

Indigenous Women's Resilience, Knowledge, and Food Sovereignty: A Study of the Role of Indigenous Women from Kasepuhan Citorek in Lebak, West Java and Indigenous Women from Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik in Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the role of Indigenous women in strengthening the resilience of Indigenous communities in *Kasepuhan Citorek* (Lebak) and *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik* (Kapuas Hulu). This study uses a critical paradigm with a multiple case study approach and qualitative analysis, data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document studies for 7 (seven) months. Data were analysed using the framework of rights to self-determination and Indigenous feminism. The results of the study indicate that the recognition of Indigenous territories, strengthening the rights of Indigenous women, food sovereignty, and the implementation of self-determination are interrelated in building the sustainability and resilience of Indigenous communities amidst the climate crisis and extractive development. Indigenous women play a central role as guardians of ecological knowledge, managers of food reserves, and decision-makers in the customary system. These findings confirm that strengthening the rights of Indigenous women is inseparable from the original rights of Indigenous communities, and is the foundation of the ecological, social, and political sustainability of Indigenous communities amidst the pressures of extractive development and the climate crisis. The existence of Indigenous women is often invisible and unrecognised. However, as with Indigenous feminism, gender justice is an inseparable part of recognising the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous Peoples. This means that recognising Indigenous Peoples is an integral part of recognising the rights of Indigenous women.

Key words: self-determination, food sovereignty, Indigenous women, Indigenous territory

Introduction

The climate crisis, the lack of recognition of Indigenous peoples, and the increasing number of conflicts over the seizure of Indigenous territories across the globe have all contributed to the food crisis, affecting more than 300 million people globally, 88 million of whom are in the Asia-Pacific region (Global Report on Food Crisis 2025). Indonesia is particularly vulnerable to the effects of the climate crisis, ranging from deforestation to an increased susceptibility to natural disasters. Moreover, Indigenous Peoples are directly impacted, facing various losses and damage to their territories as a result of the climate crisis. According to data from the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN), deforestation and natural disasters threaten the livelihoods of 40-70 million people in 2,116 Indigenous communities in Indonesia (AMAN 2025). Ironically, Indigenous women, as custodians of knowledge and guardians of traditional territories

and biodiversity, are among the hungriest and most neglected (FAO 2015).

In this article, the term 'Indigenous Peoples' refers to social groups with deep-rooted historical, cultural, and spiritual ties to their traditional territories and possess systems of knowledge, law, and governance that have evolved over generations and are independent of the structures of the modern state (UNDRIP 2007). Unlike the general public, whose socio-economic relations tend to be shaped by state and market systems, Indigenous Peoples live within a collective framework that treats territory, nature, and community as an inseparable whole (Escobar 2015). The term 'Indigenous women' cannot be understood merely as a biological or social category; rather, they are subjects whose position is shaped by their relationship with Indigenous systems, territories, and communities (Kuokkanen 2019). Unlike women in mainstream society, who are often positioned as individuals within the state system, Indigenous

women have collective roles that are integral to the social structure of their communities, particularly in the management of ecological knowledge, food systems, and socio-cultural reproduction (Shiva 1988).

The crisis faced by Indigenous women in Indonesia is not just about the availability and accessibility of food; it also reflects the unequal power relations in the governance of food systems (FAO 2023). Climate emergencies, economic crises, and violent conflicts further disrupt Indigenous women's food systems (Robert 2021). Disruption to ecosystems and food systems results in Indigenous women losing their livelihoods and access to safe and sustainable food sources (Tauli-Corpuz 2015). Indigenous women in Indonesia face a multitude of challenges, including the consequences of conflict, economic marginalisation, and systemic gender discrimination (Barume 2025). Their existence, experiences, and voices are often not recognised in decision-making processes across various spheres, which signifies the multidimensional crisis they face.

In an Indigenous context, the relationship between Indigenous women and their customary territories and food sources is not merely material or economic. It is also shaped by knowledge, ways of life, cultural values, and intergenerational responsibilities. This makes customary territories living spaces that define the existence of Indigenous women, rather than merely productive assets. Consequently, the relationship between Indigenous territories and Indigenous women is an existential foundation that underpins their identity, social roles, and sovereignty. When Indigenous territories are seized or eliminated, it is not just a space for food management that is lost, but the existence of Indigenous women themselves (Nadya 2020).

The food sovereignty of Indigenous communities, and particularly of Indigenous women, stems from their long-standing relationship with their territories, knowledge, and sustainable production practices. Food sovereignty is defined as the right of Indigenous communities, including Indigenous women, to have autonomy over their food systems. This encompasses various initiatives in accordance with Indigenous knowledge passed down through generations within Indigenous territories (IWGIA 2015). In this context, Indigenous women play a pivotal role in the

collective efforts of Indigenous communities. They safeguard seeds, determine cropping patterns, manage food resources from forests and fields, and ensure sustainability across generations. Throughout times of crisis, Indigenous communities - particularly Indigenous women - have survived by strengthening their food systems, knowledge, and sustainable management practices within their traditional territories (Shrinkhal 2015).

This paper explores the role of Indigenous women in strengthening the food sovereignty of their communities, focusing on the *Kasepuhan Citorek* in Lebak, West Java and the *Dayak Iban in Sungai Utik*, Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan. These Indigenous communities were selected as case studies because they have demonstrated customary food sovereignty practices. In the context of *Kasepuhan Citorek*, the Food Security and Vulnerability Atlas (FSVA) revealed that Lebak Regency's FSVA index in 2022 was 36.02, placing it in the 'Resilient' (priority 5) category. This level of food security and vulnerability relates to food availability, access, and utilisation (FSVA 2022). A study by AMAN shows that Indigenous *Dayak Iban* women from *Menua Sungai Utik* play a significant role in safeguarding seeds and regulating the planting cycle in accordance with natural signs and traditional calculations (AMAN 2021). Consequently, this paper aims to demonstrate the role of Indigenous women in the context of food sovereignty.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a critical approach, using social injustice, discrimination, and oppression as the basis for its analysis (Neuman 2014). The critical paradigm is used here to understand the experiences of Indigenous women affected by extractive development, while also recognising their role in safeguarding and strengthening their communities' food sovereignty. This approach views research as not only a process of data collection, but also as a reflective, partisan and dialogic space shared with participants (Mertens 2009; Neuman 2014). The research employs a qualitative approach using multiple case studies in two Indigenous communities: *Kasepuhan Citorek* and *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik*. The research focuses on understanding the role of Indigenous women in strengthening community food sovereignty amidst social change and development

pressures. A qualitative approach was chosen in order to explore the experiences, knowledge, and everyday practices of Indigenous women in depth.

Fieldwork was conducted over a period of seven months, from 5 August 2025 to 14 February 2026, across two locations: *Kasepuhan Citorek* and *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik*. The research subjects comprised eight Indigenous women from the two locations, representing various roles, and five male traditional leaders. A focus group discussion (FGD) was also held on 7-8 August 2025 in *Kasepuhan Guradog*, with 70 Indigenous women participants representing different roles. The research subjects were Indigenous women involved in Indigenous governance, Indigenous schools, ritual leadership, and advocacy for community food sovereignty. In addition, this study used secondary data in the form of documents detailing the monitoring and evaluation of food sovereignty programmes within Indigenous communities that are members of AMAN. In this study, the research participants are referred to by pseudonyms to protect their privacy, in accordance with research ethics.

In this study, the author adopts the position of an Indigenous person from the *Talang Mamak Simarantihan* community, who is also a member of AMAN. This paper analyses the collected data within the frameworks of the right to self-determination and Indigenous feminism.

The Right to Self-Determination, Food Sovereignty, and the Rights of Indigenous Women

The right to self-determination provides the normative foundation that justifies the existence and political legitimacy of Indigenous Peoples within the state system. This principle stems from the recognition that Indigenous Peoples cannot be viewed solely through the lens of the state's administrative constructs. They are socio-political entities that existed prior to the formation of the nation-state (Panzironi 2006). The inherent right signifies that the governance, laws, institutions, and social systems of Indigenous communities do not stem from a delegation of state power. Rather, they evolve organically from history, cosmology, and collective experience (Panzironi 2006). Within this framework, it is important to emphasise that the rights of Indigenous women are not a distinct category of rights but are embedded in the inherent

right and the right to self-determination. The rights of Indigenous women are embedded in both concepts.

As inherent rights arising from the historical and cosmological existence of Indigenous communities, Indigenous rights encompass the entire social framework of Indigenous communities. This includes gender relations, systems of knowledge transmission, and the division of roles in the governance of communal life (Anaya 2009). Therefore, when inherent right is recognised, it is not merely the Indigenous institutional structure or authority over territory that is recognised, but also the system of internal social relations that underpins the community's sustainability. This includes the roles and authority of Indigenous women within the community.

The same applies in the context of the right to self-determination. Self-determination is not merely an abstract collective right. Rather, it is a right exercised through concrete social practices in the daily lives of Indigenous communities. It encompasses the ability to determine the direction of development, manage resources, preserve legal and cultural systems, and establish decision-making mechanisms in accordance with collective values (Panzironi 2006). In these practices, Indigenous women are not external parties who are subsequently 'involved', but political subjects who have held these rights within the Indigenous community from the outset.

The rights of Indigenous women must be understood as an integral part of the inherent right and the right to self-determination. These rights are not additional or derivative rights that emerged later because of developments in the discourse on human rights. Rather, the rights of Indigenous women form an integral part of the social and political structures of Indigenous communities themselves. Strengthening the rights of Indigenous women strengthens the exercise of self-determination. Conversely, neglecting Indigenous women undermines the foundations of the inherent right and diminishes the meaning of self-determination as substantive community democracy. Furthermore, the right to self-determination is enshrined in international law through Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which states that all peoples have the right

to freely determine their political status and to develop their economic, social and cultural lives. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) explicitly expands upon this principle,

affirming that Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination, including the right to autonomy and self-government.

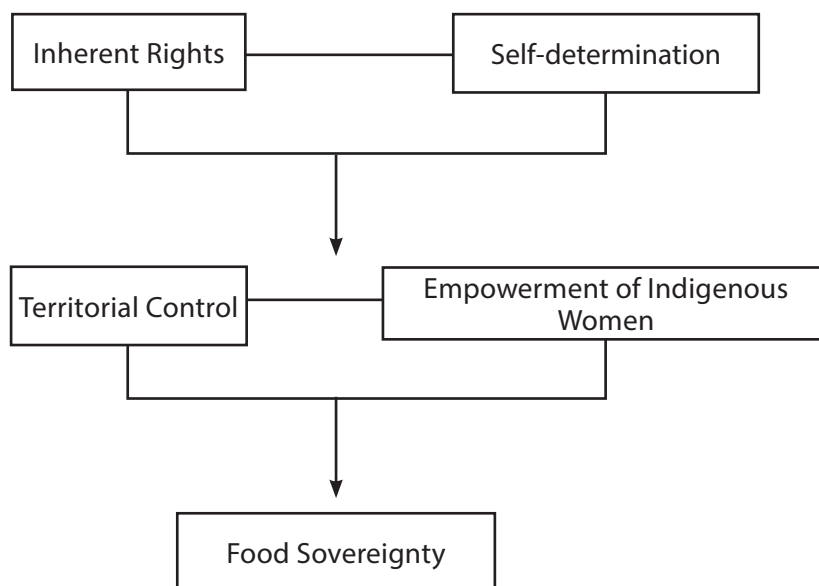


Diagram 1. Conceptual Framework of the Right to Self-Determination, Food Sovereignty, and the Rights of Indigenous Women

Source: Compiled by the author (2026)

This framework is based on three main assumptions. Firstly, Indigenous Peoples possess inherent rights rather than rights granted by the state. Secondly, these inherent rights manifest as the right to self-determination. Thirdly, the exercise of self-determination within Indigenous communities is realised in concrete terms through the management of territories, natural resources, and food systems. Indigenous women play a central role in this. This conceptual framework can be understood as both a multi-tiered relationship (both hierarchical and causal) and a normative level of inherent rights. The basis of the political and legal legitimacy of Indigenous communities' existence lies in the political level of self-determination, which underpins the right to regulate internal governance, manage indigenous territories and natural resources, and preserve legal and cultural systems. The economic-ecological level of food sovereignty is realised through control over land and forests, management of local seeds, Indigenous-based food production systems, and distribution and

consumption in accordance with community values. Finally, the socio-gender level encompasses the right to participate in decision-making processes, authority over seeds and food systems, recognition of Indigenous ecological knowledge and protection against structural marginalisation.

Indigenous Feminism

Cheryl Suzack (2010) explains that Indigenous feminism is a feminist approach that is rooted in the experiences, values, and knowledge systems of Indigenous communities rather than in Western frameworks alone. Unlike mainstream feminism, which is often considered class-centred, Indigenous feminism stems from the unique experiences of Indigenous women in confronting the erasure of traditional gender roles brought about by colonial policies. There are several key aspects to understanding the concept of Indigenous Feminism. Firstly, the interconnection between colonialism and patriarchy. The central tenet of

Indigenous feminism is that colonisation is not merely the seizure of land, but a process that imposes Western patriarchal structures on Indigenous communities. This has led to the erasure of traditional gender roles, which previously granted women certain powers or status, and their replacement with practices that marginalise Indigenous women.

Secondly, gender justice is an integral part of Indigenous peoples' sovereignty. Contrary to the view that separates women's issues from the struggles of Indigenous communities, this perspective asserts that gender justice is integral to recognising Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty and self-determination. True sovereignty cannot be achieved if women within those communities continue to experience oppression or violence (Suzack 2010).

Thirdly, there is broad intersectionality. Indigenous feminism seeks to achieve social justice that transcends boundaries such as gender, race, and class. This approach recognises that the unique position of Indigenous women is shaped by the simultaneous experience of racism and sexism, a fact that is often overlooked by mainstream feminism.

Fourthly, there is a critical examination of traditions influenced by colonialism. Indigenous feminism emphasises that traditions can be influenced by the legacy of colonialism. A critical examination is necessary to distinguish between authentic Indigenous values and 'inherited patriarchy', which is often mistakenly regarded as a traditional trait. Fifthly, culture is viewed as a tool for fostering critical consciousness. Cultural production is viewed as a theoretical and practical tool to combat silencing and marginalisation. Indigenous women reclaim cultural authority, give voice to erased histories, and envisage new political possibilities that transcend the colonial patriarchal narrative. Sixth, it provides a basis for collective action. In Indigenous feminism, collectivism is the idea that women's struggles are not individual, but are embedded in communities, social relations, and cultural continuity.

The Resilience of the *Kasepuhan Citorek*

The term 'resilience' describes the ability of a community or system to withstand, adapt to, and recover from various multidimensional threats. It encompasses the capacity of social and ecological

systems to absorb disturbances and adapt to rapid changes (Burnette 2014). The *Kasepuhan* Indigenous Community has historically faced numerous challenges that have tested its resilience with regard to its customary territory. Despite the various conflicts over forest areas, criminalisation, and intimidation they have faced, the *Kasepuhan* Indigenous Community has retained both its territory and its governance system. In 2015, the *Kasepuhan* Indigenous Community successfully campaigned for the introduction of a local regulation recognising and protecting the community's customary territory. Furthermore, in 2019, *Kasepuhan Citorek* successfully secured recognition for 1,647 hectares of customary forest.

The strength of the customary governance structure, coupled with a fair division of roles in safeguarding the customary territory, has bolstered the *Kasepuhan* Indigenous Community's resilience. They uphold ancestral traditions, such as the customary system, local wisdom, and a close relationship with nature, as the basis for this resilience. *Kasepuhan Citorek* implements a social system to protect and conserve nature in various ways, one of which is the division of roles amongst the respective *Kasepuhan* communities.

For example, the *Kasepuhan* communities of *Urug*, *Citorek*, and *Ciptagelar* play a key role in protecting the *leuweung*, or forest. Furthermore, the *Citorek Kasepuhan* is characterised primarily by its role in safeguarding food sovereignty. The *Ciptagelar Kasepuhan* is characterised by 'nu ngagelarkeun', which means introducing the *Kasepuhan* to the public. The *Cisungsang-Cisitu Kasepuhan* is pioneering the opening up of villages, while the others naturally act as the 'sempalan' - the guardians of the *Kasepuhan* at the grassroots level. This social system demonstrates that the *Kasepuhan* constitute a unified Indigenous community that has existed since long before the formation of Indonesia. All of its customary institutions, norms, values, traditions, culture, and institutional structures form an inseparable framework for life, as do its customary territories.

The *Citorek Kasepuhan's* role as guardians of food sovereignty requires them to constantly strengthen resilience, including that of the Indigenous women of *Citorek*. These women not only meet the *Citorek Kasepuhan's* internal food needs but also contribute to strengthening the *Kasepuhan's* food sovereignty more broadly. Based on participatory mapping data collected

by the Indigenous community and facilitated by BRWA, the *Citerek Kasepuhan* covers an area of 7,416 hectares.

Forests and rice fields dominate the *Citerek Kasepuhan's* customary territory (BRWA 2019).

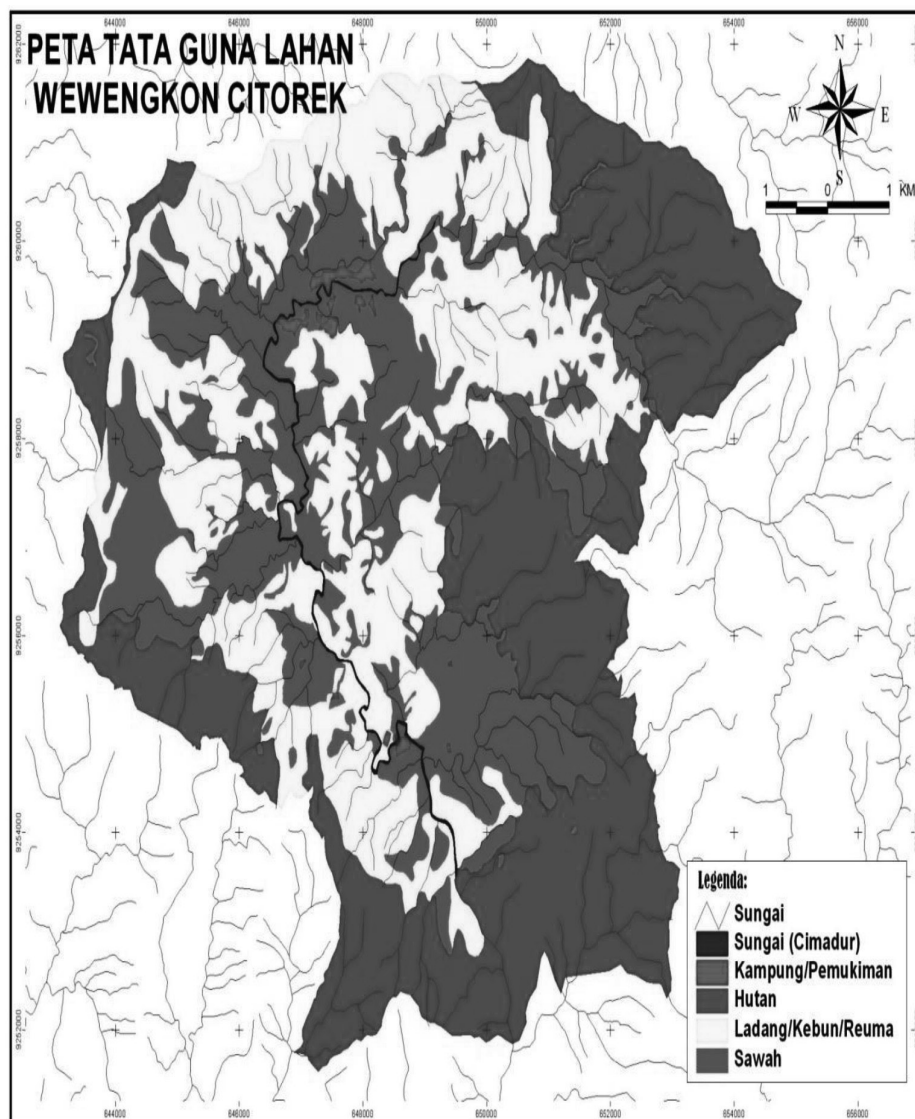


Figure 1. Map of the *Wewengkon* (Indigenous Territory) of *Kasepuhan Citorek*

Source: Participatory Mapping of the *Citerek* Indigenous Territory (2019)

This land-use map of the *Kasepuhan Citorek wewengkon* illustrates the area's traditional spatial organisation, which is based on ecological and functional considerations. Spatially, forest areas encircle food production zones (fields and rice paddies). Meanwhile, housing is located at specific points relatively close to river courses. This pattern indicates an interconnected ecological system, rather than a fragmented spatial structure.

In the context of food sovereignty, this spatial arrangement is not just a division of land functions; it

reflects an integrated food production system that is in harmony with traditional ecological practices. The forest acts as a lifeline. The extensive forest area serves as a conservation area and a source of water. It maintains hydrological balance, soil fertility, and biodiversity. Within the *Kasepuhan Citorek* customary system, the forest is not empty, but an area governed by specific customary laws. There are 'entrusted forests', 'forbidden forests', and 'cultivated forests'. The presence of forests surrounding fields and rice paddies demonstrates the dependency of the food system on the sustainability of the forest ecosystem.

Fields, or 'reuma', are traditional production spaces. This system reflects traditional shifting cultivation patterns based on cycles and soil regeneration. It is here that the practice of food sovereignty takes place, with the community determining crop types, planting patterns and land rotation based on customary knowledge rather than market logic alone. Rice paddies also form the basis of the Indigenous community's food sovereignty. They are the primary source of rice, a staple food. Their location alongside river courses highlights their reliance on natural irrigation systems. This illustrates the interconnectedness of land use, water resources, and the food system.

The role of Indigenous women is key to resilience. The Indigenous women of *Citorek* fulfil domestic roles and act as custodians of seed knowledge, granary managers, and organisers of family food distribution. They ensure the sustainability of local rice varieties, maintain food reserves for times of scarcity, and pass agricultural knowledge on to the next generation. During a focus group discussion (FGD) on 8 August 2025 at *Kasepuhan Guradog*, Neni (an Indigenous woman from *Kasepuhan Citorek*) mentioned that 25 varieties of 'padi gede' and 'padi huma' are still being preserved by Indigenous women in *Kasepuhan Citorek* to this day. In her view, the role of Indigenous women in rural communities is incomparable to that in urban areas. According to Neni, Indigenous women have the power to regulate and preserve knowledge, manage natural resources and food sources, and guarantee the sustainability of granaries. This accounts for almost 80 per cent of the authority within the Indigenous Government of *Kasepuhan Citorek*.

In times of crisis, whether due to extreme weather events or economic pressures, Indigenous women are often at the forefront of ensuring the continued sustenance of families and the community. This is demonstrated by various *Kasepuhan* customary rituals performed during times of famine or natural disasters, which can only be carried out by Indigenous women. These include the 'neres' ritual, which is intended to purify and maintain the balance of nature; the 'mapag pare nyiram' ritual, which is performed when the rice plants begin to flower (ahead of the next harvest season); and the ritual of storing rice in the 'leuit', which ensures the resilience of the *Kasepuhan* Indigenous community.

At the same time, Indigenous women continue to fulfil traditional domestic roles, such as managing the household and ensuring that the family's needs are met. According to AMAN's 2025 notes on the daily lives of *Citorek* Indigenous women, their day typically begins with completing household tasks, such as preparing meals for their families using produce from their own harvests. They then continue working in the fields or rice paddies. Upon returning home, they resume their household chores, which include processing the harvest (drying the rice, pounding it, and storing it in the granary), as well as ensuring that food is distributed to family members.

This situation indicates that women's significant contribution to the food system is not automatically accompanied by a redistribution of domestic labour. This highlights the existence of a layered workload that they bear simultaneously. This issue was discussed during the FGD on 8 August 2025. In fact, within the *Kasepuhan* customary governance system, there is no specific mechanism for the redistribution of domestic labour. Nevertheless, as part of the fair distribution of roles within customary law, Indigenous women are granted a central role that men cannot fulfil and rights that are more commensurate with their responsibilities. This is referred to as the principle of *silih asah, silih asih, silih asuh* - that is, a reciprocal relationship emphasising mutual support, love, and care when fulfilling social roles. Moreover, actual gender relations demonstrate a complementary division of roles. Typically, men engage in land clearing, heavy physical labour, and roles within the traditional leadership structure, while women play a dominant role in food management and ensuring household sustainability.

Thus, the resilience of the *Citorek Kasepuhan* has a strong gender dimension. Furthermore, this collective resilience extends beyond *kasepuhans*. *Citorek's* food sovereignty not only sustains its own community but also contributes to the wider *kasepuhan* network's sustainability. Within the traditional social structure, the sovereignty of one *kasepuhan* strengthens that of the wider union. This system shows that resilience is not just an individual ability to survive, but a collective capacity developed through traditional governance, social solidarity, and respect for nature.

Indigenous Women of the Citorek Kasepuhan and *Leuit* (Rice Granary)

Almost all the traditional institutions of the *Citorek Kasepuhan* community are closely linked to food, from traditional rituals to the structure of the traditional *Citorek Kasepuhan* government. Most of the *Citorek Kasepuhan* Indigenous community make their living from farming. The agricultural system is divided into the *huma* and *sawah* (paddy field) systems. In the *huma* system, crops are cultivated in open fields with a single

planting season per year. Meanwhile, the paddy field farming system involves cultivating rice in paddy fields with one planting season per year. Various traditional rituals emphasise the *Kasepuhan Citorek* community's food sovereignty, such as prayers to ward off rice pests, creating 'sawen' charms against misfortune in the granary (*leuit*) and 'tinggalan' rice storage traditions. Therefore, traditional rituals reflecting the community's food sovereignty are observed from the start of the planting season to the harvest.



Figure 2. The *Kasepuhan Citorek leuit*

Source: Author's documentation (2025)

The *Kasepuhan Citorek* community stores its harvest in *leuit*, or rice granary. The term 'lumbung' (granary) appears in the ancient Sundanese text *Sanghyang Siksakandang Karesian*. This text explains the sources of well-being in life.

"Clean paths, thriving crops, sufficient clothing, a tidy backyard and courtyard. In short, it is a full house, a full granary, a full chicken coop, well-tended fields, well-maintained plantations, a long life and continued good

health. The source lies with all humankind. The elements that complement life are grass, trees, vines, shrubs, lush greenery, an abundance of fruit, and tall trees thriving in fertile soil" (Atja & Danasasmita 1981).

During the *Galuh Pakuan* period, the term 'leuit' was already in use to refer to a place for storing rice, as described in the book *Sastra Ritual Wawacan Batarakala Wawacan Sulanjana*. The title of this text introduces three terms that require explanation: 'leuit',

'symbol', and 'local wisdom'. A 'leuit' is a structure used for storing agricultural produce, typically rice, which is built on stilts with woven bamboo walls. According to Koentjaraningrat (1990), artefacts embody cultural values through their function, meaning, and symbolism as manifestations of culture. Similarly, a *leuit* embodies all three of these functions: it serves a practical purpose by meeting the needs of the *Kasepuhan Citorek* Indigenous community; it fulfils a social function by promoting social solidarity; and it provides psychological benefits by offering security and comfort. A *leuit* can store rice for many years, ensuring the community does not suffer food shortages.

In *Kasepuhan Citorek*, *leuit* cannot be understood merely as a structure for storing rice; rather, it is a social institution and a symbol of food sovereignty that exists in the collective consciousness of the Indigenous community. The meaning of *leuit* is intersubjective because it is experienced collectively as a space of food security and generational continuity, as well as a spiritual space connecting humans with nature and their ancestors. With every planting and harvesting season, *leuit* serves as a reminder that rice is a precious resource that must be safeguarded with the utmost responsibility, not merely a commodity. *Leuit's* placement in a designated area separate from residents' homes highlights its collective dimension. It is not integrated into individual domestic spaces but situated within a social landscape that demonstrates that food is a shared concern. Thus, *leuit* serves as a marker that food sovereignty is social, not private. Each family has its own *leuit*, ranging from one to four units. However, they are all situated within the same area, demonstrating equality and solidarity among families in safeguarding food reserves.

Indigenous women hold a central position within the structure of authority over *leuit*. This authority is not merely symbolic, but tangible in practice. They determine when rice from the *leuit* may be taken, how much should be stored, and how the reserves should be managed to ensure sustainability until the next harvest. They act as guardians of the balance between consumption and conservation. These decisions are based on generations-old knowledge regarding seasonal cycles, the potential for crop failure, and the community's social needs. Thus, *leuit* serves as a space where the authority of Indigenous women is recognised

and exercised in concrete terms. In an interview excerpt with one of the leading Indigenous women in Citorek on 9 January 2026, this concept was explained directly:

"Leuit is not merely a place for storing rice; it is a symbol of respect for Indigenous women. It is a source of fertility and life, and its rituals are always associated with reverence for Dewi Sri, the goddess of fertility, and the protector of rice. She is also seen as the source of prosperity, representing the feminine power that maintains the balance of nature. She is worshipped as a mythological mother figure" (Yuyun, 2026, interview, 9 January).

In various decision-making processes within the *Kasepuhan Citorek* Indigenous Community, ranging from the 'seren taun' ritual to the storage of food in 'leuit', priority is always given to the views of Indigenous women, who are seen as the guardians of the community's values, balance, and sustainability. This demonstrates an egalitarian division of leadership roles between men and women within the community, based on customary law, particularly regarding the management of *leuit*.

Leuit symbolises the *Kasepuhan's* collective food sovereignty. The rice stored in *leuit* is not just a reserve; it is also a symbol of the continuity of customary law and the legitimacy of the *Kasepuhan's* traditional leadership. In the event of urgent need, disaster or food shortage in any area, *leuit* can serve as a source of solidarity, helping to maintain social balance amongst the *Kasepuhan* communities. In this context, Indigenous women not only safeguard their families' food sovereignty, but also help to ensure the continuity of solidarity across communities.

Within the framework of resilience, the existence of *leuit* in *Kasepuhan Citorek* depends heavily on the presence of Indigenous women as the primary managers. While men are involved in rice production, women are responsible for making decisions about the storage, use, and distribution of reserves. This pattern of cooperation becomes increasingly important in times of crisis. When production comes under pressure, men and women adaptively adjust their roles. Men may increase production efforts, while the Indigenous women of *Kasepuhan Citorek* use various strategies to ensure food is available, such as releasing reserves more slowly, prioritising family consumption, and supplementing the diet with other food sources (tubers, forest products) when stocks are low. They

also regulate the pace at which the harvest is utilised to ensure that reserves do not run out before the next season. This demonstrates the complementary nature of gender roles within the customary system. Equity is not measured by an equal division of labour, but rather by a balance of functions and contributions towards the sustainability of communal life.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. Unpredictable seasonal changes, a decline in the younger generation's interest in farming practices, and economic pressures that drive part of the harvest into the market can all affect the stability of food reserves. However, AMAN's (2025) findings suggest that the Indigenous women of *Kasepuhan Citorek* are still able to fulfil this function by employing strategies rooted in traditional knowledge and community solidarity. These strategies ensure the reserves remain available to guarantee survival rather than for economic accumulation.

At the heart of this phenomenon lies not only the existence of *leuit*, but also the ability of Indigenous women to manage, protect, and transmit the system of food sovereignty. In the hands of women, *leuit* functions as a living, adaptive mechanism that enables the community to survive crises while preserving continuity in terms of values, knowledge, and life itself.

Iban Dayak of Sungai Utik: From Resilience to Food Sovereignty

Historically, the *Sungai Utik* customary territory was not the original homeland of the *Dayak Iban* people. Rather, it belonged to the *Tamambaloh* tribe. The story began when a member of the *Tamambaloh* tribe invited a *Dayak Iban* to explore shifting cultivation and rattan gathering within the *Tamambaloh* customary territory. As the area was rich in natural resources, *Pateh Judan*, representing the *Dayak Iban*, requested permission from *Samagat Tamambaloh* to settle in *Ulak Paok*. This request was made in a spirit of kinship to *Samagat Ma'Lunsa* and was formalised through a customary agreement. This agreement included the provision “*bedilang besai, bejabung panjai, bedok betalaga darah*”, which means that if the Iban were to occupy *Tamambaloh* territory, they would have to adhere to *Tamambaloh* customs and refrain from disturbing the *Tamambaloh* or any other people. The agreement was formalised through a customary oath. Through this agreement, the *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik* Indigenous Community has vigorously safeguarded its territory against various threats of exploitation by outsiders - for, based on this blood pact, they are bound to protect and ensure the sustainability of the *Sungai Utik* customary territory.

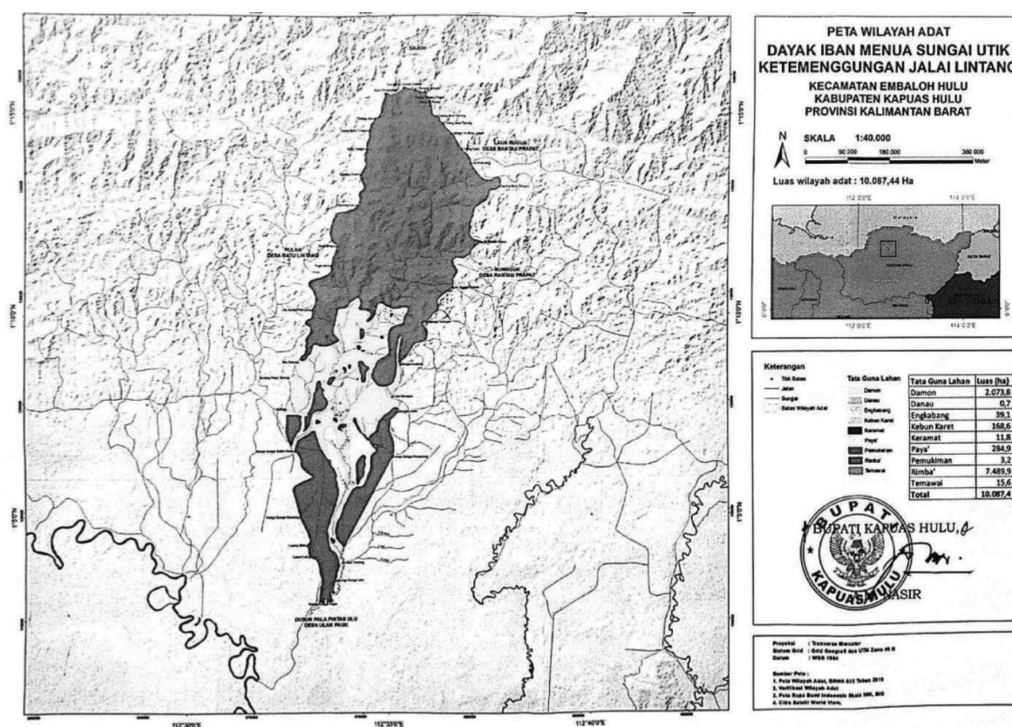


Figure 3. The Traditional Territory of the *Dayak Iban Menua of Sungai Utik*

Source: Kapuas Hulu Regency Local Regulation No. 13 of 2018 on the Recognition and Protection of Customary Law Communities

In 2018, the Kapuas Hulu Regency Government issued Kapuas Hulu Regency Regulation No. 13 of 2018, which formally recognises and protects Indigenous communities, particularly the *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik*. The following year, Kapuas Hulu Regent's Decree No. 561 of 2019 officially recognised the *Sungai Utik* customary territory, which covers an area of 10,087 hectares. This legal recognition has strengthened the resilience of the *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik* Indigenous community. They have gained legal certainty, which affirms their identity, the existence of their customary territory, and the natural resources within it. Furthermore, this regulation provides the *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik* Indigenous Community, particularly Indigenous women, with a sense of security in freely exercising their rights within their customary territory.

The *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik* also have a spatial planning system for their customary territory in accordance with customary law, ensuring the resilience and sustainability of their resources. The customary territory is divided into two areas: Firstly, *Kampung Taroh*, an area that must not be used for farming or timber harvesting. It is situated far upstream to the north of the *betang*. According to the beliefs of the *Dayak Iban* Indigenous Peoples, this area is where animals come to feed and drink. Within this area, there are springs and 'haunted' land. Secondly is *Kampung Galao*, an area of limited production under customary law. The Indigenous community may collect medicinal plants, firewood, and timber for canoe-making, but only under strict customary supervision and with penalties for non-compliance. The right of use is reserved solely for the *Dayak Iban* Indigenous community. *Sepan jelu, mali land*, and haunted land are also found in some parts of this area.

Thirdly, *Kampung Embor Kerja* is a sustainable production area that is managed according to the principles of justice and conservation under customary law. Within this area, there are also 'Tanah Mali' and 'Tanah Bertuah', which are not designated as production areas. This allows the Indigenous community to avoid logging in these areas. 'Tanah Mali' and 'Tanah Bertuah' within this area are solely used as sources of timber seedlings and other plants. This mechanism enables the *Dayak Iban* Indigenous Peoples to ensure the sustainable management of their land while

maintaining conservation in areas designated as fields, rubber plantations, or forested islands (*pulau*).

Dayak Iban Indigenous Women and Ecological Resilience in Indigenous Land Management

In ensuring food sovereignty within the *Dayak Iban* Indigenous community of *Menua Sungai Utik*, Indigenous women are integral to the overall governance system of the *Menua Sungai Utik* customary territory. In *Dayak Iban* society, food is not just a commodity to be produced and consumed; it forms an integral part of the community's cosmology, identity and generational continuity. Within this system, indigenous women are the primary guardians, both in the domestic sphere and within the community's social, ecological and spiritual structures.

The *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik* have a system of spatial planning for their customary territory that is formulated and implemented in accordance with customary law. This spatial planning is the result of collective knowledge passed down through the generations. The division of the customary territory into *Kampung Taroh*, *Kampung Galao*, and *Kampung Embor Kerja* demonstrates the community's long-standing ecological awareness regarding zoning, environmental carrying capacity, and resource sustainability. This system is the foundation of the Indigenous community's food resilience, with Indigenous women playing a central role within it.

Kampung Taroh is an area that must not be used for farming or timber harvesting. Situated far upstream to the north of the *betang* house, it is believed that this area is where animals come to feed and drink. Ecologically, this area functions as a protected zone that safeguards water sources and maintains the forest's ecological balance. Socially, it serves as a symbol of collective self-restraint, demonstrating that not all spaces may be exploited. As the guardians of their families' food needs, Indigenous women understand that the sustainability of fields and rice paddies depends heavily on preserving this upstream area. Without a secure water supply and an intact forest, there will be no harvest to store in the granaries.

"Our entire livelihood depends on the forest, from our food sources to our traditional rituals. Destroying *Kampung Taroh* is like destroying our lives" (Seda, an Iban Dayak Indigenous woman from Sungai Utik, interviewed on 19 February 2019).

This interview excerpt illustrates how respect for *Kampung Taroh* is integral to a long-term strategy for ensuring food security.

Kampung Galao is a restricted production zone. The community may collect medicinal plants, firewood, and timber for canoe-making in this area, but only under strict customary supervision and with clear penalties for violations. The right to utilise these resources is reserved solely for the Indigenous *Dayak Iban* people. This arrangement strikes a balance between utilisation and protection. Indigenous women have a particularly close relationship with this area, particularly when it comes to collecting medicinal plants and household necessities.

"In *Kampung Galao*, we gather medicinal plants and grow various types that are rarely seen in the city" (Seda, an Iban Dayak Indigenous woman from Sungai Utik, interviewed on 19 February 2019).

Knowledge of plant species, seasons, and boundaries forms part of the women's ecological knowledge, ensuring utilisation does not turn into exploitation.

Meanwhile, *Kampung Embor Kerja* is a sustainable production area. Here, fields and rubber plantations are managed according to the principles of justice and sustainability as defined by customary law. This mechanism demonstrates a regenerative mindset: production must always be balanced with sources of recovery. Indigenous women, who are responsible for seed and harvest management, play a vital role in maintaining this cycle. They select the best seeds, store them for the following season, and preserve varietal diversity.

"Dayak Iban Indigenous women have authority over most agricultural activities, including the management of harvests. Without them, farming cannot begin" (Sutomo, Chair of the AMAN Kapuas Hulu Executive Committee & a member of the *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik* Indigenous community, 19 February 2026).

In the context of food sovereignty, *Dayak Iban* Indigenous women are not only responsible for managing the kitchen and granary, but also for planning sustainability. They ensure that crops are not completely consumed and that seeds are not lost, thereby ensuring that future generations continue to have access to sufficient food sources. This shows that food sovereignty in *Sungai Utik* is not just about producing rice or tubers

but controlling the whole production cycle - from start to finish. The customary land-use system provides the structural framework, while Indigenous women act as operational guardians and custodians of practical knowledge.

The Menua Dayak Iban Sungai Utik are resilient due to the integration of customary law, ecological land-use planning, and balanced social roles. The division of customary territories ensures that some areas are fully protected, some are used on a limited basis, and some are used for sustainable production. Within this system, Indigenous women ensure that every customary policy regarding land and forests ultimately contributes to the food security of families and communities. They act as the link connecting spatial governance with everyday practices.

The role of Indigenous *Iban Dayak* women in ensuring food sovereignty is strategic and integral. They are not merely supplementary figures within the customary system; they form its very foundation. Without Indigenous women, Indigenous spatial planning would lack the driving force behind its practices. Likewise, without Indigenous spatial planning, Indigenous women's work in safeguarding food would lack an ecological foundation. Together, they ensure that the *Menua Sungai Utik* community remains food-sovereign, resilient to threats, and sustainable for future generations.

The Role of Women and Food Sovereignty in Indigenous Communities

Findings from the *Kasepuhan Citorek* and *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik* communities show that Indigenous women's practices and experiences embody a form of feminism that is fundamentally different from liberal-individualist feminism. This Indigenous feminism, which has emerged within these communities, can be described as collective Indigenous feminism - an emancipatory practice rooted in community, cosmology, and intergenerational responsibility. In contrast, individual feminism within the liberal tradition generally emphasises personal autonomy, freedom of choice, and achieving equality through individual rights. It primarily focuses on the individual woman as an independent agent in relation to the state and the market. Within this framework, success is measured by access to the public sphere, political representation,

and personal economic equality of opportunity. In contrast, Indigenous women in *Kasepuhan Citorek* and *Sungai Utik* do not view themselves as separate from their communities as socio-political entities. In fact, their identity and authority stem from their collective relationship with the community's customary territory, legal system, and social structure.

In *Kasepuhan Citorek*, Indigenous women play a central role in the *leuit* system - rice granaries that symbolise collective food sovereignty as well as serving as storage spaces. Their authority in determining when rice may be harvested, how much must be stored, and how reserves are maintained for the following season demonstrates real power. However, this power is not individualistic in nature. Rather, it is exercised for the benefit of the family and the community.

Similarly, among the Indigenous *Dayak Iban* community in *Sungai Utik*, Indigenous women are not just 'domestic actors', but also seed guardians, rice variety selectors and key figures in safeguarding and strengthening the Indigenous community's food sovereignty. This knowledge is passed down through the generations and practised within a traditional land-use planning framework that divides the territory into conservation, limited-production, and sustainable-production zones. Women's authority does not emerge as a form of resistance against men, but rather as part of a relatively egalitarian, collective gender relationship. This collective Indigenous feminism is not oriented towards competition or gender supremacy, but rather towards balance and harmony as the foundation of community sustainability. It considers women's rights an integral part of ancestral rights and Indigenous social structures, not separate from community rights.

Furthermore, food sovereignty is inseparable from the principle of self-determination in both Indigenous communities. Self-determination is not a separatist project. Rather, it constitutes internal autonomy, including the right to govern customary territories, food production systems, and decision-making processes in accordance with customary law. In *Sungai Utik*, for example, the recognition of customary territories through local government policy has strengthened the community's capacity to protect a 10,087-hectare forest. However, customary governance had already been in place through the division of spaces, such as *Kampung Taroh* (a protected area), *Kampung Galao* (limited

production), and *Kampung Embor Kerja* (sustainable production), long before formal state recognition. Within this system, Indigenous women exercise self-determination in concrete terms by controlling seeds, cropping patterns, and food distribution. In *Citorek*, self-determination is evident in the prohibition of selling harvested rice and the obligation to store paddy in *leuit*. These customary policies demonstrate that the focus of production is life sustainability rather than capital accumulation. As guardians of the *leuit*, Indigenous women are key in ensuring these collective decisions are implemented. Self-determination is not an abstract concept, but a daily practice carried out through women's bodies, labour, and knowledge.

In both communities, food sovereignty encompasses not only food availability, but also collective control over land, forests, water, and seeds. It is the economic and ecological manifestation of the right to self-determination. Within this framework, Indigenous feminism finds its practical application. Indigenous women ensure household consumption and safeguard the genetic diversity of seeds. They also maintain reserves for times of crisis and pass on ecological knowledge to the next generation. Food sovereignty is the arena in which women's rights, community rights, and territorial rights converge.

Unlike individual feminism, which is often confined to market logic (for example, through economic empowerment based on individual entrepreneurship), collective Indigenous feminism actively rejects the commodification of food. In *Citorek*, for instance, rice is not sold but stored to guarantee sustainability. In *Sungai Utik*, the forest is not logged indiscriminately. It is safeguarded as a source of life across generations. Collective Indigenous feminism shows that women's emancipation does not necessarily entail breaking away from community structures; rather, it can entail strengthening the community itself. Self-determination forms the foundation of its politics, while food sovereignty constitutes its economic praxis. In the context of the climate crisis and the expansion of extractive development, this model provides a framework in which gender justice, ecological sustainability and political autonomy can flourish together. This involves strengthening the position of Indigenous women within their communities by recognising their roles and knowledge, ensuring they have equal access to

resources and participation in decision-making, and protecting them from discrimination and violence.

The findings regarding the *Kasepuhan Citorek* and *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik* communities indicate a strong interconnection between the practice of food sovereignty and collective self-determination. Despite inhabiting distinct ecological and political landscapes, both communities exemplify the pivotal role of Indigenous women in ensuring the sustainability of the food system through their expertise in seed management and the regulation of food production and consumption. In *Citorek*, this role is realised through *leuit* management and food storage ethics, whereas in *Sungai Utik*, it is realised through customary land use regulation, seed conservation, and forest ecosystem management. The underlying principles that unite these communities are collective control over food, a connection to customary territories and the role of women as guardians of sustainability across generations rather than the form of the practices themselves.

From a critical paradigm perspective, these findings confirm that the food sovereignty of Indigenous women cannot be understood merely as an economic or cultural practice. Rather, it is an arena of power relations that reveals how communities maintain their autonomy in the face of pressure from the state, the market and extractive development. In both communities, Indigenous women fulfil not only reproductive roles, but also perform political functions in a substantive sense, namely determining the direction of production, safeguarding resources and ensuring the sustainability of their communities' livelihoods. A key takeaway is that the resilience of Indigenous communities stems from collective systems that integrate ecological knowledge, gender justice and territorial control rather than external intervention. Strengthening the rights of Indigenous women and recognising indigenous territories are therefore key to maintaining food sovereignty amid the climate crisis and increasingly intensive economic expansion.

Closing

Drawing on research with the *Kasepuhan Citorek* and *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik* communities, this study confirms that the food sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples cannot be divorced from the principle of self-

determination and the recognition of their inherent rights, which are inextricably linked to the community. Food sovereignty encompasses not only food production, distribution, and consumption, but also the concrete manifestation of the right to self-determination in economic, ecological, social, and cultural terms.

In *Kasepuhan Citorek*, the *leuit* system, the prohibition of selling rice, and the obligation to store paddy as a reserve demonstrate that the food system is founded on the principles of sustainability, prudence, and collective solidarity. Food sovereignty does not arise from market intervention or state programmes, but from customary governance that has been refined over generations. In *Citorek*, Indigenous women play a central role in ensuring the sustainability of this system through seed management, reserve storage, consumption regulation, and transmitting agricultural knowledge.

Meanwhile, among the *Dayak Iban Menua Sungai Utik*, the division of customary land use into protected areas, limited-production zones, and sustainable-production zones reveals an ecological system integrated with the social system. While the recognition of customary territories by the local government strengthens the community's political standing, the foundations of their resilience were established long before this through customary law and ancestral agreements. Within this system, *Dayak Iban* Indigenous women act as custodians of seed diversity, regulators of the planting cycle, and key figures in maintaining the balance between production and conservation.

The two case studies suggest that the rights of Indigenous women are an integral part of the rights to ancestral lands and self-determination rather than separate from the community's collective rights. Treating women's rights as distinct from their collective context risks perpetuating a liberal-individualist approach that does not fully align with the social structure of Indigenous communities. In practice, Indigenous women exercise their right to self-determination through their work within the food system.

The research also shows that food sovereignty is a political arena in which power relations between the state, the market, and Indigenous communities are contested. When Indigenous territories are seized or controlled by extractive interests, access to food sources is lost, as is the collective capacity to determine

the direction of community life. Therefore, recognising and protecting Indigenous territories is key to realising sustainable food sovereignty.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the argument that self-determination, territorial control, food sovereignty, and the empowerment of Indigenous women are interconnected. In practical terms, the study shows that the ecological and social resilience of Indigenous communities stems from a collective system that respects gender balance, environmental sustainability, and community solidarity. Empowering Indigenous women strengthens the exercise of self-determination, and strengthening self-determination ensures the sustainability of food sovereignty. These three elements are inseparable. Together, they lay the groundwork for a future in which Indigenous communities can flourish with dignity and sustainability amidst the pressures of the climate crisis and increasingly intensive extractive development.

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