

# Motivations and Intention to Sustain in Environmental Volunteering among Muslim Youth

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## Abstract

Youth will play a crucial role in preserving the environment in the future, as they have witnessed significant environmental destruction. Addressing climate change requires large-scale efforts, including volunteering. Environmental volunteering not only aids in conservation but also promotes personal well-being. However, dropouts in volunteerism among youth have been a significant issue for environmental organisations. As a result, this article discusses Muslim youth's motivation and intention to sustain environmental volunteering participation. A questionnaire was created and distributed to 356 Malay Muslim environmental volunteers as respondents. Based on the findings, Muslim youth who participated in environmental volunteering were motivated by various factors, including personal needs, community responsibility, environmental concerns, and religious beliefs. Muslim youth also intended to commit and sacrifice time, energy, and money to sustain environmental volunteering. This study contributes to the academic literature about environmental volunteering. In conclusion, to engage Muslim youth in environmental volunteering, environmental organisations should consider the personal interests of Muslim youth. In addition, it is necessary to promote environmental volunteering awareness based on community ownership, environmental responsibility, and religious-based campaigns.

**Keywords:** Environmental Volunteering, Environmental Conservation, Intention, Motivation, Muslim Youth

## Introduction

Climate change is caused by human activities such as burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes (IPCC, 2022). The effects of climate change are already being felt around the world. Climate change contributes to more frequent and severe heat waves, rising sea levels, droughts, and storms. These impacts disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, including low-income communities, Indigenous communities, and people in developing countries (File & Derbile, 2019). To address climate change, it is necessary to change the behaviour, cooperation, and efforts of governments, businesses, and individuals (Doherty &

Webler, 2016). This can be supported through policy, education, and campaigning (Mbah et al., 2022; Horisch, 2019; Marshall et al., 2017). Furthermore, environmental volunteering can potentially reduce the impact of climate change by engaging communities collectively (Omoto & Packard, 2016).

According to Omar et al. (2018), volunteering involves voluntarily contributing one's time and energy to the betterment of selected communities without expecting to receive anything in return. Environmental volunteering involves volunteering one's time and skills to protect and conserve the natural environment (Woosnam et al., 2019). This may involve planting trees, removing litter, caring for wildlife, and raising awareness about environmental issues. Environmental volunteering programmes have many advantages, both for the environment and for the volunteers (Foster, 2018; Woosnam et al., 2019). Among the benefits for youth are gaining experience, increasing knowledge, improving social relationships, career development and excellent physical health (O'Brien et al., 2010; Sloane & Pröbstl-Haider, 2019; Butler & Kern, 2016; Huang, 2018). Youth participation in environmental volunteering also helps reduce costs associated with environmental management (Foster, 2018).

Various environmental associations or NGOs have been established in Malaysia to support environmental volunteering programs among youth. These environmental NGOs include the Malaysian Nature Society, Treat Every Environment Special (TrEES), Green Earth Society, and Malaysian Green & Blue Environmental Society (MENGO, 2020). Animal and plant conservation centres also provide opportunities for the public to get involved as environmental volunteers, such as zoo volunteers. Volunteering support has also been received from environmental volunteer programs conducted in schools or universities (Smith et al., 2012) and local communities (Winch et al., 2020). However, retaining, sustaining, and reducing environmental volunteer dropouts are a significant issue for voluntary organisations (Larson et al., 2020; West & Pateman, 2016). Sustained volunteering refers to long-term voluntary activities that involve frequent participation (Aydinli-Karakulak et al., 2016). This vital task calls for a solution to what motivates volunteers to sustain themselves in environmental volunteering activities. The difference in motivation can be based on culture and values (Kragh, 2016; Molsher & Townsend, 2016; Lim & Ibrahim, 2020).

Malaysia is a diverse nation where people practice various religions, including Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and animism, all of which influence the actions of their followers. However, this study specifically focuses on Malay Muslims. Some Muslims believe that Islamic teachings encourage participation in environmental volunteering. For instance, Islam promotes values such as collaboration in environmental preservation, demonstrating politeness and kindness in good deeds, setting positive examples for others, and taking responsibility as stewards of the Earth. These principles inspire some Malay Muslim youth to engage in environmental volunteering (Mangunjaya, 2010; Yamin, 2019; Kayikci, 2019). Nonetheless, the relationship between volunteering values and religious culture concerning environmental volunteering remains inadequately explored (Smith et al., 2012).

### **Environmental Volunteering in Muslim Youth**

Environmental volunteering is a rapidly growing activity that has proven to be a valuable tool for environmental conservation. Collaborative environmental volunteering significantly impacts environmental conservation (Measham & Barnett, 2008; Woosnam et al., 2019;

Omoto & Packard, 2016). Based on previous research, environmental volunteering activities can enhance new social relationships, knowledge, physical health, mental health, and skills (Aydinli-Karakulak et al., 2016; Measham & Barnett, 2007; Molsher & Townsend, 2016). Environmental volunteering activities also significantly improve participants' positive emotions and significantly decrease their negative emotions (Kragh et al., 2016). Despite the many benefits of environmental volunteering, successful outcomes can only be achieved through an active and engaged population of volunteers.

Culture that has become a norm in the society (Schwartz, 2012). Norms are customary standards or rules that have become part of life and serve as a guide for how the members of society should behave. Culture or norms strongly influence Malaysians, where volunteerism, also known as *gotong-royong* (cooperation or communal work), is a significant aspect of their lives. This is particularly evident when they have to ensure the cleanliness of their surroundings or prepare for special events such as weddings. In addition, the culture within a society influences a person's willingness to be involved in environmental volunteering (Fang et al., 2017; Aoyagi-Usui et al., 2003). Fang et al. (2017) mentioned that cultural factors that influenced environmental conservation actions were unique factors to study.

#### *Motivations and Intention to Sustain in Environmental Volunteering among Muslim Youth*

Dropout rates in environmental volunteering are high (Larson et al., 2020). Dropout and turnover of volunteers mean that the objectives and goals of organisations organising environmental volunteer programmes are put at risk or cannot be met. In such situations, organizations must invest additional effort in recruiting and training new volunteers. Therefore, increasing the long-term commitment of volunteers is an essential task for organisers (Ding & Schuett, 2020). To address the high volunteer dropout rate, previous research has focused on volunteering motivation (Measham & Barnett, 2008; Omoto & Packard, 2016; Sulaiman, 2011; Woosnam et al., 2019; Andow et al., 2016; Rusk & Waters, 2015; Butler & Kern, 2016; Huang, 2018; Andow et al., 2016). Omoto and Snyder (1995) proposed six types of motivation as volunteer motives: values, opportunities, career, protective, social, and enhancement. Lim and Ibrahim (2020) added three more types of motivation: requirement, recognition, and religion.

In addition, previous studies have highlighted different forms of motivation, often based on age, that drive people to engage in environmental volunteering activities. For younger volunteers, skill acquisition, networking, and career development may be the primary motivators, while older volunteers may be more interested in altruistic acts such as sharing information and teaching others (Asah et al., 2014). Previous research has shown that older people are less likely to volunteer than younger people (Nesbit, 2017). From another perspective, youth represent the generation witnessing rapid ecosystem degradation locally and globally (Woosnam et al., 2019). Youth are also the agents of change in the country as they acquire sufficient maturity to participate in environmental conservation efforts. Moreover, youth are at their most productive stage when allocating energy, time, and money to environmental volunteering activities.

Based on past studies, the motivation of Muslim youth is diverse, but it can be divided into 4 aspects, namely personal need, community responsibility, environmental concern and religious belief. Personal needs focus on individual goals and are oriented toward self-

gratification, such as social power, wealth, and personal success. Among the personal need that influences a person to be involved in environmental volunteering are improving skills (Measham & Barnett, 2007), gaining experience (Pages, Fischer & Wal, 2018), enhancing social interaction such as increasing contacts (Measham & Barnett, 2007; McDougale, Greenpsan & Handy, 2011), and learning about the environment (Measham & Barnett, 2007).

In contrast, studies by Omoto and Packard (2016) and Foster (2018) showed that a sense of responsibility toward the community is a significant motivation that influences involvement as an environmental volunteer. Meanwhile, environmental concerns focus on the well-being of all living creatures, such as plants, animals, and the ecosystem as a whole (Measham & Barnett, 2007). An individual's high sense of responsibility toward the environment can nurture a more environmentally friendly attitude and behaviour that could lead to environmental activism (Paco & Rodrigues 2016).

Lee et al. (2014) and Van der Werff, Steg, Lindenberg, and Keizer (2015) found that environmental concerns were better predictors in evaluating environmentally friendly behaviours. The motivation related to religious beliefs also contributes to environmental care behaviours (Abd Rahman et al., 2020) and involvement as environmental volunteers (Crowe, 2013; Okun et al., 2017; Chowdhury, 2018). Muslims believe that numerous tenets within the Islamic faith emphasize the importance of environmental preservation. In this context, volunteering is considered a commendable act and a responsibility of Muslims as stewards of the earth, as noted in various studies (Mangunjaya, 2010; Yang, 2018; Yamin, 2019; Kayikci, 2019). Moreover, Muslims believe that the al-Quran contains several verses emphasizing the importance of performing good deeds. These teachings are often highlighted in Islamic education in Malaysia or in sermons delivered during Friday prayers at the mosque. As a result, Islamic values in the Quran inspire young people to engage in environmental volunteering. For Muslims, volunteerism will be rewarded by Allah (Sulaiman, 2011).

In the theory of planned behaviour, humans consciously behave, and their intention influences their behaviour towards environmental conservation. According to the theory of planned behaviour model, attitudes are judgments people make about behaviours they like or dislike. These attitudes are based on the environmental values held by individuals. Values are link to motivation which is can be related to personal need, community responsibilities, environmental concern and religious belief. Hence, a more positive motivation towards a behaviour leads to a higher intention to engage in that behaviour.

## **Research Methodology**

### *Research Design and Sampling*

To understand the motivation and intention behind the participation of Muslim youth in environmental volunteering, a survey study was conducted among those who are environmental volunteers in the Klang Valley of Malaysia. The youth were aged between 15 and 30 years old and had been involved in environmental volunteering activities. The types of environmental volunteering that the participants were involved in were diverse and mainly related to conservation, education, and sustainable living. Data for this study was collected through a questionnaire distributed to 356 Malay Muslim environmental volunteers as respondents.

### Research Instrument

Motivations were explored regarding personal needs, community responsibility, environmental concerns, and religious belief. Intention to sustain was examined in terms of commitment, time, energy, and money contribution. All items were constructed based on past studies and constructed by the researchers based on the interviews conducted with Muslim environmental volunteers. The respondents must choose their answer based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Examples of items from the questionnaire are:

- i. I am involved in volunteering activities to pass the time (personal needs).
- ii. I participate in volunteering activities because I want to serve the community (community responsibility).
- iii. I participate in volunteering activities due to awareness of environmental conservation (environmental concern).
- iv. I participate in volunteering activities to practice the religious value of environmental conservation (religious belief).
- v. I will continue participating in environmental volunteering activities without any payment or rewards given (intention).

### Data Analysis

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics comprise a mean, standard deviation and the interpretation of motivations and intention to sustain in environmental volunteering. The mean scores were interpreted based on Nunnally (1997): 1.00-2.33 (low), 2.34-3.66 (moderate) and 3.67-5.00 (high). The data were analysed using SPSS version 23 software. This study explored motivations in terms of personal needs, community responsibility, environmental concern, and religious belief.

### Findings

Table 1 shows the environmental volunteering motivation level across the four factors. Overall, the environmental volunteers demonstrated high levels of motivation for each factor. Religious belief had the highest mean score, followed by community responsibility, environmental awareness and personal need. The results of this study showed that all the factors studied were scored highly.

Table 1

*The Level of Environmental Volunteering Motivation*

No	Item	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
1	Personal needs	4.503	.516	High
2	Community responsibility	4.611	.464	High
3	Environmental concern	4.612	.470	High
4	Religious belief	4.640	.502	High
	Motivation (Total)	4.593	.427	High

Meanwhile, the intention of Muslim youth to sustain in environmental volunteering was examined based on four factors: commitment, sacrifice of time, energy, and money. Table 2 shows the level of environmental volunteers' intention to sustain in environmental volunteering across the four factors. Overall, the level of intention was high. The sacrifice of

energy was the highest, followed by sacrifice of time, commitment and sacrifice of money. The results of this study showed that all the factors studied were scored highly.

Table 2

*The Level of Intention to Sustain in Environmental Volunteering*

No	Item	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
1	Commitment	4.443	.600	High
2	Time contributed	4.450	.127	High
3	Energy contributed	4.460	.630	High
4	money contributed	4.320	.630	High
	Intention (Total)	4.431	.596	High

**Discussion**

Based on the research, environmental volunteers primarily aspire to achieve goals that complement their personal need, such as making the most of their free time, satisfying their curiosity about environmental volunteering activities, relieving stress, overcoming boredom, trying new things, gaining experience, and taking advantage of opportunities to engage in the field of environmental volunteerism (Rahman et al., 2021). The motivation to get involved in environmental volunteering varies by culture and country. Past studies have shown that people in developing countries such as Indonesia tend to prioritise their personal needs over environmental concerns, compared to people in developed countries such as Korea (Rachmatullah et al., 2019). Similarly. The respondents in Great Britain are strongly motivated by career opportunities and the learning experience, while the Austrian respondents are mainly attracted by value and esteem. This suggests that youth who engage in environmental volunteering may have personal motivations such as enhancing positive emotions, networking, skill building, and career development (Molsher & Townsend, 2016; Rusk & Water, 2015). Therefore, organisers of environmental volunteering should consider these motivations to encourage continued participation among youth.

A sense of responsibility towards the community motivates the youth to participate as environmental volunteers (Omoto & Packard, 2016; Foster, 2018). According to Takase et al. (2018), the frequency of participation and the development of a sense of community may be influenced by social interactions with others and the enjoyment of cultural ecosystems. Previous studies have shown that youth engage in environmental volunteering to serve as role models for their community, encouraging others to partake in similar activities. Social support and role models play a crucial role in reinforcing social norms and informing individuals about the attitudes, efficacy, and behaviours associated with environmental volunteering that are seen as positive (Steg & Vlek, 2009). According to Culiberg and Elgaied-Gambier (2016), social support often uses norms to influence behaviour through role modelling, eventually leading to new norms in society.

Volunteers perceived their involvement in environmental volunteering due to environmental concern and as an expression of their fondness for nature and animals (Andow et al., 2016). Alcock et al. (2020) found a positive correlation between recreational nature visits, nature appreciation, and pro-environmental behaviour. When volunteers engage in activities that enhance their well-being, they are more likely to replicate that behaviour and

experience positive emotions, as shown by Butler & Kern (2016), Huang (2018), and Seligman (2011). Therefore, individuals interested in environmentally related activities are more inclined to participate in environmental volunteering activities (Schwartz, 2012).

Muslims believe Islam emphasises the importance of education and encourages individuals to motivate others to engage in activities related to environmental conservation, as noted in previous studies (Efendi et al., 2017; Fua et al., 2018). The study found that students' participation in environmental volunteering was primarily motivated by religious values. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that religious beliefs may influence individuals' willingness to participate in such activities (Chowdhury, 2018; Fang et al., 2017; Sloane & Probstl-Haider, 2019). This finding is especially pertinent in Malaysia, where a significant portion of the population identifies as Muslim, and their actions are often influenced by Islamic teachings. In some Muslim groups, volunteerism is highly valued and encouraged, which could explain why youth are motivated to participate in environmental volunteering activities (Yang, 2018; Kayikci, 2019; Mangunjaya, 2010; Yamin, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how Islamic beliefs, traditions, and practices are integrated into environmental volunteering (Bensaid, 2018; Hancock, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to understand the motivation and intention of Malay Muslim youth to sustain in environmental volunteering. Volunteerism is a powerful mechanism that opens up avenues for greater participation of people in environmental sustainability projects in communities. The government needs to provide funding for implementing various programmes and environmental campaigns. In addition, it is essential to foster environmental values among the youth so that the government can take steps to strengthen environmental volunteerism. This is because the youth are future leaders who must attain more significant positive and effective maturity and the ability and motivation to build a more substantial commitment to the environment.

Educational institutions such as universities and schools can get involved by making environmental activities a compulsory form of community service that encourages environmental commitment. Volunteers can get involved by working with NGOs, universities, or environmental ministries. This can help increase the participation of environmental volunteers. Environmental education programmes (formal and informal) at different levels (e.g. university, school, or community) can also be implemented by targeting independent knowledge so that people can better understand the relationship between their behaviour and the environment. This can also help achieve more sustainable pro-environmental behaviour as people become socially responsible citizens and participate in environmental volunteering.

In addition, good use of social media to promote environmental volunteering activities should be seen as an essential means of disseminating information about the environment. Social media technologies are powerful tools, but their effectiveness for sustainability is limited by resources, individual perceptions, and the desire to engage with other volunteers. Nevertheless, social media should be fully utilised to promote the adoption of sustainability behaviours and the importance of environmental volunteering among youth.

There is a requirement to incorporate religious beliefs into environmental volunteering programs to inspire communities to participate in conservation initiatives collectively. Religious organisations should take a more active role in encouraging community involvement in environmental volunteering tasks. This can be achieved through delivering sermons, setting positive examples or leading by example, organising environmental campaigns, and collaborating with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or relevant authorities responsible for environmental conservation.

Moreover, religious values related to environmental conservation should be instilled early on within families and consistently reinforced in educational institutions. Environmental volunteering activities should be integrated into environmental education programs, focusing on incorporating values associated with environmental conservation. Identifying factors that can create the circumstances that support environmental volunteering among youth should be considered to maximise large-scale environmental conservation efforts.

Overall, this research provides significant theoretical and contextual contributions. Theoretically, it enriches the existing body of knowledge by integrating the motivational factors of Malay Muslim youth into the framework of environmental volunteering, incorporating both religious and cultural dimensions. This unique perspective bridges a gap in the literature on how religions and cultural values influence environmental behaviour. Moreover, it offers a better understanding of how religious beliefs and environmental values intersect to foster sustainable engagement, thus broadening the theoretical framework of pro-environmental behaviour studies through volunteering.

Contextually, the research highlights actionable insights into fostering environmental volunteerism within the Malay Muslim community. By linking religious practices and environmental conservation, it underscores the potential of leveraging faith-based initiatives to inspire collective action. This is particularly relevant for policymakers, NGOs, and educational institutions seeking culturally and religiously aligned strategies to engage youth in environmental sustainability. Additionally, it provides practical recommendations for embedding environmental values into educational curricula, family practices, and community activities that contributing to the sustainability of environmental volunteer's participation.

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