



# EMPOWERING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH LOCAL WISDOM AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The Case of *Mata dan Manusia Laut* by Okky Madasari

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## ABSTRACT

Children's literature plays a crucial role in empowering communities for sustainable change. It is able to build awareness, empathy, and critical thinking among young readers through engaging narratives, relatable characters, and thought-provoking themes. In the discourse of sustainability, important concepts such as environmental awareness can also be introduced by children's literature. By addressing such topics early on, literature equips children with the knowledge and values necessary to become informed and responsible citizens. It acts as a catalyst for shaping the attitudes of the next generation in building a more sustainable and environmentally conscious society. One example of children's literature that emphasizes the importance of living sustainably is the Indonesian novel entitled *Mata dan Manusia Laut* by Okky Madasari. This study explores how the novel suggests the concept of environmental sustainability through the use of local wisdom. The novel is analyzed from the perspective of ecocriticism, focusing specifically on how local wisdom promotes the idea of sustainability within a specific community. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. The results show that the novel reflects a deep understanding of the local community and environment of the Bajau Tribe, and the overall theme of interconnections between humans and nature in the discussion of local wisdom and sustainable efforts. In conclusion, integrating local wisdom into discussions of environmental sustainability by incorporating it into children's literature can be a way to empower children with the theme of environmental awareness and shape their attitudes towards sustainable living.

**Keywords:** environmental sustainability, local wisdom, children's literature, ecocriticism

## INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVE

*Mata dan Manusia Laut* is the third installment of the *Mata* series, a children's novel written by the Indonesian author Okky Madasari. The setting of the story tells about the main character's adventure in Kampung Sama, Southeast Sulawesi. This book is inspired by the life of the Sama-Bajau tribe; locals who identify themselves as "the people of the sea".

Through the captivating narrative, the book explores the intricate relationship between humans and nature, emphasizing the deep connection the Sama-Bajo people have with the sea and their surroundings. The story vividly portrays how the characters' lives are intertwined with the natural world, highlighting the importance of preserving the delicate balance between humanity and the environment.

This study explores how the book suggests the concept of environmental sustainability through the use of local wisdom. The novel is analyzed from the perspective of ecocriticism, focusing specifically on how local wisdom promotes the idea of sustainability within the Sama-Bajo community.

## METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, resulting in a literary analysis. The primary source of the data is *Mata dan Manusia Laut*, a children's novel published in 2019 by Okky Madasari, an Indonesian novelist. The secondary sources of the data include related materials such as web articles, journal articles, etc. This study utilizes the perspective of ecocriticism to analyze the significance of the natural environment in literary works. It specifically focuses on how local wisdom contributes to the empowerment of environmental sustainability.

## RESULTS



The close reading process of the book has revealed the effective utilization of certain local wisdom held by the Sama-Bajo tribe in conveying the message of environmental sustainability.

The Sama-Bajo tribe believes in the existence of sea deities that manifest themselves in various forms, including *Lummu*—the dolphins. They hold the belief that the appearance of the *Lummu* signifies many things, ranging from blessings to warnings of disasters. This wisdom has been passed, emphasizing the importance of not causing any harm to the *Lummu* in any way possible.

The Sama-Bajo tribe holds a profound belief that the sea is not only a mighty force but also a protector and, most importantly, a source of affection towards humanity. In their perspective, the sea transcends being merely a habitat; it is the foundation of their boat-village life, detached from the mainland. Consequently, they view any harm inflicted upon the sea as a direct harm to themselves, reflecting their deep bond and dependence on this aquatic realm.

The Sama-Bajo tribe refrains from fishing during the full moon. They believe that it is a time when the fishes "give birth" to ensure their continued existence. During the full moon, they strictly adhere to a practice of non-interference, avoiding any bloodshed in the sea. People are expected to take a break from their regular fishing activities during this period as a sign of respect for the natural cycle and to allow the marine life to thrive undisturbed.

The Sama-Bajo tribes regard themselves as an integral part of the sea. When babies are born, their placentas are ceremonially sent to the sea, as they believe that a placenta from a member of the tribe is akin to their twin, residing within the sea. Consequently, they hold a deep reverence for the sea and refrain from causing any harm to it, recognizing it as an extension of their own being.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Sama-Bajo tribe's unique relationship with the sea serves as a testament to the profound connection that can exist between humans and the natural world. Their customs, such as refraining from fishing during the full moon and safeguarding the sea, demonstrate a sustainable way of life that prioritizes the well-being of the environment and, in turn, their own. The Sama-Bajo tribe's wisdom and reverence for the sea offer valuable insights into how indigenous cultures can inspire a more balanced and responsible relationship between humans and the natural world. In the realm of sustainability, children's literature plays a vital role in introducing concepts like environmental awareness. *Mata dan Manusia Laut* and the Sama-Bajo tribe's relationship with the sea serve as a compelling example of how literature can educate young readers about respect for nature and sustainable practices. By instilling these values early on, children's literature equips the next generation with the knowledge and mindset to become responsible citizens, contributing to a more sustainable and environmentally conscious society.



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