

Women Empowerment Issues In Indonesia's Coastal Areas

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I. Introduction

For the last 42 years I have been actively involved in academic research and studies on Indonesian women, spanning all religion, race, ethnicity and even age groups. Yet, the one thing that I believe unite them all is simply: Indonesian women are a marginalized group. Although there are many ways to argue against my point, say by claiming that there have been advances in gender equality in the region, the fact is when I am working in the field it becomes glaringly obvious that women are still considered second class citizens in Indonesia. By discriminating women, we are wasting away their potential to become a productive and educated part of society.

Personally, I am an eye witness to the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 1976 during the New Order Regime. Now the Ministry has been renamed as the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection. The existence of the Ministry itself shows that our country recognizes that women are in a marginalized and peripheral position in society.

With the Ministry's establishment, Indonesia became a supporter of women's rights. But despite its best intentions to actively empower women, in practice it fell short of its goals many times. Yet, there were some victories. For example, the government built hospitals and infirmaries, implemented vaccination programs for children, created educational materials addressing women's and children's health issues, increased the quality of its nurses and doctors and even established the renowned Institute for Family Planning, which has helped many women stay healthy and productive by encouraging effective family planning practices.

Indonesia proclaims that it is a country that supports female empowerment initiatives. In the Beijing Platform for Action 1995, our government recognizes such critical issues that tend to impact women dramatically, such as poverty, the need for higher education, health, women's rights, violence against women, war and armed conflicts and environmental degradation. Since the enactment of the Beijing Platform for Action, there were many meaningful improvements in the fight towards advancing women's rights. For example, we created the National Commission for Women's Rights, in order to address the issue of violence against women. Indonesia also participated in ratifying international conventions, such as: CEDAW (The Convention On the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against Women) and The Convention on Children's Rights. Further, there were numerous local and national organizations that addressed women's rights issues and gender equality to the extent where, as the largest Muslim country in the world, Indonesia is one of the leaders in the female empowerment movement when compared to other Muslim nations.

Of course there will always be challenges as we fight to establish gender equality in the country. There is a slew of factors that we face, including poverty, weak infrastructure, the lack of basic facilities, such as electricity and clean water, low level of education and a patriarchal society.

Yet, in spite of all this, so many women are still able to advance their cause with assistance from the government.

It also helps that our country is seeing more and more female leaders. Now women are slowly filling all branches of government, including the executive, legislative and judicial bodies. Entrepreneurial women are shifting the gender balance in the startup industry as we speak. And female students are aiming and attaining higher education now, which propels them to achieve their optimal level of self actualization.

On a different scale, the same move towards female empowerment is happening in the lowest ranks of society, including women who work and live in the poor coastal regions. At last estimation, there are 127 million women in Indonesia (Population Projection 2010-2035, Bureau of Statistics Indonesia), out of which 93.1 million women are at productive age and, at minimum, there are 39 million Indonesian women living in the coastal region. The majority of them live in Java, the most densely populated island in Indonesia. In fact, more than 60% of Indonesians live in the island of Java. In these coastal areas, millions of women work full or part time while managing their households. But there is one major issue: the government has not formally recognized women's economic impact and activities in Indonesia's coastal regions.

II. Indonesia as Maritime Country and the Climate Change Crisis

Climate change is a global issue. It is a destructive force for the human race; an increase of 1.5-2 celsius as we approach the year 2100 will be nightmare for our planet. This is why countries around the world began establishing initiatives to limit the amount of carbon emissions, as excessive levels of it have negatively impacted the environment and increased global temperature, which in turn has resulted in melting glaciers in Antarctica, typhoon, cyclone and hurricane activities in historically temperate climates, extreme drought and flooding, landslides and uncontrollable forest fires. Because of these serious environmental damages, small islands are particularly at risk of being extinct with the rising water levels. Hence, it's no surprise that at COP 23 in Bonn, Germany, Small Islands Developing States, such as: Fiji, took the initiative to create the Talanoa Dialogue (one world, one person). The Talanoa Dialogue aims to increase risk awareness and discuss solutions to climate change issues between the platform's member nations in accordance with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Through the Talanoa Dialogue initiative, member nations of the 2015 Paris Agreement, reiterated its support of the Agreement's environmental goals and in the UN Climate Change Conference in Bonn (April 30th – May 10th 2018) the dialogue's member nations recognized that in the fight against climate change we must empower women and the youth community to maximize our efforts. Women and the youth community are key in executing and advocating for climate change prevention activities.

Indonesia needs to be a part of this conversation as well. She is the largest archipelagic country in the world, with 17,000 islands, spanning across 5,000km of area and a 95,180km² coastal area. Any changes in the global climate condition will affect the country dramatically. Indonesia also has 3 million hectares of mangrove forests, which is 20% of the world's total mangroves, and 3.1 million hectares of seagrass meadows, making it the island nation with the largest diversity in coral life.

Indonesia's natural resources is a key asset for food security and environmental conservation. For example, coral life is a food source for marine lives. As the world's largest maritime country, surrounded by ocean, mangrove, sea grass meadows and coral reefs, Indonesia faces

challenging times as it learns how to protect and preserve its rich ecosystem as global temperatures rise.

In accordance with the 2015 Paris Agreement's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the Indonesian government has released a Presidential Decree (no. 59, 2017) stating national and regional action plans to achieve SDG's (as per RPJMN 2015-2019). To attain these goals, we must implement capacity building programs in local communities and villages, especially for women. Right now coastal villages only hold 5.97% of hotels and 9.03% of restaurants out of all the food & beverage and hotel establishments in the country. Coastal areas are very much behind non-coastal areas in Indonesia in terms of development. Of course, we can say that large cities, such as: Jakarta, Surabaya, Semarang, Denpasar and Padang are in coastal regions. But the villages and communities in the direct coastal areas are never as developed as their cities.

Indonesia's coastal areas are also often mired in extreme poverty. A fisherman's work is often considered more lowly than a farmer's, despite Indonesia being a rich maritime country. In fact, according to the FAO, Indonesia is the second largest producer of fish in the world next to China. It's ironic knowing how the typical fisherman nets only 1.1 million IDR per month, whereas a non-fisherman brings in 1.2 million IDR/month. The face of poverty in Indonesia is reflected throughout the coastal regions and becomes worse as we move further south in Java, especially in South Java (Garut, Sukabumi and Cianjur).

Realizing this sad condition, the government has taken on a more active role in combating poverty by building key infrastructures, such as: roads, bridges, health centres, schools, healthier house conditions, electricity and irrigation. These facilities helped human interaction and communication, which in turn increased business activities and improved their quality of life. Hence, by March 2018 (BPS, July 2018), 500,000 people were lifted from the poverty line.

III. Women

Poverty in Indonesia is oftentimes identic with women, especially in the fishing industry along the coastal regions. In fact, in the fishing industry there seems to be a feminization of poverty. Numerous intensive field studies clearly shows a woman's peripheral position in the fishing industry, despite their being just as active as their male counterparts in the field. These research materials include findings from 1. The dynamics of gender roles and innovation dissemination by the Center for Maritime and Fishing Industry Research 2009, 2. Gender roles in the fishing industry communities 2008, 3. Women's roles in the development of the fishing industry 2009, 4. Gender in Agriculture and Fisheries: Moving the Agenda Forward, 2013. Such studies show that women often participate as a vital part of the industry, be it to navigate the boat, catch fish, clean the day's catch, prepare the nets and even sell the products to local markets. Yet, all this hard work is not counted as an economic activity in society. In fact, it is deemed as housework. The government has yet to recognize the significant economic contribution by women to the national fishing industry.

Women are a powerhouse in our country and we've yet to recognize and maximize their potential in the fabric of our economy. From a population standpoint, women now make up 49.75% of the total population (125.5 million women). And 30% of women living in coastal areas are either directly or indirectly involved in the fishing industry. The Indonesian government has focused on putting female empowerment initiatives in its agenda since 1976 by creating the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which has now evolved into the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Children's Welfare. Although there has been considerable progress in the last 40 years, there is

now a lot more work to be done as the issue of gender inequality has only become more complex.

Empowering women is an ongoing process. Giving women their power back involves changing their mentality from that of being a powerless person into someone who has full authority of herself. She is aware of her responsibilities and duties. She can self actualize and reach her fullest potential in the professional and public space. She has access to education, work training, health resources, bank loans and access to natural resources. To help us get closer to empowering all women, we must pursue a series of initiatives and instruments, including the Gender Related Development Index (GDI), Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and Gender Action Plan (GAP) and community development activities to bring our goals to fruition.

IV. Cases

In the last three years I have studied women's role and activities in the coastal region of North Java and Sumatra and held discussions with researchers in the field, be it internationally or nationally. And in that time I can definitively conclude that a woman's role is key in pursuing and executing initiatives to reduce carbon emission. Hence, the 2015 Paris Agreement recognizes that the SDG's Gender Action Plan will be vital to achieving a reduction in carbon emissions. Indonesia, as part of the Paris Agreement, has issued Presidential Decree no. 59 in 2017 outlining numerous national and regional action plans to achieve said SDG's. I'd like to share some of these plans and how they have involved women in the coastal regions.

Case 1 :

In the village of Demak, located in the north coast of Central Java, both young and old women alike are active in the fishing industry. They either participate in catching fish or they help their husbands prepare for the day and then sell their products in the local market. Here, women can even become breadwinners, but their hard work is never truly recognized. Their contribution to the fishing industry is categorized as "house work," instead of fishing work, simply because they are women.

Case 2 : Tugu Regent, Mangunhardjo, Semarang, Central Java

16 years ago the local university (University of Diponegoro) helped built a community for women who are working in the coastal region. There are 40 women in the organization working in the mangroves field and producing snacks and crackers out of the plants. Each member could produce up to 10kg of snacks per day, whereby they sell their products online and through Instagram and Whatsapp. Because of their close cooperation with the local university, their marketing capability is a lot more advanced than women in other coastal areas.

Case 3 : Banggi Rembang Village, Coastal Area of Central Java

In this village men and women work together to develop the mangrove forest for the purposes of ecotourism and as a means for food security. One community, called Kartini, has over 70 members. They mainly work in the mangrove forest to catch crabs and shellfish, wherein each person can haul in 3kg's worth of seafood per day. By using local wisdom and knowledge, the community continues to plant mangroves in a systematic way to create fish ponds and harvest salt. Yet, despite all the field work that they do, women in the Kartini community have yet to receive insurance and their identity cards still say: housewife. Instead of fisherman.

Case 4 : Sei Nagalawan Village in Kabupaten Serdang Bedagai, Coastal area of North Sumatera

There are 2 communities for women who develop and work in the mangrove forests: Muara Tanjung and Muara Baibai. Here, mangrove forest act as an ecotourism destination and as a

way to avoid abrasion in the coastline. These women also produce snacks on a small scale, as an added income stream. By having a healthy and sustainable mangrove field, the local villagers do not need to journey far to fish because the lush fields attract fish naturally.

Case 5 : Kulon Progo, Jogja, Central Java

Kulon Progo is located in the southern coast of Jogja. This area is quite developed, as the government plans on building an airport in the area. With the local government's support, women are becoming more economically empowered and productive. One interesting way of inspiring women to enter the workforce is by creating a "warung" (local store) program. Each warung has 10 shareholders, all women. The government invests up to 50jt IDR (3,400 USD) for each warung as seed investment. There are 111 warungs that sell basic household items, such as rice, oil, sugar, salt, eggs for the poor communities and all of the products come from the local Kulon Progo production centers. Each warung serves 414 poor families and also sells other products to the general public. This program has helped address the needs of those living in poverty while also empowering women to become active and productive members of society.

Another growing program is organic sugar (gula semut) production. There are currently 5,000 poor families involved in the production process of this particular sugar called ant sugar. The men climb the coconut trees and the women processes the coconut water to become sugar. This specialty sugar is in high demand and has given the local community a large economic boost. Now, we'd need an organic certification, as they do in the Philipinnes, to help increase the sugar's price in the market. The added revenue would go a long way towards improving the villagers' quality of life and helping them escape potential loan sharks in the community.

V. Conclusion

From the above cases, we can conclude that:

1. Women must have an active role as we implement food security and conservation initiatives to combat climate change.
2. To help women participate in these programs they must gain access to loans, health resources, education/training/vocational schools and safety nets.
3. We must create safety nets, so women can feel safe from the dangers of sexual harassment at work, which is a real risk in villages and communities that still put women in a peripheral position and see women as second class citizens.
4. The government has to take an active role in making sure all initiatives are implemented and women's rights are protected down to the village level.
5. The government and the state has to be involved in and become a strategic partner for stakeholders that are fighting for women's empowerment.

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