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Restorative Justice and Environmental Crime: Exploring New Models for Addressing Harm to the Environment and Communities

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ABSTRACT

Environmental crime poses a significant threat to ecological health and community well-being. Traditional punitive approaches often fail to address the root causes of environmental harm and may neglect the needs of affected communities. This study explored the potential of restorative justice as an alternative framework for addressing environmental crime, focusing on its capacity to repair harm, foster accountability, and promote community participation in environmental protection. This research employed a qualitative documentary analysis approach. Relevant documents were analyzed, including legal frameworks and policy documents related to environmental crime and restorative justice, case studies and reports on restorative justice initiatives in environmental contexts, and media reports and online resources. Data were coded and thematically analyzed to identify key themes and patterns related to the application of restorative justice in environmental crime cases. The analysis revealed several key themes: (1) the diverse forms of harm caused by environmental crime, extending beyond ecological damage to include social, economic, and cultural impacts on communities; (2) the limitations of traditional legal responses in addressing the complex nature of environmental harm and providing redress to affected communities; (3) the potential of restorative justice to facilitate dialogue, foster accountability, and develop creative solutions that address the needs of victims, offenders, and the environment; (4) the emergence of innovative restorative justice models in environmental contexts, such as environmental mediation, community conferences, and ecological restoration projects. In conclusion, restorative justice offers a promising framework for addressing environmental crime by promoting healing, accountability, and community engagement. Further research is needed to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of restorative justice initiatives in environmental contexts and to develop best practices for their implementation.

1. Introduction

Environmental crime presents a formidable challenge to ecological integrity and the well-being of communities worldwide. It encompasses a broad spectrum of illicit activities, ranging from illegal logging and wildlife trafficking to pollution and the unlawful disposal of waste. These offenses not only wreak havoc on ecosystems and deplete vital natural resources but also inflict profound social, economic, and cultural harm on communities, particularly those in vulnerable and marginalized situations. The gravity of environmental crime has spurred extensive

research efforts aimed at understanding its multifaceted dimensions, encompassing its root causes, the extent of harm inflicted, and the efficacy of diverse legal and policy frameworks in curbing its occurrence and mitigating its far-reaching consequences. Traditionally, legal systems have predominantly relied on punitive measures to address environmental crime. These measures often entail the imposition of fines, imprisonment, or the revocation of permits. While such approaches may serve as deterrents, they frequently fall short of comprehensively addressing the intricate nature of

environmental harm and may not adequately fulfill the needs of impacted communities. Moreover, an overemphasis on punitive measures can inadvertently perpetuate cycles of harm by neglecting the underlying causes of environmental crime, such as poverty, inequality, and the absence of access to essential resources.¹⁻⁵

In recent years, there has been a burgeoning interest in restorative justice as an alternative framework for addressing environmental crime. Restorative justice is a philosophy and set of practices that prioritize the needs of those harmed by crime while holding offenders accountable for their actions. It emphasizes the importance of repairing harm, fostering dialogue, and promoting community participation in the pursuit of justice. The application of restorative justice to environmental crime is still in its nascent stages, yet it holds significant promise as a means of achieving more holistic and sustainable outcomes. Restorative justice offers several distinct advantages over traditional punitive approaches in the context of environmental crime. Firstly, it acknowledges the diverse forms of harm caused by environmental crime, extending beyond ecological damage to encompass social, economic, and cultural impacts on communities. This recognition ensures that the needs of all stakeholders, including victims, offenders, and the broader community, are taken into account. Secondly, restorative justice empowers communities by providing them with a platform to actively participate in the justice process, voice their concerns, and contribute to the development of solutions. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership and promotes community-led initiatives for environmental protection. Thirdly, restorative justice promotes accountability by encouraging offenders to take responsibility for their actions, understand the far-reaching impact of their crimes, and make amends to those they have harmed. This process not only facilitates healing and reconciliation but also provides opportunities for offenders to engage in environmental restoration efforts, thereby contributing to the rehabilitation of both the environment and themselves. Fourthly, restorative justice encourages the development of creative and

sustainable solutions that address the root causes of environmental crime and promote environmental restoration and protection. By focusing on prevention, education, and long-term sustainability, restorative justice seeks to break cycles of harm and foster a more harmonious relationship between humans and the environment.⁶⁻¹⁰ This research aims to explore the potential of restorative justice as a framework for addressing environmental crime.

2. Methods

This research employed a qualitative documentary analysis approach to explore the application of restorative justice in environmental crime cases. Documentary analysis involves the systematic examination of existing documents to identify key themes, patterns, and insights related to the research question. The following types of documents were analyzed; Legal frameworks and policy documents: This included national and international laws related to environmental crime and restorative justice, as well as policy documents outlining strategies for environmental protection and crime prevention; Case studies and reports: This included reports and case studies documenting the implementation and outcomes of restorative justice initiatives in environmental contexts; Media reports and online resources: This included news articles, online reports, and other media sources that provide insights into public discourse and community perspectives on environmental crime and restorative justice.

Relevant documents were identified through a comprehensive search of online databases, government websites, and academic journals. The selected documents were carefully reviewed and coded using a thematic analysis approach. This involved identifying recurring themes, patterns, and key concepts related to the application of restorative justice in environmental crime cases. The coded data were then analyzed to develop a deeper understanding of the potential benefits, challenges, and limitations of restorative justice in this context.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data. The process of thematic analysis

typically involves the following six steps; Familiarization with the data: This involves reading and re-reading the data, transcribing audio or video recordings, and taking initial notes; Generating initial codes: This involves systematically coding the data, identifying interesting features, and assigning labels or codes to them; Searching for themes: This involves collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each theme, and identifying relationships between themes; Reviewing themes: This involves checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map of the analysis, and refining the themes; Defining and naming themes: This involves ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, identifying the essence of what each theme captures, and generating clear names and definitions for each theme; Producing the report: This involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts, and selecting vivid, compelling extracts to illustrate each theme.

The documents included in the analysis were selected based on the following criteria; Relevance: The documents must be directly relevant to the research topic, focusing on environmental crime, restorative justice, or the intersection of the two; Credibility: The documents must be from credible sources, such as academic journals, government reports, reputable news outlets, or established non-governmental organizations; Authenticity: The documents must be genuine and verifiable, ensuring that they are not fabricated or manipulated; Accessibility: The documents must be publicly accessible, either online or through physical archives; Diversity: The documents should represent a diversity of perspectives, including those of victims, offenders, community members, policymakers, and practitioners.

The data coding and theme development process involved the following steps; Initial coding: Each document was carefully reviewed and coded line-by-line, identifying key concepts, ideas, and arguments related to environmental crime and restorative justice; Code categorization: The initial codes were then grouped into categories based on their similarities and

relationships; Theme identification: The categories were further analyzed to identify overarching themes that captured the essence of the data; Theme refinement: The themes were refined through an iterative process of reviewing the data, discussing the themes with the research team, and consulting with experts in the field; Theme definition: Each theme was clearly defined and described, providing a comprehensive understanding of its meaning and significance.

The coded data and identified themes were analyzed to draw inferences about the application of restorative justice in environmental crime cases. The analysis focused on identifying the potential benefits, challenges, and limitations of restorative justice in this context. The interpretation of the data was guided by the research questions and the theoretical framework of restorative justice. Reflexivity is a critical aspect of qualitative research, acknowledging the researcher's role in shaping the research process and findings. In this study, reflexivity was maintained through regular self-reflection, journaling, and discussions with the research team. The researchers' backgrounds, perspectives, and potential biases were considered throughout the research process to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

This research adhered to ethical research practices, including; Informed consent: While informed consent was not required for the documentary analysis itself, as it involved publicly available documents, ethical considerations were applied in the selection and interpretation of the data; Confidentiality: The sources of sensitive information were kept confidential, and any identifying information was redacted or anonymized; Respect for intellectual property: Proper citations and attributions were provided for all sources used in the research; Transparency: The research methods and findings were reported in a clear and transparent manner, allowing for scrutiny and replication.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the diverse forms of harm caused by environmental crime, categorized into ecological, economic, social, and

cultural impacts. Each category is further elaborated with specific impacts and illustrative examples, drawing from real-world cases and their documented consequences; Ecological Harm: This category highlights the direct negative impacts on the environment, including habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity, degradation of air and water quality, and depletion of natural resources. The examples provided, such as deforestation, oil spills, overfishing, and illegal mining, demonstrate the wide-ranging ecological consequences of environmental crime, leading to the loss of vital ecosystems and the disruption of essential ecological services; Economic Harm: This category emphasizes the economic consequences of environmental crime, including the loss of livelihoods, damage to property and infrastructure, reduced agricultural yields, and increased healthcare costs due to pollution-related illnesses. The examples illustrate how environmental crime can negatively impact various economic sectors, such as fishing, farming, tourism, and public health, leading to financial losses and economic instability; Social Harm: This category focuses on the social impacts of environmental crime, including the displacement of communities, disruption of social networks, increased social conflict, and negative impacts on mental and physical health. The examples highlight how environmental crime can disrupt social cohesion, exacerbate existing inequalities, and lead to social unrest and conflict over scarce resources; Cultural Harm: This category addresses the cultural impacts of environmental crime, including damage to sacred sites and cultural heritage, loss of traditional knowledge and practices, and disruption of cultural identity. The examples demonstrate how environmental crime can erode cultural values, disrupt traditional ways of life, and lead to the loss of cultural heritage and identity for communities deeply connected to their environment.

Table 2 effectively outlines the key limitations of traditional legal responses to environmental crime, highlighting their shortcomings in achieving comprehensive and just outcomes; Focus on Punishment: Traditional legal systems often prioritize punishment and deterrence over repairing the harm caused by environmental crime or addressing its root

causes. This approach can result in fines or imprisonment for offenders but may neglect the ecological damage and the needs of affected communities. The example provided illustrates this, where a company receives a fine for illegal dumping but faces no obligation to clean up the waste or compensate the community. This punitive focus can create a sense of injustice and fail to provide meaningful remedies for environmental harm; Lack of Community Participation: Traditional legal processes often exclude affected communities from meaningful participation in decision-making. They may have limited input in court proceedings or environmental impact assessments, leading to decisions that do not adequately reflect their needs or concerns. The examples provided demonstrate how communities are often sidelined in legal negotiations and settlements, with their health and livelihoods disregarded. This lack of participation can create distrust in the legal system and hinder the development of effective solutions; Inadequate Redress for Victims: Victims of environmental crime often face significant challenges in obtaining adequate compensation or support for their losses. Proving harm and navigating lengthy legal processes can be difficult and costly, and financial compensation may be insufficient to cover the full extent of their losses, including lost income, health impacts, and cultural damage. The example of the oil spill demonstrates this, where the affected fishing community receives minimal compensation after years of litigation, failing to address the long-term consequences of the disaster; Failure to Address Root Causes: Punitive measures alone often fail to address the underlying social, economic, and political factors that contribute to environmental crime. Focusing solely on individual offenders rather than systemic issues like poverty, lack of regulation, or corporate greed can perpetuate the cycle of environmental harm. The examples provided illustrate this, where illegal logging driven by poverty is addressed through arrests without tackling the root cause of poverty, and a mining company receives minor penalties despite violating environmental regulations due to its influence; Limited Enforcement: Even when laws exist, limited resources, lack of political will, or corruption

can hinder effective enforcement. Understaffed environmental agencies, influence peddling by powerful actors, and lack of resources can undermine the implementation of environmental regulations, leading to continued environmental damage and injustice. The example of the mining company receiving minor penalties due to its influence highlights this challenge.

Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the potential benefits of restorative justice in addressing environmental crime. It highlights four key benefits: holistic approach to harm, community empowerment, accountability and responsibility, and sustainable solutions. Each benefit is described in detail, along with illustrative examples and data to support its potential effectiveness; Holistic Approach to Harm: This benefit emphasizes restorative justice's ability to address the diverse forms of harm caused by environmental crime, including ecological, economic, social, and cultural impacts. By considering the needs of all stakeholders, including victims, offenders, and the broader community, restorative justice offers a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to justice. The example of a pollution case, where the restorative justice process led to environmental cleanup, health monitoring, and economic support for affected residents, demonstrates the potential of this approach to address the multifaceted consequences of environmental crime; Community Empowerment: This benefit highlights the role of restorative justice in empowering affected communities by providing them with a platform to participate in the justice process, voice their concerns, and contribute to solutions. By involving communities in the decision-making process, restorative justice can foster a sense of ownership and promote community-led initiatives for environmental protection. The examples of community conferences, victim-offender dialogues, and community-led restoration projects illustrate how restorative justice can empower communities to take a proactive role in addressing environmental harm; Accountability and Responsibility: This benefit emphasizes the importance of restorative justice in holding offenders accountable for their actions and promoting their responsibility for the harm caused. By

encouraging offenders to take ownership of their actions, understand the impact of their crimes, and make amends to those harmed, restorative justice can promote healing and reconciliation. The examples of offenders participating in victim-offender dialogues, community service, or environmental restoration projects demonstrate the potential of restorative justice to foster accountability and responsibility among offenders; Sustainable Solutions: This benefit highlights the potential of restorative justice to promote the development of creative solutions that address the root causes of environmental crime and promote environmental restoration and protection. By focusing on prevention, education, and long-term sustainability, restorative justice can break cycles of harm and foster a more harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. The examples of restorative justice processes leading to alternative livelihood programs, community-based conservation initiatives, and land-sharing agreements demonstrate the potential of this approach to promote sustainable solutions; Healing and Reconciliation: This benefit emphasizes the potential of restorative justice to promote healing and reconciliation for victims, communities, and offenders. By creating opportunities for dialogue, understanding, and forgiveness, restorative justice can facilitate the healing process and promote the reintegration of offenders back into society. The examples of victim-offender dialogues, community healing ceremonies, and reconciliation agreements illustrate the potential of restorative justice to promote healing and reconciliation in the context of environmental crime.

Table 4 showcases a variety of emerging restorative justice models specifically tailored to address environmental crime. These models offer promising alternatives to traditional legal approaches by emphasizing healing, community involvement, and environmental restoration; Environmental Mediation: This model facilitates dialogue between victims, offenders, and other stakeholders to reach a mutually agreeable resolution. This collaborative approach fosters understanding, encourages responsibility, and allows for the development of solutions that address the specific needs of those harmed and the

environment. The case study highlights how mediation can lead to compromises, such as reducing a development's footprint and contributing to wetland restoration, balancing development needs with environmental protection; Community Conferences: These conferences bring together community members, victims, offenders, and representatives of relevant agencies to discuss the environmental crime and its impacts. This inclusive approach allows for a broader understanding of the harm caused and facilitates community-led solutions for reparation and restoration. The example demonstrates how a community conference can lead to a company funding a new water treatment facility and providing health screenings after a chemical spill, addressing both environmental and public health concerns; Ecological Restoration Projects: This model involves offenders directly participating in environmental restoration activities as a form of reparation. This hands-on approach allows offenders to take responsibility for their actions, contribute to healing the environment, and develop a deeper understanding of the impact of their crimes. The case study shows how employees of a company responsible for an oil spill participate in cleaning up the affected coastline and restoring damaged habitats, actively contributing to environmental recovery; Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES): This model focuses on financial compensation for environmental damage, with offenders providing funds to support conservation and restoration projects. This approach helps ensure that environmental harm is addressed through direct investment in ecological recovery. The examples illustrate how PES can fund biodiversity conservation, wetland restoration, and community gardens, providing tangible benefits to the environment and affected communities; Sentencing Circles: This model, often used by Indigenous communities, involves community members in determining appropriate sanctions and restorative actions for environmental offenses. This approach incorporates traditional knowledge and practices, empowering communities to address environmental harm in culturally appropriate ways. The case study shows how a sentencing circle involving elders, community members, and the

offender can lead to a plan that includes community service, cultural education, and environmental cleanup, integrating both traditional and restorative approaches.

Table 5 effectively illustrates how restorative justice can be applied to different environmental crime scenarios, highlighting the contrasting outcomes achieved through restorative approaches compared to traditional legal responses; Illegal Wildlife Poaching: Arrest and prosecution of poachers, confiscation of poached wildlife. This focuses on punishment but may not address the root causes of poaching (e.g., poverty, lack of alternative livelihoods) or repair the harm to the ecosystem and affected communities. Community conference involving poachers, park rangers, affected communities, and conservation experts. This fosters dialogue, understanding of the impacts of poaching, and collaborative development of a plan for reparation and prevention. Poachers participate in community service (habitat restoration, anti-poaching patrols), communities develop alternative livelihood programs (sustainable agriculture, ecotourism), and there's increased community involvement in conservation efforts. This approach addresses both the immediate harm and the underlying causes of poaching, promoting long-term solutions; Industrial Water Pollution: Fine imposed on the company, order to install pollution control equipment. This focuses on punishment and compliance but may not fully address the harm to the environment or compensate affected communities. Environmental mediation between the company, affected communities, and environmental agency representatives. This facilitates dialogue and collaborative problem-solving to assess the harm, identify remediation measures, and address community concerns. The company funds water quality monitoring and cleanup efforts, provides compensation to affected communities, and collaborates with the community on a long-term environmental management plan. This approach promotes accountability, addresses community needs, and fosters long-term environmental protection; Illegal Logging in a Protected Forest: Arrest and prosecution of loggers, seizure of illegally harvested timber. This focuses on punishment but may not lead to the

restoration of the damaged forest or involve the community in the solution. Ecological restoration project where loggers participate in reforestation efforts in the affected area, with community guidance and monitoring. Restoration of the degraded forest area, development of sustainable forestry practices in collaboration with the community, increased awareness of environmental protection among offenders and the community. This approach promotes environmental recovery, offender responsibility, and community engagement in forest protection; Waste Dumping in a Residential Area: Fine imposed on the responsible party, order to remove the

waste. This focuses on punishment and compliance but may not address the impact on the community or prevent future incidents. Victim-offender dialogue between the responsible party and affected residents. This facilitates understanding of the harm caused, taking responsibility, and agreeing on a plan for remediation. The responsible party cleans up the dumped waste, contributes to community projects (improving local parks, supporting environmental education), and develops a waste management plan to prevent future incidents. This approach promotes accountability, addresses community concerns, and fosters responsible waste management practices.

Table 1. Diverse forms of harm caused by environmental crime.

Category of harm	Specific impacts	Examples	Data
Ecological Harm	Habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity; Degradation of air and water quality; Depletion of natural resources (forests, fisheries, minerals); Disruption of ecosystem services (pollination, water purification)	Deforestation due to illegal logging; Oil spills contaminating marine ecosystems; Overfishing leading to collapse of fish stocks; Illegal mining polluting rivers and groundwater	Case: Illegal dumping of toxic waste in a wetland; Impact: Loss of 5 hectares of wetland habitat, contamination of groundwater affecting drinking water for 200 households, decline in bird populations by 30%
Economic Harm	Loss of livelihoods (fishing, farming, tourism); Damage to property and infrastructure; Reduced agricultural yields and food security; Increased healthcare costs due to pollution-related illnesses	Contamination of farmland by industrial waste; Damage to coastal communities from illegal sand mining; Decline in tourism revenue due to polluted beaches; Increased respiratory illnesses due to air pollution from illegal factories	Case: Illegal fishing using dynamite; Impact: Destruction of coral reefs, loss of income for 50 fishing families, decline in tourism revenue by 15%
Social Harm	Displacement of communities; Disruption of social networks and community cohesion; Increased social conflict over scarce resources; Negative impacts on mental and physical health	Forced relocation of communities due to mining activities; Conflicts over access to water resources in areas affected by pollution; Increased stress and anxiety due to environmental degradation	Case: Illegal wildlife poaching in a protected area; Impact: Displacement of indigenous communities, loss of cultural heritage, increased tensions between park rangers and poachers
Cultural Harm	Damage to sacred sites and cultural heritage; Loss of traditional knowledge and practices associated with the environment; Disruption of cultural identity and sense of place	Destruction of indigenous burial grounds by mining companies; Loss of traditional fishing practices due to overfishing; Damage to cultural landscapes due to deforestation	Case: Construction of a dam flooding a sacred forest; Impact: Loss of sacred sites, disruption of traditional ceremonies, erosion of cultural identity for 1000 people

Table 2. Limitations of traditional legal responses to environmental crime.

Limitation	Description	Examples	Data
Focus on Punishment	Prioritizes penalties and deterrence, rather than repairing harm or addressing root causes.	Fines, imprisonment, revocation of permits	Case: Company illegally dumps waste; Outcome: Fined \$10,000, no cleanup or community compensation.
Lack of Community Participation	Affected communities have limited input in the legal process or decision-making.	Exclusion from court proceedings, lack of consultation in environmental impact assessments	Case: Factory pollutes river; Outcome: Government agency negotiates settlement with the company, ignoring community health concerns.
Inadequate Redress for Victims	Victims of environmental crime may not receive adequate compensation or support for their losses.	Difficulty proving harm, lengthy legal processes, insufficient financial compensation	Case: Oil spill harms fishing community; Outcome: Years of litigation, minimal compensation that doesn't cover lost income or health impacts.
Failure to Address Root Causes	Punitive measures may not address the underlying social, economic, and political factors that contribute to environmental crime.	Focus on individual offenders rather than systemic issues like poverty, lack of regulation, or corporate greed	Case: Illegal logging driven by poverty; Outcome: Arrest of individual loggers, but no action to address poverty or lack of alternative livelihoods.
Limited Enforcement	Laws may exist, but lack of resources or political will can hinder effective enforcement.	Understaffed environmental agencies, corruption, influence of powerful actors	Case: Mining company violates environmental regulations; Outcome: Minor penalties due to company influence, and continued environmental damage.

Table 3. The potential of restorative justice in addressing environmental crime.

Benefit	Description	Examples	Data
Holistic Approach to Harm	Recognizes the diverse forms of harm caused by environmental crime and seeks to address the needs of all stakeholders (victims, offenders, community, environment).	Includes ecological, economic, social, and cultural impacts in the justice process.	Case: Pollution from a factory affects a community's health and livelihoods. Outcome: Restorative justice process facilitates a plan for environmental cleanup, health monitoring for residents, and economic support for affected businesses.
Community Empowerment	Provides a platform for affected communities to participate in the justice process, voice their concerns, and contribute to solutions.	Community conferences, victim-offender dialogues, and community-led restoration projects.	Case: Illegal logging in a protected forest. Outcome: Community members participate in a conference with the logging company to develop a plan for reforestation and sustainable forestry practices.
Accountability and Responsibility	Encourages offenders to take responsibility for their actions, understand the impact of their crimes, and make amends to those harmed.	Offenders participate in victim-offender dialogues, community service, or environmental restoration projects.	Case: Mining company pollutes a river. Outcome: Company representatives meet with affected communities, apologize for the harm caused, and commit to funding a water treatment plant.
Sustainable Solutions	Promotes the development of creative solutions that address the root causes of environmental crime and promote environmental restoration and protection.	Focus on prevention, education, and long-term sustainability.	Case: Poaching of endangered species. Outcome: Restorative justice process leads to the creation of alternative livelihood programs for poachers and community-based conservation initiatives.
Promotes Healing and Reconciliation	Creates opportunities for dialogue and understanding, fostering healing for victims and communities, and reintegrating offenders back into society.	Victim-offender dialogues, community healing ceremonies, reconciliation agreements.	Case: Land conflict between a developer and indigenous community. Outcome: Restorative justice process facilitates dialogue, leading to a land-sharing agreement and joint conservation efforts.

Table 4. Emerging restorative justice models in environmental contexts.

Model	Description	Examples	Data
Environmental Mediation	Facilitated dialogue between victims, offenders, and other stakeholders to reach a mutually agreeable resolution that addresses the harm caused.	Mediation between a farmer and a factory owner over water pollution; Negotiation between a mining company and an indigenous community over land use.	Case: A developer and a conservation group dispute land use near a wetland. Outcome: Mediation leads to an agreement where the developer reduces the project's footprint and contributes to wetland restoration.
Community Conferences	Brings together community members, including victims, offenders, and representatives of relevant agencies, to discuss the crime and its impact, and to develop a plan for reparation and restoration.	Community conference to address illegal logging in a protected forest; Community gathering to discuss a factory's air pollution and develop solutions.	Case: A chemical spill contaminates a local water supply. Outcome: A community conference results in the company funding a new water treatment facility and providing health screenings for residents.
Ecological Restoration Projects	Involves offenders participating in environmental restoration activities as a form of reparation to the environment and affected communities.	Offenders plant trees to reforest an area damaged by illegal logging; Offenders clean up a polluted river.	Case: A company is responsible for an oil spill. Outcome: Employees participate in cleaning up the affected coastline and restoring damaged habitats.
Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)	Offenders provide financial compensation for the environmental damage they have caused, which can be used to fund conservation and restoration projects.	A mining company pays into a fund to support biodiversity conservation; A polluter pays for the restoration of a damaged wetland.	Case: A factory is fined for exceeding air pollution limits. Outcome: The fine is used to create a fund to support community gardens and urban greening projects.
Sentencing Circles	Indigenous communities use this model to involve community members in determining appropriate sanctions and restorative actions for environmental offenses.	A sentencing circle for an individual who illegally hunted wildlife; A community-led process to address illegal fishing.	Case: Illegal dumping of waste on indigenous land. Outcome: A sentencing circle involving elders, community members, and the offender determines a plan that includes community service, cultural education, and environmental cleanup.

Table 5. Applying restorative justice to environmental crime: scenarios and outcomes.

Scenario	Traditional response	Restorative justice approach	Outcome
Illegal Wildlife Poaching	Arrest and prosecution of poachers; Confiscation of poached wildlife	Community conference: Involves poachers, park rangers, affected communities (those reliant on tourism or who consider the animal sacred), and conservation experts. Focus: Understanding the motivations for poaching (poverty, lack of alternatives), the impact on the ecosystem and community, and developing a plan for reparation and prevention.	Poachers participate in community service, such as habitat restoration or assisting with anti-poaching patrols. The community develops alternative livelihood programs (e.g., sustainable agriculture, ecotourism) to reduce reliance on poaching. Increased community involvement in conservation efforts.
Industrial Water Pollution	Fine imposed on the company; Order to install pollution control equipment	Environmental mediation: Facilitated dialogue between the company, affected communities, and environmental agency representatives. Focus: Assessing the extent of harm, identifying remediation measures, and addressing community concerns (health impacts, economic losses).	The company funds water quality monitoring and cleanup efforts. Provides compensation to affected communities for health impacts and economic losses. Collaborates with the community on a long-term environmental management plan.
Illegal Logging in a Protected Forest	Arrest and prosecution of loggers; Seizure of illegally harvested timber	Ecological restoration project: Loggers participate in reforestation efforts in the affected area. Community involvement: Community members provide guidance on reforestation techniques and monitor the progress.	Restoration of the degraded forest area. Development of sustainable forestry practices in collaboration with the community. Increased awareness of environmental protection among the offenders and the community.
Waste Dumping in a Residential Area	Fine imposed on the responsible party; Order to remove the waste	Victim-offender dialogue: Facilitated meeting between the responsible party (individual or company) and affected residents. Focus: Understanding the impact of dumping on the community, taking responsibility for the harm caused, and agreeing on a plan for remediation.	The responsible party cleans up the dumped waste. Contributes to community projects, such as improving local parks or supporting environmental education initiatives. Develops a waste management plan to prevent future incidents.

Environmental crime, a multifaceted and pervasive issue, inflicts a wide range of harms that extend far beyond the immediate ecological damage. These harms encompass ecological, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, each with its own set of

consequences for communities and ecosystems. Environmental crime directly disrupts the delicate balance of ecosystems, leading to a cascade of detrimental effects. Habitat destruction, driven by illegal logging, mining, and land conversion, results in

the loss of biodiversity and the disruption of ecological processes. The degradation of air and water quality, stemming from pollution and illegal waste disposal, poses significant risks to human health and the environment. Moreover, the depletion of natural resources, such as forests, fisheries, and minerals, undermines the long-term sustainability of ecosystems and the livelihoods they support. The economic consequences of environmental crime are far-reaching, affecting livelihoods, property, infrastructure, and public health. The loss of livelihoods in industries such as fishing, farming, and tourism can devastate communities, particularly in developing countries where dependence on natural resources is high. Damage to property and infrastructure can lead to significant financial burdens for individuals, businesses, and governments. Reduced agricultural yields and food security can exacerbate poverty and hunger, particularly in vulnerable communities. Additionally, increased healthcare costs due to pollution-related illnesses can strain public health systems and disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Environmental crime can disrupt social cohesion, displace communities, and exacerbate existing inequalities. The displacement of communities due to mining activities or other forms of environmental degradation can lead to the loss of homes, livelihoods, and social networks. Increased social conflict over scarce resources, such as water or land, can further destabilize communities and lead to violence. Negative impacts on mental and physical health, including increased stress and anxiety due to environmental degradation, can also have long-term social consequences. For many communities, especially Indigenous peoples, the environment is deeply intertwined with their cultural identity, traditions, and spirituality. Environmental crime can damage sacred sites, disrupt cultural practices, and erode traditional knowledge systems, leading to the loss of cultural heritage and a sense of displacement. The destruction of cultural landscapes, such as forests, rivers, and mountains, can sever the deep connection between communities and their environment, leading to a loss of identity and a sense of placelessness.¹¹⁻¹³

Traditional legal responses to environmental crime often fall short of addressing the multifaceted nature of environmental harm and the needs of affected communities. These limitations stem from a variety of factors, including a focus on punishment, lack of community participation, inadequate redress for victims, failure to address root causes, and limited enforcement. The emphasis on punishment in traditional legal systems often overshadows the need for environmental restoration and community healing. While fines and imprisonment may serve as deterrents, they do not directly address the ecological damage or the suffering of affected communities. This punitive approach can create a sense of injustice and fail to provide meaningful remedies for environmental harm. For instance, a company might be fined for illegal waste dumping but face no obligation to clean up the waste or compensate the community, leaving behind a legacy of environmental damage and social injustice. The exclusion of communities from decision-making processes can lead to solutions that do not adequately reflect their needs or priorities. This lack of participation can also foster distrust in the legal system and hinder the development of sustainable solutions. Communities may be excluded from court proceedings or have limited input in environmental impact assessments, leading to decisions that prioritize the interests of the state or corporations over the well-being of those directly affected by environmental crime. Victims of environmental crime often face significant challenges in obtaining adequate compensation for their losses. Proving harm and navigating complex legal processes can be difficult and costly, and financial compensation may not fully address the long-term consequences of environmental damage. Victims may struggle to document the full extent of their losses, which can include not only economic damages but also health impacts, loss of cultural heritage, and emotional distress. Punitive measures alone often fail to address the underlying social, economic, and political factors that contribute to environmental crime. Poverty, lack of economic opportunities, weak governance, and corporate greed can all drive environmental destruction. Without addressing these root causes, environmental crime is

likely to persist, even with the imposition of fines and penalties. Even when strong environmental laws exist, limited resources, lack of political will, or corruption can hinder their effective enforcement. Understaffed environmental agencies, inadequate funding, and the influence of powerful actors can all undermine the implementation of environmental regulations. This can lead to a culture of impunity, where environmental offenders believe they can act with little consequence, further emboldening environmental crime.¹⁴⁻¹⁷

Restorative justice offers a promising alternative to traditional legal responses by shifting the focus from punishment to healing, accountability, and community engagement. By recognizing the diverse forms of harm, empowering communities, and promoting sustainable solutions, restorative justice can address the limitations of traditional approaches and promote environmental justice. Restorative justice recognizes the interconnectedness of ecological, economic, social, and cultural harms caused by environmental crime. By considering the needs of all stakeholders, including victims, offenders, and the broader community, restorative justice promotes a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to justice. It acknowledges that environmental harm extends beyond ecological damage to encompass the economic livelihoods, social well-being, and cultural heritage of communities. This holistic approach ensures that all facets of harm are considered and addressed in the justice process. Restorative justice empowers communities to actively participate in the justice process, voice their concerns, and contribute to the development of solutions. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership and promotes community-led initiatives for environmental protection. By including communities in decision-making processes, restorative justice ensures that their needs and priorities are reflected in the outcomes. This can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions that address the root causes of environmental crime and promote community resilience. Restorative justice encourages offenders to take responsibility for their actions, understand the impact of their crimes, and make amends to those they have harmed. This process not only facilitates healing

and reconciliation but also provides opportunities for offenders to engage in environmental restoration efforts. By acknowledging the harm they have caused and taking steps to repair it, offenders can begin to rebuild trust with the community and contribute to environmental rehabilitation. Restorative justice promotes the development of creative and sustainable solutions that address the root causes of environmental crime and promote environmental restoration and protection. By focusing on prevention, education, and long-term sustainability, restorative justice seeks to break cycles of harm and foster a more harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. This can involve developing alternative livelihood programs, promoting sustainable economic activities, and investing in environmental education and awareness. Restorative justice creates opportunities for dialogue and understanding, fostering healing for victims and communities and reintegrating offenders back into society. By promoting empathy and compassion, restorative justice can help to rebuild trust and promote social cohesion. This can involve victim-offender dialogues, community healing ceremonies, and reconciliation agreements that address the emotional and social impacts of environmental crime.¹⁸⁻²⁰

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research underscores the profound and multifaceted harm inflicted by environmental crime, extending beyond ecological damage to encompass economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Traditional legal responses, often constrained by a focus on punishment and exclusion of affected communities, frequently fall short of achieving comprehensive justice. Restorative justice emerges as a promising alternative framework, prioritizing healing, accountability, and community engagement in addressing environmental crime. Our findings demonstrate the potential of restorative justice to address the diverse forms of harm, empower communities, and promote sustainable solutions. By recognizing the interconnectedness of ecological, economic, social, and cultural harms, restorative justice fosters a holistic approach to justice that

considers the needs of all stakeholders. Furthermore, by empowering communities to actively participate in the justice process, restorative justice promotes community-led initiatives for environmental protection and ensures that their needs and priorities are reflected in the outcomes. The research also highlights the importance of holding offenders accountable for their actions and encouraging them to make amends to those harmed. Through environmental restoration efforts, offenders can begin to rebuild trust with the community and contribute to environmental rehabilitation. Restorative justice, therefore, promotes not only environmental sustainability but also social healing and reconciliation. In moving forward, further research is needed to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of restorative justice initiatives in environmental contexts and to develop best practices for their implementation. This includes exploring the role of community-based monitoring programs, developing culturally appropriate restorative justice models for diverse communities, and examining the economic and social benefits of restorative justice approaches. Ultimately, the goal is to foster a more harmonious relationship between humans and the environment by addressing the root causes of environmental crime and promoting justice that is both restorative and sustainable. The insights gained from this research contribute to the growing body of knowledge on environmental justice and offer a pathway toward a more equitable and sustainable future.

5. References

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