

## Research article

# ECOFEMINISM OF FORESTRY CONSERVATION IN RIAU

Faza Dhora Nailufar, Hidayaturahmi, Aulia Rahmawati

School of Public Administration, STIA-LAN Polytechnic, Jakarta, Indonesia

**Abstract.**

In the last 18 years, Riau Province, especially Pekanbaru and its surroundings, has often been surrounded by smoke from forest fires. Based on National Board and Disaster Management, Riau is the province with the largest forest fires. There were 49,266 hectares of land burned with 90 hotspots detected until August 2019. The effect of it was the air pollution index in Pekanbaru and its surroundings has reached red degrees. This condition is very dangerous, especially for vulnerable groups such as women, pregnant women, elderly group and children. The central and local government have taken many actions every year, but still not sufficient to protect public health, especially vulnerable groups. So far, women and children have been forced to inhale the smoke intensively without any protective equipment (N95 masks) or proper shelters in case of forest fires. The children were forced not to go to school for weeks, because the classrooms were not equipped with air-conditioned rooms and air purifiers. Several studies have found that smoke-contaminated air, soil and food are very bad for health before and after birth. Toxic substances inhaled by pregnant women can interfere with their health and interfere with the nutrition and oxygen flow of the fetus. Another study also found that exposure to Indonesia's forest fires in late 1997 caused more than 15,600 child, infant and fetal deaths, meaning children's survival rates decreased by 1.2 percentage points due to exposure to toxic fumes. A child's nutrition and health can be directly compromised after inhaling toxic fumes or ingesting them in contaminated raw food. In addition to health impacts, forest fires also have a major impact on the economic, social and environmental affairs of local communities. And the biggest group that bears the impact is again women. The Women Research Institute (2016) states that women as the person in charge of domestic affairs turned out to be the most real victims in the domino effect of these forest fires. To name a few examples, women have to take care of sick family members even though they themselves are in poor health conditions. Women who are pregnant and breastfeeding have to breathe toxic air which results in low nutrition delivered to their children. If the head of the family cannot actively work because of illness, then it is the woman who must be the backbone of the family. Because they are directly affected, women have also been shown to be actively involved in various efforts to extinguish forest fires. Starting from technical forest fires to informal advocacy against companies that have forest concession permits. However, in various decision-making forums between the government and companies related to forest concessions that involve elements of the community, women's groups are often not involved, so women's aspirations and interests are not taken into account. In fact, in forest management and utilization, men and women have different roles and knowledge, so that their involvement is very important to realize proper governance. This study intends to explore and identify the extent to which women and their groups are involved in forest and environmental conservation efforts in Riau. The information obtained later is expected to be able to explain how the cultural and social constructs of society in supporting the involvement of women in these efforts. Including how these cultural constructs ultimately influence the government's decision to involve women's groups.

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Dhora Nailufar, email:  
fazadhora@stialan.ac.id**Published** 20 May 2022Publishing services provided by  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, Riau Province has experienced smoke problems caused by forest fires which are quite alarming. Based on data from the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), Riau is the province with the largest forest fires. As of August 2019, there were 49,266 hectares of burned land with 90 hotspots detected. As a result, the air pollution index in Pekanbaru City and its surroundings has reached red degrees, which is above 400 based on the Air Pollution Standard Index/ISPU. This condition is very dangerous, especially for vulnerable groups such as women/pregnant women and children.

The government has provided many measures to deal with the haze disaster. Almost every year the Pekanbaru City government and the Central Government have made efforts to protect public health, especially women and pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and children. So far, women and children have been forced to inhale the smoke intensively without any protective equipment (N95 masks) or proper shelters in case of forest fires. The children were forced not to go to school for weeks, because the classrooms were not equipped with air-conditioned rooms and air purifiers.

Several previous studies have found that smoke-contaminated air, soil, and food are very bad for health before and after birth. Toxic substances inhaled by pregnant women can interfere with their health and interfere with the nutrition and oxygen flow of the fetus. Another study also found that exposure to forest fires. Indonesia at the end of 1997 caused more than 15,600 child, infant and fetal deaths, meaning the survival rate of children decreased by 1.2 percentage points due to exposure to toxic fumes. A child's nutrition and health can be directly compromised after inhaling toxic fumes or ingesting them in contaminated raw food.

In addition to health impacts, forest fires also have a major impact on the economic, social and environmental affairs of local communities. And the biggest group that bears the impact is again women. Research from the Women Research Institute (2016) states that women as the person in charge of domestic affairs turned out to be the most real victims in the domino effect of these forest fires. To name a few examples, women have to take care of sick family members even though they themselves are in poor health conditions. Women who are pregnant and breastfeeding have to breathe toxic air which results in low nutrition delivered to their children. If the head of the family cannot actively work because of illness, then the woman must be the breadwinner of the family.

Women have also been shown to be actively involved in various efforts to extinguish forest fires. Starting from technical forest fires to informal advocacy against

companies that have forest concession permits. However, in various decision-making forums between the government and companies related to forest concessions involving community elements, women's groups are often not involved, so women's aspirations and interests are not considered. In fact, in forest management and utilization, men and women have different roles and knowledge, so that their involvement is very important to realize proper governance.

Many previous studies related to gender and forest management have been carried out. Most of the studies that have been conducted have been limited to women's opportunities to access forests and their products. A study conducted by Muin et al (2019) found that there is a division of roles between men and women in community forest management. However, the dominance of the role is still in the hands of men. Women tend to be only needed in lower crop cultivation activities. In addition, supporting activities such as farmer group meetings and administrators are still dominated by men. Another study also found that the percentage of working time allocation for men in community forest management activities was 62.03% and women only 37.97% and the percentage of decision-making roles in community forest management carried out by men was 63.11% and women only by 36.89% (Mando et al 2019).

Suliantoro (2011) found that the importance of feminism values applied in conservation as part of environmental ethics. The patriarchal culture that has so far dominated can be suppressed by developing the concept of caring ethics in a holistic, interactive, non-reductive, and participatory manner. The ethical principles that need to be considered are responsibility for the entire biosphere, cosmic solidarity, maintaining balance with nature, equal relations, sensitivity and simplicity. Ecofeminism values can develop human moral responsibility based on the experiences that women have. Another study found that incorporating gender aspects into forestry research is often limited by the perception that forestry is a male-dominated profession. This is due to a lack of clarity among researchers about the concept of gender, and a lack of technical skills, interest and awareness about gender (Mai et al 2011).

Based on a review of these studies, this study looks at how forest management is carried out by movements that grew and developed from women's initiation and how to balance the role of women in forest management to not just being a supporter. This study intends to explore and identify the extent to which women and their groups are involved in forest and environmental conservation efforts in Riau. The information obtained later is expected to be able to explain how the cultural and social constructs of society in supporting the involvement of women in these efforts. Including how these

cultural constructs ultimately influence the government's decision to involve women's groups.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender is a concept related to economic, political and cultural identity related to men and women. This identity varies either between countries or within a country and can change dynamically. The concept of gender is different from sex, which is more related to biological characters and reproductive organs. This research will use two theories as analytical tools, namely Ecofeminism Theory and Standpoint Theory.

### 2.1. Ecofeminism Theory

The presence of ecofeminism etymologically began in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the wedge and friction of theories in feminism and environmentalism. Terminologically, ecofeminism was introduced by Francoise d'Eaubonne in his book *Le Feminism ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death) published in 1974. The originators of the theory in this field include Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara, Vandana Shiva, Susan Griffin, Alice Walker, Starhawk, Sallie McFague, Luisah Teish, Sun Ai Lee Park, Paula Gunn Allen, Monica Sjoo, Greta Gaard, Karen Warren and Andy Smith. Ecofeminism does not only link women and the environment, but also spirituality. The crisis and the destruction of the earth are the swara of the devaluation of the earth as well as the devaluation of women.

Ecofeminism is a fundamental view of two important thoughts, namely ecology and feminism, therefore this view is known as "the ecology of feminism and the feminism of ecology" which offers a solution to the problems of human life and nature (Shiva, 1997). The word "eco" in ecology comes from the Greek Oikos, which means dwelling house; a place where all women and men live, animals, plants, water, soil, air and sun (Astuti, 2012). Ecology, studies the relationship between humans and the environment, links the sciences of humanity and natural sciences and sees the world in an integral-holistic way. Feminism is a view or thought that departs from awareness and concern for all forms of oppression, discrimination, marginalization of women. The ecofeminism movement first emerged from a feminist figure named Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 through his book "Le Feminist ou Lamort" (Feminist or Death), the longer it shows a prolonged crisis. According to Francoise (1974) that there is a relationship between oppression that occurs in women and oppression that occurs in nature. In line with Francoise's thinking,

feminists also argue that the oppression that occurs in nature is directly proportional to the oppression that occurs to women, which are both caused by the patriarchal system.

According to Megawangi, the perspective of ecofeminism arises because of dissatisfaction with the direction of the development of the world's ecology which is increasingly deteriorating (in Khotimah, 2006). In general, ecofeminism agrees that the destruction of the universe is the result of oppression by people who adhere to androcentrism or patriarchy. Along with the thoughts of Karen J Warren (in Aziz, 2011) that she revealed that society is shaped by values, beliefs, education, behavior that uses a patriarchal framework in which there is justification for the relationship of domination and subordination, oppression by men against women and hierarchical, dualistic and oppressive ways of thinking are masculine ways of thinking that have threatened the safety of women and nature. In reality, women are often "naturalized" or "feminized". It is "nature" when associated with mythical animals such as cats, rabbits and chickens, while women are "feminized" associated with activities such as being exploited, controlled, cultivated and others. If you look closely, you will see that these words are words that are often used to indicate activities related to nature, such as cultivated land, controlled land and exploited forests. It is not new if women and nature have symbolic similarities because they are both oppressed by masculine humans.

Ecofeminism rejects the view that reality is divided into two separate and unrelated parts. The impact resulting from this view is the birth of a policy of domination. Humans as those who feel they have a higher position than nature are seen as objects to fulfill human needs, giving birth to an exploitative attitude. In social relations, men feel they have a higher position than women, giving birth to a patriarchal culture that leads to women's oppression. "Nature does not belong to humans" but "humans belong to the earth", so that there is no act of domination that makes nature a fulfillment of human needs, and regenerates human consciousness to maintain and care for nature as a place to live. The thoughts contributed by ecofeminism to the world of science are very useful. In addition to building a culture with an eco-friendly lifestyle, ecofeminism is also able to become the basis for thinking and acting for women in becoming agents of change and agents of change in order to become professional women in dealing with nature and the environment, thus the role of women in all aspects related to environment is not only for work but also shared responsibility in protecting and preserving the environment.

According to Primavesi (in Suliantoro, 2011) the earth is an ecosystem in which it consists of various parts that are interrelated with each other, need each other, influence each other and determine each other. The parts are bound together to form

the web of life. Each part cannot grow and develop optimally without the support of the other. Ecofeminism according to Diamond and Orenstein (1990) is a social and political movement that unites environmentalist, feminist, and women's spiritualist movements because of shared concerns about the benefit of the earth and all forms of life on earth (in Abdulkadir and Ekawati). The flow of ecofeminism tries to explain how the marriage of ecological and feminist thought has given birth to alternative ideas about feminism. The phenomenon of environmental damage caused by massive exploitation makes women nervous about too large (male) domination. This raises the theory of nature protection by women called the theory of ecofeminism to break the ethics of anthropocentrism that prioritizes humans on nature.

## 2.2. Standpoint Theory

Furthermore, Hallstein (2003) suggests that Standpoint Theory highlights the relationship between power and knowledge. Standpoint Theory provides a better understanding and commitment to the idea that knowledge is always associated with power and politics. As a consequence, the basic principle of Standpoint Theory is that knowledge always arises in social locations and is shaped by power relations. The concept of Standpoint Theory according to Hartsock (2007: 502) involves five specific assumptions, namely:

- 1) Material life (or class position) shapes and limits the understanding of social relations.
- 2) When material life is formed for two groups by using two opposite things, then the understanding on each side will also contradict each other. When there are dominant and subordinate groups, the understanding of the dominant group will be one-sided and dangerous.
- 3) The view of groups having power will form material relationships in which all groups are forced to participate.
- 4) The views that exist on the oppressed group represent effort and reward.
- 5) Potential understanding on the part of the oppressed (standpoint) can show the cruelty of relations that already exist between groups. This situation can encourage us to move forward and create a more just life.

The epistemology and ontology of Standpoint Theory are also based on the assumptions that 1) all knowledge is a product of social activity and thus knowledge is objective; 2) The cultural conditions that surround women's lives will result in experiences and understandings that are routinely different from those experienced by men. These

differences in understanding often lead to differences in communication patterns; 3) Understanding the differences in women's experiences will be very useful; 4) We can only know women's experiences by attending to women's interpretations of their experiences.

Standpoint theory relies on three key concepts, namely point of view, situated knowledge, and sexual division of labor. Aspect of point of view (standpoint) is a position that is obtained based on social location that affects aspects of interpretation in one's life. According to Hartsock (1998:107) "a standpoint is not simply an interested position (interpreted as bias) but is interested in the sense of being engaged." A perspective is formed from experiences structured by a person's position in the social hierarchy.

Situated knowledge is a person's knowledge based on context and circumstances. Knowledge is seen as much and lies in experience. Thus, what a person learns is obtained from the position and role he carries in social life. Situated knowledge reminds us that what we know and do is not innate but is the result of our learning from experience. Different local communities may define slightly different standpoints, depending on the experience experienced.

Aspects of the Sexual Division of Labor rests on the idea that men and women are bound in different positions, based on gender which has implications for the sexual division of labor. Sexual division of labor is the allocation of jobs based on gender. This division not only differentiates work by sex, but also exploits women with jobs without providing wages. Furthermore, the inequality experienced by women in the work environment is also associated with their domestic work which is unpaid work. Thus, Standpoint Theory focuses on exploitation and the distortions that result when work is divided based on gender differences.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research method with a case study approach. Qualitative research is intended to obtain in-depth answers in order to obtain a holistic and comprehensive analysis of the research object. The locus taken is Riau Province with the consideration that Riau is the province with the largest land area affected by fires. Individual women who are members of affected communities and women's groups/communities who are concerned about environmental issues are the main objects in this research. However, to enrich the data in the research, researchers will try to dig up information on government representatives in related fields, academic observers and environmentalist organizations in general. In this study, the unit of analysis is the stakeholders who are



considered to know the role of women in environmental conservation in Riau Province. Data collection techniques in this study were observation, interviews, and secondary data.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Women's participation in environmental conservation

Ecofeminism is a social movement on environmental ethics. This movement was born to answer the need to save the environment based on women, but in an effort to protect and care for the environment, of course there must be awareness that arises in each individual woman. Awareness is the most important part in the ecofeminism movement. Towards a better change, of course there must be awareness from within each woman to improve her environment. This environmental awareness is also activated in various forms of activities, for example from the smallest things, namely not littering, using environmentally friendly products, maintaining air, sea and beach conservation, to not doing illegal hunting. These activities are part of a form of environmental awareness, both in a small and large scope because every activity carried out by humans (good or bad) on the environment will definitely affect the environment itself. The awareness of women as the driving force in this movement is an initial foundation to start a movement in realizing environmental improvement.



Figure 1



Ecofeminism was born from an intuition that the earth which is seen as Mother has been exploited, plundered and destroyed by the patriarchal system. In order to save the environment from a system, ecofeminism provides a way to involve women in saving ecology. This positions women as the main actors in the ecofeminism movement. This situation is not to exist for the position of women in the environmental world, but it is based on the destruction of nature and the destruction of women that occur simultaneously and are caused by the same system, namely patriarchy. A system that places men as the main authority figures in life, therefore ecofeminism places women as actors in its movement to be able to abolish the patriarchal system in environmental issues, so that people can freely care for and protect the environment together.



**Figure 2:** Social and Cultural Constructs on Women's Participation in Environmental Conservation in Riau.

Culture in Riau actually places women as strategic actors in preserving the environment and forests. There is a culture in some areas in Riau that segregates jobs, women work in the fields while men trade. This kind of culture actually places

women are in a strategic position in environmental conservation, so that naturally women will move in conservation and forests.

Riau Province is an area that adheres to Malay customs. In Malay custom, forest land is used as a guide, namely:

1) as a natural-forming element. The forest is a symbol of masters and spirits, the dignity of a people, as well as tribes and clans. Those who do not own land forests can be considered as people who are 'wasted' and 'low' degrees and are considered to be living on board. Based on this principle, the Malay community is obliged to defend

and maintain their forest-land as a manifestation of the fulfillment of their desires, the dignity of their land and their dignity.

2) As a philosophy and cultural dynamics

The forest with all its contents in one of them is a source of ethics and values and muwuujka 'show teaching' in life, namely:

Signs of people holding customs - nature is protected, advice is remembered Mark the person holding the mandate, which is forbidden to destroy the forest-land The sign of a long-minded person is that it is natural for him to have a view, if life is safe, the forest land is made like. If you want knowledge, Dinah's forest is made a group, and if life is about to be tested, Huta Tana is supported

3) Source of livelihood

The land forest with all its contents is used as a source of livelihood to fulfill the needs of every creature. This principle requires that the use of forest land is carried out wisely, so that it can be carried out for our descendants.

## 4.2. Women's Participation through Social Movements

The women's movements in forest conservation in Riau province can be divided into two types, namely movements born from women's own initiatives and movements born from government program interventions. The women's movement that was born internally from women is actually attached to the customs and culture of the indigenous people of Riau which teaches attitudes to protect the earth. There is a saying that says "my mother is earth, my father is sky", this proverb is one of the foundations for women to act in nature conservation efforts. Women basically have a strategic position in overcoming forest fires and environmental damage that occur.

On the other hand, the women's movement that was born from government programs also has a significant role. The government has a strategic role in initiating this women's movement. Seeing that women have an important role in environmental conservation efforts and women are the most affected parties in environmental damage, strengthening women's participation is very important. "Puanlisa" Women Care for Waste is one of the Riau Province programs. Through this Puanlisa, village women initiate waste banks, which are scattered in each village in Riau. The existence of this waste bank in addition to providing financial benefits also provides space for women to manage local resources.

For women in coastal areas, they are involved in managing climate villages, one of which is planting mangroves to prevent abrasion. Although there are many programs

carried out by the government to encourage the women's movement. However, until now there is no local regulation that confirms the involvement of women in forest conservation considering that women are the most affected party from forest destruction. So that the Riau provincial government has not been serious enough in mobilizing women in forest conservation. There are many women's movements in environmental conservation in Riau Province, both formally and informally. Puan Lisa (Woman Cares for Garbage) is an example of a women's movement community that focuses on waste management in the Siak Regency area. The women who are members of Puan Lisa are moved to manage waste in their area because they see the phenomenon of the amount of waste produced but minimal management of the maximum. Then at the initiative of an employee at the Women's Empowerment Service, the Puan Lisa movement was formed to formally accommodate women's activities in managing waste. Another reason for the formation of the Puan Lisa movement is the change in people's lifestyles which causes the accumulation of garbage resulting from changes in the use of the goods used.

Meanwhile, the informal women's movement includes the women's waste management movement in the village area. This movement is more directed towards an independent initiative from women to clean up the environment by separating plastic waste to be collected and handed over to a waste bank which will eventually be sold to third parties to be processed into recycled goods.

In general, the process of forming women's movements in environmental conservation is more of an independent initiative from women because they see the phenomenon of the problem of waste that is not managed properly and the potential for dumping of household waste. From the results of initiative ideas and support from the local government, these women's movements can more optimally form their communities.

Ecofeminism has a belief in equality in caring for and protecting the environment without any inequality. A balanced relationship (equilibrium) between men and women is the key in caring for the earth fairly. Ecofeminists do not want to return women to mythical, stereotyped and domesticated arguments but want to see them as arguments based on feminist awareness, namely seeing that there are relations that must be balanced in society, as well as relations in environmental discourse. The principles of responsibility for the needs of the biosphere, cosmic solidarity, maintaining harmony with nature, establishing equality, caring and simplicity are things that every individual must possess in life. Regarding environmental problems, it is not only centered on the physical biological environment but also the socio-cultural environment which is the basis of every individual in life.

### 4.3. The Role of Women's Social Movements in Environmental Conservation in Riau

Involvement of women's groups in forest and environmental conservation efforts, both formally and informally. Based on the results of interviews from the Lurah in the southern Riau region, it is known that the women in the kelurahan area take the initiative to collect recyclable waste, such as used bottles, plastics, mineral water glasses to then be handed over to the waste bank in the outskirts area. Every waste deposit is recorded and recorded in the waste bank passbook. Within a period of every three months, they can disburse the funds collected from the sale of the recycled waste.

The amount of funds collected from the sale of waste varies, from Rp. 1000 to tens of thousands. In three months a woman earns around Rp 200,000-Rp 300,000. This income is used by these women activists as a means of supporting their families internally, and also as a form of women's commitment to environmental conservation.

## 5. CLOSING

There are many women's movements in environmental conservation in Riau Province, both formally and informally. Puan Lisa (Woman Cares for Garbage) is an example of a women's movement community that focuses on waste management in the Slak Regency area. The women who are members of Puan Lisa are moved to manage waste in their area because they see the phenomenon of the large amount of waste produced but lack of optimal management. Then on the initiative of one of the employees at the Women's Empowerment Service, the Puan Lisa movement was formed to be able to formally accommodate women's activities in managing waste. Another reason for the formation of the Puan Lisa movement is the change in people's lifestyles that lead to the accumulation of waste resulting from changes in the use of the goods used.

Meanwhile, the informal women's movement includes the women's waste management movement in the village area. This movement is more directed towards an independent initiative from women to clean up the environment by separating plastic waste to be collected and handed over to a waste bank which will eventually be sold to third parties to be processed into recycled goods.

In closing, the process of forming women's movements in environmental preservation is based more on independent initiatives from the women themselves because it is driven by problems that occur that affect their lives, the social and cultural background from which women come from, will affect how the goals and The strategy carried out by

the women's movement is based on applicable local wisdom to achieve the universal, namely the preservation of the forest environment.

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