

### The Environmental Education Based on *Atoni Pah Meto* Culture

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**Abstract:** *The issue of environmental damage has become a problem discussed by world leaders. The people of East Nusa Tenggara, especially Atoni Pah Meto really protect the environment. However, in recent years there has been manganese mining in their area which has caused damage to the environment where they live. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze environmental education based on local culture conducted by Atoni Pah Meto. This study uses a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. The data collection technique used is the interview. Interviews were conducted with 15 people consisting of parents, children, Sunday school teachers, church administrators, and pastors. The results of the study show that Atoni Pah Meto embraces a local culture that states 'land as mother'. When they intend to destroy nature, it means they are committing crimes with their own mothers. When they take anything from nature with the same greed they make their mothers cry. The life of Atoni Pah Meto appreciates nature more so that the relationship that is created between humans and nature is a relationship that is mutually beneficial and not detrimental to one party for the benefit of the other.*

**Keywords:** *Atoni pah meto; education; environmental; local culture; land*

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues discussed in world meetings in the last decade. At the G20 meeting (International Economic Cooperation with 20 member countries) held in Bali, some of the issues discussed were environmental issues, climate change, and sustainable energy.<sup>1</sup> Environmental issues are frequently discussed due to environmental damage such as illegal logging, land burning, flooding, garbage, global warming air pollution, and the declining quality of natural ecosystems.<sup>2</sup> This shows that environmental issues receive important attention from various parties. The environment is important because it affects the quality of

<sup>1</sup> Widhia Arum Wibawana, "KTT G20: Apa Saja Yang Akan Dibahas Para Pemimpin Dunia Di Bali?," *DetikNews* (Jakarta, November 11, 2022), <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-6399977/g20-membahas-tentang-apa-ini-3-topik-besar-hingga-manfaatnya>.

<sup>2</sup> Bonita Simarmata, Abdul Hakim Daulae, and Raihana, "Hubungan Tingkat Pengetahuan Lingkungan Hidup Dengan Sikap Peduli Lingkungan Siswa," *Jurnal Pelita Pendidikan* 6, no. 4 (2018): 204–210.

human life. Basically, humans cannot live without other living things and the natural environment.<sup>3</sup> Earth is a place for human life with all things that support human life.

One of the environmental issues that is rife is the case of manganese mining. Manganese mining activities took place in the village of Noebesa, Central Amanuban District, South Central Timor Regency East Nusa Tenggara Province. Manganese mining activities in this area are carried out by PT. SMR. PT SMR took a customary approach (using *oko mama* in which there is betel nut) to landlords so that they would give up their land as a mining location. Furthermore PT. SMR also promised assistance and infrastructure development for the community around the location.

In addition, PT. SMR also helped build a church building in Noebesa village. This caused the Noebesa Village People who worked as farmers to switch workers to manganese miners. Parents instruct their children to engage in these mining activities. The community felt that the income from mining was not enough to finance their daily lives, so they returned to work as farmers. However, the people of Noebesa Village cannot use their land for farming because of a contract agreement with PT. SMR. The impact of mining has damaged the land they use due to mining so that they can no longer cultivate agricultural land, rivers become polluted, many workers experience coughing diseases, many animals die due to pollution from mining activities, and the land becomes arid. For this reason, people need education about how important it is to protect the environment and understand that the mining they do will indeed guarantee their lives in some time but result in long-term damage to the environment and the sustainability of their agricultural land which has been their main livelihood. Another thing that needs to be known by society is that children should not be taught to justify various means, specifically damaging the environment just to meet their needs.

The Book of Genesis chapter one, explains that before humans were created, God prepared the environment in which humans would live. God prepared the environment in advance to support human survival. For this reason, it has become the duty and responsibility of humans to be able to protect and preserve the environment. The duty and responsibility is to acknowledge that the earth and everything in it is a beautiful creation of God, and as Christians, we have a responsibility to protect and maintain it.<sup>4</sup> Apart from that, as created human beings, humans need to understand that the environment is a legacy that is preserved for future generations. In carrying out our duties as Christians, it is important to take sustainable steps in the use of natural resources. The most basic thing of all is to promote awareness and education about the importance of protecting the environment within the Christian community. Environmental education can provide the knowledge and skills needed to act as a responsible manager of God's creation.

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<sup>3</sup> Sihadi Darmo Wihardjo and Henita Rahmayanti, *Pendidikan Lingkungan Hidup*, 1st ed. (Pekalongan: PT. Nasya Expanding Management, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Samosir and Boiliu, "Pendidikan Agama Kristen Sebagai Upaya Menjawab Tantangan Krisis Lingkungan Hidup."

Responsibility for protecting the environment is the obligation of individuals, groups, organizations, and society as a whole to protect and protect the environment for present and future prosperity.<sup>5</sup> There are several important responsibilities in maintaining the environment, namely (a) It is important for every individual to have awareness about environmental issues and an adequate understanding of the impact of their actions on the environment. Education about the environment is the responsibility for expanding this knowledge and awareness; (b) Using natural resources wisely and sustainably; (c) Adopting sustainable practices in daily life; (d) Becoming agents of change by sharing environmental knowledge and awareness with others. Invite others to contribute to protecting the environment.

One of the responsibilities in protecting the environment is through environmental education. Environmental education is a process to shapes human beings in the world to understand and care about the environment and all the problems associated with it. Communities need to have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors and have a commitment to be able to fight together both individually and in groups to be able to solve current environmental problems and prevent new problems from arising.<sup>6</sup> The main objective of implementing environmental education is to form people to have adequate knowledge about environmental issues, to know the impact of actions taken by humans on the environment, and to have a responsible attitude toward protecting and preserving the environment. Through this education, it is hoped that humans can behave in a friendly manner towards the environment in everyday life and contribute to preserving nature and maintaining the balance of the ecosystem.

Environmental education can be carried out in various ways, namely learning based on experience, integrating environmental issues into the curriculum, applying an interdisciplinary approach in teaching about the environment, using technology, instilling environmental values and ethics, and being actively involved in real actions to protect the environment.<sup>7</sup> In addition, collaboration with local communities by utilizing local culture is one of the entry points to the success of environmental education.

Each region has its culture and local culture. local culture is a human action by using the mind in acting and behaving towards something. local culture refers to knowledge, values, practices, and traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation in a particular society or community. Local culture reflects the understanding developed by

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<sup>5</sup> Rohana Sufia, Sumarmi, and Ach. Amirudin, "Kearifan Lokal Dalam Melestarikan Lingkungan Hidup (Studi Kasus Masyarakat Adat Desa Kemiren Kecamatan Glagah Kabupaten Banyuwangi)," *Jurnal Pendidikan: Teori, Penelitian dan Pengembangan* 1, no. 4 (2016): 726–731.

<sup>6</sup> Wihardjo and Rahmayanti, *Pendidikan Lingkungan Hidup*.

<sup>7</sup> Widiawati, Rika, and Yulistina, "Analisis Penerapan Pendidikan Lingkungan Hidup Di Sekolah Dasar."

the community about their relationship with the natural, cultural, and social environment around them.<sup>8</sup>

Previous research was conducted by Meyrlin Saefatu and Yusuf Tanaem on Christian Education on the Environment Oriented to Social Transformation for Children at GMT Imanuel Noebesa states that children carry out manganese mining activities because they are instructed by their parents and are influenced by the surrounding environment with the understanding that manganese mining will fulfill their daily needs. The author offers a new approach model, namely environmental education based on the local culture of *Atoni Pah Meto* sees "land as mother" oriented towards social transformation for children in Imanuel Noebesa Church by implementing a sustainable lifestyle which is divided into the viewing stage, the Judging stage (reflection) and the Acting stage (action).

Furthermore, research conducted by Chusnul Adib Achmad and Nurfausiah Fitriani on the integration of local culture-based environmental education at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Ma'arif Ungaran,<sup>9</sup> found that environmental education can be integrated into the independent curriculum by compiling lesson plans for each subject based on environmental education. Environmental education becomes more applicable with the potential for local culture in educational institutions. The preparation of environmental lesson plans based on local culture at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Ma'arif Ungaran is a characteristic of this institution

In previous studies, it has been explained about education about the environment that is included in the school curriculum. Researchers see that in addition to the school curriculum, it is also necessary to apply environmental education based on the concept of living in a community. For this reason, this study focuses more on environmental education based on the *Atoni Pah Meto* culture. *Atoni Pah Meto* sees nature as a mother who can give life to them. *Atoni Pah Meto* protects the environment because it is their source of livelihood. Through this understanding, they truly care about nature as a mother should take care of her child. For this reason, when they intend to destroy nature, it is tantamount to them committing crimes with their own mothers.

## II. METHODS

This research is qualitative research with an ethnographic approach, namely describing a culture to understand the way of life of the indigenous people.<sup>10</sup> This is consistent with the research objective, namely to analyze environmental education based on local culture conducted by *Atoni Pah Meto*.

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<sup>8</sup> Sukron Mazid, Danang Prasetyo, and Farikah, "Nilai-Nilai Kearifan Lokal Sebagai Pembentuk Karakter Masyarakat," *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter* 2, no. 2 (2020): 341–356.

<sup>9</sup> Chusnul Adib Achmad and Nurfausiah Fitriani, *Integrasi pendidikan lingkungan hidup berbasis kearifan lokal di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Ma'arif Ungaran* (Semarang: UIN Walisongo, 2022), <https://eprints.walisongo.ac.id/id/eprint/19674/>.

<sup>10</sup> Sukadari, Suyata, and Shodiq A. Kuntoro, "Penelitian Etnografi Tentang Budaya Sekolah Dalam Pendidikan Karakter Di Sekolah Dasar," *Jurnal Pembangunan Pendidikan: Fondasi dan Aplikasi* 3, no. 1 (June 1, 2015): 58–68.

The data collection technique used is the interview. Interviews are a process of collecting data through face-to-face debriefing between interviewers and informants.<sup>11</sup> Interviews were conducted with 15 people consisting of parents, children, Sunday school teachers, church administrators, and pastors. The data analysis technique used is interactive analysis which divides data analysis into data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/data verification.<sup>12</sup>

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### **Atoni Pah Meto**

According to H. G. Schulte Nordholt, the name *Atoni Pah Meto* was given to the Timorese people who inhabited the central part of the island of Timor, namely North Central Timor and South Central Timor who spoke Dawan. The reason why the Timorese people are called *Atoni Pah Meto*. In terms of the tribes that inhabit Timor Island, it is not only those in North Central Timor and South Central Timor who speak Dawan only. This is because the Dawan people only make a living as farmers and gardeners. Dawan people do not know the Sea (water). They only know dry land or land. So, the title "*Atoni Pah Meto*" indicates that this tribal community group has certain cultures and customs. *Atoni Pah Meto* generally chooses to live in mountainous areas for gardening only. They are better known as dry or land people, not wet or sea people. That is why none of the Dawan people or from those areas make a living as Sailors or fishermen.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Environmental Education (Ecology) in Theological Approach and *Atoni Pah Meto* Approach**

The Book of Genesis chapter one, explains that before humans were created, God pre-prepared the environment in which humans would live. God prepared the environment in advance to support human survival. For this reason, it has become the duty and responsibility of humans to be able to protect and preserve the environment. The duty and responsibility is to acknowledge that the earth and everything in it is a beautiful creation of God, and as Christians, we have a responsibility to protect and maintain it. Apart from that, as created human beings, humans need to understand that the environment is a legacy that is preserved for future generations. In carrying out our duties as Christians, it is important to take sustainable steps in the use of natural resources. The most basic thing of all is to promote awareness and education about the importance of protecting the environment within the Christian community. Environmental education can provide the knowledge and skills needed to act as a responsible manager of God's creation. In addition to understanding

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<sup>11</sup> S Mukroni, "Pengaruh Kualitas Pembelajaran Guru Ekonomi Terhadap Kepuasan Siswa Di SMA Negeri 2 Sentajo Raya," *Pekbis Jurnal* 9, no. 2 (2017): 140–150.

<sup>12</sup> A. Michael Huberman, Matthew. B Miles, and J. Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis; A Methods Sourcebook* (Arizona State: SAGE, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Hello Yosef, "No Title," *Asal Usul Nama Atoni Pah Meto di Pulau Timor*, 2022.

ecology from a theological point of view, it is also necessary to understand *Atoni Pah Meto's* understanding of ecology.

Local culture has pedagogical value because it aims to regulate behavior that benefits the interests of society.<sup>14</sup> In an increasingly modern world, a lot of local culture is being abandoned because it is considered to be mystical, and irrational, and some might even hinder the economic values ordered by the world of capital in modern society.<sup>15</sup> Even though there are many local cultures that have pedagogical values that have not been explored in Indonesian culture. local culture possessed by Indonesian people needs to be explored and analyzed scientifically to obtain the true purpose of this wisdom by sorting out what is rational and what is rationalized.<sup>16</sup>

The province of East Nusa Tenggara, especially *Atoni Pah Meto*, has a local culture. Most of them work as farmers. Their life is very dependent on nature. According to them, nature can provide welfare for humans, but it can also cause havoc for those who destroy and disrupt nature. In maintaining harmony with nature, *Atoni Pah Meto* has various oral traditions. Some of these oral traditions generally use the language of rituals and ceremonies in that society. The life of *Atoni Pah Meto* has a close relationship between rites and agricultural myths, which are related to their traditional religious beliefs.

Since ancient times before Christianity entered, *Atoni Pah Meto* believed that they had a heavenly ruler 'The Highest' called *Uis Neno*, and a ruler of the universe which they called *Uis Pah* or *Pah Tuaf* (*Tuaf* means ruler, *pah* means world or nature). *Uis Neno* and *Uis Pah* are recognized as forming one divine unit. Although *Uis Neno's* superiority remains real and exceeds the power of any god or gods. *Uis Neno* and *Uis Pah* have different characteristics.

*Uis Neno* comes from the word *Uis* or *Usi* which means king, lord, owner, and *Neno* means day, sky. *Uis Neno* is defined as the god of the sky or the supreme god who rules over the heavens and the earth. *Uis Neno* is considered the origin of all things. He is the god of giving rain, sunshine, or to get offspring, health, blessings, and prosperity. Meanwhile, *Uis Pah* is a term for a spirit that is considered to have power over the land. According to *Atoni Pah Meto's* beliefs, these spirits inhabit large trees, large rocks, rivers, and mountains. He is considered a companion for *Uis Neno*. *Uis Pah* is considered to be able to bring disaster to humans. Therefore, humans have to perform various ritual ceremonies and worship to 'take the heart' of this *Uis Pah*.<sup>17</sup>

*Atoni Pah Meto* really appreciates, respects, and protects nature and its contents. Cosmology according to *Atoni Pah Meto* states that the land as the underworld (earth) acts as a mother, handler, caretaker (*a naifan*), upholder (*a su'*), feeder (*a haot*), nurse (*a sus*), and caretaker, queen and empress. While the upper nature (sky, sun, moon, stars) is the father of

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<sup>14</sup> Daroe Iswatiningsih, "Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter Berbasis Nilai-Nilai Kearifan Lokal Di Sekolah," *SATWIK: Kajian Ilmu Budaya dan Perubahan Sosial* 3, no. 2 (2019): 155–164.

<sup>15</sup> H. A Tilaar, *Paedagogik Teoritis Untuk Indonesia* (Jakarta: Kompas Media Nusantara, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Suku Dawan, Nusa Tenggara Timur," *Proto Malayan: Ras Asia di Seluruh Dunia*, 2017, <https://protomalayans.blogspot.com/2013/01/suku-dawan.html>.

protector and guardian, creator and maker. Land is also seen as a place where their deceased ancestors are buried and their bodies become soil, while their spirits are still with them.

According to *Atoni Pah Meto*, nature is their own body which must be respected, respected, and maintained. When nature is healthy, their bodies are healthy, but when nature is sick or damaged, their bodies feel sick too. According to them, the flesh is the earth, the water is the blood in which there is a spirit, the bones are the stones, and the hair is the trees. This understanding is motivated by the myth about the creation of humans which states that *Uis Neno* created humans from soil moistened with water. Soil mixed with rocks, some are oval and some are round. The stones became human bones, the oval ones became the bones of the arms, legs, and ribs, while the round ones became the bones of the skull (*nuif ma tek*). Soil becomes human flesh and fat (*afak ma baluk*), wildlife becomes fleas and tuma (*hutu ma tume*), dirt, rivers/streams/troughs of water become arteries (*kini ma keob*) and landslides become wounds and scabies (*papa ma papa*).

In addition, the recognition of the existence of *naija tuaf*, namely landlords who are supernatural is also motivated by respect for nature and the preservation of human life. *Atoni Pah Meto* really appreciates nature and the environment because they are 'nature people'. For them, nature and everything in it must be preserved. In an effort to preserve nature, they always make bans called *banu*. For example, the prohibition on catching aquatic animals such as fish, shrimp, eel (*banu mu'it*), the prohibition on picking betel nut and areca nuts prematurely (*banun puah manus*), the prohibition on harvesting fruits such as oranges, jackfruit, etc. (*banu hau fua*), the prohibition on hunting deer or other forest animals and honey (*banu oni malus*). The making of this prohibition was carried out in a customary way and of course, it involved the *Uis Pah* as the ruler of nature. If anyone violates this provision, they will receive sanctions from *usif* as a leader in their fellowship, and must also apologize to *Uis Pah* or *Naija Tuaf* through rites.<sup>18</sup>

The purpose behind these prohibition provisions which are called customary law is to reinforce awareness and determination to protect, care for, and preserve the land and the lives of fellow creatures that grow on the land. Justice on the land must indeed be made because it is from it that humans find their life. More than that, land and the environment are the source of human life. Even land cannot be tampered with and cannot be traded at will. Because it is from the land that the body comes from and it is to the land that the body will return.

*Atoni Pah Meto* believes that *Uis Neno* created them, but for them, the existence of *Uis Neno* is difficult for humans to reach. Meanwhile, *Uis Pah* is the lord of the earth, who is described as a mother for them, who holds, carries, or carries them, bribes and feeds them, takes care of them, and cares for them. This is what strengthens them that it is *Uis Pah* gives them wealth, intelligence, longevity, victory in war, and strength. Their understanding that

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<sup>18</sup> Hendrikus Nayuf and John C. Simon, "Pohon Keramat Dan Pohon Pengetahuan: Studi Etno-Teologi Tentang *Atoni Pah Meto* Dan Kejadian 2:16-17," *Dunamis: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 5, no. 2 (2021): 2541–3945.

the earth or land is mother, departs from their belief that in nature there is a spirit that is able to bring prosperity to their lives.

In this regard, *Atoni Pah Meto* adheres to a local culture that states 'land as mother'. This concept is a form of *Atoni Pah Meto's* appreciation of the land which is the source of their livelihood. Through this understanding, they truly care for nature as they should protect a mother. For this reason, when they intend to destroy nature, it is tantamount to them committing a crime with their own mother. When they take anything from nature with the same greed they make their mothers cry. Therefore, *Atoni Pah Meto* does not arbitrarily take or destroy what is in nature because they will get bad luck. For this reason, the life of *Atoni Pah Meto* who used to appreciate and love nature more so that the relationship created between humans and nature is a relationship that is mutually beneficial and not detrimental to one party for the benefit of the other.

After Christianity entered, humans were directed to believe only in God as the creator, owner, and sustainer of life. People are made aware that God gives everything. For this reason, all forms of offerings must be addressed to Him. For example, bringing upstream produce to the church, livestock, and others. They are no longer allowed to practice this local culture because it is considered to have mystical value. Cultural values that contain elements of respect for nature began to decline and eventually disappeared. Many people think that culture is infidel so people don't want to know what values are contained in the culture that need to be developed. However, this does not mean that Christianity is the main cause of changes in human lifestyles so environmental damage occurs. It is not Christianity that is blamed but it is the understanding of humans that must be changed or renewed. Culture must be seen as something that can contribute to the Gospel as long as it does not conflict with the Gospel. This means that negative things in culture must be eliminated but positive things must be developed for the welfare of nature, humans, and other creatures. There is no need to worship *Uis Pah* anymore because humans are only allowed to worship God, but the values of respect for nature that have been instilled need to be maintained with the belief that the earth belongs to God which has been entrusted to be cultivated by humans.

According to the author, every local culture that exists in each tribe has its own meaning. Indeed, rationally, it can be said that the things that are believed cannot be accepted by common sense. But it is necessary to consider that every local culture that exists in society has a pedagogical content in educating people. Every life has its own context and era. Local culture that existed in an area or tribe was also cultivated in society at that time. Today, with an increasingly modern and sophisticated world, humans are starting to forget it. In fact, some local cultures can actually be analyzed by looking at the meaning and message conveyed by each of these local cultures so that we understand how to act in life. For example, one of the examples of local culture is presented above. The stories contained in this local culture are no longer believed today because every human being already has a religion and believes that only God can be worshiped, and not on rocks, trees, water, and mountains. However, the meaning of this local culture can be used as a lesson about how one should protect the environment around him by establishing a respectful relationship



with one another. For this reason, what we see in the implementation of local culture in society actually has pedagogical values in the formation of the personality or character of community members, including children.

### **Implications of Environmental Education Based on *Atoni Pah Meto* Culture**

Environmental education based on *Atoni Pah Meto's* local culture that views the land as a mother has profound and significant implications. In this view of culture, land is considered a life-giving living entity and plays a central role in the survival and culture of the *Atoni Pah Meto*. Here are some important implications of this view: First, environmental education based on local culture can help maintain and respect traditional knowledge and practices that have existed in the *Atoni Pah Meto* community for centuries. This includes the way they interact with nature, utilize natural resources, and maintain sustainable ecosystems; Second, this kind of education enables the *Atoni Pah Meto* ethnic group to defend their cultural values in a modern context. This can help avoid conflicts between environmental interests and cultural values; Third, through a deep understanding of the relationship between culture and environment, the *Atoni Pah Meto* community may be better able to maintain the balance of the local ecosystem. They can understand how human actions affect the environment and take wiser actions; Fourth, local culture-based environmental education can also enable communities to identify environmental problems they face and find solutions on their own. It empowers them to manage their natural resources sustainably; Fifth, the concept that land is considered mother means that the *Atoni Pah Meto* people naturally have a deep respect and concern for land. This can lead to strong environmental preservation and protection efforts; Seventh, these implications may seep into the education of later generations. Children may be taught to respect the land and safeguard the environment as a cultural heritage to be preserved.

The importance of local culture-based environmental education such as *Atoni Pah Meto* is respecting and understanding the unique cultural values of the group while promoting a deeper understanding of man's relationship with nature. By recognizing that land is the mother, the *Atoni Pah Meto* community can make a valuable contribution to environmental conservation and sustainability. This will help ensure that environmental conservation efforts go hand in hand with the cultural values and needs of those communities.

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

*Atoni Pah Meto* embraces a local culture that states 'land is mother'. This is a form of *Atoni Pah Meto's* appreciation of the land which is the source of their livelihood. They really take care of nature as they should take care of a mother. When they intend to destroy nature, it means they are committing crimes with their own mothers. When they take anything from nature with the same greed they make their mothers cry. *Atoni Pah Meto* does not just take or destroy what is in nature because they will get bad luck. The life of *Atoni Pah Meto* appreciates and loves nature more so that the relationship that is created between humans

and nature is a relationship that is mutually beneficial and not detrimental to one party for the benefit of the other.

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