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Andi Misbahul Pratiwi, Katie McQuaid & Robert M. Vanderbeck

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Gender, vulnerability, and power in Indonesia's climate policies

Andi Misbahul Pratiwi, Katie McQuaid and Robert M. Vanderbeck

School of Geography, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

ABSTRACT

Indonesia has developed key climate policy documents to guide its adaptation and mitigation agendas while committing to gender mainstreaming and inclusion within its broader development framework. However, there is an urgency to understand if and how these documents advance gender and climate justice. To this end, we examine how gender is constructed and operationalized within Indonesia's climate policies using feminist intersectional policy analysis. Our analysis of ten climate policies, published by Indonesian ministries between 2010 and 2022, identifies three key issues. First, gender is framed narrowly, often implying a linear relationship between gender and vulnerability, portraying women and marginalized communities as inherently disadvantaged while overlooking their agency, leadership, and the structural root causes of their exposure to climate vulnerabilities and risks. Although women in Indonesia have long demonstrated leadership and agency in environmental struggles, gender is conceptualized in Indonesia's policies in a reductive manner, reproducing a binary and hetero-patriarchal understanding of gender. Second, policies prioritize top-down institutional knowledge and government perspectives over community-led insights and diverse knowledges. Strategies to amplify grassroots voices remain underdeveloped and perpetuate imbalanced patriarchal power dynamics that limit their influence on decision-making processes. Third, intersectional and diverse forms of leadership and political action are inadequately addressed, despite their critical role in shaping more inclusive and just climate policies. While capacity-building and participation are encouraged, the policies fail to foster models of leadership, policymaking, and programming that embrace diverse community experiences, knowledges, and agency and meaningfully engage local responses, needs, and priorities. Our article underscores the need for contextually grounded intersectional approaches to climate policy, integrating diverse and intersecting vulnerabilities, knowledges, and forms of agency while tackling the root causes of inequalities to promote justice, inclusivity, and transformative climate adaptation in Indonesia and elsewhere.

Key policy insights

- Gender mainstreaming in Indonesian climate policy remains largely procedural and vulnerability-focused, failing to address structural drivers of inequality.
- Climate governance prioritizes technocratic and institutional knowledge while limiting meaningful integration of community-led and grassroots expertise.
- Binary and heteronormative gender framings marginalize diverse identities and oversimplify power relations.
- Transformative adaptation requires contextually grounded intersectional approaches that redistribute decision-making power and strengthen community leadership.

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CONTACT Andi Misbahul Pratiwi gyamp@leeds.ac.uk Woodhouse, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK

1. Introduction

While Indonesia, as the country with the second-longest coastline and home to thousands of small islands, faces severe risks from climate change and disasters (BNPB, 2025), it also hosts hundreds of active social movements and environmental conflicts (Tarigan, 2023). A key example is the women's environmental movement, which thrives at the local level and is driven by various natural resource conflicts, including the climate crisis (Candraningrum, 2014, 2019, 2024; Permatasari & Setiawan, 2024). For instance, in eastern Indonesia, women from Kodingareng Island have mobilized against destructive sand mining, threatening their livelihoods and the island's ecosystem (Chandra, 2020). The hashtag #KamiMenolakTenggelam (translated as #WeRefuseToSink) has been used by fisherwomen on the North Coast of Java Island to protest the urgent tidal flooding issues in their coastal villages (Roejan, 2023). Many coastal villages have already been submerged due to a complex interplay of factors, including sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and extractive development (Desmawan & Sukamdi, 2012; Masnu'ah et al., 2024). In this situation, women and other marginalized groups are at the forefront, not only bearing the brunt of environmental and climate injustices and intersectional burdens, but also leading resistance movements against these crises.

In this article, we analyse how gender and leadership are constructed within Indonesia's climate policy framework and examine whether these policies meaningfully recognize grassroots agency evident in climate struggles. As Indonesia advances climate adaptation commitments in line with post-Paris Agreement targets (Apresian, 2025), a growing body of research shows that climate impacts are uneven and shaped by intersecting social and structural inequalities rather than experienced uniformly. Marginalized groups often face heightened risks due to pre-existing inequalities linked to historical and political-economic processes such as colonialism and neoliberal development (Crawford et al., 2023; Fraser, 2023; Jones et al., 2024). These dynamics reinforce multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination across gender, sexuality, class, age, diffability,[1] and race (McQuaid & Pirmasari, 2023; Sovacool et al., 2023; Terry, 2009). Feminist scholars adopting an intersectional lens demonstrate how gender interacts with these inequalities to shape differentiated experiences of climate risk and response (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Resurrección et al., 2019). Policies that fail to recognize such intersecting inequalities risk reinforcing injustice and contributing to maladaptation (Juhola et al., 2016). Maladaptation occurs when adaptation strategies unintentionally increase vulnerability or create new risks (Popke et al., 2016; Resurrección et al., 2019). This underscores the importance of integrating social and structural analysis into climate adaptation planning (McMullen et al., 2019; Nightingale, 2009).

Policies must acknowledge that women's climate vulnerabilities are shaped by structural gender inequalities. In Indonesia, disparities persist across health, education, economic participation, and political representation. The country ranks 87th out of 146 in the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2023), has one of the highest child marriage rates in Southeast Asia (UNICEF, 2023), and records high levels of gender-based violence, with over 289,000 reported cases in 2023 (Komnas Perempuan, 2024). Women are disproportionately represented in informal and unpaid domestic labour, often with limited labour protections, restricted access to technology, and higher poverty rates – patterns that are particularly pronounced among older women in rural areas (BPS, 2024; MoWECP, 2024). They also remain underrepresented in local and national parliaments (BPS, 2025; CWI, 2024). Global research further shows that climate change can intensify such inequalities, contributing to increased child marriage, educational disruption, health risks, and gender-based violence (Caridade et al., 2022; Pope et al., 2023; Yüzen et al., 2023).

Such intersectional and asymmetrical burdens and impacts are simultaneously re/produced by inequitable global systems while being deeply embedded within local contexts, shaped by different histories, identities, geographical locations, and political contexts. In Indonesia, women in coastal communities face livelihood disruption, water scarcity, health risks, and displacement linked to sea-level rise, extractive development, and tidal flooding, particularly in poorer fishing households (Latifa & Fitranita, 2013; Masnu'ah et al., 2024). Indigenous Papuan women confront compounded pressures from exctractivism and resource conflicts that erode livelihoods and local knowledges (Katmo et al., 2022; Malinda, 2021; Munro & Baransano, 2023). Women with diffabilities and gender and sexual diversity groups also encounter exclusion from disaster planning and heightened stigma during climate crises (Dewi & Wongkar, 2022; Pirmasari & McQuaid, 2023). At the same time, these communities also demonstrate resilience and agency, contributing to, and leading, community-based disaster risk

reduction and adaptation strategies (Rahmawati, 2023; Triadi & Ismoyo, 2022). While celebrating power in climate change is essential – as it manifests through strong resistance in public spaces and everyday activism (Allison, 2017; Bee et al., 2015; Gonda, 2019) – it is equally critical to push beyond stereotypical narratives or binaries of vulnerability and agency in order to recognize and raise urgent questions about the complexities of gender, climate change, and feminist politics (de Wit, 2021; Resurrección, 2013). All of this raises urgent questions about the ways in which gender and intersectional complexity are framed, operationalized and/or neglected in climate policies and action.

In this paper, we critically reflect on how these policies typically fail to demonstrate intersectional complexity, and, in light of this, we examine whether the recent Indonesian policy approach has the potential to advance gender and climate justice. Although research on climate adaptation policies in Indonesia has grown in recent years (Apresian, 2025), this body of research reflects the more general lack of integration of feminist theory and conceptualization into climate policy research (Alonso-Epelde et al., 2024). Studies that explore intersectional justice in tackling climate change in transformative ways remain largely overlooked (Singleton et al., 2022/2021). By critically analysing Indonesia's climate policies, we highlight the need for policy-making that meaningfully engages with intersectional vulnerabilities, knowledges, and agency, and contributes to more inclusive and transformative adaptation strategies.

Our article begins by providing an overview of Indonesian climate policies that situates the development of these policies historically and politically within wider trajectories of gender discourse in Indonesia. Section 3 outlines our feminist intersectional methodology to analyse key national Indonesian policy documents produced between 2010 and 2022. Section 4 present the findings of our policy analysis, revealing critical gender and intersectionality gaps within these climate policies. We then engage in a discussion that directly interrogates power structures that shape the representation of gender and intersectional complexity, recognition of diverse knowledges, and community leadership. Section 5, we underscore the urgent need for a climate policy framework that moves beyond siloed inclusion toward intersectional and transformative adaptation.

2. Setting gender and climate policy in Indonesia in context

Indonesia has demonstrated its commitment to climate change policies through the ratification of several environmental conventions, starting with the outcomes of the 1972 Stockholm Conference (MoEF, 2022). The country ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change via Law No. 6 of 1994, followed by the Kyoto Protocol ratification through Law No. 17 of 2004 and the Paris Agreement in Law No. 16 of 2016. A gender mainstreaming approach underpins Indonesia's gender-responsive policy development, including climate adaptation efforts, institutionalized through the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1984 and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 (MoWECP, 2015a). The government has committed to integrating a gender perspective into climate adaptation policies as mandated by Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 on Gender Mainstreaming and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection notably leads gender mainstreaming in climate adaptation policies (Bappenas, 2021).

Gender mainstreaming itself has been widely critiqued for its binary approach, which overlooks intersecting identities such as race, class, ethnicity, diff/ability, and sexuality (Squires, 2009) and fails to address the structural transformations necessary for substantive gender equality, particularly in the face of global crises like climate change (Alston, 2014; Whittenbury, 2013). Studies indicate that Indonesia's current gender-sensitive disaster risk management strategies remain inadequate to reduce inequalities (Septanaya & Fortuna, 2023), and broader gender equity goals remain unfulfilled (Oktari et al., 2021). Scholars argue for a strategic shift beyond male/female binaries to recognize gender diversity and power dynamics more holistically (Butale, 2022; Novovic, 2023; Rao & Kelleher, 2005; Tolhurst et al., 2012), and moving beyond gender mainstreaming to gender-transformative policies (Fedele et al., 2019; Resurrección et al., 2019), to address and rectify the root and systemic causes of gender inequalities. Building gender-transformative policies requires a critical understanding of how gender itself is constructed, and how power dynamics reinforce social and gender

inequalities. This can be achieved by better understanding hidden and deep-seated power structures and their historical and political contexts (MacArthur et al., 2022; Resurrección et al., 2019).

Gender discourse in Indonesia has been shaped by shifting political regimes and historical events, which in turn influence how gender is framed and operationalized in policy. In Indonesia's pre-independence era (before 1945), the women's movement in Indonesia played a crucial role in fighting colonialism, developing the idea of nationalism, and empowering women's rights in the domestic and public sphere (Ningrum, 2018; Rahayu & Aprilia, 2018; Stuers, 1960). In the early independence era, the women's movement continuously fought for women's political rights, worked to lift women out of poverty, and pushed policies that accommodated women's needs (Wieringa, 2003). During the authoritarian regime (1966–1998), the women's movement was systematically oppressed (Wieringa, 2002, 2003) in conjunction with the re/production of a masculine, binary, and hetero-patriarchal gender ideology. Under the doctrine of *state ibuism*, women were confined to the roles of mothers and dutiful housewives within the heteronormative family, while men dominated public spheres (Blackburn, 2004; Mutaqin, 2018; Suryakusuma, 2011). This ideology was further shaped by colonial legacies that influenced Indonesian policies and frameworks (Blackburn, 2004; Sproat, 2015). For example, the establishment of women's organizations such as Dharma Pertiwi (an association of military officers' wives), Dharma Wanita (an association of civil servants' wives), and the Family Welfare Guidance Organization (*Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*/PKK), which is state-controlled and has a parallel hierarchical structure mirroring the hierarchy of their husbands' positions, from the village to the national-level (Arivia & Subono, 2017; Blackburn, 2004; Suryakusuma, 1996, 2011). It replicates the model of women's organizations formed by the Japanese government during colonial occupation in Indonesia, known as *Fujinkai* (Sproat, 2015). Furthermore, the domestication of women in the Marriage Law of 1974 regulates women's roles as housewives, influenced by both Japanese and Dutch colonialism (Pirmasari, 2020; Sproat, 2015), as well as by the gender discourse in the traditional worldview of Islamic law (Cammack, 1989; Cammack et al., 1996).

The 1998 Reformasi era marked a turning point for civil society and the women's movement. Two years later, women's rights activists successfully pushed for gender mainstreaming in public policy and development agendas, manifested in Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000. This mandate aimed to ensure that development policies incorporated women's voices and needs, leading to a series of publications on gender-responsive policies (Arivia & Subono, 2017). Key legal advancements included the 2004 Domestic Violence Law, the 2007 Human Trafficking Law, a 30% quota for women in the 2003 Election Law, the 2019 revision of the Marriage Law to raise the minimum marriage age for women, and the 2022 Sexual Violence Criminal Law (Pratiwi, 2023). However, the pursuit of gender and intersectional justice remains stagnant in both policies, facing growing resistance from antifeminist groups, rising conservatism in the last decade (Alfirdaus et al., 2022; Hidayahtulloh, 2023; Nurmila, 2020), and the return of an authoritarian regime (Mietzner, 2025). This backlash has contributed to the proliferation of discriminatory and homophobic local regulations (Komnas Perempuan, 2021) and stalled the approval of various policies for gender justice (Wardhani, 2024), further undermining gender equality and transformational efforts. Additionally, gender discourses acress in Indonesia are highly diverse, shaped by regional differences – West, Central, and East Indonesia – as well as geographical differences – urban, suburban, rural, coastal, and mountainous. These intersect with diverse religious and spiritual beliefs, ethnic identities, class, age, sexuality and other identities and values, influencing policies and practices at multiple scales, from the national to the individual (Beta, 2022; Blackburn, 2004; Candraningrum, 2014; Davies, 2018; Hendrastiti, 2019). This shows how gender discourses in Indonesia are highly contested and policies become a battleground for different gender discourses to be operationalized, ultimately re/producing dominant gender in/justices in practice.

3. Method: feminist intersectional policy analysis

Feminist intersectional analysis provides a powerful lens and set of tools for examining how climate policies shape and reinforce social (in)equalities. It challenges power structures and offers a more nuanced understanding of marginalization, oppression, and vulnerability (Osborne, 2015; Singleton et al., 2021), connecting climate action with justice and equity. Intersectionality provides a critical and powerful framework for understanding how multiple identities, such as gender, age, race, caste, indigeneity, and (diff)ability – intersect to shape

individuals' experiences of vulnerabilities and resilience in the face of climate change (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Cho et al., 2013; McCall, 2005). More importantly, it reveals how these experiences are shaped by power: deep-seated injustices, oppressions and discriminations that exacerbate marginalization and intensify climate impacts (Mikulewicz et al., 2023). As Kaijser and Kronsell (2014) emphasizes, intersectional analysis moves beyond merely identifying patterns of power; it critically examines the underlying categorizations that sustain or disrupt structural inequalities in climate governance. It asks which identities are legitimized and mobilized for political action, and which are rendered invisible within dominant climate agendas (Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014). By problematizing gender via an intersectional approach, we can expose how climate policies either reinforce or dismantle systemic inequalities.

To do so, we analysed 10 climate policies published by the Indonesian Ministry of National Development Planning (Bappenas), the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF), the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (MoWECP), and the Ministry of Finance (MoF) between 2010 and 2022. These documents were prepared through multistakeholder meetings, working groups, and public consultations. The documents were selected based on their publication year and relevance to Indonesia's climate strategies. We included only national-level documents published by ministries, excluding climate documents produced at the provincial and district levels. In total, ten policy documents (seven general policy documents and three technical guidelines) were analysed and organized chronologically to trace the development of Indonesia's climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. The documents are as follows: (1) Indonesia Climate Change Sectoral Roadmap: Synthesis Roadmap; (2) National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation; (3) National Adaptation Plan: Executive Summary; (4) General Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation; (5) Technical Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation at the Regional Level; (6) Updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) on Climate Change Adaptation; (7) Indonesia Long-Term Strategy for Low Carbon and Climate Resilience 2050 (LTS-LCCR); (8) Climate Resilience Development Policy 2020–2045; (9) Indonesia's Adaptation Communication; and (10) Technical Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Budget Tagging. The general documents establish foundational values, principles, and policy directions for national climate adaptation. In contrast, the technical guidelines provide actionable frameworks for ministries and local governments to operationalize gender mainstreaming in climate initiatives. All analysed documents are publicly accessible online and published in Bahasa Indonesia and/or English. Notably, most of the analysed documents relate to adaptation, as follows the *2014 National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation*, the Indonesian government developed adaptation policies involving more ministries and agencies compared to previous mitigation policies (Apresian, 2025).

We applied an intersectionality framework through a two-stage analytical process. First, we identified the placement of gender-related terms via keyword searches and examined how these terms intersected and connected with other political concepts. We used not only the word 'gender' but also 'women' to ensure that we did not overlook any sections where the gender framework was implicitly discussed, even if the term 'gender' was not used. The coding was led by the first author, and the interpretation process was conducted collaboratively through iterative discussions that refined our intersectional lens and revealed the power dynamics shaping policy narratives. Second, following Hankivsky and Cormier (2011), who highlight the lack of methodological guidance and synthesis of 'best practices' for applying intersectionality in policy analysis, we structured our text analysis around three intersectional and transformative questions informed by the gender and climate change scholarship (Elmhirst, 2015; Kaijser & Kronsell, 2014; Rocheleau et al., 1996, p. 2015; Sundberg, 2017): (1) Representation and inclusion: Who is included, and how are different communities represented? (2) Power and knowledge: Whose knowledge is recognized and privileged in policy discourse? (3) Agency and Political Action: Who is considered a meaningful agent of change, and in what ways? These guiding questions helped us examine how Indonesian climate policies address inequalities by adopting gender as a critical axis, allowing us to assess whether policies move beyond rhetorical commitments to challenge systemic inequities and advance gender and climate justice. The analysis was conducted at two levels: first, reviewing general policies (7 documents), and second, conducting a granular analysis of gender-specific policies (3 documents). This layered approach enabled a deeper exploration of consciously gender-focused climate policies, uncovering their structural, ideological, and material contexts, and critically assessing both the gaps and transformative potential within policy narratives.

4. Findings and discussion: navigating gender within climate policies

We begin our analysis examining how gender-related terms are used in Indonesian climate policies, as illustrated in Table 1. In the first column, we list the documents based on published years, starting from 2010. In the second column, we categorize the policies into two types: general documents and gender-specific documents, which influence our analysis further. In the third column, we highlight illustrative quotations from the documents associated with gender and gender mainstreaming. The fourth column indicates how many times the word 'gender' appears in each document to allow us to explore the evolution of the integration of gender perspectives. Finally, in the fifth column, we mark the location of explicitly gender-related concepts. In general, climate policy documents consist of several sections with different names, which for analysis purposes we divide into two main clusters: background and strategy. The 'background' cluster includes several chapters including introduction, vision, current condition, and context; while the 'strategy' cluster, as we define it, includes chapters focused on pathways, activities, action plans, programmes, strategies, and implementation. This allows us to better understand how gender is positioned within Indonesia's climate policies over time and assess whether gender is primarily framed as a contextual issue, acknowledged in background discussions, or as an actionable priority integrated into strategic planning and practice.

Several tendencies are clear from an examination of the texts. A key characteristic of Indonesian climate policy discourse is that the words 'gender' and 'women' tend to be used interchangeably and are closely related. The frequency with which terms related to women and/or gender are used in the documents has also increased markedly over the decade. For example, in 2010, the use of the word gender was relatively infrequent, with only two mentions in the document. This then grew, especially in 2015, when there were technical documents specifically related to gender and climate change and continued to grow over the following years. Also notable are the ways in which other concepts are increasingly linked to gender in these policies, including 'impacts' (dampak), 'vulnerable society' (masyarakat rentan), 'vulnerabilities' (kerentanan), 'vulnerable groups' (kelompok rentan), 'differentiated effects' (perbedaan dampak), 'community-based approaches' (pendekatan berbasis komunitas), 'leadership' (kepemimpinan), 'capacity-building' (peningkatan kapasitas), and 'inclusivity'(inklusivitas). Additionally, one can see how in some cases discussions of gender remain consigned to the background section of documents, and are less evident or invisible in sections on concrete strategy. Finally, there is clearly evolution in the overall approach adopted within the policies: a gender mainstreaming approach becomes evident within Indonesian climate policy discourse over the past decade, followed by a shift to the use of the concept of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), as first seen in *Indonesia's Adaptation Communication* (MoEF, 2022).

Despite the shifting of gender framework and the increasing use of gender terminology in policies and technical guidelines that more detail address gender issues in more detail, we argue that the interchangeable use of 'gender' and 'women', as well as the persistent association of 'gender' with 'vulnerability', remains problematic. As other scholars have noted, this will fail to transform gender power dynamics, structures, and norms in climate change issues (Hillenbrand et al., 2015; Resurrección et al., 2019), such as access to control over resources, decision-making processes, and the neglect of complex care work that involves many actors across multiple stages: household, community, market, and state (Elmhirst, 2011; Kabeer, 2015; Rocheleau et al., 1996). We elaborate and develop our critique in the following section by analysing both general and gender-specific documents through three key thematic questions: representation and inclusion; power and knowledge; agency and political action.

4.1. Gender as a listing practice: on general documents

Our analysis of seven general policy documents reveals a limited commitment to gender within Indonesia's climate adaptation and mitigation agenda, where gender appears as a listing practice rather than a political and substantive inclusion in policy documents. In the first theme, representation and inclusion, our analysis highlights how characteristic of this national policy discourse is that gender tends to be constructed primarily in relation to women's and children's issues. For example, the *Indonesia Climate Change Sectoral Roadmap: Synthesis Roadmap* (Bappenas, 2010) conceptualizes gender through the specific vulnerabilities of women,

Table 1. Frequency, location and operationalization of gender in Indonesian climate policies.

Climate policies (1)	Category	Illustrative quotations (2)	Frequency ('gender' and 'women' terms) (3)	Location in text (4)
Indonesia Climate Change Sectoral Roadmap: Synthesis Roadmap (Bappenas, 2010, p. 173)	General Document	… will be required to address the issues related to **impacts** of climate change on biodiversity, energy and food security, population and **gender** in Indonesia (p. 7)	3	Background
National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation (Bappenas, 2014, p. 96)	General Document	… need to consider efforts to reduce vulnerability, especially in communities that are **vulnerable** to climate change, such as women, children, low-income, elderly groups, and others (p. 31)	13	Background and Strategy
General Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation (MoWECP, 2015a, p. 98)	Gender-Specific Document	Building a knowledge system that supports the improvement of adaptive capacities for **women and men** in vulnerable areas to ensure sustainable climate change adaptation efforts (p. 18)	405	Background and Strategy
Technical Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation at the Regional Level (MoWECP, 2015b, p. 94)	Gender-Specific Document	… **men, women, girls, boys, the elderly, and people with disabilities**, in terms of access and participation, as well as receiving equal benefits and having a voice in decision-making related to climate change adaptation and mitigation actions (p. 75)	487	Background
National Adaptation Plan: Executive Summary (Bappenas, 2019, p. 32)	General Document	… need to consider (embedded) **gender sensitivity** and **vulnerable groups**, ecosystem-based, landscape-based or spatial, as well as financial innovation (p. 12)	3	Background and Strategy
Updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) on Climate Change Adaptation (MoEF, 2021a, p. 46)	General Document	Capacity-building programme and activities on climate change is one among a number of approaches to address just transition and decent work issues in mitigation and adaptation, including **gender and inter-generational needs as well as the needs of vulnerable groups** (p. 19)	19	Background and Strategy
Indonesia Long-Term Strategy for Low Carbon and Climate Resilience 2050 (LTS-LCCR) (MoEF, 2021b, p. 156)	General Document	Under the Paris Agreement, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, to respect, promote and consider their respective obligations, as well as **gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity** (p. 117)	25	Background and Strategy
Climate Resilience Development Policy 2020–2045 (Bappenas, 2021, p. 372)	General Document	Book 1: List of Priority Locations & Climate Actions It also considers the **inclusiveness aspects** (gender equality, people with disabilities, children, elderly, and other vulnerable groups) and maintains the ecosystem's sustainability … (p. 9)	1	Background
		Book 2: Institutional Arrangement for Climate Resilience … individuals and groups to the **potential risks and impacts** of climate change, especially women, children and **vulnerable groups** (p. 11)	4	Strategy
		Book 3: The Roles of Non-State Actors in Climate Resilience There are 9 out of 23 non-state actors, that focus on and pay attention to gender and climate issues. Only 5 out of 196 activities specifically target or are intended for women's groups from 2010 to 2024. All five activities are **capacity-building**. (pp. 45–70)	19	Strategy

(*Continued*)

Table 1. Continued.

Climate policies (1)	Category	Illustrative quotations (2)	Frequency ('gender' and 'women' terms) (3)	Location in text (4)
		Book 4: Climate Resilience Book Funding Not mentioned at all	N/A	N/A
		Book 5: Monitoring, Evaluation, & Reporting of Climate Resilience Actions … which take into account the sustainability of ecosystems and aspects of **inclusivity** (gender equality, people with disabilities, children, senior citizens, and other vulnerable groups) (p. 20)	1	Strategy
Indonesia's Adaptation Communication (MoEF, 2022, p. 124)	General Document	There are tools for assessing the inclusion of gender issues in climate change projects, i.e. **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI).** This shows that Indonesia's policy is quite responsive in dealing with gender issues (p. 82)	116	Background and Strategy
Technical Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Budget Tagging (MoF, 2022, p. 138)	Gender-Specific Document	Women have traditionally been custodians of cultural heritage and **knowledge** about the use of natural resources for medicine, food, and other purposes (p. 21)	1251	Background and Strategy

Source: Authors' compilation.

particularly concerning child health and reproductive issues. Similarly, the *National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation* (Bappenas, 2014) identify the women as a vulnerable group, especially those who are pregnant, older, poor, or living in rural areas. These documents frame the differential impacts of climate change along two axes: gender (framed as a man/woman binary) and age (children, adults, older people), emphasizing that women, especially in poorer communities, experience more severe consequences:

> In general, contagious diseases are not directly influenced by environment but often occur within vulnerable society (toddlers and pregnant women), especially in villages which in the majority have low income and poor access to health services. (Bappenas, 2010, p. 46)

> … need to consider efforts to reduce vulnerability, especially in communities that are vulnerable to climate change, such as women, children, low-income, elderly groups, and others (p. 31). (Bappenas, 2014, p. 31)

Furthermore, from the earlier documents to the recent ones, the concept of vulnerability is increasingly expanded to link to other groups. In Indonesia's climate agenda (MoEF, 2021a; MoEF, 2022),[2] for example, indigenous groups and local communities are listed along with women as vulnerable groups who need to participate in the planning and implementation.

> Regarding climate change, local communities are also generally addressed as part of a vulnerable group. However, local communities are a very important group regarding efforts to reduce gas emissions into the atmosphere through forest maintenance. (MoEF, 2022, p. 39)

In the second theme, power and knowledge, the general documents fail to sufficiently acknowledge diverse forms of knowledge, including gender-based and experiential knowledges within different communities. Among the seven general documents, only one explicitly mentions women's knowledge, while other forms of local and gendered knowledge remain invisible. Where women's knowledges are acknowledged, they are framed in relation to traditional domestic roles, including reproductive functions and caregiving within households, as seen in this example from *Indonesia's Adaptation Communication* document (MoEF, 2022):

> The Government of Indonesia has realized that mainstreaming gender-based climate change adaptation inclusively is very important to increase social resilience and livelihoods at the community level. Women play an important role in supporting the family's recovery and survival because of their knowledge and experience in managing natural resources to meet the family's needs. (MoEF, 2022, p. 82)

The document lists ministries, sub-national governments, the private sector, CSOs, universities, and development partners as stakeholders. Among these, only CSOs are described as engaging with communities (MoEF, 2022, pp. 22–23). Local communities are therefore categorized as vulnerable subjects rather than stakeholders, revealing a hierarchy of power and knowledge in climate adaptation and mitigation.

In the third theme, agency and political action, these aspects are mentioned but remain underdeveloped and often relegated to the background rather than fully integrated into the strategy cluster (see Table 1). In the *Updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) on Climate Change Adaptation* (MoEF, 2021b), community participation is promoted as a key principle in the policy planning process:

> Strengthening community engagement in development planning process at all levels, taking into account gender participation, gender equity and gender balance and vulnerable groups, cross inter-generational needs. (MoEF, 2021, p. 29)

However, few general documents mention participation; instead, they tend to emphasize capacity-building frameworks for vulnerable groups. For example, in the *Climate Resilience Development Policy 2020–2045*, *Book 2: Institutional Arrangement for Climate Resilience*, which outlines the responsibilities of each ministry, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection – despite being the lead institution for gender mainstreaming – remains primarily focused on capacity-building programmes as illustrated below:

> Formulation and enactment of policies to protect and encourage capacity building for women, children and vulnerable groups in all priority sectors for climate change adaptation. (Bappenas, 2021, p. 11)

A similar tone appears in *Indonesia's Adaptation Communication* (2022), which identifies capacity-building as a key strategy for fostering climate-resilient communities through cultural and gender-based approaches, increasing socio-economic and livelihood capacities, and strengthening local capacity in managing resources (MoEF, 2022, p. 53). For instance, actions to improve ecosystem and landscape resilience include maintaining peat wetting infrastructure, capacity-building for communities, and improving the skills of women (MoEF, 2022, pp. 76–77).

Our analysis of seven general documents shows that gender is treated as a checklist rather than substantively integrated into Indonesia's climate adaptation and mitigation agenda. Groups such as women, men, girls, older people, and Indigenous communities are listed without addressing intersecting power dynamics, systemic marginalization, or differing vulnerabilities (MoEF, 2022, pp. 37–40; Versey, 2021). Gender is narrowly framed in terms of vulnerability, justifying interventions aimed at 'saving' marginalized groups rather than fostering leadership and agency (Mohanty, 1988; Rocheleau et al., 1996; Weatherill, 2024). This reproduces discourses depicting women as inherently vulnerable (Arora-Jonsson, 2011) and reinforces the essentialist image of the climate victim (MacGregor, 2010), upholding heteronormative and patriarchal structures while marginalizing gender – and sexual-minorities groups (Dalton, 2023). Uncritical links between gender and vulnerability risk victimizing women, obscuring power relations, and perpetuating technocratic approaches that exclude communities (de Wit, 2021; Gupta et al., 2024; MacGregor, 2010; Singh et al., 2021; Tong & Topgül, 2024). Consequently, the government, NGOs, and humanitarian organizations are positioned as the primary actors controlling climate initiatives, framing top-down interventions – often labelled as 'empowerment' or 'capacity-building' – as the main mechanism to assist 'vulnerable' communities (Bappenas, 2021, pp. 45–70). Such practices reflect and replicate the practice where women's roles, interests, and voices remain tightly controlled and regulated within Indonesia's authoritative governance regime (Wieringa, 2002, 2003).

4.2. Leadership left behind: on gender-specific documents

To further examine the structural, ideological, and material contexts, we analysed three gender-specific documents: (1) *General Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation* (MoWECP, 2015a), (2) *Technical Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation at the Regional Level* (MoWECP, 2015b), and (3) *Technical Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Budget Tagging* (MoF, 2022). With over 400 mentions of gender and related terms, these documents provide an opportunity to assess how deeply and consistently policymakers engage with gender justice across adaptation, mitigation, and budgeting processes. This analysis also allows us to explore how these policies reflect Indonesia's socio-cultural context, techno-economic

framing, and constructions and interpretations of gender – highlighting whether repeated mentions of gender indicate meaningful engagement or merely superficial inclusion.

The first theme, representation and inclusion, highlights that while gender is discussed more frequently and in greater detail in these technical documents than in general policies, such discussions remain limited, as they are not yet articulated through an intersectional lens. Gender continues to be framed narrowly within the context of 'women's issues', from the foundational frameworks to climate adaptation strategies. For instance, in the *General Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation* (MoWECP, 2015a), climate change impacts such as crop failure, shortages of fuel and clean water, natural disasters, and migration are described as disproportionately affecting women at the household level – particularly through food insecurity, job loss, and limited access to health services. However, the gender analysis remains limited, with minimal attention to issues such as trafficking, gender-based violence (GBV), and maternal mortality (MoWECP, 2015a, p. 4). Furthermore, it does not acknowledge the diversity among women – such as differences in class, occupation, age, or marital status – that may shape both their experiences of climate impacts and their adaptive capacities due to existing power dynamics.

Another document issued in the same year was the *Technical Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation at the Regional Level* (MoWECP, 2015b), which serves as guidance for local governments. This document differs slightly from the previous one as it explicitly mentions intersectional factors that may influence how certain groups experience the impacts of climate change, including gender and diffability status.[3] This guideline also frames 'the community' as a vulnerable group – one that must be encouraged to participate and have a voice in decision-making processes:

> Climate change will bring different impacts in each region, generation, social class, occupation, age, gender, and income level. The applicable adaptation strategies will vary for each area, as their profiles, characteristics, and physical, social, environmental, and economic conditions also differ. The majority of marginalized groups (such as children, Indigenous communities, farmers, and fishers) are more vulnerable than other segments of society. (MoWECP, 2015b, p. 9)

> To ensure effective advocacy, the Working Group needs to define its long-term vision for the desired social change regarding justice for all components of the population, men, women, girls, boys, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, in terms of access and participation, as well as obtaining equal benefits and having a voice in decision-making … . (MoWECP, 2015b, p. 75)

The *Technical Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Budget Tagging* (MoF, 2022), presents a more complex representation of women in climate-related issues compared to the earlier documents. It provides data and explanations concerning gender inequalities affecting women, girls, and Indigenous women, as well as issues of violence, women's leadership in politics, and child marriage (MoF, 2022, pp. 22–24). The document also draws detailed connections between key sectors and gender inequality – linking energy, transportation, agriculture, industry, and waste management to climate mitigation, and economic resilience, livelihoods, ecosystems, spatial resilience, and support systems to climate adaptation.

Significantly, the document acknowledges that women are not just victims – 'Women are not just victims or beneficiaries, but also development actors with knowledge and experiences different from men' (MoF, 2022, p. 37) – this marks notable progress, as women are recognized not only for their vulnerabilities but also for their agency and contributions to development. While we observe a significant shift in representation and inclusion between the 2015 and 2022 documents. However, further examination is needed to understand how power dynamics and climate knowledge are addressed – or remain unaddressed – within these technical documents, which we elaborate in more detail below.

The second theme, power and knowledge, shows that although general climate policy documents link women's knowledge to areas such as natural resource management, household sustainability, and cultural preservation, the technical documents tend to replicate rather than challenge this framing. This tendency is most evident in the *General Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation* (MoWECP, 2015a) and the *Technical Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Budget Tagging* (MoF, 2022):

> The role of women in agriculture, particularly in food crop production, is crucial for household food security. (MoWECP, 2015a, p. 13)

> Women are traditionally the custodians of cultural heritage and knowledge related to the use of natural resources for medicine, food, and other purposes. (MoF, 2022, p. 39)

Although the MoF (2022) document explicitly acknowledges that women are not merely victims and possess knowledge different from men, it does not explore how these differences can be valued in climate budgeting processes or how such knowledge could be meaningfully integrated into Indonesia's climate finance mechanisms. The document also continues to narrow women's knowledge to the domain of natural resource use (MoF, 2022, p. 39). As a guideline for ministries and agencies on gender-responsive budgeting, the technical document reinforces an essentialist view of women's knowledge. It fails to provide frameworks or best practices that account for the gendered dynamics of power and knowledge production. It also fails to explain how gender-responsive budgeting can be effectively implemented across government institutions, or how power relations influence interactions between the state and communities, as well as within communities themselves.

In the third theme, our analysis show that agency and political action remain largely absent from the *technical guidelines*, which tend to emphasize participation rather than leadership. For instance, in the *General Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation* (MoWECP, 2015a), there is minimal recognition or promotion of women's leadership across diverse identities within the background, foundational framework, or strategic sections. Instead, the proposed strategies focus primarily on leadership training for rural women (MoWECP, 2015a, pp. 70–86). Similarly, the *Technical Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Climate Change Adaptation at the Regional Level* (MoWECP, 2015b, p. 41) emphasize the use of Gender Analysis Pathways and Gender Budget Statements to ensure that local government policies mainstream gender, without further acknowledging the importance of intersectional leadership. The MoF (2022) document also highlights participation and consultation as components of gender-responsive budgeting (pp. 77–91). Across the three technical documents, the recurring theme is the promotion of participation rather than the substantive recognition of women's agency and political power.

Published at different times, these technical documents reveal an evolution in gender ideology that is articulated. It is also important to acknowledge that the technical guidelines refer to the general guidelines, which means that the two categories of policies cannot be considered separately within their structural, ideological, and material contexts. Here, there is a gradual shift from framing gender as a 'women's issue' toward a more inclusive approach that recognizes intersecting identities, local women's knowledge, and the importance of participation in decision-making and budgeting processes. However, inconsistencies remain in how community and feminist leadership are conceptualized and promoted. The absence of an intersectional perspective risks rendering women's participation domesticated, tokenistic, and technocratic, overlooking the complexity of gender relations in Indonesia. As previous scholars have highlighted, gender constructions in Indonesia have long been shaped by colonial, political, and cultural values that influence power dynamics, environmental knowledge, and feminist leadership practices within the household, community, market, and state in response to the climate crisis and ecological degradation (Katmo, 2016; Masnu'ah et al., 2024; Pirmasari & McQuaid, 2023; Zulfa et al., 2025). Despite this complexity, the gender-specific documents continue to overlook these intersectional injustices and fall short of promoting genuine agency and transformative leadership.

5. Conclusion

This analysis advances to scholarship on intersectional climate governance by offering an in-depth examination of how gender is framed and institutionalised within Indonesian climate adaptation policies. While this study focuses on analysing existing adaptation policies in Indonesia, future research could explore best practices, opportunities, challenges, and the structural and cultural barriers faced by policymakers and communities to strengthen climate adaptation strategies. Our intersectional analysis of seven general and three technical Indonesian climate policy documents reveals limited progress, with technical guidelines providing more detailed exploration of gender. Nonetheless, gender remains superficially included by: (1) treating it as a listing exercise, categorizing identities without addressing complex power dynamics (Lindqvist et al., 2020) and excluding gender – and sexual-diverse people, reflecting heteronormative injustice and stigma; (2) framing women's knowledge as inherently tied to domestic and natural spheres which reinforcing patriarchal and colonial

legacies and Global North perspectives that romanticize women's connection to agriculture and the environment (Blackburn, 2004; Saraswati & Beta, 2021), dichotomies such as male vs. female, public vs. domestic, scientific vs. non-scientific, and culture vs. nature (de Wit, 2021; Harding, 1986, 1991); and (3) failing to promote equitable leadership and address discriminatory systems, allowing power hierarchies to dictate decision-making and privileging technological, market-based solutions over community engagement (Crawford et al., 2023; Wani & Ariana, 2018; Pearse, 2017), at the same time mirroring Global North dominance in climate knowledge and policy (Gay-Antaki, 2022/2022; Pasgaard et al., 2015; Resurrección, 2024). This top-down framing risks perpetuating universalist adaptation agendas that ignore local realities, intersectional vulnerabilities, and equitable knowledge practices (Hurrell & Sengupta, 2012; Michael et al., 2023). Overall, Indonesian climate adaptation policies reproduce hierarchical divisions between government and communities, limiting the potential for transformative change. Yet, such simplifications fail to engage with the intersectional complexities that policies must address. As de Wit (2021, p. 18) argues, 'Gender and climate change discourses repeat historical productions of vulnerability and development, leading to a tendency to speak rather than listen to the very women they claim to support'.

Indonesia's climate policies, which represent potential key modalities for inclusive and transformative adaptation and mitigation efforts, require continuous evaluation and monitoring to achieve intersectional climate justice. This includes moving beyond reductionist or essentialising gender mainstreaming and victim narratives, as well as checklist projects. We call for an intersectional and transformative approach that serves as a guide for policymakers and governments to work with communities. This approach demands policies that acknowledge and address the root causes of gender disparities in climate vulnerability, build agency, reshape structural relationships, and foster feminist leadership in climate adaptation efforts (Aziz & Anjum, 2024; CARE, 2019; Gupta et al., 2024; Resurrección et al., 2019). It is essential to centre the diversity of experiences, knowledges, and voices of marginalized communities, recognize the interconnectedness of gender, social, economic, and environmental injustices, celebrate community agency and leadership, and advocate for policies that address structural inequalities rather than merely adapting to the symptoms of climate change. Without this shift, gender mainstreaming is doomed to perpetuate the status quo, fostering maladaptation and entrenching inequalities.

Notes

1. 'Diffability' is a term that combines 'difference' and 'ability' to emphasize the unique abilities and strengths of individuals with disabilities, rather than focusing solely on their limitations. It is often used as a more empowering and positive alternative to traditional terms like 'disability' or 'handicap', which can carry negative connotations. The term diffability (Bahasa Indonesia: *difabel*) has been gaining popularity among activists in Indonesia. It was introduced by Mansour Fakih and Setiadi Purwanta, both of whom are blind, as an alternative to disability (Bahasa Indonesia: *disabilitas*). Derived from the English phrase 'differently-abled people', diffability serves as a critique of the term disability, which reinforces the marginalization of people and fails to normalize the diversity of abilities (see Pirmasari & McQuaid, 2023; Thohari, 2011; Suharto et al., 2016).
2. This cannot be separated from the political context, particularly the advocacy efforts by civil society organizations in Indonesia to secure indigenous communities' rights from 2003 to the present (HUMA, 2022; Arumingtyas, 2016), and the presence of the 2019 Ministry of Environment and Forestry Regulation on Customary Forests and Rights Forests, which subsequently opened the legal recognition of customary forests (MoEF, 2021).
3. This recognition aligns with ongoing advocacy for the protection of disability rights in Indonesia, which was later formalized in the *People with Disabilities Act* (2016). Such advocacy efforts had been carried out by civil society organizations since at least 2012 (PATTIRO, 2016).

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