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Understanding Vulnerability, Promoting Leadership, and Seeking Justice: A Feminist Policy Analysis of the Climate Adaptation Action Plan in Central Java and Demak District

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Abstract

In Indonesia's climate policy discourse, gender has become an increasingly prominent keyword, from the National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation (2014) to the National Gender and Climate Change Action Plan (2024). This paper analyses gender representation in the Climate Adaptation Action Plans of Central Java (2023) and Demak Regency (2024), two coastal areas highly vulnerable to both climate crises and gender inequality. Using a feminist policy analysis framework and drawing on the concept of Gender Transformative Adaptation (GTA), the analysis focuses on three key aspects: representation, knowledge and power, and leadership. The findings reveal that gender justice remains a marginal concern. Women are predominantly framed as vulnerable groups in need of empowerment, rather than as agents of change with equal knowledge and capacities. The policy documents reflect a top-down technocratic approach that overlooks local knowledge and grassroots women's experiences. Moreover, the absence of women's organizations as strategic actors signals weak institutional recognition of women's leadership in climate adaptation. This paper argues for more participatory, intersectional, and transformative approaches to local climate adaptation policymaking to ensure greater justice, inclusivity, and contextual relevance.

Keywords: coastal women leadership, climate adaptation, Central Java Province, Demak Regency, intersectionality, feminist policy analysis

Introduction

Climate change has become a climate crisis and is now referred to as the climate apocalypse. It has impacted ecosystems, human systems and the planet. According to the Sixth Assessment Report of Working Group I of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world is likely to reach or exceed 1.5°C of warming within the next two decades. The report shows that total emissions must be reduced by 45 per cent by 2030 to avoid a climate catastrophe. However, at current emission rates, global emissions are projected to increase by almost 14 per cent (IPCC 2021). Climate change has altered both ecosystems (land, freshwater and oceans) and human systems (water security, food production, health and well-being, cities, settlements and infrastructure) on a global scale. These impacts are being felt across all regions of the world with varying degrees of severity, including in Africa, North America, Australasia, Asia, Europe, Central and South America, small islands, the Arctic, Antarctica, the Mediterranean region, tropical forests, mountainous regions, deserts and areas of high biodiversity (IPCC 2022). The latest Carbon Brief report (2025) reveals that the rate at which CO_2 is increasing in the atmosphere now exceeds the IPCC's mitigation pathway for limiting global warming to 1.5°C. This is based on long-term observational data from the Mauna Loa Observatory. 2024 was recorded as having one of the fastest CO_2 spikes in history, indicating that global mitigation measures have not been effective enough (Carbon Brief 2025). This situation requires the world to strengthen not only its mitigation efforts, but also to develop fair and inclusive adaptation strategies, including for Indonesia, which is vulnerable to climate disasters.

In early 2025, Indonesia experienced an increase in the intensity of disasters, particularly floods and extreme weather events. The National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) recorded 200 disasters in January 2025, 165 of which were floods. Indonesia plays a key role in global food production from coastal and marine resources. With a coastline stretching approximately 108,000 km, it boasts the second-longest in the world

(World Population Review 2024). The country also plays a significant role in ensuring global food security, with the fisheries sector making the largest contribution of any in Southeast Asia (FAO 2018). However, amid the climate crisis, Indonesia's marine and coastal resources are under threat from ecological damage and economic loss (Bappenas 2021a). Central Java Province has experienced the highest number of disasters compared to other Indonesian provinces. As of January 24, 2025, the region had experienced 31 disasters, including floods, landslides, tidal waves, erosion, and extreme weather (BNPB 2025). For instance, the Demak district in Central Java was hit by a flood in early January 2025. Tidal flooding first hit the Semarang-Demak coastal road, disrupting transport, economic and health services (Yusuf & Dennys 2025). Heavy rainfall caused two embankments in the Demak district to collapse. The flooding affected nearly 10,000 people, who experienced difficulties accessing clean water (Demak Disaster Management Agency 2025).

Demak Regency is one of 15 priority areas for climate-resilient development/ PBI in Central Java Province (Bappenas 2021b). The intensity of flooding and tidal flooding demonstrates the vulnerability of Demak Regency to climate disasters. This phenomenon has reportedly become more frequent over the past ten years (Nurhadi 2024). Since the 1980s, rising sea levels and land subsidence have made this region more vulnerable to tidal flooding (Prasetyo et al. 2019). Significant changes to the coastline have also been observed in the coastal area of Demak Regency between 1990 and 2015 due to erosion, resulting in the submergence of several villages (Ervita & Marfai 2017). A total of 495.80 hectares of land along the coast of Demak Regency has been affected by erosion (Ervita & Marfai 2017). Villages that have begun to sink due to tidal flooding include Timbulsloko, Bedono, Sriwulan, Purwosari, Morodemak and Purworejo (Detik.com 2023; Endra 2022; MediaIndonesia 2021). These villages are located on the north coast of Central Java, bordering the Java Sea (Wisnu 2022). The Bonang and Sayung subdistricts are at very high risk of tidal flooding (Bappeda Kabupaten Demak 2024).

Climate disasters, including tidal flooding, impact communities in coastal areas. In Demak Regency, tidal flooding has destroyed fishponds, disrupted distribution and transportation, and suspended teaching and learning activities in schools. This has also caused changes in the community's social and economic conditions. For example, many residents who previously relied on aquaculture for their livelihood have had to seek factory employment in Semarang (Sarbini et al. 2019) or migrate (Nurhidayah et al. 2021). The impact of tidal flooding on women is more complex due to their gender-based vulnerability (Adger 2006; MacGregor 2010). This vulnerability stems from various forms of pre-existing, interrelated injustices relating to gender, society, politics and the environment. The vulnerability experienced by women varies depending on gender identity, class, ethnicity, age, and ability (IPCC 2014). This exacerbates the situation faced by women during disasters, particularly in coastal areas (Masnu'ah et al. 2024).

Women in coastal areas, who are predominantly employed in fishing, either at sea or in processing and selling catches, experience various forms of structural and cultural violence amid the climate crisis (Pratiwi & Boangmanalu 2017). For example, societal gender constructs place women in unpaid domestic and care roles within the home and community. This means that, when tidal flooding occurs, women bear a double burden. During disasters, they are responsible for ensuring food security and the health of their families (Latifa & Fitranita 2013). They are also more vulnerable to dropping out of school (Litha 2022), child marriage, violence, maternal mortality (Pope 2023) and poverty (Momtaz & Asaduzzaman 2018). Data also shows that women in Demak Regency face various problems, such as violence, child marriage and poverty. SIMFONI-PPA data indicates that Central Java was the third province with the highest number of reported cases of violence against women in 2024, with 1,687 cases in total (SIMFONI-PPA 2024). By the end of December 2024, at least 37 cases of violence had been reported in Demak Regency. The issue of child marriage also remains a problem. Data from the Demak Class 1B Religious Court shows that the number of marriage dispensation requests in 2022 was very high, at least 418 cases, with the youngest child being 14 years old (Utama, 2024). In Central Java, 2.01 per cent of boys and 4.74 per cent of girls aged 10 years and over were not attending school in 2023 (BPS 2024). This means that, in percentage terms, twice as many girls as boys were not in education. In Demak Regency, the labour force participation rate for women is lower than for men. Meanwhile, the number of women working as unpaid family workers (35,588) far exceeds the number of men in this category (8,202) (BPS 2024). In the context of the climate crisis, this issue is exacerbated, further widening the inequality gap experienced by women. Despite experiencing multiple layers of vulnerability in

this context, women demonstrate various forms of daily adaptation that impact change at the community level (Widiantini & Boangmanalu 2022; Situmeang & Alfalha 2022).

To address their vulnerability to climate crises, policies, programmes, and activities that can reduce women's exposure to disasters need to be implemented. Indonesia already has various policy instruments for climate adaptation. Prior to ratifying the Paris Agreement on 31 October 2016 through Law No. 16 of 2016, it had produced several policy documents related to climate change adaptation, including the Indonesia Climate Change Sectoral Roadmap: Synthesis Roadmap (Bappenas 2010), the National Action Plan on Climate Change Adaptation (Bappenas 2014), the General Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation (KPPPA 2015a) and the Technical Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation in Regions (KPPPA 2015b). Several additional climate adaptation policy documents have since been drafted, including the Climate Resilient Development (PBI) document (Bappenas 2021a) and, most recently, the National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (KPPPA 2024). These national-level documents serve as references for the drafting of climate adaptation and development plans at the regional levels. At provincial and district levels, local governments have developed Climate Adaptation Action Plans to guide the implementation of equitable climate adaptation development.

This paper analyses the extent to which Climate Adaptation Action Plans at the regional level are gender transformative, using case studies from Central Java Province and Demak Regency. Adopting a Feminist Policy Analysis (FPA) approach and applying the Gender Transformative Adaptation (GTA) framework, this analysis examines how well these plans integrate gender and climate justice issues, and how effectively they represent marginalised groups, local knowledge, and feminist leadership at the grassroots level. Analysing this policy is important for identifying the gaps and opportunities for equitable climate adaptation. Furthermore, studies of climate adaptation documents from a feminist perspective remain rare in climate policy discourse, both in Indonesia and globally. This research, therefore, contributes to the development of a discourse on gender and climate in policy, particularly in the Indonesian context. It can serve as a reference for policymakers and grassroots communities to inform the development of future climate adaptation policies, programmes, activities, movements, challenges and advocacy opportunities.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study takes a feminist perspective, focusing on women's issues and exploring their experiences of gender inequality (voicing the voiceless). The study is intended as a tool for social change (Reinharz & Davidman 1992). The study analyses the Central Java and Demak Regency Climate Adaptation Action Plans. These documents are the 2023 Central Java Province Climate Adaptation Action Plan and the 2024 Demak Regency Climate Adaptation Action Plan. They were prepared by the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda) of each region. The researchers obtained these documents by sending a letter of request to Bappeda regarding climate adaptation policies. Central Java Province and Demak Regency were chosen as case studies because part of their territory is coastal and currently experiencing the significant impact of the climate crisis (Bappenas 2021b).

The policy text is analysed using the Feminist Policy Analysis (FPA) framework. FPA is a critical approach to public policy which highlights the ways in which gender inequality affects women and marginalised groups (Bacchi 2009). The aim of FPA is to reveal gender bias, advocate for equality and challenge the underlying power structures of the policy process. Within this analytical framework, policies are viewed as inherently biased products that require questioning (Bacchi 1999, 2009, 2016). Therefore, it is important to reject the false neutrality of policies and prioritise social justice in analysis (Bacchi 2009; Hankivsky et al., 2014). FPA provides a robust framework for evaluating and transforming public policies to make them more equitable. We organised our text analysis around three key questions using the analytical tools of FPA, incorporating gender analysis into text analysis and the Gender Transformative Adaptation (GTA) framework: (1) Representation: Who is included, and how are different communities represented? (2) Power and knowledge: Whose knowledge is recognised and prioritised in the policy discourse? (3) Leadership: Who is seen as a meaningful agent of change, and how? (Kaijser & Kronsell 2013; Rocheleau 2015; Elmhirst 2015; Sundberg 2017; Resurrección et al. 2019). These questions provide a framework for evaluating the extent to which local-level Climate Adaptation Action Plans have meaningfully incorporated women's voices, knowledge and leadership, and advanced climate justice.

Transformative Adaptation for Climate Justice

In the context of climate change, the term 'adaptation' began to gain widespread attention in the 1990s, particularly following the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The 1992 Rio de Janeiro Convention identified adaptation and mitigation as the two primary responses to climate change (UN 1992; Schipper & Burton 2009). While the term is not explicitly defined in the convention document itself, its presence in various articles has sparked debate and academic discussion about its meaning, scope and purpose (Schipper & Burton 2009). Since then, numerous definitions of climate change adaptation have been developed by disaster and climate scientists, as well as scholars from other disciplines (Smit & Wandel 2006).

Adaptation is emphasised as an adjustment that encompasses changes in the behaviours of individuals or institutions (Pielke 1998), socio-economic-ecological systems (Smit et al. 2000) and the characteristics of systems as a whole, in order to cope with external pressures (Brooks 2003). The primary goal of adaptation is to minimise vulnerability and enhance the capacity of systems (both human and non-human) to cope with, manage or utilise emerging changes and risks (Smit & Wandel 2006). The IPCC (2022) defines adaptation as the process of adjusting to climate change in order to mitigate losses or capitalise on potential opportunities. It refers to processes or actions that adjust to current and future climate change at various levels, including individual, group, household, community, market, and national levels (Smit et al. 2000; Smit & Pilifosova 2003; Smit & Wandel 2006).

The concept of adaptation is also closely related to the concepts of 'adaptive capacity' and 'vulnerability'. 'Adaptive capacity' refers to a system's ability to alter its characteristics or behaviour in response to external pressures, such as climate change or disasters (Smit & Wandel 2006). In other words, adaptation is the tangible manifestation of adaptive capacity: the greater a system's adaptive capacity, the greater its ability to adapt and reduce vulnerability (Brooks 2003). Therefore, understanding adaptation determines the strategies adopted, the scope of interventions, and the objectives to be achieved in protecting communities from climate risks and in strengthening long-term resilience and social justice.

However, the concept of adaptation has been criticised and refined over time by thinkers, particularly feminist scholars. They argue that gender inequality at various levels (e.g. household, community, market and state) creates vulnerabilities specific to women that differ from those experienced by men (Arora-Jonsson 2011; Alston 2014; UNFCCC 2022; Yadav & Lal 2018). The climate crisis is not a neutral scientific issue, but rather one influenced by highly gendered discourses (MacGregor 2010). Meanwhile, de Wit (2021) emphasises that adapting to the climate crisis involves not only technical and biophysical aspects, but also power relations, conflicting interests, and local community leadership. Therefore, individuals' and groups' ability to adapt is largely determined by their social position within the power structure, creating barriers or opportunities for them to act, access resources, and make decisions that impact their resilience to climate change (de Wit 2021).

Furthermore, feminist scholars emphasise the importance of gender analysis in discourse, policy and adaptation processes to avoid exclusion. This is because many climate adaptation policies focus more on infrastructure or technological solutions without considering underlying inequalities, including gender inequalities (Tong & Topgül 2024; Gupta et al. 2024). Intersectional analyses have highlighted how gender intersects with other inequalities and forms of discrimination based on identity (e.g., race, class, ethnicity, age), as well as economic and political inequalities. These inequalities result in differing experiences of and responses to the climate crisis (Resurrección et al. 2019; Crenshaw 1991; McCall 2005). Adaptations that are unresponsive to gender dynamics and intersectional inequalities can lead to undesirable consequences, including an increased risk of violence and exclusion against women (Resurrección et al. 2019). This failure to consider gender dynamics and intersectional inequalities reflects a form of maladaptation, whereby adaptation policies reproduce exclusion and reinforce existing structural inequalities in society (Juhola et al. 2016). This deepens the vulnerability of groups that should be accommodated, listened to and celebrated.

One approach to ensuring equitable climate adaptation is Gender Transformative Adaptation (GTA). This approach addresses the limitations of purely technical and technocratic adaptation methods. Rather than merely accommodating change or adjustment, GTA shifts the analytical focus to challenging and transforming the social, political and economic structures that are at the root of marginalisation and inequality (Resurrección et al. 2019; CARE 2019). This

approach not only seeks to reduce the vulnerability of women and other marginalised groups to the impacts of climate change but also aims to transform the gender norms, power relations, and institutional structures that limit women's access to leadership and the recognition of their diverse identities in everyday life amid the climate crisis.

In its publication, 'Gender-Transformative Adaptation: From Good Practice to Better Policy', CARE (2019) highlights three key pillars for achieving transformative climate adaptation: building agency, changing power relations, and transforming structures. The first of these, building agency, involves increasing the capacity, confidence, aspirations, and skills of women and men, enabling them to actively participate in the adaptation process. The second pillar, changing power relations, aims to shift the power dynamics in social relationships, from households and community groups to decision-making participation at the market and state levels. Thirdly, transforming structures involves changing discriminatory social norms and exclusionary practices, as well as gender-unresponsive public policies and services, in both formal and non-formal spheres (CARE 2019).

Resurrección et al. (2019), in 'Gender-Transformative Climate Change Adaptation: Advancing Social Equity', argue that gender-transformative climate change adaptation is a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of economic, political, ecological and cultural vulnerability. This is achieved through actions that challenge systemic inequalities and patriarchal power relations, thereby empowering women and making them better able to adapt. This approach emphasises the importance of local context awareness, as climate vulnerability is specific to each location and cannot be solved with uniform solutions. Key principles include ensuring equal access to and control over resources and assets, such as land and housing; recognising and reducing the time limitations women face due to domestic and caregiving workloads; and investing in basic social services, infrastructure and social protection to increase mobility and resilience. It is also important to create space for inclusive participation and decision-making at all levels, ensuring that climate adaptation reflects the needs and voices of affected groups (Resurrección et al. 2019).

Furthermore, gender-transformative climate adaptation recognises that gender issues are not only women's issues, but also issues of power relations and the complex, intertwined structures of social, economic, political, and ecological inequalities (Djoudi et al. 2016). This approach emphasises the importance of analysing how patriarchal norms, institutions and practices create and perpetuate vulnerability in the context of climate change. Furthermore, gender-transformative adaptation highlights the need for justice in the knowledge production process. It must be open, participatory, equitable and empowering, recognising and elevating local knowledge, women's life experiences, and the voices of marginalised groups, rather than merely reproducing dominant perspectives (Nightingale et al. 2020; Forsyth & McDermot 2022). In this framework, collective leadership is essential for driving social and ecological transformation. Women, young people, Indigenous communities, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups are involved and empowered to determine the direction of climate policy and action (Resurrección et al. 2019; Huyer et al. 2021; Tong & Topgül 2024; Gupta et al. 2024). Truly transformative adaptation requires the dismantling of structures of injustice to create inclusive, equitable, and sustainable social and political spaces.

Representation: Who is Included in Climate Adaptation Actions?

This section illustrates the groups included in climate adaptation policies in Central Java and Demak Regency, and their level of representation. The most striking finding is that gender justice in the context of climate change has not formed a significant or substantial part of the climate adaptation action plan documents in either region. For example, the Central Java Climate Adaptation Action Plan (2023) only references 'gender equality' once throughout its extensive list of action plans. The same is true of the Demak Regency Climate Adaptation Action Plan (2024). Gender equality is defined as follows:

> "In implementing climate-resilient development in five priority sectors with an action approach through infrastructure, technology, capacity building, governance and financing, aspects of inclusivity (gender equality, persons with disabilities, children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups) and ecosystem sustainability are taken into consideration" (Chapter IV, p.18, Central Java Climate Adaptation Action Plan). "In implementing climate-resilient development in five priority sectors with an action approach through infrastructure, technology, capacity building, governance and funding, aspects of inclusivity (gender equality, persons with disabilities, children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups) and ecosystem sustainability are taken into consideration" (Demak Regency Climate Adaptation Action Plan 2024, Chapter IV, p. 18).

However, neither document provides further information on gender inequality in the context of each region. Both documents present data broken down by gender for the total and working populations, as well as data on the vulnerability of coastal areas in Central Java and Demak Regency to tidal flooding as a result of the climate crisis. The 2023 Central Java Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan states that 83 sub-districts in Central Java are prone to tidal flooding, affecting 15,036 hectares of fishponds and resulting in losses totalling IDR 91,330,155,833. In general, potential losses in Central Java's marine and coastal sectors between 2020 and 2024 due to tidal flooding amounted to IDR 77.61 trillion (p. iv, 2023). The Demak Regency Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan (2024) also mentions that coastal areas are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including submergence and loss of fishponds. Tidal flooding affected 4,279 hectares of fishponds in Demak Regency, resulting in losses of approximately IDR 30,000,000. It has also impacted the production of the capture fisheries sector, causing a significant decrease from 5,448,451 tonnes in 2021 to just 3,886 tonnes in 2023. Aquaculture production decreased from 766,497 tonnes in 2021 to 51,026 tonnes in 2023 (p. 74, 2023).

While the documents present data on population size by gender and the vulnerability of coastal areas to tidal flooding, neither provides an overview of gender inequality issues such as child marriage, school dropout rates, or cases of gender-based violence. Nor do they present any analysis showing the link between the impact of the climate crisis and gender inequality. The documents also lack intersectional data and descriptions, such as the link between tidal flooding — a climate disaster in the coastal areas of Central Java and Demak Regency — and maternal mortality rates and women's reproductive health. This indicates that gender and climate issues are still perceived as merely a women's issue (Djoudi 2016) and are not prioritised in regional climate development. However, this data is essential for developing an equitable climate adaptation agenda that benefits everyone.

Power and Knowledge: Whose Knowledge is Recognised and Prioritised?

The Central Java Climate Adaptation Action Plan (2023) does not recognise the community as a group with valuable local knowledge that should be incorporated into the regional climate change agenda. This is evident in a programme related to coastal and small island management, which involves providing assistance and facilitating access to science, technology, and information, as well as organising education and training (Chapter VI, p. 151, 2023). The document also fails to discuss the local knowledge of indigenous, coastal and agricultural communities in the context of climate development. Furthermore, women's knowledge of natural resource management is not an integral part of the document. The adopted approach to climate vulnerability focuses on capacity building, assuming that communities lack sufficient knowledge, and positions the government as the provider of various socialisation and training programmes.

> "Capacity-building efforts to reduce the negative impacts of climate change require credible measures to monitor climate-related parameters, the adoption of new technologies and methods, and raising awareness of climate change (Central Java Climate Adaptation Action Plan, 2023, Chapter VI, p. 18). This approach includes socialisation, provision, training and other activities to build capacity within communities, organisations and the government" (Central Java Climate Adaptation Action Plan 2023, Chapter VI, p. 18).

The same approach is evident in the Demak Regency Climate Adaptation Action Plan (2024). Community groups are positioned as recipients of capacity-building programmes provided by the government. For instance, activities related to science, technology, innovation, and economic productivity (in agriculture) comprise capacity building and information access for agricultural businesses, enabling them to boost their productivity by implementing contemporary applied agricultural science, engineering, and technology. This includes knowledge of commodity values and seasons, breeding and care methods, soil types, weather and climate, pest control and fertilisation, post-harvest technology, and agricultural marketing through digital marketplaces and platforms (Chapter VI, p. 30, 2024). In small-scale fish farmer empowerment activities, programmes take the form of mentoring and facilitating access to knowledge, technology and information, as well as providing education and training (Chapter VI, p. 44, 2024).

However, the list of capacity-building activities for business actors in the agriculture and fisheries sectors in the second document still shows a gender-neutral approach, as it lacks sex-disaggregated data. For example, the absence of data on the number of female fishers, female farmers and young women means activities cannot ensure equal participation or address the specific needs of women's groups. This situation has the potential to reinforce the marginalisation of

women in climate-resilient development. Furthermore, this reflects the top-down nature of Indonesia's climate policy, which treats communities, especially women, as passive recipients rather than knowledge holders. This approach highlights the hierarchical knowledge gap between the state and society, thereby limiting the scope for fair and inclusive transformation (Resurrección 2019; Crawford et al. 2023; Forsyth 2022). Without providing space for gender-based and local knowledge, climate adaptation policies tend to favour technocratic and market-based solutions that do not consider the daily realities of the groups most affected. Therefore, it is crucial to establish collaborative and equitable spaces for knowledge production with communities to ensure that adaptation strategies accurately reflect local needs, experiences and capacities (Forsyth 2022).

Leadership: Who is Involved as Agents of Change?

Neither the Central Java Climate Adaptation Action Plan (2023) nor the Demak Regency Climate Adaptation Action Plan (2024) meaningfully accommodates or promotes women's leadership in climate adaptation. Both documents state that the climate adaptation agenda must ensure the involvement of non-governmental actors, including civil society organisations, academics, the private sector and individuals (Bappeda, Province of Central Java 2023; Bappeda, Demak Regency 2024). However, the list of non-governmental actors does not proportionally include organisations or communities focusing on women's empowerment, gender justice, and climate issues.

> "The impacts that occur at the local level can be dealt with effectively by involving groups and institutions. Interventions by non-governmental organisations can be carried out through community assistance and infrastructure development. In addition, non-governmental organisations can target the smallest administrative units alongside communities formed within society, thereby making climate resilience actions more comprehensive" (Central Java Climate Adaptation Action Plan 2023, Chapter IV, p. 9).

The Central Java Climate Adaptation Action Plan (2023) only mentions one non-governmental group focusing on environmental issues and gender justice: the Indonesian Women's Advancement Group (MAMPU). This group runs a 'buy waste' initiative, collecting waste from residents' homes, markets, landfills, and coastal areas. However, the Demak Regency Climate Adaptation Action Plan (2024) makes no mention of women's organisations or communities as non-governmental actors. This absence reflects the weak institutional recognition of women's contributions and leadership potential in the climate adaptation agenda at the local level, indicating a tendency towards systematic exclusion in the policy formulation process (Resurrección 2013, 2019). Nevertheless, women's groups, organisations, and communities in both Central Java and the Demak Regency have been actively involved in and leading climate adaptation efforts at the grassroots level (Masnu'ah et al. 2024).

Promoting women's leadership requires more than just participation and capacity building. Local governments often portray women as the primary victims of the environmental crisis rather than agents of change. This approach ignores the structural roots of gender inequality and oppressive power relations (de Wit 2021; Nightingale 2009; Pearse 2017). Consequently, policies only tend to address symptoms rather than the deeper causes of injustice. Meanwhile, women at the grassroots level possess local knowledge, life experience, and collective strength that are essential in responding to the climate crisis. However, transformative change requires more than just symbolic recognition: it necessitates developing agency, dismantling power relations and strengthening feminist leadership in climate adaptation (Gupta et al. 2024; CARE 2019).

Closing

An analysis of the Climate Adaptation Action Plans for Central Java and Demak Regency reveals that gender equity has not been meaningfully incorporated into climate adaptation policies. Vulnerable groups, particularly women, are still underrepresented, with their inclusion limited to disaggregated data and participation narratives that fail to address the structural roots of existing inequalities. Often, women are portrayed as victims in need of capacity building rather than being recognised as agents of change who can contribute valuable knowledge, experience and leadership skills to addressing the climate crisis.

Furthermore, knowledge inequality is reflected in top-down approaches that treat communities, particularly women, as passive and less knowledgeable. These approaches ignore the local practices and knowledge that women have long employed in managing natural resources and surviving climate disasters. Meanwhile, women's organisations and civil society groups barely feature on the list of policy actors, reflecting the weak recognition of women's leadership capacity in sustainable climate development.

A technocratic approach alone cannot achieve fair, intersectional and transformative climate adaptation. Courage is needed to open up dialogue, recognise the knowledge and leadership of communities — especially women — and empower them to play a central role in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies. Fair adaptation addresses the root causes of inequality, dismantles unequal power relations, and paves the way for a more inclusive future. This must be reflected in the Regional Climate Adaptation Action Plan.

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Footnotes

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