others were carried out via written communication (text messages), given that the geographical conditions of Alor made it difficult to meet face-to-face with all informants in the coastal and mountainous regions [11]. Observations were carried out to monitor and scrutinise people and places at the research site, following Creswell's procedures for selecting a site, entering the location and making initial notes, identifying who and what was being observed, defining the researcher's role as an observer, conducting repeated observations over time, designing a recording system, producing descriptive and reflective field notes, and gradually withdrawing from the observation site once sufficient data had been collected [12].

In this qualitative study, the researcher acted as the primary instrument, directly involved in data collection, analysis, and interpretation, supported by instruments such as interview guidelines, observation guidelines, and field notes. Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach through interactive and ongoing stages from the outset of data collection: data reduction (selecting, focusing and simplifying raw data), data presentation (organising the data in the form of descriptive narratives, thematic matrices

and direct quotations from informants), and drawing conclusions and verification (interpreting the meaning of the data inductively, which is continually verified through re-reading and triangulation). Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation across coastal, mountainous, and urban congregations; extended researcher engagement in the field; and member checking to ensure consistency of meaning and avoid misinterpretation. This research followed social research ethics: each informant received an explanation of the research objectives and their rights as participants; some informants' identities were kept confidential at their request; participation was voluntary; and the data were used responsibly for academic purposes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Congregation's View on the Relationship between Humans and the Environment

All informants acknowledged humanity's absolute dependence on the environment. Respondents 1, 3, 6 and 7 explicitly stated that humans need the environment to sustain, support and perpetuate their lives. Respondent 4 reinforced this statement by citing specific needs such as oxygen, air, and other natural resources. Respondent 5 added a theological basis, noting that God created the universe before humankind, indicating that the environment already existed as a prerequisite for human existence. Thus, these statements establish the foundation that, without the environment, human life would be impossible. Pembekalan staf pastoral mengawali penanaman ajaran pelestarian lingkungan guna mengubah perilaku jemaat.

Respondents 2 and 5 emphasised this reciprocal relationship. Whilst most informants focused on humanity's need for the environment, Respondent 2 added the perspective that the environment also 'needs' humans to care for and manage God's creation. This does not mean that the environment physically requires humans, but rather that humans have been entrusted with a moral and spiritual responsibility. Messages that emphasise stewardship have strong potential to encourage behavioural change towards sustainability within religious communities [13]. Respondent 5 reinforced this by referring to interdependence, whereby humans cannot thrive without a healthy environment. Thus, human dependence is not passive; rather, the quality of the environment is largely determined by human actions. Human actions either damage or improve the environment, and the state of the environment in turn affects human well-being [14].

The social and theological dimensions complement one another. Respondent 4 broadened the meaning of 'environment' to encompass not only the physical world but also family and community, complementing other respondents who focused more on nature, as humans also require social relationships to survive. Meanwhile, Respondents 2 and 5 presented a faith-based perspective that environmental stewardship is part of humanity's responsibility as creatures entrusted with caring for the earth. Thus, the informants' statements are not contradictory but rather mutually enriching: humanity's need for nature, social connections and ecological responsibility form a single, integrated whole.

Data from the four GKII congregations in the Alor region that were interviewed subsequently reinforced and enriched this pattern of reciprocal relationships, whilst also demonstrating that this perspective is passed down across generations through the oral teachings of their ancestors. The leaders of the Sion Kamengtaha Congregation emphasised that nature was created by God as a place of refuge, comfort and peace for humankind, a source of coolness, water and other necessities, and that humankind therefore has a duty to preserve it; the message passed down by their elders specifically forbids the unregulated extraction of stone and sand, as well as the unregulated felling of trees. Humanity has a mandate to preserve nature so that it remains as perfect as it was at the beginning of His creation [15]. The pastor of the Petleng Village Congregation (YL) summarised it succinctly: "humans need nature, nature needs humans," and added the regenerative teachings of the ancestors whenever a banana plant is harvested, a new banana sapling must be planted, whenever a coconut tree is felled, it must be replaced by planting a new one—although he noted that the teaching forbidding the taking of certain natural resources is not explicitly passed down within his congregation.

A member of the GKII Welai Barat (KM) congregation expressed a similar view: humans and nature need one another, and the oral teachings of the ancestors, which are still remembered, emphasise that every tree planted must be tended and watered morning and evening, and that every tree felled must be replaced with a sapling so that the environment is not damaged. The pastor of GKII Olindou (IKK) summed it up in a saying that was the most profound of all the informants: "If we look after nature, then nature will look after us." The convergence of these four voices from coastal, mountainous and urban congregations affirms that the ethic of ecological reciprocity is not merely an abstract theological concept, but a way of life that has long been passed down across generations within Alor society, in line with the spirit of the 'Three Stones of the Hearth' philosophy, which places humanity, fellow human beings and nature as the three pillars that must stand in balance for life to continue.

3.2. The Community's Perception of the Environmental Situation: Then and Now

Respondents revealed that while some members of the public care for the environment, many others damage it rather than preserve it; the felling of trees and the destruction of plants are seen as negatively affecting daily life and diminishing the beauty of nature. According to the respondents, the main cause of this environmental destruction is people prioritising personal interests, greed, and selfishness; therefore, the proposed solution is to replant every tree and plant that is felled to ensure the environment is preserved. Respondents believe that the expected outcome of tree replanting is preserving the ecosystem's balance and reducing environmental damage, while for the church, this activity can enhance the beauty of the church's surroundings and increase the congregation's appreciation of God's creation. The author agrees that the root cause of environmental damage does indeed stem from human greed and selfishness; therefore, technical solutions without a change in spiritual awareness will be difficult to sustain.

Testimonies from four GKII congregations in the Alor region show how environmental change is experienced differently across areas, shaped by each area's

geography, yet all converge on a single common thread: declining ecological carrying capacity. In the coastal and mountain slope areas represented by the Sion Kamengtaha Congregation Committee, current conditions are characterised by coastal erosion and flooding caused by the unregulated extraction of gravel and sand for sale, which has caused the sea to encroach on the land and destroy protective trees such as coconut and tamarind, whilst on the mountain slopes, erosion and flooding are caused by illegal logging and sand extraction; both phenomena have caused collective trauma in the wake of disasters such as the sudden arrival of Tropical Cyclone Seroja. This informant emphasised that in the past, economic needs could be met through small-scale farming and simple trading at the market, whereas now commodity prices have fallen while the cost of basic necessities continues to soar, driving residents to exploit coastal and mountainous resources to survive.

In the village of Petleng, the Church Pastor (YL) described the transformation of the landscape from one that was once filled with large trees—coconut, teak, cashew and tamarind —into rice fields and settlements, with direct consequences for water availability: gardens and rice fields have dried up, farmers are scrambling for water for irrigation, and although the population continues to grow, the water flow is actually dwindling. In Welai Barat Sub-district, a GKII worker (KM) highlighted an even more fundamental issue: clean water, which residents once did not need to buy, must now be purchased because it is scarce. Meanwhile, the GKII Pastor of Olindou (IK) provided the most comprehensive account, covering three ecosystems at once: the large trees along the main road and in the surrounding area have been felled to make way for buildings and facilities; the air, which used to be cool and clean, is now hotter, dustier, and polluted by factory smoke; water flow is dwindling to the point where it no longer meets needs; and in the sea, fish that were once abundant are now in decline due to the practice of dynamite fishing, which is also destroying the beauty of the underwater world.

Sunday School and Youth workers, Church Partners (Ministry of Religious Affairs/Pastors), and the Women's Group have complementary perspectives on the state of the environment and the threats of environmental degradation. Sunday School and Youth workers began by noting that environmental degradation in their area is not yet very apparent, making it difficult to predict the extent of future damage. However, Church Partners presented more concrete and worrying facts: the most pressing environmental need is water availability, with river flows decreasing significantly during the dry season, residents' wells running dry, and environmental degradation causing ongoing erosion and flooding. Interestingly, the Women's Group provided real-life accounts of contradictory practices within the church community itself: some trees once planted on the church grounds were eventually felled, diminishing the beauty of the surroundings, and there has been no strong call to plant trees around the church grounds. Thus, although perceptions of the extent of the damage vary amongst congregants—ranging from 'not yet very noticeable' to a water crisis that is already evident—all testimonies, both from the initial respondents and the four additional informants, agree that the threat of environmental damage, particularly concerning water, trees and natural beauty, is already being felt throughout the GKII Alor ministry area, from the coast to the mountains and urban areas.

3.3. Environmental Programmes Run by the Church

The church has run a programme to plant flowers and trees on the church grounds and has encouraged the congregation to maintain the cleanliness and beauty of their own homes. In addition, the pastor frequently issues appeals through the 'Voice of the Pastor' to beautify the environment, and the church also organises activities to share experiences and hold discussions on environmental awareness. However, respondents acknowledged that several considerations remain in implementing the programme, as the church must be mindful of the feelings and circumstances of the entire congregation. The author argues that the church's efforts through planting, appeals, and discussions have been highly positive and strategic in building collective ecological awareness. However, concerns about the congregation's feelings must be balanced with firm pastoral courage, as caring for the environment is a non-negotiable part of the faith.

Findings from the four GKII congregations in the Alor District indicate that church environmental programmes, although not yet uniform in form, have begun to take root in various contexts. The leadership of the Sion Kamengtaha Congregation reported that guidance on environmental protection has been conveyed through sermons from the pulpit as well as through tiered directives from the leadership at the District, Regional and General levels of the GKII, indicating that environmental concern has become part of the church organisation's structural communication, rather than merely a local initiative in the village of Petleng. Congregational participation ensures sustainable programs, fulfilling the Christian responsibility of earth stewardship (Hursepuny et al., 2025). The Congregation Pastor (YL) described a more concrete and cross-sectoral collaborative programme: the GKII Alor Tengah District, specifically Sector 2, has taught and organised the planting of breadfruit trees along the banks of the Mebung River in collaboration with the North Alor Tengah Sub-district Government, accompanied by the tradition of praying together to ask for rain for the newly planted trees —a practice that combines ecological action with the spirituality of intercessory prayer.

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Interestingly, there is a significant point of convergence between the testimonies of the Women's Group on the theme of environmental degradation and Rev. Kornalia Makani's report on mangrove planting at Pailelang Beach: both emphasise that the

involvement of church youth in tangible ecological restoration actions—rather than mere discourse—is key to the programme's sustainability. The programmes reported by these four additional informants also align with the findings of the Sunday School and Youth Workers, who have begun incorporating environmental awareness into the Sunday School curriculum, indicating a convergence in GKII Alor's pastoral policy direction toward integrating ecology into church education. However, the scope and intensity still vary between congregations.

3.4. Environmental Degradation and the Challenges of Protecting the Environment

Church Partners added that the efforts already made—such as appeals not to fell trees near rivers and the community's planting of bamboo and various types of trees—are still not enough. They emphasised the need for the government to help ensure an adequate water supply. Meanwhile, Sunday School and Youth workers saw the need for the church to partner with environmental organisations so conservation activities could be carried out through concrete action, rather than mere rhetoric. The women's group also agreed that church leaders needed to strongly motivate the congregation to beautify the church grounds by planting gardens and trees, as a beautiful environment is vital to the congregation's comfort. The church is encouraged not to stop at merely symbolic programmes such as planting a thousand trees or creating a mini-garden, but also to ensure sustainability and avoid contradictory practices such as felling trees that have already been planted. Tackling environmental degradation requires a paradigm shift towards integrated, data-driven, and equitable environmental governance through cross-sectoral collaboration among government, institutions, civil society, and individuals (Ratiu, 2024).

Data from four additional congregations show that the root of the difficulties in protecting the environment in Alor is structural and economic, rather than solely due to individual behaviour. The leaders of the Sion Kamengtaha congregation and the pastor of GKII Olindou, speaking separately yet in agreement, stated that the greatest difficulty lies not with nature, but with people: pressing economic needs drive residents to fell trees and dig up sand for sale, and to clear land for factories, motorways and tourist sites, whilst cooperation with the government to curb such practices is deemed difficult because the government itself supports these extractive economic activities in the name of development. These statements provide an important nuance that complements—yet differs slightly from—the findings of Vic. Yulia Laning in Petleng Village, who, in contrast, reported positive collaboration between the church and the North Central Alor Sub-district Government in a programme to plant breadfruit and candlenut trees.

This contrast shows that the relationship between the church, the community, and the government on environmental issues is ambivalent and highly dependent on local context: in one area the government acts as a collaborative partner, while in another the government's development interests clash with conservation efforts. Three distinct yet closely interrelated aspects emerge: the church's role as a moral guide and social cohesive force; the government's role as a collaborative partner; and the government's position as a source of conflict when its centralised policies disregard local values.

In Petleng Village itself, the challenges mentioned by Yulia Laning were more technical in nature and related to everyday behaviour: residents did not use water wisely, and there was a habit of felling trees without replanting them—challenges which were subsequently addressed through the involvement of young people in planting breadfruit in Mebung and the planting of candlenuts by parishioners in their own gardens, under the guidance of the Sub-district Government. Rev. Kornalia Makani in Welai Barat articulated the root of the problem in a more reflective manner: a lack of awareness regarding the need to protect nature, particularly the habit of felling trees without preparing replacement saplings for replanting—an issue to which the church has responded through the voice of the pastor, who continues to advocate for the replanting of felled trees.

Thus, the common thread running through all the testimonies—from both the initial respondents and the four additional informants across coastal, mountainous and urban areas—confirms that the root causes of environmental degradation in Alor do indeed stem from economic pressures and a lack of collective ecological awareness; consequently, technical solutions alone (reforestation) without being accompanied by the strengthening of spiritual awareness, ongoing education, and—in some areas—consistent partnership with the government—run the risk of becoming merely ceremonial and unsustainable.

3.5. The Community's Perspective on Mangrove Revitalisation

The respondent (PAl) stated that coastal communities often complain about coastal erosion, which is causing the land to be gradually eroded; however, since 2018, the TSI Foundation, together with the community of Pailelang Village, has been implementing a mangrove revitalisation programme involving the church, the village government, and various other parties such as schoolchildren, the police, and the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI). This programme has benefited both the environment and the local economy and has received support from the village government and the community, although the respondent acknowledged that some community members remain indifferent to environmental conservation activities. The author considers the mangrove revitalisation programme in Pailelang Village a concrete example of ideal multi-stakeholder collaboration, in which the church, the government, the community, and non-governmental organisations work together to tackle the crisis of coastal erosion. Early community involvement in participatory mapping of ecosystem resources has been shown to facilitate social learning whilst building social capital [16].

GKII youth have been directly involved in mangrove planting at Pailelang Beach, Alor Barat Daya Sub-district—the same location as the revitalisation programme the TSI Foundation initiated in 2018. The convergence of these two independent sources of data—one from the perspective of the coastal community and NGO partners, the other from the perspective of church workers in a different sub-district—reinforces the credibility of the finding that the mangrove revitalisation in Pailelang is not merely a symbolic programme, but has genuinely involved the active participation of the GKII congregation, particularly the younger generation, as part of a multi-stakeholder collaborative network. The challenge posed by the indifference of some residents should not dampen enthusiasm, but should

instead serve as a target for a more intensive persuasive approach through community leaders, the church, and environmental education. [17].

3.6. The Congregation's Expectations Regarding the Church's Future Ministry and Environmental Programmes

In addition to describing the environmental situation and the programmes already in place, all additional informants also voiced specific hopes for the future direction of GKII Alor's environmental outreach and education, which, surprisingly, showed a high degree of convergence despite the informants coming from congregations that are geographically and socially diverse. The leaders of the Sion Kamengtaha Congregation hope that the church will continue to guide the congregation to love and conserve nature by cultivating long-lived trees along the coastline, fostering a love of nature and gardening amongst young people, and incorporating gardening into the Sunday school curriculum from an early age so that a love of nature is instilled as early as possible. This hope aligns with the recommendations of the Sunday School and Youth Workers in their previous findings regarding the need for an environment-based curriculum for children. The congregation very much hopes that concern for the environment will not be treated as a separate programme, but will instead be integrated directly into the church's core mission [18].

The pastor of the Petleng Village Congregation (YL) expressed a more specific and practical hope: that sermons in church might regularly incorporate teachings relating to the protection of the environment or the natural world, the pastor's voice should continually remind the congregation that whenever a tree is felled, a replacement sapling must always be prepared for replanting; outdoor or beach services should continue to protect the environment by providing bins for worshippers in the open air; and the congregation should be taught not to litter in the church but to keep their rubbish to dispose of or burn at home [19]. KM from Welai Barat echoed similar hopes with an emphasis on institutional sustainability: preparing sermons on environmental themes once a month on a scheduled basis; urging every categorical group within the church to maintain environmental cleanliness as a sign of care; organising open-air or beach services whilst ensuring rubbish bins are provided to keep the environment clean; and scheduling each group within the church to water the flowers or plants grown on the church grounds twice a week. The pastor of GKII Olindou (IK) summarises this within the framework of a broader shared responsibility: the church and the entire congregation have a duty to protect and care for the natural environment, which must be put into practice through teaching people to love the environment from Sunday school, through youth groups, women's groups, to men's groups, worship services that are occasionally combined with planting activities, and the empowerment of church gardens as a means of fostering the habit of sustainable gardening. Elevating employee performance and maintaining top-tier service in the hospitality industry require strong leadership, clear communication, and favorable working conditions [20].

Four patterns of expectation emerged from all these additional informants the regular inclusion of environmental themes in sermons, disciplined waste management during outdoor worship services, a schedule for tending the church's plants involving all

categorical groups, and the integration of gardening into the Sunday school curriculum directly address the second stage of this study's theoretical framework, namely collaborative action, in which the congregation's critical awareness of Alor's ecological vulnerabilities is beginning to result in proposals for concrete and measurable actions, rather than mere discourse [21]. This convergence of hopes across congregations also strongly indicates that the GKII Alor congregations—whether coastal, mountainous, or urban — already possess sufficient collective awareness to move from critical awareness toward the institutionalisation of ecological practices within liturgy and church education, provided consistent pastoral leadership facilitates this. [22].

3.7. Summary: A Model for the Transformation of Contextual Service and Education

The transformation of ministry and education at GKII Alor through community empowerment can be understood as a three-stage cycle that is interlinked and sustainable. First, critical consciousness: the congregation of GKII Alor—as evident from the testimonies of all informants across the region—already possesses a fundamental awareness that humans and nature are interdependent, and that environmental degradation (coastal erosion, soil erosion, water scarcity, deforestation, dynamite fishing) is a tangible consequence of greed and economic pressures, rather than merely a neutral natural phenomenon. This awareness serves as the foundation for the 'ecclesia discernens' approach, in which the pastor and the church council do not provide ready-made answers, but rather facilitate a process of joint discovery between academic theological knowledge and the ecological knowledge of farmers, fishermen and traditional elders as field theologians [23].

Secondly, collaborative action: this critical awareness has begun to translate into concrete action, as evidenced by the various programmes reported by the four additional informants—planting breadfruit along the Mebung River in collaboration with the sub-district government, planting walnut trees at spring sites, the revitalisation of mangroves at Pailelang Beach involving church youth alongside the TSI Foundation and various stakeholders, and gardening activities with children from the PAR programme. These concrete models of church-based projects align with the finding that a collaborative approach involving local communities, scientists, and stakeholders can bring about significant ecological and economic improvements in Alor [24].

Thirdly, theological reflection: every act of environmental empowerment must be continually re-examined as part of a living faith—as reflected in the custom of praying for rain for the crops in Petleng Village, or the hope that sermons will regularly incorporate teachings on caring for nature. A model of praxis that emphasises that action precedes reflection, and that reflection leads to new, more transformative action, provides the most relevant framework for GKII Alor. [25]. The 'Three Stones of the Stove' philosophy serves as an apt metaphor to summarise these three stages: just as a traditional Alor stove can only support a pot stably when the three stones stand in balance and reinforce one another, the transformation of ministry and education at GKII Alor can only proceed sustainably when critical awareness, collaborative action and theological reflection stand together as an inseparable whole. Thus, environmental empowerment is not an additional

programme on the sidelines of 'true ministry', but rather the very heart of the church's entire mission, transforming GKII Alor into a community that faithfully listens to and cares for the land, water and all of God's creation.

4. CONCLUSION

Research into the transformation of ministry and contextual education through community empowerment at GKII Alor has yielded three main conclusions. To date, the ministry and education carried out have not optimally empowered the local community. A significant gap exists between theological understanding and on-the-ground practice. Congregations across various regions—from Sion Kamengtaha, Petleng Village, Welai Barat, to Olindou—demonstrate a consistent theological awareness of their responsibility to care for creation. They understand Genesis 2:15 on stewardship and care for God's garden, as well as the ancestral legacy of ecological reciprocity, which teaches balance between humanity and nature. However, this understanding remains confined to discourse. Its implementation remains sporadic and ceremonial, and has not yet become the lifeblood of everyday church life.

The church tends to separate worship from ecological realities, as if caring for the environment were a matter outside the church's mission. Worship takes place inside the building, whilst issues concerning land, water and forests occur outside the church walls without any clear theological connection. Four environmental aspects that can serve as vehicles for transformation in service and education: backyards for family and church gardens, spring water sources for community-based conservation, the 'sasi' tradition as a form of ecological wisdom, and coastal ecosystems such as the mangroves at Pailelang Beach. By triangulating data from the community and the church, it has been shown that mangroves provide tangible economic and ecological benefits, such as protecting against coastal erosion, serving as habitat for marine life, and providing raw materials for the community.

These four aspects are not merely physical objects, but living spaces for theological learning. Every time the congregation plants a tree or cares for a spring, they are learning about a faith rooted in the earth, about God's all-encompassing love for creation. A practical model of environmental empowerment that can be integrated into the church's liturgy, teaching, and social action is a three-stage transformative cycle, metaphorised through the 'Three Stones of the Hearth' philosophy: critical awareness, collaborative action, and theological reflection. Data from four additional congregations show that the church has launched programmes such as tree planting, mangrove planting, environment-themed sermons, and scheduling church garden maintenance. However, the church still needs to strengthen sustainability measures, avoid contradictory practices such as felling trees without replanting, and, in some areas, strengthen partnerships with local authorities, given the ambivalent relationship between economic development interests and environmental conservation.

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