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Gender and Climate Change in Indonesia: An Intersectional Introduction

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The articles in this *Intersections* special issue on gender and climate change in Indonesia speak to demands that gender inequity and the diverse roles and complex lived and local experiences of women and girl-children should be centred in the analysis of climate challenges and the mobilisation of climate solutions. The articles that follow present a geographical sweep of women's climate experiences in mainland and island locations in East Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, South Sulawesi, Central Java, Yogyakarta, islands in Maluku Province, Nusa Tenggara, Riau, and Bali. The authors scale the global gaze down to local experiences to explore gendered social, economic and labour impacts across a range of sectors that are key to climate mitigation and adaption in Indonesia: forest governance, water management and access to safe water, fire governance, agriculture and cultivation, coastal resource management and small-scale fisheries, and energy transitions in the coal production sector.[1]

The authors expose the ways in which, in Indonesia as elsewhere, women continue to be both disproportionately vulnerable to climate impacts and disproportionately affected by the adverse consequences of climate-related adaptation and mitigation strategies. They reveal that, despite declaratory policies on inclusion and participation, gender perspectives remain poorly integrated into development planning, policies lack gender-disaggregated strategies, and women are still sparsely represented in formal climate-relevant decision-making and implementation processes. The authors demonstrate the ways in which women's formal and informal economic and livelihood roles in natural resource management and ecosystem stewardship are under-recognised, under-supported, under-represented, under-valued, and under-estimated.[2] Their insights expose the structural and normative inequities that 'reproduce gendered norms and hierarchical gender relations.'[3] In sum, they show how

[1] I am grateful to the authors for the opportunity to read and reflect on their insightful analysis and research findings on these important topics.

[2] See also Tia Rahmania, Fatchiah Kertamuda, Septantri Shinta Wulandari and Asep Marfu, 'Empowering women for a sustainable future: integrating gender equality and environmental stewardship,' *Social Sciences and Humanities Open* 11 (2025); Nabilla Rahmani, 'Rooted in care: women behind Indonesia's climate goals,' 5 June 2025, https://www.undp.org/indonesia/stories/rooted-care-women-behind-indonesias-climate-goals.

[3] Sofyan Ansori et al., 'Women in flames: gendered exclusion in Indonesia's fire governance', *Intersections*, this issue.

'gendered power relations shape climate resilience'[4] and how women's multi-faceted exclusion is intersectional, layered and consequential.[5]

A global background on gender and climate justice

The global context for these conversations is two-fold. First, climate precarity is known to be highly gendered. Gender-differentiated experiences of climate impacts are a function of women's 'exposure to climate risks but also … the sensitivity of their livelihoods and socioeconomic situations to climatic changes and their capacity to cope with these changes.'[6] The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports significant adverse impacts on women and girl-children arising from 'changes in agricultural productivity, impacts on human health and food security, destruction of homes and infrastructure, and loss of property and income.'[7] UN Women calculates that, under a worst-case climate scenario, another 158.3 million women and girls could be pushed into extreme poverty by 2050 with many hundreds of millions more facing diminished livelihoods, hunger, and disaster situations.[8] At the same time, women and girls globally are disproportionately burdened with managing increasingly scarce food, water and fuel resources, expectations sometimes captured in the contested concept of 'earthcare.'[9] They are vulnerable to climate disruptions in employment sectors such as agriculture and aquaculture and are more likely to suffer the impacts of climate-related disasters such as droughts, floods, and extreme weather events at the same time as burdens of care intensify. These gendered vulnerabilities are not innate but are 'mediated and (re)produced by existing political economic and patriarchal institutions, forms of social discrimination and exclusions, and persistent poverty.'[10]

Second, questions of social justice, including gender justice, must be at the heart of climate mitigation and adaption. Climate justice discourse calls for 'equity in the distribution of environmental risk, recognition of the diversity of the participants and experiences in affected communities, and participation in the political processes which create and manage … policy.'[11] This emphasises the importance of fairness in the management of climate-related costs and benefits and, indeed, in how those costs and benefits are identified and calculated. It calls for participatory processes grounded in inclusive and deliberative modes of

[4] Zulfa Sakhiyya et al., 'Beyond victimhood: gendering climate resilience in Indonesia through feminist participatory action research,' *Intersections*, this issue.

[5] In her contribution to this special issue, Smita Tanaya extends this intersectional analysis generationally to examine how young people also face socially reinforced conditions of precarity and exclusion. Smita Tanaya, 'Precarity, power, and quiet resilience: women and young people navigating climate-driven coastal change in Indonesia,' *Intersections*, this issue.

[6] World Bank, *Empowering Women for Climate Resilience in Cambodia* (The World Bank, 2024), viii.

[7] IPCC, *Climate change 2023: synthesis report* (IPCC Secretariat, 2023), 51.

[8] UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: the Gender Snapshot 2025* (UN Women, 2025), 10.

[9] For more on these contestations, see Sherilyn Macgregor, *Beyond mothering earth: ecological citizenship and the politics of care* (UBC Press, 2014).

[10] Bernadette P. Resurrección, *Gender, climate change and disasters: vulnerabilities, responses, and imagining a more caring and better world*, Background paper prepared for UN Women Expert Group Meeting, October 2021, EGM/ENV/BP.2, 4.

[11] David Schlosberg, 'Reconceiving environmental justice: global movements and political theories', *Environmental Politics* 13, no. 3 (2004), 528–29, https://doi.org/10.1080/0964401042000229025.

governance and decision making. It also demands a focus on 'local impacts and experience, inequitable vulnerabilities, [and] the importance of community voice,' often captured in the concept of recognition justice.[12] Recognition justice acknowledges distinct and diverse but often marginalised identities, histories and lived experiences and seeks to eliminate forms of socio-cultural domination of some groups over others. Gendering recognition and climate (in)justice calls for intersectional and multidimensional analyses that, through exposing the structural realities of disempowerment and disadvantage, simultaneously create space for recognising and valuing disparate forms of women's agency, activism and leadership, and for exploring how women's situated knowledge and lived experiences are crucial to outcomes that are ethically transformative and ecologically effective.

The Indonesian context

Indonesia is 'highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, including extreme events such as floods and droughts, and long-term changes from sea-level rise, shifts in rainfall patterns and increasing temperature.'[13] Recent Indonesian governments have committed to climate targets that anticipate net-zero emissions by 2060 in the pursuit of climate resilience and a just transition to a low-carbon economy.[14] Nevertheless, the economy remains highly reliant on fossil fuels, has been slow to develop clean energy options, and has generated uneven results in managing socially just and equitable policies and outcomes in agriculture, forestry, energy and transport sectors (among others).[15] The Asian Development Bank reports that impacts will be experienced across multiple sectors and regions, costing anything between 2.5 and 7 percent of Indonesia's GDP by 2100, with 'the poorest bearing the brunt of this burden.'[16] Women are among the highest risk groups, particularly in 'already vulnerable communities [that] may be pushed further below the poverty line.'[17]

Reports on the Indonesian government's Just Transition White Paper, developed in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and launched during the UN General Assembly meeting in 2024, suggest that embedding gender-responsive policies into national transition planning will instigate a 'paradigm shift' that closes the 'loop between local action and systemic change.'[18] In its 2025 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the government accepted that 'mapping gender issues in climate change in all development sectors' was

[12] David Schlosberg and Lisette B. Collins, 'From environmental to climate justice: climate change and the discourse of environmental justice,' *WIREs Climate Change* 5, no. 3 (2014), 359, https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.275.

[13] World Bank, *Climate Risk Profile: Indonesia* (The World Bank Group, 2025), 5

[14] Government of Indonesia, *Second Nationally Determined Contribution: Republic of Indonesia*, 2025, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/2025-10/Indonesia_Second%20NDC_2025.10.24.pdf.

[15] See the analyses at Climate Action Tracker, *Indonesia*, updated 8 December 2025, https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/indonesia/.

[16] Asian Development Bank, *Country Risk Profile: Indonesia* (Asian Development Bank, 2021), 3.

[17] Ruddy Gobel, Mara Hammerle and Caitlin McCaffrie, *Powering Prosperity: A framework for a fair and inclusive energy transition in Indonesia* (Centre for Policy Development, 2025), 6

[18] UNDP, Powering a just transition: how strategic investments are transforming Indonesia's energy future, 9 June 2025, https://www.undp.org/indonesia/stories/powering-just-transition-how-strategic-investments-are-transforming-indonesias-energy-future-0.

crucial to successful climate mitigation and adaptation.[19] The NDC emphasised the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women in promoting climate resilience. In theory, this commitment is an embodiment of the country's foundational principles of *Pancasila*, particularly the fifth principle of 'social justice for all,' and is guided by the *Asta Cita*, the development vision articulated in the government's Medium-Term Development Plan 2025–29.

The 'rich laboratory'

The research in this special issue contributes to what Bernadette Resurrección calls the 'rich laboratory' of insights and lessons to be drawn from adaptation and mitigation experiments.[20] Three critical and overlapping themes resonate across these articles: the epistemological importance of feminist political ecology and intersectional analysis; the ontological challenges to and conceptual and empirical recalibrations of how we identify and understand women's agency; and the imperatives of challenging top-down technocratic interventions (or fixes) in favour of what Wendy Harcourt describes elsewhere as 'pluriversal and alternative possibilities' that 'subvert mainstream narratives in practice.'[21]

Feminist political ecology

The case studies draw on the insights of feminist political ecology (FPE) to analyse and explain how gender and climate justice (and injustices) intersect in practice in Indonesia. FPE is embedded in intersectionality, an understanding of gender 'not [as] a standalone identity' but as one that 'intersects with other social identities of difference such as class, race, ethnicity, age, ability, sexuality and geographical location' through the workings of power.[22] As the articles here demonstrate, FPE is not a singular or tightly defined theoretical or conceptual model. Rather, by recognising gender as a material, relational and contested category,[23] it sets out to 'navigate theory and practice, individual and collective engagements at the edge of academic and activist desires to produce politically meaningful knowledge, building on the insights of empirical research and feminist theory.'[24] The authors in this special issue bring FPE into nuanced and constructive conservations with other heterodox discourses, such as gendered commoning,[25] ethnohydrology,[26] and transformative models of climate

[19] Government of Indonesia, *Second Nationally Determined Contribution: Republic of Indonesia.*

[20] Bernadette P. Resurrección, *Gender, climate change and disasters: vulnerabilities, responses, and imagining a more caring and better world*, Background paper prepared for UN Women Expert Group Meeting, October 2021, EGM/ENV/BP.2, 9.

[21] Wendy Harcourt, 'Why feminist political ecology matters', *Space and Polity*, 30, no. 2 (2026), 192, https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2026.2613240.

[22] Resurrección , *Gender, climate change and disasters,* 3.

[23] See Annisa Sabrina Hartoto et al., 'Gendering the commons: climate change and forest governance in Indonesia,' *Intersections*, this issue.

[24] Ana Agostino, Rebecca Elmhirst, Marlene Gómez, Wendy Harcourt and Panagiota Kotsila, 'Sketching out the contours,' in *Contours of feminist political ecology,* ed. Wendy Harcourt, Ana Agostino, Rebecca Elmhirst, Marlene Gómez and Panagiota Kotsila (Palgrave Macmillan), 2, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20928-4_1

[25] Hartoto et al., 'Gendering the commons.'

[26] Bokiraiya Latuamury et al., 'Women's access to safe water in Eastern Indonesia: intersectional inequities and climate adaptation pathways,' *Intersections*, this issue.

resilience.[27] Intersectionality therefore foregrounds the ways that gendered inequities are shaped simultaneously by infrastructural deficits, constraints on resource access and control, biophysical conditions and climate-related ecological vulnerability, and long-established socio-economic and socio-cultural dynamics.[28]

FPE also mobilises research practices that challenge the kinds of gender-insensitive measurement that Joanne Crawford defines as 'methodological exclusion or exclusion by design' by which 'what is not measured is rendered invisible in data.'[29] The authors reinforce the importance of participatory action research and ethnographic engagement, multi-site community-based fieldwork, and mixed-methods approaches that include participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions, life-story interviews, and household livelihood questionnaires and mapping exercises. This is not simply a material corrective. Rather it brings women's lived experiences and their actual voices to the fore and, as Annisa Hartoto and her colleagues explain, situates those everyday experiences 'within broader governance and ecological contexts.'[30]

Gendered exclusions, inclusions and agency

The feminist political ecology/ies that have inspired the research in this special issue provide layered insights into the ways in which gender is obscured, and women are often disproportionately ecologically and politically marginalised in climate contexts. Through investigating women's situated-ness and challenging reductive approaches to women as victims, the authors show how women's agency can function as forms of resilience rather than just measurable indicators of participation. This is very much a critique of what Sandra Harding described as the 'add women and stir' approach.[31] The core of this analysis lies in the intersection of structural inequities, gendered exclusions, and power asymmetries to reveal how women's experiences are explained and/or discounted, how access to resources and decision-making authority is limited, how forms of inclusion still rely on particularist gendered narratives, and how participatory and recognition gains are often partial and paradoxical.

In all of the sectors and local ecologies explored in this special issue, gendered norms, practices, and relationships frame assumptions about whose experiences are heard, whose knowledge counts, who participates in decision making and adaptive initiatives, and on what (or whose) terms.[32] Despite their often significant experience in agriculture, energy, forestry,

[27] Sakhiyya et al., 'Beyond victimhood.'

[28] See Latuamury et al., 'Women's access to safe water in Eastern Indonesia'; Ansori et al., 'Women in flames.' In many respects, FPE owes a genealogical debt to debates about the tensions between feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory, on which see Nancy A. Naples and Barbara Gurr, 'Feminist empiricism and standpoint theory,' in *Feminist research practice: a primer,* ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Sage Publications, 2nd ed. 2014).

[29] Joanne Crawford, *Gender and poverty as a feminist foreign policy priority* (Melbourne: Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition/International Women's Development Agency, 2023), 2.

[30] Hartoto et al., 'Gendering the commons.'

[31] Sandra Harding, 'Just add women and stir?' in *Missing Links: Gender Equity in Science and Technology for Development,* ed. International Development Research Centre (IDRC, 1995), https://doi.org/10.3362/9781780442839.013.

[32] The articles also caution against reductive approaches that accommodate women as a single constituency or category without attention to how they are themselves also embedded in what Mutiara Kurniasari and

coastal fisheries and other climate-relevant sectors in Indonesia, women face gender-shaped 'time-poverty and deliberative exclusion.'[33] Decision-making participation is often 'constrained by care burdens and limited access to capital [and] patronage.'[34] In familiar echoes of the double-burden, women are still expected to be 'stewards of their households,'[35] regardless of whether they also have income-generating roles in formal and informal economies. Indeed, as several of the articles demonstrate, women's economic participation seldom translates into formal authority over forest and farm lands, water, fisheries, or energy resources. Rather, women's environmental labour is categorised as 'supplementary rather than central'[36] and is re-coded as moral service.[37]

Economic and decision-making participation are also constrained by social and cultural norms about gender-appropriate spaces. In Indonesia as elsewhere, formal leadership is still a largely male domain. Workplaces and economic practices in key climate mitigation and adaptation sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, fire management, and energy, all of which are explored in this special issue, remain gendered and sometimes highly masculinised spaces, shaped by assumptions about what constitutes men's work and women's work. The latter is still most often characterised as domestic, supportive, informal, and intuitive in contrast to 'men's work' which is not only cast as public and productive,[38] but comes with gendered expectations of desired skills and physical capacity (see, for example, the studies on fire management, coastal fisheries, and coal production) and is deeply embedded in cultural assumptions about appropriate roles for women. As the research here shows, in some cases women reproduce those assumptions: in others, they resist or navigate around them.

The articles provide grounded ethnographic investigations of women-led initiatives and innovations that are gender-informed and that have created spaces for diverse forms of women's agency. Women in Indonesia are shown to be pioneers of climate resilience,[39] and agents of ecological transformation.[40] The kinds of care, cooperation and social reproduction that are associated with women's labour are cast as forms of climate action that help to support sustainable outcomes.[41] But there are cautionary tales here as well. As Smita Tanaya argues, improvisational forms of adaptation and the expansion of women's workloads in keeping households and local economies afloat in the face of climate impacts often constitute little more than agency from the margins, strategies for endurance rather than resilience. Mutiara Kurniasari and colleagues argue along similar lines, revealing in their study how

colleagues describe as hierarchies of privilege and precarity; see Mutiara Kurniasari et al., 'Beyond harmony: climate adaptation, gender inequality, and symbolic governance in Bali,' *Intersections*, this issue.

[33] Latuamury et al., 'Women's access to safe water in Eastern Indonesia.'

[34] Hartoto et al., 'Gendering the commons.'

[35] Martha J. S. Mendrofa et al., 'Future of women workers facing energy transition in coal-producing regions: case study of East Kalimantan, Indonesia,' *Intersections*, this issue.

[36] Tanaya, 'Precarity, power, and quiet resilience.'

[37] Kurniasari et al., 'Beyond harmony.'

[38] Kurniasari et al., 'Beyond harmony.'

[39] Sakhiyya et al., 'Beyond victimhood.'

[40] Kurniasari et al., 'Beyond harmony.'

[41] Hartoto et al., 'Gendering the commons.'

women's agency both 'secures household and ritual survival' and 'simultaneously reinforces the gendered foundations of *subak* [irrigation system] authority' that excludes women from decision-making.[42] Indeed, many of the authors are cautious about versions of inclusion and participatory justice that focus on equal numbers in the absence of a more thoughtful attention to equity and agency in the face of structural and social barriers.

The socio-economies of seaweed harvesting and cultivation (touched on by Tanaya in this special issue and part of the KONEKSI suite of collaborative research projects) offer another clear example of gendered intersectional challenges and the complexities of agency and empowerment when viewed through a feminist political ecology lens that sits comfortably alongside the more detailed case studies that follow. Indonesia is a prominent global producer of seaweed products but climate change impacts—for example more frequent storms, sedimentation, increased rainfall—are affecting the reliability of harvest and supply chains which rely heavily on small-scale community-based production. Women play a crucial role in seaweed economies, and seaweed cultivation is often hailed as a tool for women's empowerment and a livelihood diversification strategy that provides financial buffers for poorer households in times of economic uncertainty. Some studies do report improved well-being and life satisfaction for women involved in seaweed production.[43] Yet apparent empowerment benefits for women are still confined by gender-limited access to financial resources, technology and physical markets.[44] Gendered stereotypes mean that women's labour and what Maddy Bolt refers to as 'feminized knowledge systems' are under-valued or invisible in data and marginalised in decision making on seaweed cultivation economies.[45] Despite their livelihood value, women's contributions are often viewed primarily as an addition to and extension of domestic and household responsibilities, thus *increasing* their time and unpaid caring burdens, or as simply helping their husbands who are the designated fishers and decision-makers.[46]

Practical resistance and the pluriverse

As Zulfa Sakhiyya and co-authors remind us later in this issue, feminist political ecology challenges the reductive and extractive narratives and top-down rational-technocratic interventions that frame mitigation, adaptation, and resilience as measurable strategies—or technologies of governance as Hartoto and colleagues describe them[47]—but pay little attention to the ways in which those narratives and approaches are 'embedded within a

[42] Kurniasari et al., 'Beyond harmony'; see also for a nuanced explanation of the social-religious contexts of Balinese *subak* governance.

[43] Silva Larson et al., 'Women's well-being and household benefits from seaweed farming in Indonesia,' *Aquaculture* 530 (January 2021).

[44] See Ita Sualia and Boedi Julianto, 'Women's leadership in Indonesia's modern seaweed processing industry,' *United Nations Industrial Development Organization,* 31 March 2023, https://www.unido.org/stories/womens-leadership-indonesias-modern-seaweed-processing-industry.

[45] See Maddy Bolt, 'Indonesian women sustain seaweed traditions in a changing climate,' *Mongabay,* 10 June 2025, https://doi.org/10.66709/news-300402.

[46] See Fadhilah Trya Wulandari, *Overview: Gender barriers in aquaculture and fisheries*, (Australia-Indonesia Centre/The Partnership for Australia-Indonesia Research, 2020).

[47] Hartoto et al., 'Gendering the commons.'

socio-ecological relationship … intertwined with power, culture and lived experiences.'[48] This is about more than replacing top-down, state-instigated interventions with bottom-up policy modes, though the latter is at least a starting point. Nevertheless, even supposedly bottom-up approaches to gender-participation run the risk of becoming one of deference to 'invited spaces.'[49] At its core, and drawing on Harcourt, intersectional modes of governance set out to trouble power relations.[50] Many of the articles here are therefore explicit in their push for a more intersectional approach that cultivates heterodox forms of gender-aware and gender-inclusive governance. Transformative participation(s) demand reflexive interventions that function through continually re-negotiated forms of grounded engagement and governance of the kind examined in the articles that follow. The authors described this variously as gender-inclusivity,[51] community action,[52] pioneering resilience,[53] or quiet resilience from the margins.[54] Taken to its logical conclusion, this is the pluriverse as the space of multiple lived experiences, everyday life and social renewal.

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[48] Sakhiyya et al., 'Beyond victimhood.'

[49] For more on 'invited spaces', see Faranak Miraftab, 'Invited and invented spaces of participation: neoliberal citizenship and feminists' expanded notion of politics,' *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies* 1, no. 1 (2004).

[50] See Harcourt, 'Why feminist political ecology matters.'

[51] Hartoto et al., 'Gendering the commons.'

[52] Latuamury et al., 'Women's access to safe water in Eastern Indonesia.'

[53] Sakhiyya et al., 'Beyond victimhood.'

[54] Tanaya, 'Precarity, power, and quiet resilience.'

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