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Preface to Special Issue on Environment and Climate Change in Indonesia: Pursuing Gender Equity

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All over the world, the most disadvantaged people are already feeling the impact of climate change. It impacts on economic activities and well-being in the ability of people to sustain themselves, their families and their communities. At the time of writing (August 2026), there are warnings that the world is about to experience the worst El Niño event in 100 years.[1] Indonesia, as an archipelagic nation in the equatorial zone, is especially susceptible to climate change and the associated severe El Niño events. Many of its communities live in coastal areas, including on small islands where subsistence depends on agriculture and fisheries, both dramatically impacted by disruption to the once reliable variation of the monsoon—the wet and the dry. Rising sea levels and coral bleaching threaten smallholder fisheries. Already (as in other parts of the world) migration from places where livelihoods have become unsustainable is a strong response. But this does not exhaust the ingenuity of Indonesia's farmers and fishers in their efforts to face increasingly severe impacts on their livelihoods from changes to which their contribution (emissions) is negligible.

These impacts do not affect everyone in the same way: equity is critical to understanding the impacts of climate change and response to crises. This special issue of *Intersections* brings together research papers on equity—especially gender equity—and climate change in Indonesia.

The research reported in this special issue was funded through KONEKSI (which means connection in Bahasa Indonesia), Australia's flagship bilateral development assistance program in the knowledge and innovation sector in Indonesia. KONEKSI is funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in partnership with Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional (BRIN), the Indonesian National Research and Innovation Agency, which is tasked with national science, technology, and research. Indonesia has strong policy formulations on facing climate change and ensuring a Just Transition, including gender justice. Indonesia has signed up to the Conference of the Parties (COP) with pledges and is also committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include goals on climate change and gender equity.

The goal of KONEKSI is to contribute to an enduring relationship between Indonesia and Australia that advances mutual interests and supports Indonesia's inclusive and sustainable development.[2] The program aims to increase the use of knowledge-based solutions for inclusive and sustainable policies and technologies. KONEKSI is a vehicle to

[1] See Robert McSweeney and Daisy Dunn, 'Explainer: How the "super El Niño" will reshape the world's weather,' *Carbon Brief,* 18 August 2026, https://interactive.carbonbrief.org/el-nino-explainer/index.html.

[2] For more information, visit KONEKSI (Knowledge Partnership Platform Australia–Indonesia), n.d., https://koneksi-kpp.id/en, accessed 24 August 2026.

produce knowledge on complex socio-economic problems, where effective solutions are often beyond a single sector or category of stakeholders. The program began in 2023, and is funded until 2027. To date (2026), KONEKSI has funded four rounds of collaborative research grants, and contributed to creating 101 knowledge partnerships involving 169 Indonesian organisations and 44 Australian organisations.[3]

A key component of KONEKSI has been a series of competitive grants for teams of Australia-Indonesia research collaborators. The articles in this special issue report on grants in the inaugural collaborative research grants program (the largest to date), on the theme of The Environment and Climate Change (ECC) (2023–25). Funding collaborative research was intended to strengthen collaboration and partnership between researchers in the two countries, with the further aim of finding innovative policy and technological solutions to problems and building research capacity in Indonesia. The successful projects undertook multidisciplinary research on climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience.

Both Indonesian and Australian governments emphasise equity as a goal in their official approaches to development and development assistance. DFAT frames this concern using the term Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI). Equity measured against GEDSI goals is a key pillar of the KONEKSI program. Successful grants were required to build GEDSI concerns into partnerships, design and research methodologies, as well as linking research findings to research with applied outcomes (understood as impact).

The papers in this special issue all have a particular focus on gender equity in the face of climate change, and responses to it, but in line with the GEDSI focus, many researchers also integrate intersectional approaches to understanding social and economic disadvantage. That is, they integrate a concern for gender equity but also class differences, and in some cases consider the concerns of people living with disabilities, in terms of access to resources and unpicking vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change—already being faced by Indonesia in its pursuit of economic growth and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

Gender equity in Indonesia

Indonesia's total population is evenly divided between male and female citizens (females around 143.28 million of a total population of 287.89 million).[4] Women and men have fairly comparable levels of educational attainment but only 53.7 per cent of working-age women are economically active, compared to 82.3 per cent of men.[5] Women are concentrated in services, and the agricultural and manufacturing sectors. Men's wages are on average higher than women's. Many women leave the workforce after marriage or the birth of their first child as they have the burden of household work and caring responsibilities.[6]

The commitment to universal education, which has benefited women, dates from the Suharto era (1966–98), but this regime left a negative legacy of a law that defines men as household heads and women as household managers. This ideology has proven hard to shift,

[3] KONEKSI website.

[4] 'Indonesia,' *World Population Review*, 1 January 2026, https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/indonesia.

[5] 'Indonesia,' *Gender Data Portal: World Bank,* n.d., https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/indonesia (accessed 2 September 2026).

[6] Republic of Indonesia, *Fostering Inclusive Growth: Advancing a Sustainable and Resilient Indonesia: Indonesia's Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2025*, Ministry of National Development Planning (Kementerian PPN/Bappenas), 2025.

and this gendered division of labour is most often referred to as 'traditional,' thus ignoring the historical roles of women in most of the sociocultural groups that comprise Indonesia. Women have long been active participants in extra-domestic economic activities and the Suharto-era ideology places primary responsibility for household management (such as feeding the family) on women. Cultural as well as legal changes are required, including recognition of the unpaid care and domestic work done by women.

At the country level, gender equity has slightly improved in some dimensions. For example, the proportion of women owning agricultural land increased from 19.6 per cent in 2021 to 23.9 per cent in 2023.[7] As the studies in this special issue show, women play important roles in village economies and in household livelihoods and resource management (including critical roles in water management). Temporary migration has been a common response by poor communities to economic challenges arising from climate change, and this can intersect with the sexual division of labour in the household in complex ways, as labour migration is often gender specific (i.e. to gendered occupational niches).

In the higher-level political sphere, Indonesian women have been gaining political representation since the passage of a law requiring political parties to adopt gender quotas, which has been amended to require that women are placed in winnable positions, at the top of party lists, using a 'slipper system' for male and female candidates. Women currently hold 22 per cent of seats in the national parliament, and the upward trend is reflected also in provincial and district parliaments (in 1982, only 9% of parliamentary positions were held by women).[8] In her introduction to this special issue, Elliott notes that 'despite declaratory policies of inclusion and integration, women remain poorly integrated into development planning,' and this is revealed in several studies in this special issue.

A practical consequence of this, evidenced in many of the studies in this issue, is that women are often excluded from village-level decision-making bodies (for example, responses to challenges brought by climate change), as membership is limited to (male) household heads. Women also have less access to technology (such as mobile phones),[9] which hampers their opportunities to participate in the digital economy for example.

Geographical footprint of the research in this special issue

Indonesia is an archipelagic nation comprising over 17,000 islands spanning the equatorial zone, and it encompasses a diversity of ecosystems from large islands with volcanic soils and high rainfall to small coral islands with poor soils for agriculture. The papers in this special issue report on research from across the archipelago, from urban areas, densely populated sectors of 'inner Indonesia' with rich volcanic soils, high rainfall and long-established settled agriculture, to the sparsely populated spaces of the so-called 'Outer Island' with poor soils, high seasonal variation in rainfall and patterns of shifting agriculture. The once predictable monsoonal rains are becoming less predictable as a consequence of global warming, and this renders rural livelihoods—especially in Eastern Indonesia—precarious. Coastal communities throughout the archipelago depend on the seas for their livelihoods.

The research sites covered in this special issue range over diverse ecosystems and local economies: Enrekang (South Sulawesi) for the discussion on social forestry, Central

[7] Republic of Indonesia, *Fostering Inclusive Growth,* 63.

[8] Republic of Indonesia, *Fostering Inclusive Growth,* 53.

[9] In 2023, 63% of women had access to mobile phone, in comparison to 72% for men. See Republic of Indonesia, *Fostering Inclusive Growth,* 64.

Kalimantan for the analysis of fire governance, Pundilemo (South Sulawesi) and Banyusoco (Yogyakarta), Bali for the examination of water governance, Buano Island (West Seram) and Tiga Island (Central Maluku) for the analysis of access to safe water for women, East Kalimantan in connection to energy transition, Kupang, Poso and Yogyakarta for the discussion on climate resilience and Nusa Tenggara Barat and Riau for the examination of coastal change and resilience. This reflects KONEKSI's aim to provide evidence on the diversity and complexity of the Indonesian geographical landscape.

By disseminating research done in locations that are not usually the main focus of research attention, this special issue takes the conversation to areas previously overlooked, expanding the range of geographical discussions to show the diversity and complexity of Indonesian development. The availability of articles in English increases the potential audience of these articles to readers who are interested in Indonesian development but unable to access articles in Bahasa Indonesia.

Bilateral research partnerships

The KONEKSI program aims to contribute to an enduring relationship between Indonesia and Australia through the development of research partnerships between individual researchers and research institutions (mainly universities) in the two countries. The program aims to increase collaboration and mutual understanding in the 'knowledge sector' and to develop research-based solutions that can contribute to inclusive and sustainable policies and technologies. The translation of knowledge acquired through the funded projects into policies that could be implemented by governments at different levels constitutes an important goal for KONEKSI.

The editors of the special issue have been involved in KONEKSI: Sonia Roitman as a grantee and Australian lead on a bilateral team in this round; and Kathryn Robinson as GEDSI and academic advisor, which involved consideration of grants for funding, and also participation in training workshops for Indonesian participants. Over the years, Australia has developed rich connections between researchers and institutions, and the KONEKSI grants have provided a new model for these collaborations. The KONEKSI partnerships build on an already strong record of collaborative research between Australia and Indonesia, revealed in a 2024 report by ACOLA (The Australian Council of Learned Academies).[10] Much of the report used bibliometric data on co-publication, and key findings show that the number of partnerships has been growing, strongest in the last 5–10 years; that Australia is Indonesia's fourth largest research partner by co-authorship; and that collaborations are strong in the sciences (including medical sciences) as well as in the humanities and social sciences. Energy transitions emerged as a key area of collaboration. The report found that in addition to Australian researchers gaining a better understanding of Indonesian situations through collaborations with Indonesian researchers and institutions, the understanding of different research cultures was a critical outcome of partnerships such as those funded by KONEKSI. These forms of deepened understanding contribute to a more effective translation of research findings into policy.

From our experience, successful bilateral relationships require several conditions: First, there needs to be genuine commitment from both parties to building the relationship and conducting the expected activities to fulfil the project's objectives. Second, regular

[10] Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA), *Mapping Australia's Indonesia research capability. 2024 Report.* ACOLA, 2024.

dialogue and communication, including clarifying expectations and working logics, is essential. Third, projects need to be co-designed by partners in an inclusive way that minimises power relationships and hierarchies. Fourth, flexibility and adaptability are crucial, as many elements of the project will not proceed according to the initial plan, and problems and obstacles will need to be overcome. Fifth, mutual understanding and patience are important to overcome cultural differences. All this requires trust, respect and time. Building strong relationships that are not transactional requires time, and often these relationships have started to develop prior to projects being even conceptualised. There is an informal relational stage before any grant application or project implementation that is the basis for a long-lasting partnership.

While bilateral academic partnerships provide strong institutional and personal achievements, they also present challenges, which require careful consideration and management. These challenges might be based on cultural differences, language barriers, and different working logics and expectations.[11] The articles included in this special issue have been able to overcome these challenges to produce high-quality outputs disseminating the findings of the projects.[12]

Scholarship and policy translation

The KONEKSI program assumes that innovative solutions for inclusive and sustainable policies and technologies are generated by knowledge partnerships. Elliott's introduction to this special issue makes a string argument that 'social justice, including gender justice must be at the heart of climate mitigation and adaptation', which she terms 'recognition justice'. Social justice-based solutions are at the heart of many of the articles in this issue.

The authors in this issue draw on global feminist dialogues addressing climate change, most notably feminist political ecology, and tackling social inequity through intersectional analysis. These approaches generate solutions that are not top-down, but grow out of local circumstances and are based on the needs of communities.

The articles in this special issue demonstrate the interconnection of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which requires considering them as a comprehensive framework, rather than in isolation. All articles address issues of gender equity (SDG5) and climate action (SDG13), but they also refer to other SDGs: SDG6 (clean water and sanitation) in the articles by Mutiara Kurniasari et al. and Bokiraiya Latuamury et al.,[13] SDG15 (life on land) in the

[11] There is a large body of literature on this. See for example, Adhi Indra Hermanu, Tri Sundari, and Ocky Karna Radjasa, 'Efficiency Analysis of International Research Collaboration: A DEA Approach on Indonesian University Research Partner Counties,' *Higher Education Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2025): e70008, https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.70008; and Sonia Roitman, Bakti Setiawan, Annisa Hadny Zakiyaturrahmah and Ainun Murwani, 'Beyond University Planning Studio Courses: Involving Civil Society Organizations in Educating Planners,' *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 44, no. 3 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X221074062.

[12] All articles included in this issue went through a blind peer review process involving at least two independent reviewers. We are extremely grateful to these reviewers who volunteered their time to undertake this activity.

[13] See Mutiara Kurniasari et al., 'Beyond harmony: climate adaptation, gender inequality, and symbolic governance in Bali,' *Intersections*, this issue, and Bokiraiya Latuamury et al., 'Women's access to safe water in Eastern Indonesia: intersectional inequities and climate adaptation pathways,' *Intersections*, this issue.

articles by Annisa Hartoto et al. and Nurul Amin[14], SDG11 (inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements) in the articles by Zulfa Sakhiyya et al., Sofyan Ansori et al. and Smita Tanaya,[15] and SDG7 (affordable and clean energy) in the article by Martha Mendrofa et al.[16]

These articles offer evidence that can be translated into policy recommendations for governments, as follows:

- There are obstacles in accessing forest management rights due to established conditions such as: only farmers and heads of households, who are designated as such in their identity cards (KTP), can be members of Forest Farmer Groups (*Kelompok Tani Hutan* (KTH). This proportionally disadvantages women who are rarely acknowledged as household heads in Indonesia.[17] These conditions that hinder equal opportunities for women should be revised by the government, which could contribute to women getting a higher financial remuneration and their contribution to the local economy being valued.
- The participation and contribution of women in fire governance is poorly acknowledged, as discussed by Sofyan Ansori et al. This is due to cultural norms with prevailing patriarchal values and elite capture processes. At the local level, it is important for the government to advocate for more inclusive participatory processes where women can participate freely, without cultural sanctions.
- The income gender gap still reproduces gender inequalities, as evidenced by farmers and firefighters.[18] This gap needs to be addressed by the government as one of the main conditions towards achieving gender equity (SDG5).
- Gender-inclusive approaches to governance do provide better benefits for women than male-dominated models. This is shown by Hartoto et al. for the case of social forestry management, Tanaya for the analysis of livelihoods in coastal areas, and by Kurniasari et al. and Latuamury et al. for the analysis of water management. The outcomes of gender-inclusive approaches go beyond income or productivity, including social cohesion, confidence and well-being. It is important for the government to advocate for gender-inclusive approaches to be implemented in social and economic projects. This will contribute to more equal opportunities for decision-making between men and women.
- Women are more affected by climate change. To overcome this deficit, it is important to create conditions for women to be able to make decisions and lead adaptation practices to mitigate climate change, as documented by Sakhiyya et al.

[14] Annisa Sabrina Hartoto et al., 'Gendering the commons: climate change and forest governance in Indonesia', *Intersections*, this issue; Nurul Auliya Amin, 'How control shapes gender inequality in social forestry: Implications for access, participation and benefits in South Sulawesi, Indonesia,' *Intersections*, this issue.

[15] Zulfa Sakhiyya et al., 'Beyond victimhood: gendering climate resilience in Indonesia through feminist participatory action research,' *Intersections*, this issue; Sofyan Ansori et al., 'Women in flames: gendered exclusion in Indonesia's fire governance,' *Intersections*, this issue; Smita Tanaya, 'Precarity, power, and quiet resilience: women and young people navigating climate-driven coastal change in Indonesia,' *Intersections*, this issue.

[16] 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.

[17] Amin, 'How control shapes gender inequality in social forestry.'

[18] Ansori et al., 'Women in flames.'

- Women are more vulnerable to some adaptive changes responding to climate change. For example, the energy transition moving away from coal production severely impacts women's jobs, as discussed by Mendrofa et al. The energy transition process is not gender neutral. Solutions to support and diversify women's livelihoods need to be developed by government and other stakeholders to minimise the negative impacts of this transition.
- A stronger commitment to gender mainstreaming is required in policies at local, regional and national levels.

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