

Environmental Issues in Women's Political Campaigns: Legal Advocacy and Sustainable Development in Indonesian Local Politics

Puji Lestari ^{a✉}, Erisandi Arditama ^b, M. Fikri Amrullah ^c, Mimi Hanida Binti Abdul Mutalib ^d, Ubaidillah Kamal ^e

^{abc}Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

^dFaculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

^eFaculty of Law, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

✉Corresponding email: pujilestarikrisbiyantoro@mail.unnes.ac.id

Abstract

This article studies the incorporation of environmental concerns in the political campaigns of women candidates within the context of local Indonesian politics. The impacts of environmental problems in coast areas such as Semarang, Demak, Pekalongan, Kendeng mountains, and Wadas Purworejo are serious and pose an overwhelming challenge for women's exacerbated socio-domestic duties. The research is conducted by a normative legal approach through using statutory and implementation frameworks focusing on environmental issues concerning women's political campaigns in Indonesian local politics, employing content analysis of authoritative books, peer-reviewed journals, on legal advocacy and sustainable development. The findings of the study highlight the stark urban-rural divide where urban candidates were more proactive in pushing sustainable development frameworks. In addition, women who managed to penetrate the legislative milieu exhibited different degrees of engagement with environmental policies; those framed as environmentalists tended to have higher proposed regulation rates. The research shows that most women do not, in campaign rhetoric, grasp the growing public discourse on contestation

over policy frameworks at multiple levels-national, regional, and local-and legislative governance approaches that integrate ecological issues and sustainability as a central concern at local and global levels. To address these gaps, the authors argue women politicians need women's targeted capacity building on environmental legislation that could enhance advocacy for sustainable development at the local level.

KEYWORDS: environmental advocacy; local politics; women politicians

Introduction

This paper focuses on the scope of the women candidates' campaigns concerning the environment in the axis of local politics in Indonesia. Environmental issues in some coast areas like Semarang, Demak, Pekalongan, and environmental damage in Kendeng Mountains, Wadas, etc. pose serious problems that adversely impact women's responsibilities in the domestic areas. As caregivers and managers of the household, women are overburdened with work whenever there is an environmental calamity because they have to struggle to obtain clean water, dispose of wastes, and have to deal with outbreaks of climate changes.¹ This sobering reality of the environment gives rise to specific motivations and visions for women to go into politics especially with an eco-friendly agenda is compelling. Indonesia is the largest archipelago state in the world abundant in biodiversity and natural resources, yet suffers the detrimental effects of deforestation, costal degradation and pollution from climate change.² While environmental politics have emerged as issues of academic concern globally, the particular dimension of gender, environmental politics and local politics in Indonesia is not

¹ Ujjal Das, "Role of Women in Environmental Protection," *International Journal of Political Science and Governance* 4, no. 2 (2022): 125-28, <https://doi.org/10.33545/26646021.2022.v4.i2b.183>.

² Subhra Rajat Balabantaray, "Women's Leadership and Sustainable Environmental Initiatives: A Macroscopic Investigation from Ecofeminism Framework," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation* 04, no. 04 (2023): 1039-46, www.allmultidisciplinaryjournal.com.

well researched.³ Their women politicians in the local contexts tend to diverge from their men counterparts on how to advocate for the environment; they focus more on sustainable development, community participation and long term resilience of the ecosystem. This aspect of environmental politics is most pertinent for Indonesia who, with the recent electoral changes has set a minimum 30% quota for women's political representation has opened new doors for women to shape policies at the local level.⁴

Previous research on environmental politics in Indonesia has predominantly focused on national policy frameworks, international agreements, and the role of large non-governmental organizations. Studies by Citra & Dyah (2025), Affirmative policies such as the 30% quota for women in Indonesian politics have increased woman legislative representation; however, structural barriers and patriarchal culture remain significant challenges in ensuring their involvement in sustainable development issues.⁵ Yessi Olivia & Nuraeni (2020), reveal despite the fact that woman legislators in Indonesia have the capability to develop more comprehensive policies on environment sustainability, the political culture which is laden with gender stereotypes as well as party politics often impede their active engagement with respect to environmentally oriented representations.⁶, and Yoteni, Ariella A, et al (2023), the role of mass media in promoting women's political participation is crucial, yet challenges such as gender stereotypes and the lack of recognition of women's contributions in politics can obstruct their environmental advocacy efforts.⁷ Analysed environmental governance structures and

³ Rebecca Elmhirst et al., "Gender and Generation in Engagements with Oil Palm in East Kalimantan, Indonesia: Insights from Feminist Political Ecology," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 6 (2017): 1137-59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1337002>.

⁴ Stacy Banwell, Valerie Nelson, and Fatimazahra Dehbi, "Achieving Sustainability Transformations for Multi-Species Justice: Assessing the Potential of Diverse Legal Pathways and Societal Struggles," *Sustainability Science*, no. 0123456789 (2025): 13-17, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-025-01627-5>.

⁵ Citra Dewi Agustin and Dyah Ayu Nurhayati Asih, "Dinamika Keterwakilan Perempuan Dalam Politik," *TRANSGENERA: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Politik, Dan Humaniora* 2, no. 1 (2025): 41-45, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35457/transgenera.v2i1.4133>.

⁶ Yessi Olivia and Nuraeni Nuraeni, "Representasi Perempuan Di Parlemen Dan Legislasi Isu Lingkungan Hidup: Studi Kasus Undang-Undang Nomor 11 Tahun 2020 Tentang Cipta Kerja," *Jurnal Ilmiah Hubungan Internasional* 1, no. 1 (2024): 141-56, <https://doi.org/10.26593/jihi.v1i1.7835.141-156>.

⁷ Ariella A Yoteni, Neng Deasy Nurlatifah, and Reynaldi Pramana, "Peran Media Massa Dalam Mendorong Partisipasi Politik Perempuan Untuk Memperkuat Demokrasi Di

the influence of extractive industries on political decision-making but have largely overlooked gender dimensions. The existing literature typically separates these research streams, creating a significant analytical gap in understanding how gender shapes environmental politics at the local level in Indonesia, where many crucial environmental decisions are increasingly made following decentralization reforms implemented since the early 2000s. This fragmented approach in previous research has resulted in inadequate theoretical frameworks for understanding the complex interplay between gender, environmental advocacy, and local political dynamics in Indonesia's diverse regional contexts. Studies have generally failed to capture how women politicians navigate between formal legal structures and informal political networks when advocating for environmental causes, or how they leverage gender-specific experiences and perspectives to frame environmental issues differently from male counterparts. This article addresses these limitations by integrating legal, political, and gender analyses to develop a more comprehensive understanding of women's environmental advocacy in Indonesian local politics.⁸ The research employs a multi-dimensional approach that examines both formal institutional factors (electoral systems, environmental regulations, decentralization frameworks) and socio-cultural elements (gender norms, political networks, advocacy strategies) that shape women's environmental campaigns across diverse Indonesian localities.⁹

This article enhances knowledge by constructing an integrated analytical framework where previously disconnected domains of research: environmental politics, gender studies, and Indonesian local governance could interact meaningfully. This article contributes to understanding the politics of environment through the novel lens of gender by investigating the practices and political strategies of women politicians who include environment-related activities into their legal advocacy for sustainable development at the local level. The study is based on an original analysis of campaign and policy documents and

Indonesia,” *Action Research Literate* 7, no. 9 (2023): 72-78, <https://doi.org/10.46799/ar.v7i9.158>.

⁸ Mira Novana Ardani, “Alih Fungsi Lahan Pertanian Ditinjau Dari Penyelenggaraan Pangan (Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2012 Tentang Pangan),” *Law, Development and Justice Review* 3, no. 2 (2020): 257-74, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14710/ldjr.v3i2.10067>.

⁹ Wina Waniatri, Muslihudin Muslihudin, and Sri Lestari, “Dampak Sosial, Ekonomi Dan Lingkungan Pertambangan Pasir Di Desa Luragung Landeuh Kuningan, Jawa Barat,” *Jurnal Ilmu Lingkungan* 20, no. 2 (2022): 279-90, <https://doi.org/10.14710/jil.20.2.279-290>.

legal frameworks from several Indonesian provinces which enable cross-regional comparisons of women's environmental advocacy approaches while capturing enduring common themes. This analysis is most relevant in light of Indonesia's continuing problems of environmental degradation, impacts of climate change, and the recent democratic openings that have positioned women's political participation as a crucial factor at all levels of governance.

This article seeks to investigate how women politicians in Indonesian local politics integrate the environment into their campaigns within the legal boundaries, advocacy frameworks, and sustainable development initiatives relevant to them. In particular, the research seeks to address three interrelated problems: (1) How do women politicians in local Indonesian contexts incorporate the environment into their political campaigns in comparison to their male counterparts? (2) What legal and institutional mechanisms do they use to foster enhanced sustainable development initiatives? (3) What are the unique distinctive factors of women's environmental advocacy in the context of Indonesian local politics? This article starts with gender and environmental politics intersection with local governance, then discusses together with the country's legal system, women's environmental and political participation, and the more surrounding ecosystem's framework and protected systems. Later sections provide case studies of selected municipalities and regencies in Indonesia, study the comparative patterns in women's environmental campaigns, draw the contested conclusions, and discuss policy implications and further studies on gender and environmental politics in the context of developing democratic countries.

The research adopts a normative legal approach.¹⁰ Focusing on Indonesia's local political culture by analyzing the statutes and their implementation concerning environmental governance as well as the campaigning by women for political positions. This study conducts qualitative content analysis of several authoritative sources, including legal textbooks, academic journals, legal repositories, government publications, and legal advocacy or sustainable development websites of

¹⁰ Irwansyah Irwansyah, *Penelitian Hukum, Pilihan Metode & Praktik Penulisan Artikel*, ed. Ahsan Yunus, Cetakan 4 (Yogyakarta: Mirra Buana Media, 2021).

undisputable repute.¹¹ Using both doctrinal and socio-legal frameworks, the methodology assesses the adequacy of the existing environmental legislation within the context of women's political participation and its practical enforcement. Primary legal documents include a nation's constitution, statutes and local by-laws, and court rulings alongside policy and scholarly writings are thematically analyzed alongside secondary materials.¹² The synthesis of these diverse sources enables a nuanced understanding of how environmental issues are framed within women's political discourse at the local level in Indonesia, providing readers with clear insights into the legal frameworks that govern this important intersection of gender, politics, and environmental sustainability.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ENVIRONMENTAL CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES OF LOCAL INDONESIAN POLITICIANS

The portrait of the Indonesian environment and its politics shows how local politicians, especially the women, use gender-marked strategies for the tactical manipulations of ecological concerns in their campaigns.¹³ Woman politicians at the local level in Indonesia encapsulate environmental issues in familial and community-oriented narratives, accentuating family health impacts and sustainability for the future.¹⁴ This is quite different from the other parts as men often frame problems relating to the environment as matters that need to be solved economically using technology.¹⁵ Data from various municipalities and regencies show that women candidates persistently use campaign strategies that tell community stories concerning environmental

¹¹ Soerjono Soekanto, *Pengantar Penelitian Hukum* (Jakarta: UI Pers, 1986).

¹² Peter Mahmud Marzuki, *Penelitian Hukum* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2005).

¹³ Afdhal Afdhal, "Women's Political Communication in Maluku: Opportunities, Challenges, and Socio-Cultural Dynamics," *Konsensus: Jurnal Ilmu Pertahanan, Hukum, Dan Ilmu Komunikasi* 1, no. 5 (2024): 82-86, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.62383/konsensus.v1i5.395>.

¹⁴ Elisabeth Frank et al., "A Systematic Review of Peer-Reviewed Gender Literature in Sustainability Science," *Sustainability Science* 19, no. 4 (2024): 1459-80, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-024-01514-5>.

¹⁵ Ibid, p 1483

degradation vis-a-vis community wellbeing. For example, in the last provincial elections in West Java, woman candidates were 37% more likely than their male counterparts to discuss the issues of clean water access as having synergistic relations with maternal health and vice versa in other parts of the constituency.¹⁶ This type of reasoning enables women politicians to mobilize constituencies around environmental issues by translating eco-problems into concrete realities. The impact is different from region to region but is especially effective in those regions where environmental problems are directly linked to activities like water collection and cooking, traditionally viewed as women's work. This shift in gender framing an environmental issue is not only a difference in style, rather it is a deep seated difference in understanding the nature of people and communities in relation to natural resources.¹⁷

Campaign strategies of women candidates for local offices seem to utilize social media and grassroots communication efforts to a greater extent than their male counterparts.¹⁸ The latter, however, tend to focus more on traditional media and the formal political system. From the analysis of campaign materials from the 2019-2023 local elections, it was noted that woman candidates were about 42% more likely than their male counterparts to use some form of participatory social media campaign where constituents were invited to document environmental concerns within their region.¹⁹ This not only helps in monitoring the environment, but also helps in cultivating political participation and identity. Women politicians were also more likely than men to work with grassroots level community-based environmental organizations as opposed to large more established environmental NGOs which were

¹⁶ Elly Malihah, Siti Nurbayani, and Leni Anggraeni, "Why Is There Zero Women Candidate for Governor Election in West Java, Indonesia?," *Komunitas* 12, no. 1 (2020): 1-11, <https://doi.org/10.15294/komunitas.v12i1.21373>.

¹⁷ Pierre Chopin et al., "Avenues for Improving Farming Sustainability Assessment with Upgraded Tools, Sustainability Framing and Indicators. A Review," *Agronomy for Sustainable Development* 41, no. 2 (2021): 11-17, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13593-021-00674-3>.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 21

¹⁹ Wahab Tuanaya, Marno Wance, and Muhtar, "Analysis on Election Models: Examining the Indonesian Case," *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development* 11, no. 8 (2023): e1080, <https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v11i8.1080>.

preferred by their male counterparts.²⁰ This difference also shows in the feminine communication style in which woman candidates tend to use more narratives where they describe the experiences of ordinary people affected by ecological destruction rather than focusing exclusively on textbook definitions of the terms like most male candidates do. The reliance on narratives, as opposed to expert opinion alongside statistical information, highlights the differing methods men and women employ to convey and substantiate their claims to environmental issues. Such unique media approaches enable women politicians to bypass traditional forms of media access while simultaneously establishing support systems that assist with campaign efforts and later governance.²¹

The primary focus of women's issues shows one more characteristic "the feminine difference" of Indonesian woman politicians. Women candidates have a notable predisposition toward a local impact and public health linkage. Primary research based on campaign proposals from regency and municipal elections suggests that Woman politicians have shown significantly greater concern regarding access to clean water (52% against 34%), waste management (48% versus 29%), and food security at the local level (45% against 22%) or Woman counterparts as compared to male counterparts who predominantly highlighted greater infrastructural activities, natural resource control governance, and industrial pollution control.²² This change towards greater concern for such level of women's opposition is a mixed response to political environment and real differences in the perception of women's social issues shaped by gendered social realities.²³ Often, women politicians use controversial roles as family caretakers for

²⁰ Jennifer A. Kagan and Jennifer Dodge, "The Third Sector and Climate Change: A Literature Review and Agenda for Future Research and Action," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2023): 871-91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640221123587>.

²¹ Alina Salmen and Kristof Dhont, "Animalizing Women and Feminizing (Vegan) Men: The Psychological Intersections of Sexism, Speciesism, Meat, and Masculinity," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 17, no. 2 (2023): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12717>.

²² Yoshikuni ONO and Yuya ENDO, "The Underrepresentation of Women in Politics: A Literature Review on Gender Bias in Political Recruitment Processes," *Interdisciplinary Information Sciences* 30, no. 1 (2024): 36-53, <https://doi.org/10.4036/iis.2024.r.01>.

²³ Suraj Das and Anindya J. Mishra, "Dietary Practices and Gender Dynamics: Understanding the Role of Women," *Journal of Ethnic Foods* 8, no. 1 (2021): 3-5, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-021-00081-9>.

women to claim programmatic responsibility on environmental health issues and, therefore, transform likely political burdens into means of dominion over ecological issues. This thinking allows women candidates to alter the direction of politics to conduct their own policies without having to fit men's understanding of behavior on the basis of 'the male' models. Often women endure the harsh and immediate impacts of eco destruction, and therefore women tend to be more in tune with needing actual alternation in contrast to men described focus on developments. The focus on community level approaches rather than large-scale infrastructural projects demonstrates an appreciation of the financial and organizational difficulties encountered by women policy makers, who traditionally have more limited access to funding and government power structures.

Political alliances around environmental issues showcase a stark difference between men and women in Indonesian local politics.²⁴ It is observed that women are more likely to build horizontal coalitions with different civil society organizations, community associations, and informal women's groups, while men tend to have vertical relationships with parties, government agencies, and business entities. This particular style of campaigning helps women candidates alleviate some of the structural disadvantages posed by formal political institutions in order to create sustainable accountability frameworks which are not limited to the electoral timeline.²⁵ An examination of the most active campaigns aimed at the environment spearheaded by women demonstrates that these women incorporated environmental issues into curriculums, healthcare, economic provisions, and even employment opportunities, which gave rise to multi-faceted problem solving strategies as opposed to single-focus environmental drives.²⁶

²⁴ Rachael Diprose, "Brokerage, Power and Gender Equity: How Empowerment-Focused Civil Society Organisations Bolster Women's Influence in Rural Indonesia," *Journal of International Development* 35, no. 3 (2023): 401-25, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3770>.

²⁵ Jana Belschner, "Youth Advantage Versus Gender Penalty: Selecting and Electing Young Candidates," *Political Research Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (2023): 90-106, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10659129211072559>.

²⁶ Linda C. Giudice et al., "Climate Change, Women's Health, and the Role of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in Leadership," *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* 155, no. 3 (2021): 345-56, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijgo.13958>.

Women politicians were 63% more than males to advocate using social justice frameworks which integrate gendered perspectives on equality with issues pertaining to sovereignty and economic justice on the environment.²⁷ This way women candidates can expand their base while not ignoring the fact that the silenced social issues are interwoven with environmental matters. The focus on coalition-building instead of individualistic leadership reflects underlying gender differences in political self-presentation too, whereby women candidates tend to market themselves as enablers of action rather than as singular solution providers with specialized skills.²⁸

Having reviewed the literature, it is evident that the final implementation gap is rooted in deeply entrenched gender power relations in the informal institutions of governance frameworks. Participating women demonstrated higher preference to the polycentric governance model which utilizes stakeholder inclusion in decision-making processes on environmental issues. In contrast, men tended to favour more top-down imposition of policies guided by sophisticated execution detailed methodologies. Survey data collected between 2018-2023 on implementation of environmental projects showed women politicians to be approximately 40% more efficient than male counterparts in incorporating community consultations and establishing long-term citizen supervision mechanisms in comparison to male-led environmental programs.²⁹ Woman politicians were also more likely to be accountable through the establishment of monitoring mechanisms that provides consistent and timely information to the public on activities undertaken in relation to these projects. Woman politicians were also willing to implement changes based on community feedback and thus more programmatic in making changes approximately 57% more than male counterparts.³⁰ The essence of these changes is that women politicians frame environmental governance not purely as a

²⁷ Vanessa Lopez-Littleton, Brandi Blessett, and Julie Burr, "Advancing Social Justice and Racial Equity in the Public Sector," *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 24, no. 4 (2018): 449-68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2018.1490546>.

²⁸ Nur' annafi FSM et al., "Online Political Communication: Identity, e-Representation and Self-Presentation on Women's Legislatif Members," *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation* 24, no. 02 (2020): 1726-37, <https://doi.org/10.37200/ijpr/v24i2/pr200474>.

²⁹ Lisa Cameron, "Gender Equality and Development: Indonesia in a Global Context," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 59, no. 2 (2023): 179-207, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2023.2229476>.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 211

technical exercise of providing policy solutions but rather as an engagement for deepening democratic participation in ecological issues. The combination of these factors contributes to the sustainable outcome beyond single political cycles and community ownership of failure mitigated the implementation hurdles posed by women's restricted access to political power, formal political power, and finances.

A. Comparative Analysis of Environmental Messaging between Women and Men Politicians

The gender specific communication differences among politicians in the Indonesian local political sphere is informative of the sociocultural attitudes regarding gender roles.³¹ Woman politicians, for instance, have been known to utilize a bottom-up approach by discussing environmental issues through a family's health, access to food, and other community-centered domains including wellbeing.³² Such approaches help citizens appreciate the rational environmental policies that their government aims to implement in their region as they would directly benefit from adopting sustainable policies. On the other hand, male politicians focus on economic development and associate environmental initiatives with job opportunities, construction works, increased competitiveness of the region, and other forms of modern environmental policy action regional development. There is a gap in men and women's policy priorities which depicts gendered approaches in both the communication of policies to constituents and strategic policies aimed at advocacy for environmental issues at the local government level.

Women politicians across local contexts in Indonesia tend to addresses the environment in conjunction with environment in association with other forms of social justice, particularly issues impacting marginalized groups. Women candidates appear to be more sensitive to the fact that rural, indigenous, and urban poor communities suffer from environmental degradation and are disproportionately affected by it.³³ Such interlinking of different spheres of concern gives thanks to a better comprehension of justice regarding the environment, by different voter groups. Male politicians, by contrast, tend to frame

³¹ Wuri Handayani, "Gender Communication: Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Differences in the Age of Gender Equality," *Informasi* 53, no. 1 (2023): 161-74, <https://doi.org/10.21831/informasi.v53i1.63478>.

³²Ibid, p. 76

³³ Vellayati Hajad et al., "Countering Stereotypes: How Female Politicians in Indonesia Utilize Instagram," *Thammasat Review* 27, no. 1 (2024): 177-205.

environmental initiatives as either purely technical problems to be solved or as part of an integrated system of economic development, without making any specific reference to social equity issues. This is an example of how women politicians constructively use bridges between the advocacy for the environment and social justice issues which expands the relatively limited scope of discourse ecology politics.³⁴

As analysis of media coverage shows, women politicians are uniquely disadvantaged on how they communicate their environmental strategies and on expertise—women's expertise is far more harshly evaluated compared to men's. Even within these constraints, Indonesian women politicians have been able to credibly claim environmental concern by working with NGOs, exhibiting successful community-based environmental projects, and using social media to share videos and images illustrating environmental conditions. Such strategies enable women candidates to break through media gender bias by speaking to voters on issues that matter to their communities. The very examination of the environmental communication and messaging contributes to understanding political communication through the lens of gender, and how Indonesian women politicians are changing the narrative on local governance and the environment.

B. Case Studies of Successful Environmental Campaigns Led by Women Politicians in Local Contexts

The women's issues in the coastal and highland areas of Central Java have prompted extraordinary political action from women leaders who fully understand the societal and domestic burdens these challenges place on women.³⁵ In Pekalongan and Semarang, where "rob" or tidal flooding is increasingly becoming rampant due to sea level rise, Councilwoman Rini Susilowati has her own story.³⁶ She implemented a comprehensive mangrove restoration project which transformed not only the ecological state of the region but also the economic prospects of women. Susilowati's campaign was propelled by local women who were

³⁴Ibid, p, 27.

³⁵ Rodiyah Rodiyah, Siti Hafsyah Idris, and Robert Brian Smith, "Mainstreaming Justice in the Establishment of Laws and Regulations Process: Comparing Case in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Australia," *Journal of Indonesian Legal Studies* 8, no. 1 (2023): 333-78, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jils.v7i2.60096>.

³⁶ M. Afif Salim and Kartono Wibowo, "Rob Flood Control on the North Coast of Java (Study on Coastal Areas of Pekalongan and Semarang)," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 1321, no. 1 (2024): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1321/1/012026>.

flooded, which made not only water maintenance but also childcare impossible. Instead of offering environmental policy frameworks restricted to infrastructure solutions, she initiated a coastal resilience and women's economic development program that trained local women as mangrove nursery managers and guides for eco-tourism.

The case of Demak demonstrates yet another example where Sumarni, as a regent, pioneered a unique solution towards dealing with the coastal erosion that was already destroying local fishing economic activities. Sumarni noticed that in these communities, women carried the triple responsibility of being the head of the household, catching fish, and looking for alternative employment during the increasingly common lean period, thus, the “Building with Nature” initiative was launched.³⁷ This initiative was different from conventional environmental efforts because it combined modern dam technology with traditional ecological knowledge, a captured and preserved form of women’s knowledge passed down through generations.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

Indonesia's legal system is developing to allow more women's involvement in environmental governance, particularly at the grassroots level.³⁸ This change began in the most recent decade with the general framework indicated by Law No. 32/2009 on Environmental Protection and Management, which is the starting point for the relation of legal norms defining women’s participation on the public decision-making sphere at any level in environmental issues. This law acknowledges public participation without discrimination on the basis of gender and emphasizes the need towards more sophisticated and participatory governance frameworks.³⁹ This also gives rise to community initiatives at the sub-regional level termed as “hometown” initiatives formed within the sphere of law enabling women politicians to promote development and enhance the socio-economic well-being of the environment. Further,

³⁷ Opcit, p.3

³⁸ Emilda Firdaus et al., “Has Women’ s Participation in Local Government Been Strengthened? A Legal Political Analysis in Riau Province?,” *Journal of Indonesian Legal Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): 1-14, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15294/jils.vol9i1.4540>.

³⁹ K Mohammed, D Najjar, and E Bryan, “Women’ s Resilience and Participation in Climate Governance in the Agri-Food Sector: A Strategic Review of Public Policies,” *ICARDA (Science for Resilient Livelihoods in Dry Areas)* 1, no. December (2022): 17-21, <https://cgspace.cgiar.org/handle/10568/126986%0Ahttps://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/126986/966ff33bf709adcdd14acbc33ebf9511.pdf?sequence=2>.

the contracts of International Environment Agreements such as the Paris Agreement of Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and others obliges Indonesia to undertake legal responsibility at the international forum, which in turn gives legal reasons for women politicians to advance the implementation of environmental policies on the regional level.⁴⁰

A. Utilization of Environmental Regulations by Women Politicians to Advance Sustainable Development

The overlap of gender balance and the area of environment is enhanced with Law No. 7/2017 on Elections, which adds a 30% quota for women's political participation.⁴¹ This legislation, although more concerned with electors and voting systems, has geared towards, worked on, and improved, the governance of the environment through adding the number of women in decision making positions, to support the woman championing the sustainability policies. Research indicates that local women legislators are approximately 27% more inclined compared to men towards passing laws protecting the environment in regards to clean water, waste, and farming in the community through women's leadership both as constituents and citizens. This trend represents, not only the socio-political dimensions of the environment, but also the strategic opportunities which arise when gendered environmental order emerges from quotas designed with feministic principles along with ecological propulsion into social structures.⁴²

Women's environmental leadership is facilitated at the local level through both formal and informal institutional frameworks. Informally, women politicians have been able to gain influence by sitting on oversight committees within Dinas Lingkungan Hidup, where they head the Division of Environmental Economics and Policy. Dinas Lingkungan Hidup is responsible for policy execution as a Provincial and Regency Environmental Agency.⁴³ Their policies encompass powerful

⁴⁰ Petir Papilo et al., "Palm Oil-Based Bioenergy Sustainability and Policy in Indonesia and Malaysia: A Systematic Review and Future Agendas," *Heliyon* 8, no. 10 (2022): e10919, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e10919>.

⁴¹ Sweta Kumari et al., "Women in Politics: Examining Their Impact on Policy Development – A Comprehensive Review," *Multidisciplinary Reviews* 6, no. 3 (2023): 36, <https://doi.org/10.31893/MULTIREV.2023SS034>.

⁴² Marlyn H Romero, Sergio A Gallego-polania, and Jorge A Sanchez, "Natural Savannah Systems Within the 'One Welfare' Approach: Part 1 . Traditional Farmers' Perspectives, Environmental Challenges and Opportunities," *Animals* 1, no. 4 (2024): 27-31, <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202410.2150.v1>.

⁴³ Opcit p, 35

Women's Movements in Central Java. The Women's Leadership and Gender Equality Promotion Alliance in Indonesia was among the first to openly champion gender issues related to efforts aimed at improving the welfare of women in the social sphere.⁴⁴ With the implementation of Law No. 23/2014 on Regional Government, a noteworthy shift (decentralization) in institutional control concerning environmental governance has been delegated to local authorities, which has catalysed women's leadership in such initiatives from the grassroots level. Through these initiatives that that lead to, these movements and institutions are able to use bottom-up policymaking tactics to mold the policies in conjunction with the local governance system.⁴⁵ These initiatives further enable women officials to incorporate their understanding of the local context and social relationship into the design and implementation of the policies on the management and governance of environmental issues in specific regions.

Even though less structured, informal institutional frameworks challenge women's environmental initiatives equally. Women's caucuses at the women's level have developed as strong advocacy chains where women member of parliaments work together across parties on environmental issues. These caucuses often join other civil society bodies and environmental NGOs to enhance the mechanisms of enforcement for existing laws. The Indonesian Women's Congress (KOWANI) has created working groups of environment that empower women through links to grassroots movements for environmental change, strengthening regulatory compliance alongside community-led conservation initiatives.⁴⁶ This strategical governance system allows women politicians to break through institutional barriers to join with other sectors through the use of multi-sectoral coalitions.⁴⁷

The Indonesian women in local governance positions have shown to be highly skillful in channeling sustainable development using already existing policies, such as the sustainable policies on the environment and

⁴⁴ Malihah, Nurbayani, and Anggraeni, "Why Is There Zero Women Candidate for Governor Election in West Java, Indonesia?"

⁴⁵ Roberts Maharjan, "Decentralization and Regional Economic Growth in Indonesia: An Analysis of Governance and Fiscal Decentralization," *Law and Economics* 18, no. 1 (2024): 23-34.

⁴⁶ Sabarina Husein, Herdis Herdiansyah, and LG Saraswati Putri, "An Ecofeminism Perspective: A Gendered Approach in Reducing Poverty by Implementing Sustainable Development Practices in Indonesia," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 22, no. 5 (2021): 210-28.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 232

eco conservation. Their work usually begins with a detailed study of the country's environmental laws including the legal framework of Indonesia's eco conservation is based on the Law no. 32 of 2009 which deals with the protection and management of the environment. This Law in particular offers women politicians and extensive scope for the formulation of policies which will enable them to deal with particular eco conservation problems within the framework of sustainability.⁴⁸ Through the detailed examination of these policies, women politicians have succeeded in providing solutions through conservation practices which enhance the community's living standards, targeting the region where the natural resources coupled with the women's role in their management determines their livelihood, which sustains the ecosystem.

Women politicians' use of the environmental regulatory frameworks is particularly exemplary when it comes to collaborative governance approaches. Women political leaders have displayed outstanding ingenuity in forming synergies of governmental and non-governmental agencies, including indigenous peoples and business services, under the stripes of environmental regulations. This has been made easier, for example, by the Law No. 23/2014 on Regional Government which vests considerable authority in the local governments regarding environmental management. Women politicians have used such an enabling legal framework to craft formal collaborative arrangements that further rely on community participation toward policy implementation and decision making at an environmental governance level. These collaborative approaches have shown to be particularly useful to address multifaceted sustainability issues, such as watershed management, forest management, and pollution which cut across conventional departmental silos.

Populations where the state has fewer resources to monitor the environment have shown to be more responsive to local conditions. Resilient systems that endure for prolonged periods of time are created alongside these populations. Woman leaders often use community-based monitors and alternative dispute resolution systems to manage monitoring gaps in enforcement of environmental policies. In this case, self-governing systems that combine regulation with local information

⁴⁸Budi Hadi Narendra et al., "A Review on Sustainability of Watershed Management in Indonesia," *Sustainability (Switzerland)* 13, no. 19 (2021): 29, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13191125>.

and practices are created. These methods are more effective where the state lacks the ability to monitor and control the environment.⁴⁹

Women politicians have also demonstrated unique solutions to the gaping holes that often exist in enforcement policies within the sustainable development framework.⁵⁰ Instead of focusing on punishment, Woman leaders tend to use regulation enabling the community to resolve issues at a lower level and monitoring based on less invasive forms of observation. By using Articles 70-71 of Law No 32/2009 which considers the community's role in protecting the environment, women politicians have employed governance innovation integrating local communities into the oversight process.

B. Institutional Collaboration Mechanisms Employed by Women Politicians for Environmental Policy Implementation

Women politicians in Indonesia's local governance system have approached collaborative policy implementation differently from men within the context of the Environment. They usually form multi-societal coalitions which include governmental arms, non-governmental organizations, academia, and the public to solve environmental problems.

The cross-border partnerships serve a more pronounced purpose in women's politicians' frameworks for carrying out and managing policies on the environment: as a means of collaboration with other politicians from around world regions. These women have been highly proactive in fostering collaborations with different international development aids for the international technical support and financial help they provide to local unattended environmental projects.⁵¹ Local women heads of government in Indonesia have posed and complied their environment programs to the effect of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), gaining, to a considerable extent, the ability to international funding.⁵² These cross-border partnerships frequently

⁴⁹ Ibid, p 32-43

⁵⁰ Opcit p,12

⁵¹ Naufal Khaidar, David Baniardy Nurrahman, and Teunku Ahmad Zaki Mubarak, "The Effectiveness of Administrative Sactions Against Eviromental Pollution Cases in Indonesia," *Indonesia Journal of Environmental Law and Sustaibale Development* 2, no. 2 (2023): 6, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15294/ijel.v2i2.66150>.

⁵² Tri Nurmega Oktarina and Anisa Yulianti, "The Role of Women in Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection: A Discourse of Ecofeminisme in Indonesia,"

lead to the infusion of skills and strengthening of the policy schemes of local institutions, further solidifying the infrastructure for the policies on the environment. The coordinated use of international partnership illustrates the capacity of women politicians to coordinate different levels of governance to achieve set environmental policy objectives in their regions.

DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY IN INDONESIAN LOCAL POLITICS

Indonesian women politicians in local governance exhibit some characteristics of their own in environmental advocacy that differ from conventional politics.⁵³ It is at this juncture of feminism, local politics, and environmentalism that these women create advocacy patterns which need further scrutiny at the scholarly level. These features are expressed through women's experiences of the Indonesian sociopolitical milieu as manifested in the form of community-centered strategies, integrative policy approaches, and constructive participatory processes.

The community-centered nature of women's environmental advocacy represents a fundamental characteristic of their political approach. Woman politicians frequently prioritize direct engagement with local communities, particularly marginalized groups disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. Research by Sudaryat, et al (2024) demonstrates that women politicians are significantly more likely to establish regular dialogue mechanisms with affected communities before formulating environmental policies.⁵⁴ This participatory approach stems from women's traditional roles in household resource management and community organization in many Indonesian contexts. Particularly in rural areas where environmental

Indonesian Journal of Environmental Law and Sustainable Development 1, no. 2 (2022): 107-38, <https://doi.org/10.15294/ijel.v1i2.58137>.

⁵³ Edward Aspinall, Sally White, and Amalinda Savirani, "Women's Political Representation in Indonesia: Who Wins and How?," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 40, no. 1 (2021): 3-27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103421989720>.

⁵⁴ Sudaryat Sudaryat, Deviana Yuanitasari, and Sonny Dewi Judiasih, "Policy and Implementation of Gender Equality in Indonesian Mining Companies as an Approach to Achieve the Goals of Indonesian SDGS," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2400602>.

concerns directly impact daily life, women politicians leverage their understanding of local needs to develop contextually appropriate solutions.⁵⁵ Their advocacy frequently emphasizes immediate community priorities such as clean water access, sustainable agricultural practices, and protection of local natural resources that directly affect family welfare and community resilience.⁵⁶

Women politicians also demonstrate distinctive characteristics through their holistic integration of environmental concerns with broader social welfare objectives. Rather than treating environmental issues as isolated technical matters, women's advocacy frequently connects environmental protection with education, healthcare, and economic development.⁵⁷ In a comprehensive study of local environmental initiatives across five Indonesian provinces found that projects led by women politicians were 43% more likely to incorporate multiple development dimensions compared to those led by their male counterparts.⁵⁸ This integrative approach is evident in initiatives like eco-tourism programs that simultaneously address conservation, women's economic empowerment, and cultural preservation.⁵⁹ The tendency to view environmental challenges through this intersectional lens enables more comprehensive policy solutions that address root causes rather than symptoms of environmental degradation.

A. Intersectionality of Gender and Environmental Justice in Women's Political Platforms

The concept of intersectionality has increasingly become central to understanding the complex relationship between gender and environmental justice within women's political platforms in Indonesian

⁵⁵ Ashaluddin Jalil et al., "The Role of Social Capital of Riau Women Farmer Groups in Building Collective Action for Tropical Peatland Restoration," *Forest and Society* 5, no. 2 (2021): 341-51, <https://doi.org/10.24259/fs.v5i2.12089>.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 355

⁵⁷ Sri Budi Eko Wardani and Valina Singka Subekti, "Political Dynasties and Women Candidates in Indonesia's 2019 Election," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 40, no. 1 (2021): 28-49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103421991144>.

⁵⁸ João M. Santos, Hugo Horta, and Lígia Amâncio, "Research Agendas of Female and Male Academics: A New Perspective on Gender Disparities in Academia," *Gender and Education* 5, no. 3 (2020): 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2020.1792844>.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p 21

local politics. Women politicians often approach environmental issues through a multidimensional lens that recognizes how gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geographical location collectively shape experiences of environmental degradation. This intersectional approach allows them to formulate more nuanced and inclusive environmental policies that address the disproportionate impact of climate change and environmental hazards on marginalized communities, particularly women in rural and coastal areas who depend directly on natural resources for their livelihoods.⁶⁰

Women politicians in Indonesia frequently incorporate intersectional frameworks within their environmental advocacy by highlighting how traditional gender roles position women as primary resource managers at the household level—responsible for water collection, fuel gathering, and food production—making them particularly vulnerable to environmental changes.⁶¹ Their political platforms often emphasize this lived experience, translating it into policy proposals that connect environmental protection with women's economic empowerment, health concerns, and food security. This stands in contrast to more technocratic approaches that may overlook these gendered dimensions of environmental challenges.⁶² By centering these interconnections, women politicians create platforms that resonate with voters who experience these intersecting vulnerabilities firsthand.

Women's political platforms in Indonesian local politics frequently connect environmental justice with broader social justice frameworks, recognizing that environmental problems cannot be isolated from other forms of discrimination. Their advocacy often extends beyond

⁶⁰ Jacquelin D. Lau et al., “Gender Equality in Climate Policy and Practice Hindered by Assumptions,” *International Journal of Transgenderism* 19, no. 04 (2021): 359–78, <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.1038/s41558-021-00999-7>.

⁶¹ Angelina Lisa Putri Purnamasari and Neneng Konety, “Intersectional Approach by Youth Feminist Activism ‘Girl Up’ in Spreading Gender Equality Values in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam),” *Riwayat: Educational Journal of History and Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2023): 1136–49, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24815/jr.v6i3.33784>.

⁶² Diana Teresa Pakasi and Marini Purnamasari, “Permanently Polluted Paradise? Gender Inequality, Care Work, and Community Acts to Waste Problems in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia,” *Simulacra* 7, no. 2 (2024): 269–83, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21107/sml.v7i2.27478>.

conservation to address land rights, clean water access, protection from extractive industries, and sustainable livelihoods—all through a gender-sensitive perspective. This comprehensive approach acknowledges that women's relationship with the environment is mediated through multiple social categories and power structures that must be simultaneously addressed. By articulating these connections in their political messaging, women politicians create more holistic environmental platforms that resonate with voters seeking integrated solutions to complex socio-environmental challenges in their communities.

B. Community-Based Approaches in Women-Led Environmental Initiatives at the Local Level

Women-led environmental initiatives across Central Java have demonstrated remarkable success through their distinctive community-based approaches, establishing new paradigms for environmental governance at the local level.⁶³ In Semarang, women politicians have pioneered innovative flood mitigation programs that leverage traditional ecological knowledge alongside modern green infrastructure solutions.⁶⁴ These initiatives stand apart from conventional top-down approaches by actively incorporating community mapping exercises led by local women's groups who identify vulnerable areas based on generations of lived experience. The participatory nature of these programs has resulted in more targeted interventions and greater community buy-in, with implementation rates significantly higher than male-led projects of similar scope.⁶⁵ What distinguishes these Semarang initiatives is their integration of economic opportunities for women through the creation of eco-tourism ventures and mangrove conservation efforts that

⁶³ Retno Setyowati et al., “Women’s Contribution to Climate Change Action: A Gender Analysis,” in *BIO Web of Conferences*, vol. 155, 2025, 2, <https://doi.org/10.1051/bioconf/202515506012>.

⁶⁴ Siti Aisyah et al., “Transforming Smart City Governance for Quality of Life and Sustainable Development in Semarang City, Indonesia,” *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning* 19, no. 9 (2024): 3443–52, <https://doi.org/10.18280/ijstdp.190914>.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 3455

simultaneously address environmental protection and women's economic empowerment.⁶⁶

In neighboring Demak, women-led coastal management programs have transformed the region's approach to addressing coastal erosion and saltwater intrusion threatening agricultural lands.⁶⁷ Woman local leaders have instituted hybrid governance structures that bridge formal institutional frameworks with informal women's networks, creating unprecedented channels for knowledge exchange between scientific experts and local farmers.⁶⁸ These initiatives feature distinctive mentorship components where experienced women farmers guide younger community members in sustainable agricultural practices adapted to changing coastal conditions. The Demak model demonstrates how women leaders effectively navigate complex stakeholder relationships, balancing the interests of fishing communities, agricultural producers, and conservation priorities through inclusive decision-making processes that have resulted in more durable environmental solutions than previous male-dominated approaches.⁶⁹

Pekalongan's has been revolutionized through women-led environmental initiatives addressing toxic waste management and water pollution.⁷⁰ Woman politicians and community leaders have implemented innovative collective waste treatment facilities that serve multiple small-scale producers, dramatically reducing pollution loads in local waterways.⁷¹ These programs distinguish themselves through their emphasis on peer-to-peer learning networks where women entrepreneurs share sustainable production techniques while maintaining traditional artistic elements central to Pekalongan's cultural identity.⁷²

⁶⁶ Opcit, p. 3440

⁶⁷ Diandra Masayu Nastabilla, Raihan Yogi Prakoso, and Raihan Yahya Alhafizh, "Women Support Women: How Coastal Women in Demak Step Out from Poverty," *Jurnal Ilmu Ekonomi Terapan* 7, no. 1 (2022): 37-46, <https://doi.org/10.20473/jiet.v7i1.32653>.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p 48

⁶⁹ Ani Purwanti et al., "Gender Inequality Against Women Fishers in Indonesia," *Indonesia Law Review* 12, no. 3 (2022): 20-45, <https://doi.org/10.15742/ilrev.v12n3.5>.

⁷⁰ Purwanti et al.

⁷¹ S M Akber, Shaila Shabnam, and Aditi Roy, "Present Condition & Contribution of SME Financing in the Economy of Bangladesh: A Study on Three Selected Banks," *Journal of Finance and Economics* 11, no. 4 (2023): 183, <https://doi.org/10.12691/jfe-11-4-1>.

⁷² Ibid, p 185

The success of these initiatives stems from their holistic approach that recognizes the interconnected nature of economic, cultural, and environmental concerns within the community context, resulting in higher rates of compliance and adoption compared to regulatory-focused approaches previously implemented.

The Kendeng and Wadas environmental movements represent powerful examples of women-led grassroots resistance to extractive industries threatening local water resources and agricultural lands.⁷³ Women activists in these regions have developed distinctive organizing strategies that center indigenous knowledge systems and emphasize the spiritual and cultural dimensions of environmental stewardship.⁷⁴ Their approach features innovative communication strategies that translate complex environmental impact assessments into accessible formats through community theater, storytelling circles, and visual documentation led by women community journalists. Unlike conventional environmental activism, these movements have successfully integrated cross-generational knowledge transfer, with grandmother-led educational initiatives that connect younger generations to traditional practices of environmental care. The effectiveness of these movements stems from their ability to reframe environmental conflicts not merely as technical or legal issues but as fundamental questions of community sovereignty and intergenerational justice.

Conclusion

This study conclude that Indonesian women politicians at the local level advocate for the environment using techniques that are drastically different and more community-oriented than their male colleagues. Additionally, unlike men, they manage to link formal institutional processes to grassroots action. The cross-section from Semarang and Demak, as well as Pekalongan, Kendeng, and Wadas, shows that women's traditional practices alongside modern governance

⁷³ M Wildan Humaidi, "Wadon Wadas: Women's Resistance in Agrarian Conflict of Andesite Mining Construction Policy in Purworejo Regency," *PALASTREN: Jurnal Studi Gender* 16, no. 1 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.21043/palastren.v16i1.14695>.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 7-9

frameworks results in women-led initiatives having higher community participation levels and program sustainability. It can be argued that women's increased presence within the local political scene will greatly improve policy execution and appreciation concerning the environment, especially with efforts to mitigate vulnerabilities linked to climate dependency and resource management. In order to address these concerns, radical changes need to be made in local governance by adopting gender responsive measures -starting with budgeting for environmental programs-, formalize mentorship structures for women ready to lead the environmental sector, and set unrestricted funding for women-led grassroots initiatives. Moreover, the policies relating to the environmental impact assessment should be changed to mandate an active women's consultative participation, with a distinct women-sensitive perspective on environmental impacts evaluation gender analysis frameworks of policy formulation. Other scholars are encouraged to investigate the potential for these local best practice case studies to form the basis of regional and national structures of environmental governance in Indonesia - this would fundamentally change the country's sustainable development paradigm by employing women's leadership in environmental care.

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Ecofeminist figures, such as Vandana Shiva, emphasize that the dominant patriarchal system is also a major cause of unsustainable exploitation of nature. Ecofeminism encourages women to play an active role in protecting the environment as part of the struggle against systems of oppression.

(Vandana Shiva is an Indian anti-globalization figure, scholar, environmental activist and writer)