



## Mainstreaming Gender In The Blue Economy In Indonesia: Literature Review From An Ecological And Maritime Feminism Perspective

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### **Abstract**

The blue economy has emerged as a strategic framework for sustainable development that emphasizes the responsible use of marine resources. Although Indonesia possesses vast potential in this sector, gender inequality remains a persistent barrier in its management. Coastal women who play essential roles in processing, marketing, and maintaining marine-based livelihoods are still underrepresented in blue economy governance. This study conducts a critical literature review to explore how ecological feminism and maritime feminism can provide an integrative theoretical lens to reinterpret gender relations in Indonesia's blue economy. The novelty of this study lies in its synthesis of these two feminist perspectives, which have rarely been jointly applied to analyze marine governance in developing countries. The research was conducted between January and April 2025 using qualitative descriptive with and systematic literature review (SLR) methods and content analysis to identify recurrent themes, including inequality of access, invisibility of women's labor, and the link between marine environmental degradation and gendered vulnerability. The findings reveal that women's contributions are substantial yet systematically overlooked within a masculine blue economy framework. By integrating ecological and maritime feminist approaches, this study offers a conceptual model for gender-transformative blue economy policies that promote equality, inclusivity, and sustainability. These insights contribute to expanding feminist discourse in marine studies and support evidence-based policymaking for a just blue economy in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Blue Economy, Gender, Ecological Feminism, Maritime Feminism*

### **Abstrak**

Ekonomi biru telah muncul sebagai kerangka kerja strategis untuk pembangunan berkelanjutan yang menekankan pemanfaatan sumber daya kelautan secara bertanggung jawab. Meskipun Indonesia memiliki potensi besar di sektor ini, ketidaksetaraan gender masih menjadi hambatan yang terus-menerus dalam pengelolaannya. Perempuan pesisir yang memainkan peran penting dalam pengolahan, pemasaran, dan pemeliharaan mata pencaharian berbasis kelautan masih kurang terwakili dalam tata kelola ekonomi biru. Studi ini melakukan tinjauan pustaka kritis untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana feminisme ekologis dan feminisme maritim dapat memberikan perspektif teoretis integratif untuk menafsirkan ulang relasi gender dalam ekonomi biru Indonesia. Kebaruan studi ini terletak pada sintesisnya dari kedua perspektif feminis ini, yang jarang diterapkan secara bersamaan untuk menganalisis tata kelola kelautan di negara-negara berkembang. Penelitian ini dilakukan antara Januari dan April 2025 menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif berdasarkan literatur review sistematis dan analisis isi untuk mengidentifikasi tema-tema yang berulang, termasuk ketidaksetaraan akses, ketidaktampakan tenaga kerja perempuan, dan hubungan antara degradasi lingkungan laut dan kerentanan gender. Temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa kontribusi perempuan substansial namun secara sistematis diabaikan dalam kerangka ekonomi biru yang maskulin. Dengan mengintegrasikan pendekatan feminis ekologi dan maritim, studi ini menawarkan model konseptual untuk kebijakan ekonomi biru yang transformatif gender, yang mendorong kesetaraan, inklusivitas, dan keberlanjutan. Wawasan ini berkontribusi pada perluasan wacana feminis dalam studi kelautan dan mendukung pembuatan kebijakan berbasis bukti untuk ekonomi biru yang adil di Indonesia.

**Kata Kunci:** *Ekonomi Biru, Gender, Feminisme Ekologi, Feminisme Maritim*

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## Introduction

The blue economy has been recognized as one of the important approaches in sustainable development, focusing on the responsible use of marine and coastal resources (Lee et al., 2020). This concept offers a solution to manage the enormous potential of marine ecosystems, while maintaining ecological balance. According to Khoiriyah, (2024) Indonesia, as a country with the second longest coastline in the world, has extraordinary potential in developing the blue economy. This sector is one of the driving forces of the economy, with the fisheries sector, coastal tourism, and marine-based renewable energy as the main components.

However, despite this great potential, the blue economy sector in Indonesia faces various challenges. One of the main challenges is the gender inequality that is still deeply rooted in marine resource management. Coastal women, who are often involved in work related to fisheries and coastal management, often do not receive equal recognition as men (Torre-Castro et al., 2017). This inequality is reflected in access to resources, training, and opportunities to participate in decision-making related to blue economy management.

Based on data from WCI 2022 (Workmen Compensation Insurance) 42% of the fisheries workforce in Indonesia are women. However, the majority of women are involved in the informal sector, especially in fish processing, marketing, and other related economic activities, while men are more dominant in the capture fisheries and marine natural resource management sectors. In many ways, women's work in this sector is often invisible and unrecognized in blue economy policies. Their roles tend to be limited to jobs that are considered less strategic, even though their contribution is very large to the local economy and environmental sustainability.

The issue of gender inequality is often overlooked in blue economy development policies, which tend to focus more on the formal sector and activities dominated by men. Therefore, there needs to be a more inclusive approach that can ensure that women get an equal place in marine-based economic development. The perspectives of ecological feminism and maritime feminism offer a more holistic understanding of this inequality. Both invite us to

see the relationship between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women as two interrelated issues, and emphasize the need to recognize the role of women in preserving marine ecosystems.

Ecological feminism highlights the importance of the relationship between environmental degradation and social injustice towards women, who often feel the impacts of such degradation more (Malone, 2015). On the other hand, maritime feminism focuses on women who live in coastal areas and are directly involved in marine activities, whether in the form of seafood processing work or in coastal natural resource management (Harper et al., 2017). Both of these perspectives propose policies that not only pay attention to economic development, but also pay attention to gender equality in the marine and fisheries sector.

Gender mainstreaming in the blue economy in Indonesia still faces major obstacles. This is due to several factors, such as patriarchal dominance in the social structure, lack of gender-responsive policies, and ignorance about the significant contribution of women in the marine sector. In addition, the lack of adequate data on the role of women in this sector is also an obstacle in formulating inclusive policies. Nevertheless, several policies that are more directed at empowering women in the marine sector have begun to be implemented, although their impact is still limited.

Data from the Humanis Foundation (2025) shows that coastal women in Indonesia have a significant role in processing marine products, especially in coastal areas. Women play a central role in the fisheries value chain and aquatic food systems. They not only help prepare for going to sea, but are also involved in catching, cultivating, processing, marketing catches, and managing family finances. Despite their significant contribution, women's roles are often under-recognized and have not been fairly accessed to economic resources and government support.

In addition, in a report published by Women Heads of Households (PEKKA) and the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) (2018), it was stated that although women have an important role in the marine sector, existing policies in Indonesia do not reflect the specific needs of women in the fisheries and marine sector. This study highlights

that coastal women do not have sufficient access to planning and decision-making related to marine resource management.

It is important to conduct deeper research on the role of women in the blue economy in Indonesia, by integrating ecological and maritime feminist perspectives. This approach is expected to identify gender disparities in the marine sector and provide solutions to create a more equitable and sustainable blue economy. By considering women's contributions to marine and coastal resource management, the resulting policies will be more inclusive and able to encourage more equitable welfare in coastal communities.

Through this literature review, this study aims to explore literature related to gender in the blue economy in Indonesia, as well as examine how the application of ecological and maritime feminist perspectives can help create more gender-equitable policies. By analyzing existing data, this study hopes to provide new insights into gender mainstreaming in the management of the blue economy in Indonesia.

## Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a literature review approach as its primary method, following the steps of a systematic literature review (SLR) (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2023). The main objective of this method is to explore, review, and analyze literature relevant to the issue of gender mainstreaming in the blue economy in Indonesia through the lens of ecological feminism and maritime feminism. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand social and environmental phenomena in depth through published written sources (Mulyana et al., 2024).

Table 1. Literature Category

Category	Example Source	Information
Statistic Data	Central Statistic Agency	Providing figures women's involvement
Theoretical Literature	FeminismEcology and Maritime	Theoretical framework and approach
Case Studies and Reports	PEKKA and ASPBAE	Showing real practices and policies

This review examines 30 publications on gender perspectives in Indonesia's blue economy. Approximately 60% of the studies used qualitative methods and case studies, 18% were conceptual or theoretical, 8% were based on feminist ethnography, followed by 7% quantitative methods, and took the form of regulations and policy reports. The research focus consisted of 57% domestic Indonesian literature and 43% global perspectives. Publications were based on a research timeframe from 2016-2025, but were dominated by publications from 2020-2015. An increase in the concentration of literature on a global and domestic scale could enrich the maritime feminism perspective.

The literature review period was conducted between January and April 2025. During this period, researchers collected secondary data from various credible sources, including scientific journals, research reports from international institutions, and statistical data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP). In addition, documents from civil society organizations such as PEKKA and gender study reports from non-governmental organizations were also used as the main references in this analysis.

The data studied include statistics on women's involvement in the fisheries and marine sector, national and regional blue economy policies, and conceptual literature on ecological and maritime feminist theory. The analysis was carried out using a qualitative interpretive approach, namely by critically reading and synthesizing the arguments, findings, and concepts in the documents analyzed. This approach aims to understand the relationship between gender inequality, the role of coastal women, and the blue economy policy framework in Indonesia.

The analysis process, using the content analysis method to identify key themes that recur in the literature (Sitasari, 2022). Such as inequality of access, the role of women in marine product processing, marginalization of women in decision-making, and the relationship between marine environmental damage and the social position of coastal women. The results of this analysis are then systematically arranged in the discussion to reveal how the perspective of

ecological and maritime feminism can explain and provide solutions to the problems faced by women in the blue economy sector.

The validity of the data in this study is maintained by using sources that have been scientifically and institutionally recognized. In addition, researchers compare various references from different years and sources to ensure consistency and accuracy of information. With this approach, it is hoped that the results of the study can provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of a gender-equitable blue economy in Indonesia.

## Result and Discussion

### The Role of Women in Indonesia's Blue Economy

Women have a significant contribution to the development of the blue economy in Indonesia. Their involvement covers various stages of the value chain, from the provision of equipment, fishing and cultivation activities, to the processing, distribution, and marketing of marine products. Data from the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP, 2023) shows that more than 148,000 women are recorded as active as business actors in the marine sector (Figure 1.)

Figure 1: Fisheries Business Actors Based on Gender



Source: satadata.kkp.go.id, 2022 (processed by APINDO, 2023)

They play roles as fish farmers, seafood processors, marketers, and fishermen. Women only occupy approximately 10% of the total number of fisheries business actors. The data illustrates that marine and fisheries business actors are still dominated by men, except for fish processing and marketing activities where women play a higher role. This number is

believed not to reflect the reality on the ground as a whole, because there are still many women who are not formally registered due to unclear work status and minimal administrative recognition. Findings from Gabriela, (2024) confirm that women's contributions to sustainable coastal development are frequently underreported, despite the fact that they are crucial in preserving the sustainability of coastal resources, boosting household economies, and fostering community resilience to environmental change.

Women are also directly involved in maintaining household food security based on the sea and utilizing the catch to meet family nutritional needs. A study by the World Resources Institute (2020) recorded a contribution of 169,000 metric tons of fish per year from women in the small-scale sector, with an economic value of more than USD 250 million. This role is not only economically important, but also shows a contribution to coastal social and ecological stability. Women's initiatives in seafood processing demonstrate adaptive abilities and the potential for a creative economy based on local resources.

Women's activities are also evident in coastal conservation and management activities. According to Kumaini (2024), women in Kendal, Central Java, manage micro-businesses based on marine product processing while participating in mangrove conservation and environmental education programmes. This is also confirmed by Purwanti et al. (2024), who reveal the active role of women's groups on Mantehage Island in mangrove rehabilitation through a cultural ecofeminism approach, where local values and ecological responsibility are interconnected. They combine economic activities with conservation efforts that strengthen the socio-ecological resilience of coastal communities..

Women demonstrate a deep understanding of marine ecosystems and seasonal cycles, and have strong social networks within the community (Torre-castro et al., 2017). This knowledge can be used to strengthen adaptation systems to the climate crisis and environmental change. However, these contributions are often not accommodated fairly in the policy system. The lack of gender-disaggregated data and low access to training, business capital, and management areas are major obstacles.

The role of women contributes not only to the economic aspect, but also to social resilience and environmental sustainability (Rumbekwan & Tanamal, 2022). One form of progress in women's participation in the blue economy has also been found in collaborations between communities that have formed organisations to address structural social inequalities and access to resources. According to Prawitasari et al. (2025), collective solidarity among women on Pari Island has encouraged resistance to marginalisation and led to a community-based blue economy model.

The contribution also has a long history in the management of marine gastronomic traditions and the archipelago's spice routes, proving that women have long been an integral part of the maritime economy (Wardah et al., 2025). Recognition of this role needs to be strengthened through inclusive policies that make women the main subject, not just a complement in the development of the marine sector. Gender mainstreaming in the blue economy is an important part of the sustainable development strategy in Indonesia's coastal areas.

### **Gender Inequality in Blue Economy Management in Indonesia**

In general, the obstacles currently faced by women in the blue economy range from norms to inadequate working conditions that are not conducive to work-life balance, often hindering women's retention and participation in the fisheries, aquaculture and maritime transport industries. As a result, several countries with marine resources have adopted policies that promote effective gender inclusion (Boström et al., 2025). However, policy in Indonesia is based on law Number 7 of 2016 concerning the Protection and Empowerment of Fishermen, Fish Farmers, and Salt Farmers does not explicitly recognize the role of women in this sector. The definition of fishermen in the law tends to be narrow, only covering fishing activities, thus excluding women's roles in processing and marketing marine products. As a result, women are often ineligible for fishermen's insurance and other financial assistance (Purwanti et al., 2023).

Social stigma is also a significant barrier. As shown in the study by Wahyuni et al. (2025), these obstacles form a vicious circle that also

affects young women in the context of generational gaps in access to opportunities and blue economy empowerment programmes. In many coastal communities, women involved in fishing activities are often considered only as "fishermen's wives" and not as fishermen themselves. This results in them not being recognized in official documents such as Identity Cards (KTP), which impacts their access to government programs. Women's involvement in decision-making is also very limited. KOMNAS HAM (2021), explains that although women play an active role in economic activities, their voices are rarely heard in the management of marine and coastal resources. Patriarchal customary systems and social norms often hinder women's participation in decision-making processes. Pauwelussen (2022), also highlighted how masculine culture in fishing practices is sacred to expertise and habit. The double burden experienced by women plays a role in the domestic sphere, the management of an ecosystem (Purwanti et al., 2025), but they receive lower economic benefits (Lynch et al., 2022; Damayanti et al., 2024).

The lack of gender-disaggregated data is also a challenge in formulating inclusive policies. Many coastal empowerment programs have not used a gender-sensitive approach, resulting in the replication of inequalities in development interventions. Efforts to address this inequality have been made by various parties. The Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) is working with USAID to support women's participation in the blue economy program, including through training and access to capital. KKP also remains committed to realizing development in the marine sector. One of them is through gender mainstreaming (PUG) by involving women in developing coastal areas and small islands in Indonesia. KKP has issued Regulation of the Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries Number 43 of 2023 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming in the KKP Environment and Regulation of the Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries Number 51 of 2016 concerning Guidelines for Mapping the Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming in the Marine and Fisheries Sector in the Regions. However, the implementation of this policy still faces

challenges, especially in changing social norms that hinder the role of women.

### Utilizing Ecological and Maritime Feminism Perspectives to Address Gender Inequality

The perspective of ecological and maritime feminism can provide a critical framework for understanding and addressing gender inequality that occurs in marine resource management, especially in the context of the blue economy. Several studies compiled by Ratri (2022) apply Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) in the fisheries sector and coastal communities to explain how social identities such as race, ethnicity, and politics influence gender inequality in access to and power over natural resources. Ecological feminism emphasizes the importance of the relationship between women and the environment, and how women are often the guardians of ecological balance through their local knowledge (Purwanti et al., 2024).

The marginalisation of women in coastal management policies is one of the challenges to gender equality, despite their important role in managing ecosystem conservation. Through an ecological feminist approach, as explained by Christine et al. (2022), this inequality can be understood as part of a social structure that not only oppresses women but also damages the environment, while Rosalinda et al. (2024) emphasise the importance of integrating a gender perspective into coastal climate adaptation policies to achieve more equitable and inclusive sustainability.

Maritime feminism, which is a branch of ecological feminism, recognizes the importance of the impact of gender-equitable coastal management and pays attention to the central role of women in the marine sector that is often overlooked in natural resource management policies and practices. In many coastal areas, women play a key role in marine resource management, both in terms of production, processing, and distribution of marine products, but their position is often marginalized in policy making. Maritime feminism urges for equality in decision-making participation, empowerment of women in technical and leadership fields, and recognition of their contributions to the sustainability of coastal and marine ecosystems (Pomeroy & Fanny, 2008)

Research by Harper et al. (2020) in the journal *Nature* emphasizes that women play an important role in the small-scale fisheries value chain—especially in post-harvest activities such as processing, marketing, and distribution—but still face significant barriers in access to technical training, asset ownership, and business capital. This condition results in systemic economic and political exclusion, while weakening the main objectives of the blue economy which emphasize aspects of social inclusivity and ecological justice. When the blue economy is narrowly interpreted as only optimizing the marine sector economy without considering the gender dimension, the risk of blue grabbing or monopolization of marine utilization by economic elites and state institutions becomes high.

International institutions such as FAO (2021) have advocated a gender-transformative fisheries management approach, an approach that not only involves women symbolically, but also changes norms, institutions, and the distribution of power in the fisheries system to be more gender-equitable. This approach encourages women to be given space in decision-making, mastery of technology, and access to resources on an equal basis with men. Several local initiatives in Indonesia have shown success in implementing this principle. For example, in the Pantar Strait Marine Reserve, women are the main actors in mangrove ecosystem rehabilitation and coastal conservation (Turasih, 2023) and involved in turtle conservation activities through a community-based approach (Pauwelussen & Swanson, 2022). However, their involvement is still limited due to funding constraints, patriarchal cultural norms, and the absence of a formal recognition mechanism for their role.

Another example is seen in the empowerment program on Pari Island, Seribu Islands, initiated by Pandu Laut Nusantara (2024), where local women are involved in community-based ecotourism. This program has succeeded in increasing household income, strengthening community social resilience, and encouraging environmental conservation practices based on local wisdom. The maritime feminist approach in this case shows that women's involvement in coastal management has a direct impact on the success of the blue

economy program, with results that are not only economic, but also social and ecological. Thus, the use of ecological and maritime feminist perspectives in blue economy development is a necessity. It is not enough to just make women the target or object of beneficiaries, but they must be active subjects in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the program.

The formulation of marine and fisheries policies must be equipped with gender-disaggregated data, gender impact assessments, and participatory monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that involve women. This is in line with Siscawati et al. (2020), who state that women's empowerment is a prerequisite for inclusive and sustainable national development. Collaboration between government, civil society, academics, and local communities is key to ensuring that the principles of social justice and gender equality truly become the foundation of sustainable coastal and marine resource management.

## Conclusion

Women's roles are central to the operation and resilience of Indonesia's blue economy, yet their contributions remain structurally undervalued and largely invisible in formal governance. This study reveals that gender inequality in access, participation, and decision-making is rooted not only in social norms but also in the masculine paradigm that shapes blue economy policies.

By integrating ecological and maritime feminist perspectives, this study offers a conceptual lens to reinterpret marine governance shifting the focus from women as beneficiaries to women as agents of transformation in sustainable ocean management. The synthesis of these two feminist frameworks represents a novel contribution to gender studies in the marine sector, highlighting the interconnection between ecological sustainability, power relations, and social justice.

For policy, the findings emphasize the urgency of gender-transformative approaches that institutionalize women's voices, promote equitable access to marine resources, and recognize their ecological knowledge as a key asset for sustainable development. Strengthening gender-responsive data, cross-sectoral

collaboration, and feminist-informed education in coastal communities can serve as pathways toward a more inclusive and just blue economy in Indonesia

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