

SOCIAL SCIENCE AND EDUCATION | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Religion and the Military: Synergistic Communication and Collaboration in the Development of the Blue Economy in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia possesses vast maritime potential, notably exemplified by the mangrove ecosystems along its coastal regions. The effective management of marine resources necessitates an integrated and comprehensive model. This necessity has predominantly been addressed through the blue economy framework. The defense of national territory inherently involves military engagement; however, sole management of coastal areas by the military presents potential challenges. Consequently, the involvement of religious groups is essential to facilitate communication and promote the blue economy initiatives within these coastal zones. This study's primary objective is to enhance coastal communities' welfare through the synergy between religious institutions and military forces. The findings indicate that spiritual and military entities have independently undertaken mangrove conservation efforts. While both parties acknowledge the necessity of collaborative action for developing a mangrove-based blue economy, such collaboration has yet to be realized due to the absence of a formal legal framework. The synergy between religious groups and the military occurs organically, rooted in a shared historical legacy of contributing to the formation of the Indonesian nation and supporting national development efforts. Effective program collaboration requires the presence of development actors capable of serving as catalysts to unify these two sectors. Mangrove conservation activities remain largely ceremonial, lacking structured oversight and sustainability measures for implementing a comprehensive, role-specific, and goal-oriented program.

Keywords: Communication Synergy, Religionist, Military, Mangrove, Blue Economy.

I. Introduction

Well-being is a fundamental condition and objective inherent to human existence. An increase in the level of welfare is directly proportional to the collective happiness of a nation's people, including those in Indonesia (Putra et al., 2020). As a discipline concerned with human welfare, economics addresses utilizing

potential resources across various sectors, particularly given that Indonesia possesses more than 17,500 islands, 108,000 kilometers of coastline, and an extensive marine territory (Mutaqin et al., 2021).

CEIC said the fisheries sector contributed USD 27 billion to Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2019 (CEIC, 2019). This significant potential must be managed appropriately for economic benefit and to mitigate natural disasters. Effective natural disaster management is estimated to save up to USD 639 million annually (Beck et al., 2018). Therefore, developing marine areas must integrate both natural and artificial ecosystems. Mangrove forests, inherently linked to marine ecosystems, serve as vital environmental commodities (Lestari, 2013). Thus, strategic efforts are necessary to utilize marine resources through an environmentally and economically sustainable framework, known as the blue economy (Nathan James Bennett et al., 2021).

The blue economy is a concept that seeks to balance development, environmental sustainability, and the enhancement of community welfare across various sectors, including fisheries, renewable energy, marine tourism, water transportation, waste management, and climate change mitigation (Pradana, 2021). Accordingly, the blue economy can bridge traditional economic perspectives and environmental considerations (Kabil et al., 2021). Furthermore, coastal areas are closely linked to issues of national territorial defense, necessitating military involvement to safeguard state interests (Cahyati, 2017).

The involvement of religious groups is also essential to strengthen public education and prevent misunderstandings regarding these initiatives. This study aims to explore the perspectives of religious and military actors in optimizing the mangrove-based blue economy in Indonesia. To address the research problems previously formulated, the following section provides an overview of current trends in blue economy research.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

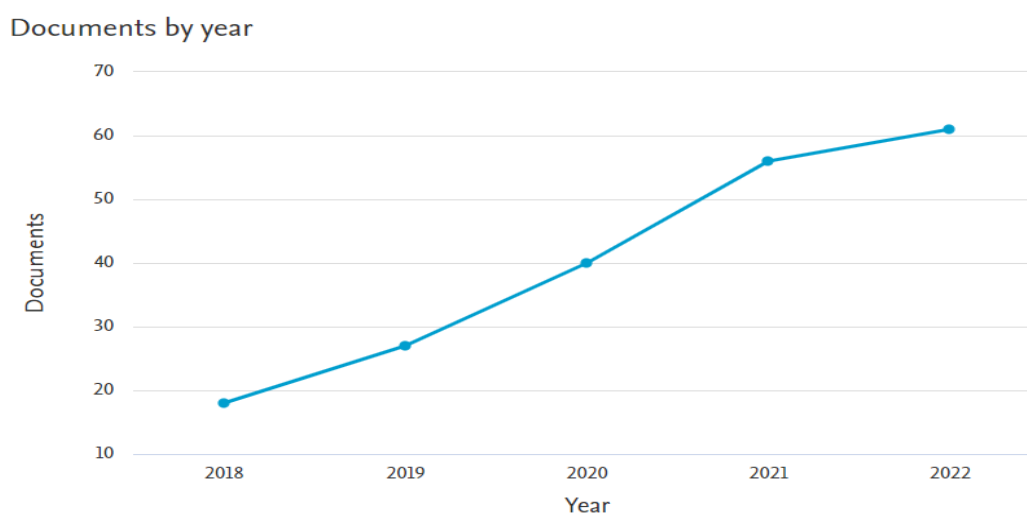


Figure 1. Trends in Blue Economy Research Over Five Years

Source: Scopus

Research trends in blue economy studies in 2018 primarily focused on conceptual discussions related to conservation and development. In addition, studies explored the five pragmatic rules and the perspectives of various stakeholders. Other research during this period examined the application of the blue economy in the Indian Ocean (Nathan J. Bennett, 2018; Burgess et al., 2018; Clark Howard, 2018; Voyer et al., 2018).

Most of these studies were published in Marine Policy. Moving forward to 2022, research on the blue economy began to incorporate discussions on climate change adaptation and mitigation within the blue economy framework. Stakeholder involvement remained a consistent theme across studies during these five

years. By 2022, publishers beyond Marine Policy had increasingly engaged in blue economy discussions, including journals such as Sustainability, Development and Change, and Political Geography (Fusco et al., 2022; Germond-Duret, 2022; Shiiba et al., 2022).

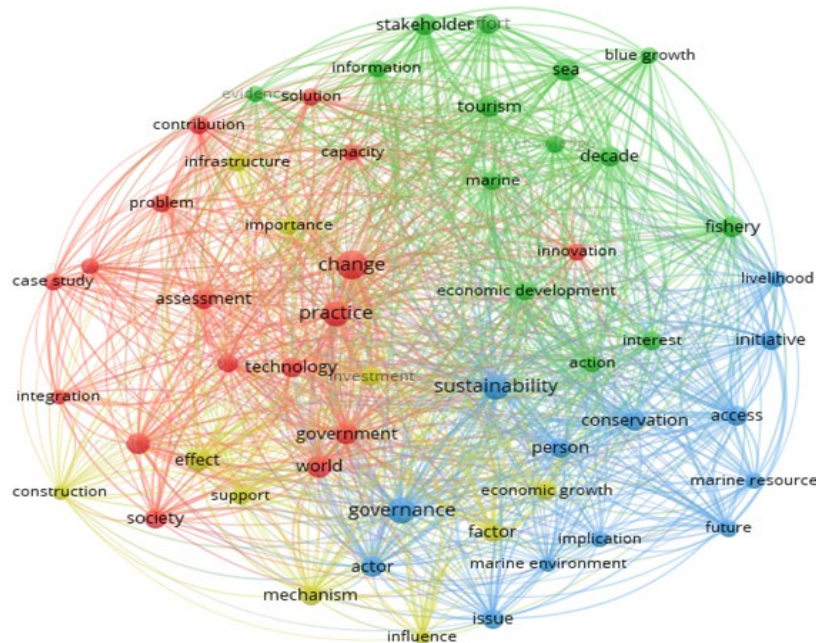


Figure 2. Network Visualization of Scopus Articles in the Field of Blue Economy
Source: Scopus and processed by VOSViewer

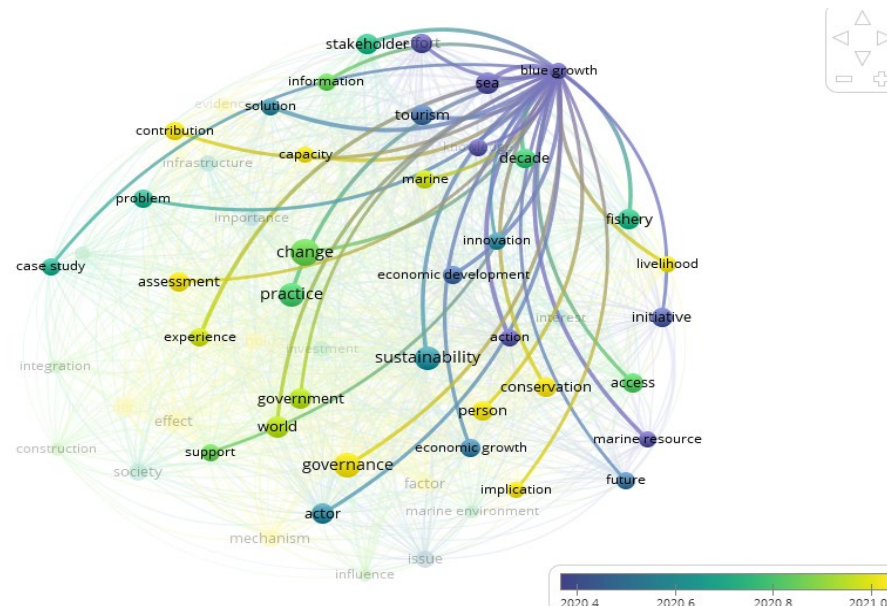


Figure 3. Overlay Visualization of Articles in Scopus-Indexed Journals Related to the Blue Economy
Source: Scopus 2018-2023 and processed with VOSViewer

Figures 1 and 3 illustrate research trends in the blue economy, encompassing capacity, contributions, actors, conservation, and livelihoods. To ensure the success of the blue economy campaign, efforts through soft power are essential, including initiating the G20 Religious Forum, also known as the R20 Forum (Haryanto & El Syam, 2023). This forum represents Indonesia's most significant religious social capital, namely Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), which numbered around 36,000 in 2022 (Kemenag RI, 2022), with 9,008 of them having the potential to establish business units (Silvana & Lubis, 2021).

The blue economy offers a framework to harness national maritime potential for defense interests and community welfare improvements, and it must directly engage with marine aquaculture initiatives to foster the development of "blue communities" (Campbell et al., 2021). Therefore, reorientation efforts through the synergy of military and religious elements are necessary to advance the development of coastal areas, particularly regarding mangrove forest commodities.

A literature review supporting this research is necessary to highlight the relevance and urgency of the study. Moreover, previous studies provide a foundation for identifying new research directions. The following section presents a general overview of related scientific articles published over the past five years. Institutionally, Islamic boarding schools have been transforming from purely religious institutions into providers of social services, including mangrove management, acting as partners to the government (Kuvaini et al., 2017). One effective strategy has been the involvement of NGOs, such as BINTARI, which have adopted local cultural approaches, such as friendship, mentoring, and facilitating village youth groups, to enhance community engagement (Roospandanwangi, 2018).

Furthermore, infrastructure development associated with the blue economy has been socially integrated. Developing webGIS platforms has enabled public access to blue economy-related information (Ervianto, 2018; Fawaz & Nababan, 2021). Public education efforts are also essential for mangroves, and they can be supported by community organizations such as Marine Nature Lovers (PAB 18) through effective campaigns using slogans like "Bandar Bakau" (Nurazira, 2019).

The blue economy concept significantly influenced coastal communities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Rusydy & Mansur, 2021). Although a specific legal framework for the blue economy has not yet been established, existing regulations such as Law No. 17/2007 on the National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) 2005–2025 and Law No. 32/2014 on Marine Affairs can be used legally. Policy reflections on the blue economy are evident in initiatives such as the Blue Economy concept, Maritime Domain Awareness, the Global Maritime Fulcrum, and Nusantara Insight (Parasasti, 2022), although more specific development remains necessary. Strengthening stakeholder synergy is crucial to enhancing the implementation of blue economy programs, particularly in areas such as tourism development (Chamidah et al., 2021).

III. Research Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach, with the study conducted across six provinces in Indonesia: DKI Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, East Java, Bali, and East Kalimantan. Data collection began with a documentation study from various pieces of literature, aimed at classifying research actors and institutions representing religious and military elements.

The documentation search revealed that the military element is represented by the Indonesian National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI) through two service branches: the Army (Angkatan Darat, AD) and the Navy (Angkatan Laut, AL). The respective institutions responsible for territorial oversight are the Territorial Assistant to the Chief of Army Staff (ASTER KASAD) and the Assistant for Maritime Potential to the Chief of Naval Staff (ASPOTMAR KASAL).

In Bali Province, observations were made at the office of the Chief of Staff of the Regional Military Command (KASDAM) IX/Udayana, specifically within the Territorial Assistant division (Aster), as well as at the Indonesian Navy Base (LANAL) in Denpasar.

Indonesia's two largest religious organizations, the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU) and the Muhammadiyah Central Board (PP Muhammadiyah), were selected to represent the religious element.

Additionally, the study included the Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI), which represents the majority religious group in Bali, and Jami'yyah Ahlith Thoriqoh Al-Mu'tabaroh An-Nahdliyah (JATMAN), an Islamic Sufi organization affiliated with the global Sufi community.

The research was conducted through in-depth interviews with selected key informants and supplementary interviews with individuals deemed relevant and recommended by institutions representing military and religious elements. The list of research informants is presented as follows:

Table 1. Data Source

Element	Institution	Informant
Military	Director of the Army Territorial Center (Direktur Pusat Teritorial Angkatan Darat, Dirter Pusterad)	Brig. Gen. TNI Eko Astono J. Kalimantanoro
Military	Head of the Sub-division of Regional Resilience Development, Indonesian Navy's Maritime Potential Service (Kasubdis Bintahwil Dispotmaral)	Lt. Col. (Navy) Samsul Bahri, S.E., M.Tr. Opsla
Military	Commander of the Indonesian Navy Base (LANAL) Denpasar	Col. Marine I Dewa Nyoman Gede Rake Susilo, S.E.
Military	Territorial Assistant to the Chief of Staff, IX/Udayana Regional Military Command (ASTER KASDAM IX/Udayana)	Col. Infantry Puji Hartono, S.I.P.
Religionist	Secretary of the Central Executive Board of Muhammadiyah	H. Muhammad Sayuti, M.Pd., M.Ed., Ph.D.
Religionist	Deputy Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU)	Sidrotun Naim, S.Si., M.Mart.St., M.S., M.S., M.P.A., Ph.D.
Religionist	Chairman of the Environmental Assembly, Central Board of Muhammadiyah	Dr. Anwar Abbas, M.Ag.

The data collection stage involved conducting a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) by bringing together representatives from religious and military elements. The FGD was held offline in the Defense University of the Republic of Indonesia meeting room, while two speakers participated online via Zoom. The speakers who attended the FGD were as follows:

Table 2. Informants for Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Element	Institution	Informant
Military	Territorial Assistant to the Chief of Army Staff (ASTER KASAD)	Maj. Gen. TNI Achmad Daniel Chardin, S.E., M.Si.
Military	Maritime Social Communication, Maritime Potential Staff of the Indonesian Navy (Komsosmar Spotmaral)	Col. (Navy) Indra Joko Rerangin
Religionist	Secretary of the Environmental Assembly, Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah	Djihadul Mubarak, S.E., M.H.
Religionist	Secretary General of Jam'iyah Ahlith Thoriqoh Al-Mu'tabaroh An-Nahdliyah (JATMAN)	Dr. KH. Mashudi, M.Ag.
Religionist	Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI)	Dr. Putu Ngurah Suyatna Yasa, S.E., M.Si.
Religionist	Deputy General Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU)	Sidrotun Naim, S.Si., M.Mart.St., M.S., M.S., M.P.A., Ph.D.
Religionist	Institute for Disaster Management and Climate Change, Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (LPBI PBNU)	Maskut Candranegara, M.Pd.

Implementing the FGD also involved representatives from government institutions responsible for the Blue Economy and Mangrove programs, namely the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries and the Peatland and Mangrove Restoration Agency. Technical data analysis was conducted following the approach of Miles and Huberman (2014), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data presentation was supported using an analysis tool, NVivo 12 Plus, with crosstab data analysis units.

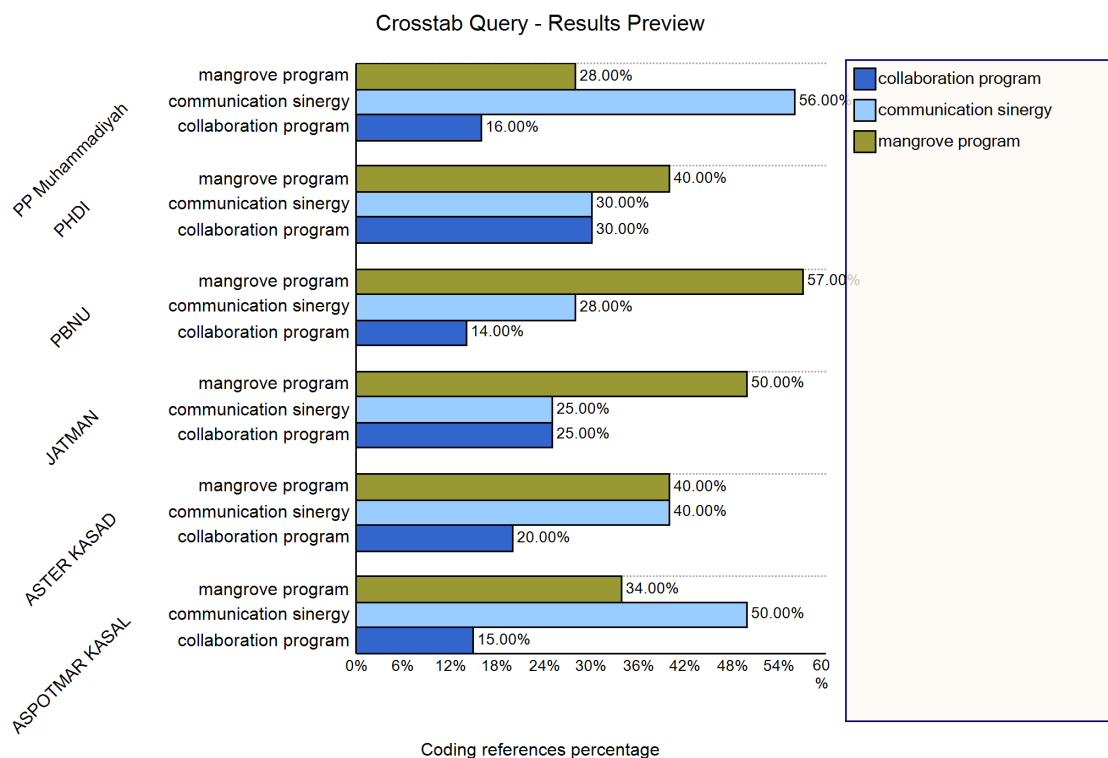
IV. Results and Discussion

Indonesia's military and religious groups have a long history that predates the formation of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. These two elements also played a key role in establishing the state. Historical records indicate that the Indonesian military has its roots in the santri (religious students), and many military figures in Indonesia are also religious figures. The military holds both the power of defense and governance. State sovereignty, including territorial boundaries, is the military's responsibility to safeguard. This includes both land and sea borders. Mangroves are ecosystems that serve as natural defense barriers against military and non-military threats originating from the sea. Mangroves have become a national concern, particularly concerning border islands, where national borders are at stake. At the same time, religious groups are influential societal elements capable of mobilizing the masses spiritually and mentally. Religious teachings also emphasize the protection of nature and the prohibition of its destruction. These two major components in Indonesia hold the potential to develop the mangrove blue economy. Both elements recognize that mangroves have great potential, which can be utilized to benefit local communities.

The following are the findings from research related to the optimization of mangrove forest areas from the perspectives of religious and military groups. This includes communication synergy with other stakeholders, both military and religious groups, and with other stakeholders such as the government. It also covers activities related to mangroves, including conservation efforts, optimizing mangrove forest areas, and aspects of program cooperation involving other stakeholders.

As seen in Figure 5, the implementation of the mangrove program involves all elements with values, with the most participation being around 30%. However, this mangrove activity is currently limited to the conservation stage, primarily of mangrove planting. This initiative aligns with the Indonesian government's program, as articulated in the President's speech at the World Conference in Glasgow, England, regarding Indonesia's active role in reducing deforestation rates and minimizing global carbon emissions. Mangrove planting activities have gained momentum since 2020 and continue to the present day. The ceremonial implementation of these planting activities is viewed as a form of nature conservation by both religious and military elements. However, the ministry responsible for the blue economy and mangrove programs perceives this activity as a planting project, lacking strict supervision and sustainable programs.

The results of this study reveal that religious elements, particularly the PP Muhammadiyah and PBNU organizations, exhibit surprising differences. PP Muhammadiyah demonstrates more potent communication synergy but is weaker in implementing the mangrove program. In contrast, PBNU excels in program execution but is less effective in communication synergy. Analysis indicates that PBNU, with its large membership base and organizational structure extending from the central to local village levels, has been more active in mangrove implementation activities since 2020. Conversely, PP Muhammadiyah focuses on critical educational analysis, promotes thoughtful engagement, and emphasizes stakeholder synergy. Military elements, specifically from the TNI (Indonesian National Armed Forces), including the Army and Navy, are directly involved in territorial activities. As a military force operating in maritime zones, the Navy has numerous programs synergizing with other stakeholders. Meanwhile, the Indonesian Army balances mangrove planting initiatives and communication synergies with other stakeholders. The Army is tasked with territorial defense, necessitating effective communication with community elements. Coaching activities are conducted by Village Development Officers assigned to each village across Indonesia, allowing for a balanced implementation of the mangrove program and communication synergy with other stakeholders.



Note: PP Muhammadiyah (Muhammadiyah Central Leadership), Territorial Assistant Chief of Army Staff (ASTER KASAD), Jam'iyah Ahlith Thoriqoh Al-Mu'tabaroh An-Nadhliyah (JATMAN), Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI), Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU), Assistant for Maritime Potential (Aspotmar Kasal)

Figure 5. Blue Economy Development from Religious and Military Perspectives

Source: Interview transcript processed with NVivo 12 Plus

The research also highlights the roles of religious elements from JATMAN and PHDI. These two institutions maintain a balanced approach between communication synergy programs and collaborative efforts. PHDI, a Hindu religious assembly predominantly found in Bali, actively communicates with various sectors, including government, education, and society. Integrating religious principles into development programs makes religion an inseparable part of all aspects of life. Consequently, activities related to mangroves or blue economy optimization programs closely align with the Hindu tri hita karana concept. On the other hand, JATMAN, an organization focused on Sufism, emphasizes Islamic teachings, particularly Rahmatan lil alamin, which promotes compassion for the universe, including the environment and nature (Afandi, 2020). These two organizations adopt a more 'calm' approach by implementing religious teaching programs for their adherents, in contrast to PBNU and PP Muhammadiyah, which appear to compete for organizational sustainability (Nashir et al., 2019; Barton & Yilmaz, 2021; Hosen, 2012).

The findings indicate that the cooperation aspect of the program is minimal among all elements, both military and religious. This suggests that each element still fragments the implementation of the mangrove program. Cooperation is formalized through joint agreements between military and religious organizations to optimize mangrove forest areas. Nevertheless, religious and military elements have naturally collaborated in various activities as a form of synergy in developing the Republic of Indonesia. Both religious leaders and military personnel recognize the importance of cooperation with other elements. However, challenges remain regarding program implementation coordination, funding, and sectoral egos among institutions.

V. Conclusion

Implementing the national blue economy program, particularly regarding mangroves, is still at the conservation stage. It is essential to strengthen knowledge about the importance of mangroves and the economic value that mangrove forests can provide to the community, fostering a common understanding between military and religious elements. Currently, cooperation between religious leaders and the military exists only at a natural synergy level, functioning as a form of collaborative development among the various components of Indonesia's development.

A legal framework for the cooperation program between religious and military elements is necessary to facilitate joint efforts in the conservation, supervision, and maintenance of mangroves, ultimately leading to their utilization for economic benefit to the community and even as a source of foreign exchange for the state. Religious leaders and the military, in collaboration with government entities responsible for the blue economy, mangrove programs, and the business sector, should work together to implement mangrove conservation and optimization initiatives. This synergy could be a forum or consortium, with a presiding officer or coordinator, preferably someone who can effectively engage and be accepted by all stakeholders, such as the President.

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