

# Fostering Environmental Sustainability through Recycling Practices: Integrating the Principle of *Islah* in the 'Main Sama-Sama' Approach

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## ABSTRACT

In the context of Islam, recycling is not merely a conservation activity but also a manifestation of humanity's responsibility as *khalifah* in preserving the Earth. Thus, this study aims to analyze the role of recycling practices in fostering environmental sustainability through the integration of the principle of *islah*, as illustrated in the 'Main Sama-Sama' approach. This approach focuses on repurposing discarded materials into toys that can benefit various segments of society. Through a qualitative approach involving textual analysis and sculpture studies, this research seeks to highlight the integration of the *islah* principle within the 'Main Sama-Sama' approach. The findings show that the incorporation of *islah* strengthens ecological awareness and promotes social unity through the spirit of mutual assistance. The 'Main Sama-Sama' initiative, which emphasizes collaborative activities among community members, has been proven to enhance the effectiveness of recycling practices and instill positive moral values. Furthermore, it reinforces collective responsibility in environmental education, in alignment with Islamic teachings, to ensure ecological sustainability and social harmony.

**Keywords:** Recycling, Sustainability, Environment, *Islah*, 'Main Sama-Sama'

## INTRODUCTION

The growth of population and rapid urbanization have led to a worrying increase in solid waste generation on a global scale. The depletion of natural resources and the negative impact of waste on ecosystems necessitate the urgent promotion of recycling practices as a key component in environmental sustainability strategies. Although various recycling initiatives have been introduced, public awareness and participation remain insufficient. In this context, there is a need to design more creative and inclusive approaches that not only emphasize environmental *islah* but also actively engage the community in meaningful ways (Kabirifar et al., 2020).

The growing environmental crisis demands innovative and practical solutions, especially in industries that contribute to waste generation and pollution. One such industry is toy production, which typically relies on non-biodegradable plastics and packaging (Reem et al., 2024). This paper proposes eco-friendly toy production as a pathway toward environmental sustainability, integrating the Islamic principle of *Islah* (reformation or positive change). Through the 'Main Sama-sama' approach, encouraging collaboration and community

engagement, this framework combines sustainable practices with playful, educational experiences to foster environmental awareness. By using recycled materials and promoting responsible consumption, eco-friendly toy production offers an opportunity to reshape consumer habits, create social awareness, and engage the younger generation in environmental stewardship. The principle of *Islah* acts as the moral foundation of this movement, promoting not only reformation in production practices but also encouraging individuals to be stewards of the Earth.

One innovative approach proposed is the 'Main Sama-Sama' strategy, which focuses on the reuse of discarded items such as bottles, boxes, and other recyclable materials to create toys. This initiative not only contributes to waste reduction efforts but also serves as a tool for promoting sustainability education, particularly among children. In addition to raising awareness about the importance of environmental conservation, this approach fosters creativity and entrepreneurial skills from an early age, transforming recycling from a mere obligation into an enjoyable and impactful lifestyle. From the *islah* perspective, this strategy not only emphasizes the physical restoration of the environment but also underscores the ethical relationship between humans and nature. The concept of *islah* asserts that every individual has a moral responsibility to care for and improve the environment, not merely to avoid causing harm (Hartanto, 2019). The 'Main Sama-Sama' initiative reflects this restorative effort by embedding learning elements through creative play activities, making environmental stewardship more accessible and applicable across various age groups.

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the 'Main Sama-Sama' approach in fostering environmental awareness and sustainable practices within the community. It will assess how this initiative can shift societal perceptions of waste, from being seen as mere trash to being recognized as a valuable resource, while also identifying potential challenges that may hinder its success. The findings of this study are expected to make a meaningful contribution to sustainability literature and recycling practices, with an emphasis on the holistic principles of *islah*. The central question is; To what extent can this approach cultivate a sense of responsibility and ensure the continuity of environmental restoration efforts for future generations? This article will explore these issues through in-depth analysis.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach through a narrative design to gather information, data, and reference materials from reliable sources. Narrative research emphasizes understanding and meaning-making based on stories, experiences, and observations (Potteiger & Purinton, 1998). In this study, two forms of analysis are applied: content analysis and visual semiotic analysis. Content analysis focuses on examining previous studies to derive the meaning of the *islah* principle and recycling practices from an Islamic perspective. Meanwhile, visual semiotic analysis is conducted on the artwork of 'Main Sama-Sama' to explore the integration of this work with the *islah* principle. According to Chandler (2007), visual semiotic analysis involves the study of signs that appear visually and the procedures for interpreting their meanings. A design or drawing contains intrinsic meanings that can be formulated into loose principles to guide researchers in understanding the meaning of the images or sculptures produced (Soikun & Ibrahim, 2018). Thus, these two analytical approaches can summarize the integration of the *islah* principle within the 'Main Sama-Sama' artwork, fostering environmental sustainability through recycling practices.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH RECYCLING

The recycling approach is one of the key strategies for ensuring environmental sustainability. Recycling reduces the amount of waste sent to landfills. By processing used items and converting them into useful materials, we can ease the burden on landfills, which are often sources of pollution and environmental degradation. Promoting recycling also reduces the demand for new products, which, in turn, decreases the amount of waste generated (Kaletnik & Lutkovska, 2020). Additionally, recycling helps conserve natural resources such as wood, metal, and water by reducing the need for extraction and production of new materials. By minimizing activities such as mining, deforestation, and resource exploitation, recycling can protect habitats and preserve biodiversity. Uncontrolled waste disposal poses risks by releasing hazardous substances

into the air (Sharma, 2020). Recycling mitigates these activities and improves air quality in areas around waste disposal sites. Initiatives that improve air quality contribute to public health and well-being by reducing the risks of respiratory diseases and other health issues.

Recycling also creates job opportunities in the recycling and waste-processing industries, supporting economic growth while preserving the environment. It encourages innovation in green technology, fostering the development of more environmentally friendly processes and products. Furthermore, recycling promotes critical thinking about consumption habits and encourages reuse practices, which reduces the need for new products (Ferronato & Torretta, 2019). Participation in recycling activities fosters a sense of responsibility among individuals, leading them to make better choices and appreciate the value of existing resources.

Recycling is a powerful tool for ensuring environmental sustainability. By reducing waste, conserving natural resources, minimizing pollution, and raising public awareness, recycling provides benefits not only to the environment but also supports sustainable economic growth. However, achieving true sustainability requires more than just recycling—it must be accompanied by reduction in consumption, reuse of products, and active community involvement. The 5R approach offers a comprehensive framework for waste management, based on five principles: Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, and Recycle. This integrated approach aims to minimize waste across the entire consumption chain, from production to disposal (Kabirifar et al., 2020). Each element of the 5R strategy works synergistically to mitigate the negative environmental impact of waste and promote a sustainable lifestyle.

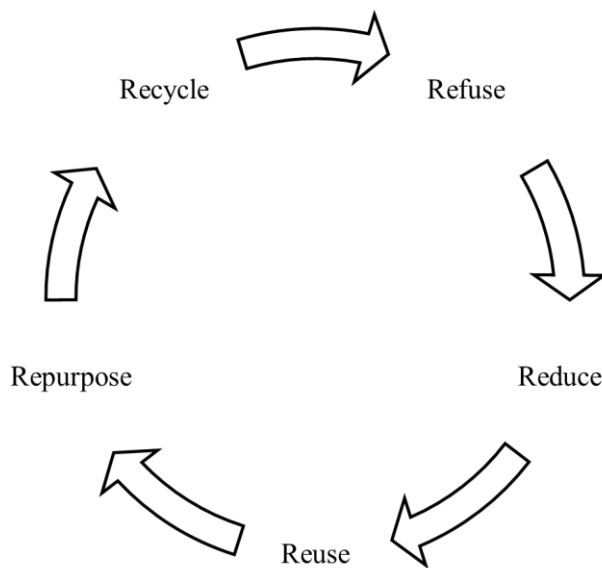


Figure 1: 5R Strategy in Environmental Management

### **Refuse**

The foundation of sustainability lies in making conscious decisions to refuse unnecessary goods or products, especially those that are environmentally harmful, such as single-use plastics. By rejecting products that negatively impact the environment, consumers support a more sustainable market and reduce the demand for non-renewable resources. For example, consumers can refuse plastic bags by replacing them with reusable bags. Within the context of the ‘Main Sama-Sama’ strategy, this principle is applied by teaching children to choose toys made from eco-friendly or recycled materials.

### **Reduce**

The Reduce principle emphasizes efforts to minimize waste generation by limiting the use of raw materials or excessive packaging. This involves practices such as optimizing product usage and preventing resource

wastage. For instance, the ‘Main Sama-Sama’ strategy supports this principle by repurposing bottles, boxes, or discarded materials into toys, thereby reducing the need to purchase new toys that might generate more waste.

## Reuse

Reuse focuses on repeatedly utilizing existing items to reduce early disposal and extend product lifespans. In this context, used cardboard boxes or bottles can be transformed into toys or household tools. The ‘Main Sama-Sama’ approach promotes reuse by encouraging children and parents to turn discarded materials into toys, such as making robots from bottles or cars from boxes, resulting in a more creative and meaningful play experience.

## Repurpose

Repurpose refers to creatively transforming the original function of an item into a new, useful purpose. This approach prevents waste by discovering new value in old items. For example, in the ‘Main Sama-Sama’ strategy, discarded boxes can be turned into dollhouses or water bottles into flowerpots. This practice not only reduces waste but also encourages creativity and learning among children.

## Recycle

Recycle involves processing waste materials to create new products. Although recycling is a critical component of waste management, it is not the first step, as it requires resources and energy. This process is appropriate for materials that cannot be reused or repurposed. In the ‘Main Sama-Sama’ context, children are also taught the importance of sorting waste for recycling, such as collecting plastic bottles or paper to be sent to recycling centers. Early education is essential to nurture a generation that is more responsible towards the environment.

The 5R strategy not only focuses on reducing waste but also fosters cultural and behavioral change towards environmental preservation. By integrating this strategy into the ‘Main Sama-Sama’ approach, communities are taught to view waste as a resource that can be utilized. The concept of *islah*, or environmental restoration, is achieved not only by reducing pollution but also by strengthening the ethical relationship between humans and nature through creative and meaningful activities (Das et al., 2019). Additionally, the 5R strategy improves resource efficiency and reduces reliance on single-use products. This approach is essential in the long term for ecosystem sustainability, carbon reduction, and minimizing the impact of climate change (Klarin, 2018). However, the effectiveness of this strategy depends on the continuous commitment of society and the policy support of governments and local authorities.

The 5R approach provides a comprehensive framework for sustainability by emphasizing *islah* through practical and accessible practices. The global toy industry generates significant environmental challenges, primarily due to:

**Use of Non-recyclable Plastics:** Traditional toys are often made of hard plastics that do not decompose, adding to landfill waste.

**High Carbon Footprint:** The manufacturing and transportation processes involved in toy production are energy-intensive, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions.

**Packaging Waste:** Toys are frequently over-packaged in plastic, further increasing environmental pollution.

These issues necessitate a shift toward sustainable toy production, where environmental impact is minimized using recycled, biodegradable, or sustainable materials (Reem et.al, 2024). This aligns with the concept of *Islah*, which encourages reformation to restore balance and improve existing systems. The ‘Main Sama-Sama’ strategy not only nurtures a more responsible and creative generation but also strengthens sustainable lifestyles

in everyday life. The combination of education, awareness, and action aims to build a balanced and harmonious community with nature, ensuring environmental sustainability for future generations.

## THE ROLE OF THE *ISLAH* PRINCIPLE IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

*Islah* originates from the Arabic root word meaning to repair, restore, or improve. In the Islamic context, *islah* encompasses efforts to improve the self, society, and the environment to achieve well-being in both this life and the hereafter. This principle is highly relevant to environmental sustainability as it emphasizes the human responsibility to safeguard Allah's creation and maintain ecological balance (Nurhaeni et al., 2021). Below are key dimensions of *islah* related to environmental sustainability:

### a. Restoration and Preservation of Natural Resources

*Islah* urges humans to repair environmental damage caused by human actions or natural factors. Allah states in the Quran:

*'Corruption has spread on land and sea as a result of what people's hands have done, so that Allah may cause them to taste (the consequences of) some of their deeds and perhaps they might return (to the Right Path).'* (Surah al-Rum 30: 41)

This principle calls for restoration efforts, such as recycling, to minimize environmental damage and ensure that resources remain available for future generations. In this context, *islah* plays a role in ensuring a healthy and sustainable environment, enabling the continuity of life for humans and other creatures. Recycling contributes to these goals by reducing pollution, conserving resources, and supporting a sustainable economy.

### b. Preventing Wastefulness

Islam warns against *israf* (wastefulness) and *tabzir* (extravagance without benefit). Both are forbidden in Islam. Allah says:

*'Do not waste. Surely He does not like the wasteful.'* (Surah al-An'am 6: 141)

Recycling is a practical form of *islah* that effectively reduces waste and promotes the reuse of existing materials. This practice aligns with the Islamic values of resource optimization and environmental stewardship.

### c. Khalifah of the Earth and Ecological Responsibility

The concept of *islah* aligns closely with the idea of humans as khalifah of the earth, entrusted with the responsibility to protect and lead wisely. This moral duty requires humans to preserve the environment and avoid causing harm. Allah SWT states:

*'(Remember) when your Lord said to the angels, 'I am going to place a successive (human) authority on earth.'* (Surah al-Baqarah 2: 30)

Recycling is a form of ecological responsibility that aligns with the role of khalifah. It ensures that resources are used wisely and that efforts are made to restore and sustain them.

### d. Social Cooperation in the Implementation of *Islah*

Environmental restoration and sustainability require collaborative efforts within society (Khan, Shahbaz & Jam, 2019). The principle of *islah* encourages the active involvement of all members of society in improving environmental conditions through programs such as community recycling initiatives. Allah SWT says:

‘Cooperate with one another in goodness and righteousness, and do not cooperate in sin and transgression.’ (Surah al-Ma’idah 5: 2)

In the environmental context, this verse underscores the importance of mutual support in preventing harm and promoting environmental conservation.

#### e. Gratitude and Stewardship of Natural Resources

The earth and its resources are considered a trust (*amanah*) from Allah SWT, which must be managed with gratitude. *Islah* demands that people use natural resources responsibly, avoid waste, and strive to preserve the environment (Maulida et al., 2022). Allah reminds us:

‘And (remember) when your Lord proclaimed, ‘If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more. But if you are ungrateful, surely My punishment is severe.’ (Surah Ibrahim 14:7)

Recycling is not merely an economic choice; it is also an act of worship and gratitude, reflecting the appreciation of Allah’s blessings.

The principle of *islah* in environmental sustainability emphasizes improvement, restoration, and preservation as collective responsibilities. Recycling, aligned with Islamic values, prevents waste, sustains resources, and fosters social cooperation (Hartanto, 2019). Through this approach, individuals and communities act as *khalifah* on earth, fulfilling their trust to care for the environment with gratitude and responsibility (Nasir, Yaacob & Petera, 2021). This not only ensures physical and ecological well-being but also draws people closer to the spiritual goals of life.

### INTEGRATION OF THE ISLAH PRINCIPLE IN THE ‘MAIN SAMA-SAMA’ PROJECT

The issue of environmental pollution has become increasingly critical as the amount of non-biodegradable waste, such as plastic, paper, metal, and fabric, continues to rise. The growing use of these materials contributes to various forms of pollution, which not only harm human health but also threaten the survival of animals and plants (Silvestre & Tirca, 2019). In response to these challenges, numerous initiatives have been implemented to manage waste and preserve environmental sustainability. These efforts aim to mitigate the negative impact of waste on both the environment and society (Zorpas, 2020). In line with this concept, the ‘Main Sama-Sama’ art project is proposed to breathe new life into discarded materials, focusing particularly on plastic toys and household items such as beverage bottles, lubricant containers, detergent bottles, drinking straws, and electrical appliances. The project’s objective is to incorporate creative and sustainable elements into art creation through community involvement. Its primary focus is to produce vehicle-themed toys from discarded materials and to repurpose broken toys.

Play is an essential element in the cognitive and emotional development of children, serving as a medium for informal learning from an early age. Toys stimulate imagination and act as a channel for expressing creativity. However, many toys today are easily damaged and often discarded once they are no longer usable, especially by children. This contributes to the rise in plastic waste, adding further pressure to the environment. In contrast, adults tend to value and manage their toys with greater care. Some toys, such as Gundam models, remote-controlled cars, or animated figures like Batman and Transformers, are cherished as collectibles with sentimental or commercial value. Through the ‘Main Sama-Sama’ project, discarded materials will be repurposed into vehicle-themed toys and displayed as part of an interactive art installation at the UiTM Melaka Art Gallery. Visitors will not only be able to touch and play with the exhibited toys but also could create their own toys using the provided recycled materials. This activity aims to raise awareness about recycling practices in a practical manner while fostering stronger relationships between communities and the environment. Interestingly, visitors who wish to take a toy home will be required to exchange it for a drawing of the toy, highlighting the concept of value exchange.

This project is divided into three phases: Pre-Activity, Ongoing Activity, and Post-Activity. This division aims to ensure the project is implemented in an organized and comprehensive manner, with the involvement of various parties, including lecturers, Fine Arts students, and the surrounding community of UiTM Melaka.

### a. Pre-Activity

This phase focuses on the collection of used toys and plastic materials from UiTM Melaka staff and the local community. The handover process is not only systematically documented but also provides an opportunity for participants and contributors to share ideas and suggestions relevant to the installation project. This approach ensures active and collaborative participation, strengthening the relationship between the institution and the community in advancing sustainability-oriented initiatives.



Figure 2: Sketch of 'Main Sama-Sama' Project



Figure 3: Project's Raw Materials

Figure 2 presents the sketch of the 'Main Sama-Sama' project, serving as a crucial guide for the project's execution. This sketch ensures that the installation process aligns with the established criteria while still fostering participants' creativity. Meanwhile, Figure 3 highlights a selection of raw materials utilized in the project. These materials were sourced through collection efforts and donations of used items from the local community, reflecting their support and active participation in the program.

## b. Ongoing Activity

A total of 10 lecturers and 20 students were brought together in a mini workshop to create at least one vehicle-themed toy prototype using discarded materials. These creations will be exhibited at the UiTM Melaka Art Gallery as a testament to creativity and environmental awareness. Visitors are also invited to design their own toys on-site using the provided materials. As a symbol of appreciation and value exchange, any toy that visitors wish to take home must be exchanged for a drawing of the toy.



Figure 4: Implementation of 'Main Sama-Sama' Project

Figure 4 illustrates the implementation of the 'Main Sama-Sama' project, involving the active participation of lecturers and students. This collaborative approach aims to gather diverse ideas and creativity, ensuring that every participant contributes meaningfully to the development process. The toys produced serve as foundational models or guides and remain open to modifications according to the skills and creativity of the participants, making the process dynamic and inclusive.

## c. Post-Activity

Throughout the course of this project, every step has been documented for record-keeping purposes. This documentation process has been organized into a book format that includes images of activities, the production process, and participants' reflections on their experiences in the project.



Figure 5: Outcomes of 'Main Sama-Sama' Project



The primary inspiration for this project comes from personal childhood experiences, where financial constraints and distance from urban areas required creativity in crafting toys from discarded materials such as plastic, wood, and tin. Handmade vehicles, including cars, trucks, and rockets, were not only more durable but also provided a deeper sense of satisfaction compared to store-bought toys. This experience resonates with many children, whether from urban or rural areas, as their imagination often turns surrounding objects into playthings. For example, a water bottle could easily be imagined as a rocket, while cups could be stacked into buildings. The 'Main Sama-Sama' project aims to stimulate cognitive skills and creativity, especially among children. When existing toys break, children naturally turn to household items such as cups and bottles, transforming them into new toys. This experience demonstrates that creativity and imagination are limitless resources, and discarded materials can be repurposed in meaningful ways if given a second life.

The 'Main Sama-Sama' approach emphasizes play as a tool for education, collaboration, and social bonding. Toys offer a unique medium to introduce environmental concepts in a way that is accessible and enjoyable for children. This approach can:

1. **Teach Environmental Responsibility:** Eco-friendly toys can foster environmental awareness by showing children the value of recycling and resource conservation.
2. **Encourage Collaborative Learning:** Through community workshops and play-based activities, families can learn how to create toys from recycled materials together.
3. **Cultivate Emotional Connection with Nature:** Nature-themed toys can foster a sense of responsibility toward the environment by encouraging children to explore and care for their surroundings.

By integrating environmental messages into playtime activities, children internalize sustainable habits, contributing to long-term behavioral changes (Michael, et.al, 2020).

This project also hopes to evoke nostalgia and raise awareness about the importance of managing resources wisely. Additionally, it holds economic potential by enabling communities to commercialize repurposed toys. From a design and aesthetic perspective, discarded materials often come in vivid colors such as red, orange, and bright green, making the toys produced from them visually unique and captivating. The project acknowledges that children possess a high degree of imagination and curiosity, learning by observing, mimicking, and playing. Thus, a creative environment like this can foster healthy mental and emotional development. In summary, the 'Main Sama-Sama' project is not merely an artistic endeavor but also a platform to promote awareness about the importance of recycling and environmental restoration (*islah*). Through interactive activities and community involvement, the project seeks to cultivate a sustainable culture among the public. By combining creativity, education, and environmental restoration, this project aims to inspire similar initiatives in the future.

From the *Islah* perspective, this approach is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, calling for individuals and communities to improve themselves and their environment. Applied to eco-friendly toy production, *Islah* manifests in the following ways:

1. **Reformation of the Toy Industry:** Encouraging manufacturers to reform their practices by adopting sustainable materials and reducing waste aligns with the principles of *Islah*.
2. **Restoration of Harmony:** Just as *Islah* aims to restore balance within communities, eco-friendly toys aim to restore harmony with nature by reducing pollution and resource depletion.
3. **Promoting Social Responsibility:** The principle of *Islah* fosters moral responsibility for caring for the planet, emphasizing that sustainability is not just an economic or environmental issue, but also a spiritual and ethical obligation.
4. **Encouraging Moderation and Conscious Consumption:** Instead of promoting the constant purchase of new toys, the focus shifts to valuing what we have, repairing, sharing, or donating toys, contributing to sustainable consumption.

Eco-friendly toy production represents a significant step toward fostering environmental sustainability (Shahruk et. al, 2020). By integrating the Islamic principle of *Islah*, this movement encourages reform and

positive change within the toy industry while promoting responsible consumer habits. The 'Main Sama-sama' approach adds an essential element of collaboration and play, making environmental education enjoyable and accessible to children and communities. As children learn through play and families engage in collective efforts, eco-friendly toys become more than just objects, they serve as tools for social change, environmental stewardship, and personal growth. This synthesis of sustainability, community engagement, and moral responsibility offers a promising pathway toward a more sustainable future (Yasamin et.al, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

The "Main Sama-Sama" art project offers a creative and practical approach to fostering a culture of recycling and environmental restoration. Based on the 5R concept, this project demonstrates that discarded materials do not necessarily have to become waste that pollutes the environment; instead, they can be given new, beneficial functions. The vehicle-themed toys produced through this interactive process not only stimulate creativity and imagination but also connect various segments of society, including artists, students, educators, and families. Thus, the effort to improve and protect the environment is not solely the responsibility of certain parties but requires the collaboration and active involvement of the entire community. This project emphasizes that every individual, regardless of background or age, can play a role in environmental sustainability. By fostering recycling awareness through art and play activities, the project aims to inspire other initiatives in building a more sustainable and harmonious future.

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