

Green Heroes: How Folklore Can Inspire Eco-Friendly Habits in Children

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Abstract

In the last thirty years, the environment of Jayapura, Papua, has been in dire need of attention. Illegal logging and mining, carelessly disposing garbage done by various people happen without control. This is an uneducating lesson for children. It is also feared that children as the relay generation will continue this bad habit. In 2019, there was a flash flood that claimed many lives. One of the communities affected is the Sentani community in Jayapura. The Sentani community has a wealth of folklore that was passed down orally from one generation to another. Those cultural heritages teach wisdom about protecting the environment. However, the habit of storytelling and chanting no longer exists. Sentani children do not recognize their ancestral folklore. This paper aims to analyze how folklore can inspire Sentani children to have environmentally friendly habits through the folklore they learn. This research analyzes ecological values revealed in Sentani folklore and (2) disseminate ecological values to develop ecological knowledge and environmentally friendly habits for children. Folkloric data are folktales, oral poems, folk songs, proverbs, and bark paintings collected from our previous research results. Those data were strengthened and enriched by interviews and FGDs with traditional leaders and Sentani elders in the East, Central, and West Sentani in July 2025. By learning the folklore, children are expected to understand the importance of a healthy environment and become green heroes who provide environmental awareness to others.

Keywords: folklore; Sentani children; ecological knowledge; eco-friendly habits

Introduction

Papua has a wealth of folklore belonging to hundreds of tribes living on the coast, in valleys, and in the mountains. Data from the Papua Province and the Papua Arts Council (2025) shows that 255 tribes live in Papua, spread across seven cultural regions, namely Tabi (87 tribes), Saireri (37 tribes), Domberai (19 tribes), Bomberai (52 tribes), Ha -Anim (29 tribes), La Pago (19 tribes) and Me Pago (11 tribes). One of the tribes living in the Tabi region is the Sentani. Administratively, Sentani is located in Jayapura Regency. The Sentani people live on the shores of beautiful Lake Sentani, which has 22 islands scattered from east to west in the middle of the lake. To the north of the lake are the Cyclops Mountain ranges, with the highest peak reaching 2,166 meters. The Sentani people call their region rali-wai, which means scattered from east to west. They have cultural heritage that is not well preserved. Only the older generation living on the islands and in the villages are still familiar with this cultural heritage. Meanwhile, those living in urban areas, especially the younger generation, no longer recognize them (Yektiningtyas, 2011, Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023).

Some of these cultural treasures are folklore, including folktales (legends, myths, fables), oral traditions (helaehili and ehabela), traditional expressions, folksongs, dances, carvings, and paintings (Yektiningtyas, 2023). Through folklore, various histories, beliefs, local knowledge, socio-cultural values, morals, and wisdom are conveyed, both explicitly and implicitly. One of the knowledge, beliefs, and wisdom of the Sentani people is their view of nature and its care (Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023; Yektiningtyas & Modouw, 2019). In various stories and oral poems, nature and the diversity of flora and fauna become the settings the story and characters that are treated with respect. The following excerpt from the ehabela singing tells of the richness of forest products, wood that is priceless.

Emere uyi rane oro hebale
Aka, kabo ohoro ayae wetemae
Raimere uyi rane oro rawale
Aka, kabo hahoro ayae mokoiteimae

(I step on the boat made of eme wood.
Brother, it's just nibung wood, just say.
I step on the boat made of raime wood.
Brother, it's just nibung wood, just say.)

Holli uyi rane oro hebale
Aka, kabo ohoro ayae wetemae
Kanbai uyi rane oro rawale
Aka, kabo hahoro ayae mokoiteimae

(I step on the boat made of holli wood.
Brother, it's just nibung wood, just say.
I step on the boat made of kanbai wood.
Brother, it's just nibung wood, just say.)

In the chant above, the wood of eme tree (*Pometia pinnata*), raime, holli, kanbai,) are valuable trees that are used to build houses and boats. The Sentani people are very proud because their forest is filled with expensive types of wood. Meanwhile, nibung (*Oncosperma tigillarum*) is wood that is considered cheap and does not need to be a source of conflicts in their family. The diversity of fauna also appears in several fables such as kangaroos (*Macropodidae*), birds of paradise (*Paradisaeidae*), cassowaries (*Casuarius*), cuscuses (*Phalanger*), crocodiles (*Crocodylidae*), eagles (*Aquila*).

The old Sentani people had long been proud of their rich flora and fauna, but they also knew how to care for it and always taught this to their descendants. One way they preserve nature was through their myths, which were passed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next generation. These myths emphasize the importance of protecting nature, namely the land, forests, and lakes. The community was not allowed to cut down trees indiscriminately. They had to choose which trees to use. Large trees growing in the valley were forbidden to be cut down. Old Sentani people believed that these trees were the home of a god known as the Tree God, who was believed to protect them. They also believed in the Water God who lived in Lake Sentani and the rivers. Therefore, they had to keep the lake and water clean. If the lake was dirty, the gods would be angry and would not provide them food, such as fish (Yektingtyas, 2021). The myths of the tree god and water god were firmly held by the old Sentani community. Their obedience in protecting nature had successfully spared them from natural disasters, such as floods and landslides.

However, since the 1970s, or since Jayapura was designated as the capital of Papua Province, forests and land had been converted into offices, schools, shops, housing, and hotels (Albert Pepuho, Helena Suangburaro, Irenius Ohee, interview July 2025). Ironically, this phenomenon had caused the beautiful nature with its flora and fauna to be destroyed by people who are only interested in themselves (Yektingtyas & Dewi, 2023). Those who consider themselves modern were actually engaging in illegal logging and mining for selfish reasons. There were also Sentani people who were involved in selling land to people who could not manage it properly. It is interesting to note that this destruction of nature is carried out by people who know the contents of the Holy Bible, which teaches humans to respect, care for, and manage nature properly (Genesis 1:28, Genesis 2:15, Psalm 24:1). The culmination of these irresponsible human actions was the flash flood that occurred in 2019, which claimed hundreds of lives and caused immeasurable material and immaterial losses.

As a fairly large city, not all of Sentani's diverse population is responsible for environmental sustainability. One example is that they litter indiscriminately. Many motorists still throw plastic beverage and food containers on the road, in gutters, or in rivers. As a result, when it rains, all the trash fills the gutters, rivers, and eventually ends up in the lake. They may not know that there are 14 rivers that flow from Mount Cyclops

to Lake Sentani. Meanwhile, there is only one river that flows from the lake to the Pacific Ocean, namely the Itaufili River (Anthoneta Ohee, Corry Ohee, interview in June 2025). Therefore, when the flash flood occurred in 2019, Lake Sentani turned into a giant garbage dump, and the homes of the Sentani people on the lake's shores and islands were submerged.

There is concern that children will imitate the actions of adults. They observe and imitate the actions of adults because they believe that what adults do is right. This is related to the theories of Bandura (1977) and Lickona (2008), which state that children learn many things through observation and imitation of the behavior of adults in their environment. In the context of instilling environmental awareness, children tend to imitate the attitudes and actions of adults they consider to be role models, such as parents, teachers, or community leaders. Children find it difficult to accept advice to maintain environmental cleanliness if adults themselves do not set a good example. Good habits need to be continuously modeled. Therefore, this group of young children needs to be initiated into learning to love the environment. A study on the basic literacy of Sentani children (Yektiningtyas & Karna, 2013; Yektiningtyas & Modouw, 2023) proves that children like folklore, such as folk tales and songs, as learning materials. Therefore, in this study, folklore is also used as a medium for learning and raising awareness of the importance of protecting the environment for children. The objectives of this study are (1) to analyze ecological values in Sentani folklore, and (2) to disseminate environmental values to children at the reading house so that they develop eco-friendly habits.

There have been several studies conducted on the use of folklore and environmental education. In 2023, Yektiningtyas and Modouw researched the role of Papuan children's storybooks in improving children's interest in reading. In 2024, Yektiningtyas & Dewi unraveled the Sentani people's ecological knowledge through folklore. Research on fables as a medium of environmental education for Sentani children was conducted by Yektiningtyas & Silalahi in 2020. However, there has been no specific research discussing the wider use of folklore as a medium for raising children's awareness of the importance of eco-friendly habits.

Discussions of environmental-based folklore are inseparable from ecocriticism, a critical approach that studies the relationship between literature and the environment. According to Garrard (2004), ecocriticism is the study that connects literature with ecology, with the aim of criticizing anthropocentric views and raising ecological awareness through the representation of nature in literary works. Ecocriticism emphasizes the importance of viewing nature as a subject with intrinsic value, not merely a story setting or object to be exploited. This is also related to eco-theology that highlights the role of humans in managing the earth. Genesis 1:26-28 states that God created humans in His image and likeness and gave a cultural mandate to "have dominion over the earth." This mandate does not mean unlimited exploitation, but rather a call to be wise stewards. This principle reflects humans' moral responsibility towards creation as a form of respect for the Creator. Furthermore, Garrard (2004) emphasizes the way literature represents nature and human interaction with the environment. The basic principles of ecocriticism encompass four important issues. First, interdisciplinary

ecocriticism, which combines literary studies with ecology and social sciences, aims to understand human impact on nature through literary texts. This ecocriticism also emphasizes how literary works can influence society's perception and understanding of the environment (Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023). Second, Garrard critiques anthropocentrism, emphasizing the importance of shifting the anthropocentric perspective that places humans at the center and recognizing that nature has intrinsic value that must be respected. Third, ecological awareness, where literature serves as a medium to raise readers' awareness of environmental issues, encouraging changes in attitudes and actions that are more environmentally friendly. Fourth, the representation of nature, related to ecocriticism, examines how nature is depicted in literary works, whether nature is treated as a backdrop, a symbol, or as a living entity with a central role.

According to Bandura (1977), Glotfeley & Fromm (1996), Lickona (2008), Lange & Dewitte (2022), character education must consistently instill moral values and good habits in order to form strong positive attitudes in children from an early age. In the context of instilling environmental awareness, this process can be carried out through various methods, one of which is the use of folklore as a learning medium (Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023). Folktales that contain moral messages about the importance of protecting nature can build children's awareness of their responsibility towards the environment. For example, stories about living things that are interdependent in the ecosystem teach the values of empathy and appreciation for nature. Through repetition and reflection on stories, children are encouraged to internalize values of caring and begin to develop environmentally friendly habits, such as disposing of trash properly and keeping their surroundings clean (Braun & Dierkes, 2017; Buell, 2001).

With this approach, character education focuses not only on teaching theory, but also on forming observable habits and attitudes that children can apply in their daily lives. Folklore can also be an additional medium that reinforces this learning because folk tales often feature characters who care about nature and show the consequences of destructive behavior towards the environment. By seeing and hearing real examples and stories that contain moral messages, children can more easily internalize environmental values and apply them in their daily lives. Thus, role models and learning media play a very important role in shaping children's environmental awareness from an early age. Folklore that personifies nature, such as trees and animals, can be used as a medium for children to learn to appreciate the living things around them. Theories by Bandura (1997), Garrard (2004), and Lickona (2008) reinforce the argument that folklore is not just entertainment, but also a medium for education and the formation of environmental awareness from an early age. Folklore can also be an additional medium that reinforces this learning because folk tales often feature characters who care about nature and show the consequences of destructive behavior towards the environment. By seeing and hearing real examples and stories that contain moral messages, children find it easier to internalize environmental values and apply them in their daily lives. Thus, role models and learning media play a very important role in shaping children's environmental awareness from an early age (Ardoin, Bowers, Roth & Holthuis, 2018).

Methodology

This descriptive-qualitative research was conducted in May-July 2025. Folklore data was collected through observation, interviews, focus group discussions, and documentation. Observations of the lives and attitudes of the communal ecological practice were carried out on the islands of Asei and Yokiwa (east), Abar (center), and Kwadeware (west). Interviews were conducted with traditional leaders (ondofolo and khote), village heads, community elders, cultural figures, youth, parents, and children. Interviews and FGDs were conducted to obtain information and responses about the socio-cultural life of the old Sentani community and the modern community regarding their views and behavior towards the environment, namely land, forests, lakes, and rivers. In addition, these activities were carried out to obtain environment-based folklore data.

The folklore data collected through previous research and interviews and FGDs in May-July 2025 is as follows.

No	Folklore	Title
1	Myths	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emfote 2. Haembu 3. Tete Habhu 4. A story of land seller in Kleublow
2	Legends	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Origin of Lake Sentani 2. Lake Emfote
3	Fables	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ebi and Kande 2. Cassoway and the Sparrows 3. Naugthy Cassowary 4. Ebeu and Nangga 5. Tepaisaka and Kilipase
4	Oral poems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The journey of Yabansai people to Waena 2. Journey to an old village, Kwadeware: The beauty of Lake Sentani 3. <i>Maekor Rata wipulu, Rata klabulu</i>
5	Folksong	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kani blam kla bham 2. Igwa yo, huba yo
6	Bark paintings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Flora 2. Fauna

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion of research on the role of Sentani folklore as a learning medium for Sentani children to develop eco-friendly habits.

1. Ecological Values revealed in Sentani Folklore

This part discusses (1) natural resources and ecological values and (2) how communities care for the environment as represented in Sentani folklore. Although

folklore is not actively practiced, it is still become reference of the ecological insights of ancient communities (Glotfeley & Fromm, 1996; Garrad, 2004; Merta, et al, 2022; Padmasari, Nugraha & Dewi, 2024). Similarly, Sentani folklore, which is no longer recognized by most people, especially the younger generation, it reflects the diversity and ways in which older generations cared for nature, which became a reference for life lessons (Yektiningtyas & Silalahi, 2000; Yektiningtyas & Dewi 2023). One of these is about the richness and importance of the environment and how to care for it. The following is a reflection of the diversity of the Sentani community's environment in folklore, namely mountains, lakes, land, and flora and fauna, which are often the main themes in various folklore. In "The Origin of Lake Sentani," the beauty of Mount Cyclops (Dobonsolo) is described, filled with wilderness with diverse trees, flora, and fauna that are now becoming rare or even extinct. The following is an excerpt from a song that sings of the richness of Sentani's flora.

Yeba kam nei rorale
Aka, ra yo nare mokanale
Follo kam nei hebale
Aka, ra yam nare hebanale

(I built a hut with a roof of sago palm leaves, yeba.
Brother, I have established a village.
I built a hut with a roof of sago palm leaves, follo.
Brother, I have established a village.)

Sago (*Metroxylon sagu*) is a staple food for the Sentani people. There are several types of sago trees, such as yeba, follo, ninggi, yameha, eli, nahem, otekulu, and para. The existence of sago trees is now often a concern for the community and researchers because their supply is dwindling. Most Sentani people themselves cannot distinguish between these types of sago in detail. Since 1970, when Jayapura was designated the capital of Papua Province, Jayapura has undergone major changes (Irenius Pepuho, Agus Ongge, interview July 2025). Much of the land has been allocated for the construction of housing, shops, schools, hospitals, airports, etc. Many sago gardens and forests were cleared. Many plant species became rare or disappeared. In addition to flora, folklore tells of fauna that are becoming rare, as in the chant below.

Igwabun neiboi manende
The Ebaeit yo miyae kandeit holo ereijae ereyole
Thaibun neiboi manende
The Hayaere yam miyae kahe holo haleijae haleyole

(Approaching the Igwa region
Women from the village of Ebaeit see a school of kandeit fish
Approaching the Thai region
Women from the village of Hayae see a school of kahe fish)

The kandeï fish (*Glossamia beauforti*) and kahe fish (*Glossamia wichmanni*) are endemic fish to Sentani Lake, but their populations are also beginning to decline. Several introduced fish species, such as the Toraja snakehead (*Channa striata*) and lohan (*Amphilopus labiatus*), have become predators and are causing the kandeï and kahe fish to become increasingly rare. In addition, kandeï, which prefer clean environments, choose to live in the middle of the lake because the lake's shores are polluted with trash (Ohee & Keiluhu, 2018).

Meanwhile, the diversity of birds living in the Sentani region is sung below.

Nalikayi thanda manende

The Ebaeit yo miyae ayeholo ereijae ereyole

Walfokayi thanda manende

The Hayaere yam miyae ayeboholo haleijae haleyole

Using a foreign boat,

A woman from Ebaeit village visited and saw various kinds of birds.

Using a foreign boat,

A woman from Hayae village visited and admired various kinds of birds.

Just like the sago palm trees, some birds in Sentani are also beginning to disappear. Among them are the cassowary (*Casuarinus*), the mambruk (*Goura*), and the bird of paradise (*Paradisaeidae*). They have moved to quieter and safer forests. A fable entitled "The Arrogant Cassowary" tells the story of various birds that are now becoming extinct, such as the cassowary, eagle, and cuscus (*Spilocuscus*).

The cassowary considered the tree to be its home. The eagle then fought with the cassowary, but because it was smaller, the eagle gave up. Even the wild boar, which had always been strong, became weak in front of the cassowary. At that moment, it saw birds, butterflies, and cuscus gathering together.

In Indonesia, kangaroos (*Macropodidae*) are only found in Papua. Unfortunately, they cannot be easily found. Children can only see them through the story of "Tepaisaka and Kilibahe" that is read to them.

Long ago, in a village called Yoka Waufo Boi, also known as Kamaeyaka, south of Lake Sentani, there lived a kangaroo named Tepaisaka and a dog named Kilibahe. The two were enemies.

Bark paintings are also an interesting medium for representing the diversity of Sentani's flora and fauna, such as the endemic fish of Lake Sentani, eels, lake stars, and sago palms, as seen in the painting below.



Bark paintings depicting the rich flora and fauna of Sentani (Doc. Yektiningtyas, 2025)

Through folklore, it appears that the old Sentani community had a good ecological awareness. The philosophy of the old Sentani community metaphorically described the earth as khani (Yektiningtyas, 2011), which means woman. Just as a woman has a womb that gives birth to children, the land also grows various plants that are used to support the community's livelihood. Caring for the land and treating it properly will bring onomi (blessings) to those who do so (Albert Pepuho, Yuliana Ansaka, interview in June 2025). Conversely, those who violate the land will receive pelo (a curse). A story from Klebouw tells of a husband and wife who violated the boundaries of the land. Even though they were questioned repeatedly by the tribal chief, they still did not admit that they had committed a violation. Finally, that night, the husband died mysteriously, followed by his wife shortly thereafter (Irenius Pepuho, interview, July 2025). The value of land is so sacred that there are serious consequences for violators. The story of the husband and wife who deceived the tribal chief is related to a Sentani saying, hu jokho erele (The eyes of the gods are always watching), which is used as a reminder that even if our actions are unknown to humans, the gods always see us.

The reciprocal relationship between humans and nature as represented in folklore (Garrard, 2004; Buell, 2021; Braun & Dierkes, 2017; Lestari, La Fua & Wahyuni, 2024) produces a harmonious life. This is also what the old Sentani community did. Humans take care of nature, and nature gives its best to humans. A Sentani expression says hu nei nineyaele aniyaele rowotiyaele which literally means that the gods (hu) will provide food at the right time. This expression can be interpreted as meaning that if humans treat nature well, then in time the gods will send food for them. (Yektiningtyas and Mawene (2018). Myths about the existence of gods and goddesses support the ecological concept of the Sentani community. Their belief in tree gods living in large trees prevents them from cutting down large trees. If they cut them down, they would disturb the gods and goddesses who are believed to protect the community's livelihood (Yektiningtyas & Dewi, 2023). The Sentani people believe in natural punishment for those who violate certain ecological rules. An informant (Corry Ohee, interview 2024) recounted the story of a man who died because he cut down trees indiscriminately. The story of "Haembu" tells of a man who was kidnapped by haembu, a dark force in the form of a small child with a bald head, one eye, one nose, one ear, and one tooth, because he violated the boundaries of the forest. On the other hand, those who protect nature will receive abundant harvests and fish. Interestingly, since the Gospel entered

Sentani in the 1920s, they have also received similar ecological lessons, for example from Genesis 1:28 of the Holy Bible, which says, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" This phrase, "subduing the earth," should be interpreted as responsible management, not unlimited exploitation

Belief in the water god had long led the old Sentani people to carefully care for the water. They had a well-organized lake system, for example, for cooking, bathing, and washing. They believed that if they maintained the lake properly by not throwing garbage into it, the water god would provide an abundance of fish. Conversely, if they polluted it, the god would be angry and would not send fish. Overexploitation of animals also had consequences. A myth entitled "Tete Habu" told about a tribal chief called Grandpa Habu who ordered the community to hunt as many pigs as possible. He believed that the pig's blood, stored in a place called "habu," transformed into a boy. His greed for pig hunting disturbed the community, and the grandfather ultimately died tragically.

2. Dissemination of environmental values to children

On the one hand, years of observation show that modern society lacks good environmental habits. On the other hand, the Sentani community possesses a rich wealth of environmentally-based folklore. Therefore, this study considers disseminating the ecological values of Sentani folklore to children as the next generation. This initiative is considered crucial to prevent them from imitating the bad habits of their predecessors. This is related to children's tendency to imitate the actions of adults (Bandura, 1971; Bandura, 2018). Therefore, children need to develop their environmental habits and attitudes. According to Lickona (1991), character education must consistently instill moral values and good habits to foster a strong positive attitude in children. In the context of instilling environmental values, this process can be carried out through various methods, one of which is the use of folklore as a medium for environmental learning (Hess, Glotfeley & Fromm, 1997; Garrard, 2010; Lestari, La Fua, Wahyuni, 2024). With this approach, character education does not only focus on teaching theory, but also on forming real habits and attitudes of caring for the environment that can be observed and applied by children in their daily lives.

In this study, the dissemination of environmental values was carried out through environment-based folklore learning in several reading houses in East Sentani (Yokiwa Village and Asei Island) and Central Sentani (Hobong Village and Yoboi Village). Some of the folklore taught were fables, myths, and folk songs. This activity also involved reading house instructors and several parents and community elders. Their presence was expected to support learning about the diversity of flora and fauna and environmental care. Ironically, this folklore tells of several flora that are no longer recognizable to children because they are difficult to find in their environment, such as the khombouw tree (*Ficus* Sp), the soang tree (*Xanthosthemos* spp), several types of sago, and medicinal plants that were once often used by the community. The bark of the

khombouw tree which is commonly used as a painting canvas, is no longer easily found in the Sentani area. The community often searches for it in other districts, such as Nimboran, about a 3-hour drive from Sentani. Corry Ohee, a bark painter (interview, May 2025) said that sometimes they order bark from Kalimantan.

Various fauna often personified in folktales or oral poems are extinct or hard to find, such as the bird-of-paradise, the mambruk, the cassowary, the kangaroo, the cuscus, the turtle, and the kandeï fish. In everyday life, it's challenging to introduce this diversity of flora and fauna because they're often not readily encountered. Therefore, in the learning process, in addition to using pictures and videos, parents and community elders were asked to share their past experiences interacting with these animals. They also explained why these animals have become increasingly difficult to find. Antonetha Ohee shared her experience of why birds-of-paradise and kangaroos are no longer found in the Sentani area.

Birds-of-paradise used to live in the Klimbe forest (north of Lake Sentani), while kangaroos lived in several villages. However, due to forest encroachment, the quiet-loving birds-of-paradise have now moved to quieter forests, one of which is in Repang Muafif, about three hours by car. Kangaroos are even no longer found, as Sentani has become a fairly large city with a bustling population. Even more distressing is the kandeï fish, once abundant in Lake Sentani. Now, the lake's shores are littered with trash, preferring to live the clean place in the middle of the lake.

Antonetha Ohee also emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. The extinction or scarcity of flora and fauna is caused by human activity (Dewi, 2016; Buell, 2006; Yektingtyas & Dewi, 2023). Children are encouraged to love the environment by implementing simple practices, such as caring for animals, not littering, watering plants, and so on.

Folklore depicting characters who protect nature is also used as a good example for children. A fable tells the story of Ebi (a bird typical of Sentani) and Kandeï (a fish endemic to Sentani), who were best friends. They planned to make a garden. They chose good land and cut down enough trees to clear a field. However, they left the large trees. They also cleaned up their trash and burned it. They didn't dump it in the lake. In the legend about the origin of Lake Sentani, an old man living on Mount Cyclop shared the use of his ponds. The grandfather's way of dividing the water reflects the old way the Sentani people divided the water in Lake Sentani. They did not mix water usage. Meanwhile, people now use water indiscriminately. They use the same area of water for bathing, cooking, and washing. They do not divide it according to the need. As a result, as explained by Antonetha Ohee, the village head of Asei Island, several parts of Lake Sentani have now been contaminated with *E. coli* bacteria. This means the lake water is no longer safe for consumption.

A folksong entitled "Khani bham. Kla bham" (No land, No forest) written by John Modouw tells the story of land and forests that have been lost because they were sold and exploited by irresponsible people. Eventually, they can no longer farm and hunt. They live in poverty and misery.

Mekhai nebham khelewamaene
Khelai nibhi mokhowoyaene

Yoho yonggo nine fewounge
Ibho ingse randa fewjeunge

The land where we farmed has been sold.
We now live in poverty.
We cannot do anything.
We cry in our own village.

Dobonsolo reyara kla mba
Ebunsolo refam klha mba
Mana ya khale hirale
Khani bham kla bham mephaele

Where is the forest on this mountain?
Where is the forest on the northern mountain?
We live in poverty now.
There is no land, no forest.

This song reflects the songwriter's concern and anxiety over the environment being damaged and passed into other hands. It also depicts the consequences of human greed in exploiting the natural world around them. The consequences of humans not properly managing nature, such as cutting down large trees to clear land for farming, have resulted in floods and landslides. This story is told in a story about two men clearing a land (Irenius Pepuho, interview, June 2025).

Through learning about the importance of the environment for children, it was concluded that many flora and fauna have become extinct or endangered. They also learned about several good figures who protect nature and the destruction caused by irresponsible exploitation. However, today's children see society disregarding the environment, such as by burning forests, logging, sand mining, and littering. This learning not only provides knowledge but also raises awareness of the importance of caring for nature (Braun & Dierkes, 2017; Frimansyah & Saepuloh, 2022; Lange & Dewitte, 2022). Evaluations conducted after three months showed positive results. Instructors and parents reported that after this activity, there were changes in the children's attitudes and habits. They became more concerned about their environment. They diligently swept the yard, watered the plants, and did not litter. They also shared their new habits with their friends at school. Children need more adults who can serve as role models so they can emulate their good deeds. In this way, they can also become little heroes who care about the environment so that in their hands this planet will be greener, cleaner and healthier.

Conclusion

The Sentani community has a wealth of environmentally-based folklore containing moral messages about the importance of preserving nature. This study concludes that

folklore can build children's awareness of their responsibility towards the environment. For example, stories about interdependent living things in an ecosystem teach the values of empathy and respect for nature. Through repetition and reflection on the stories, children are encouraged to internalize the values of caring and begin to develop environmentally friendly habits, such as disposing of trash properly and maintaining a clean environment. They are encouraged to avoid imitating the actions of adults who do not care for the environment. Instilling environmental values in children is an important step in forming a generation that cares about and is responsible for environmental sustainability. One effective medium for this goal is folklore, namely folktales rich in moral messages and cultural values. Through an eco-theory approach, folklore can be understood as a means of cultural criticism against the exploitation of nature and as a forum for showing nature as a living subject with an important role in human life. Thus, folklore functions not only as traditional entertainment but also as an educational tool that can build ecological awareness and character in children from an early age. It is hoped that they will become green heroes who disseminate the importance of protecting the environment to their peers.

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