

## Ecofeminism in Indonesia: Opportunities and Challenges of Women as Queens of the Environment

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explain the opportunities and challenges for Indonesian women in waste management that should be environmentally friendly. This is important because women are often in a domestic position, and the highest waste production is in the kitchen. In addition, the condition of TPA (Final Disposal), namely centralized waste disposal sites in big cities, is increasingly inadequate. Therefore, waste management must start from the source, which is the kitchen in every household. The opportunity for women to become 'environmental heroes' is in their role as regulators of all household affairs. This opportunity is currently popular since Indonesia needs eco-feminism, because women are considered to be more sensitive to nature than men. The challenges of the eco-feminism movement are that women often feel that there is a lack of time, that garbage bank facilities are far away, the low prices offered by garbage banks, and that there is a perception that making compost is masculine. To overcome these challenges, it is necessary for stakeholders such as universities and companies to give attention through their CSR activities. This is important because the Indonesian government is already overwhelmed with managing its residents' waste.

**Key words:** Ecofeminism, kitchen waste

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Women and cleanliness are two very identical things. This means that women are expected to have a role as parties who always look clean, beautiful and smell good so that women are ideal figures for all cosmetic advertisements and fashion industry. Women are also expected to like cleanliness, because culturally women are considered to be the party most responsible for cleaning activities in their home environment (Hickey, 2013). Therefore, the standard of hygiene for women is higher than for men (The'baud et al., 2019). The main place that is most expected to always be cleaned is the kitchen. This is because women are familiar with cooking activities and the kitchen is the room that generates most waste compared to other rooms.

Women's identification with cleanliness shows that compared to men, women are the ones who consume more in terms of purchasing goods and are at the same time producers of waste. This shows that women can become victims of poor waste management and can also act as 'environmental heroes'. Women as victims of poor environmental management can occur, for example when they cook water that is polluted by garbage. Women can also act as environmental heroes when they manage waste in an environmentally friendly manner, for example by making compost, becoming waste bank managers, becoming Adiwiyata School (green curriculum school) teachers (Shinta, 2019), and becoming activists on environmental issues (Shinta&Patimah, 2021).

Culturally, women are expected by society as parties who can manage their waste (Hickey, 2013). This is because women, especially in countries with patriarchal cultures such as Japan and Indonesia, are often referred to as the main caretakers of the household. In Indonesia, when the wife is fully involved in the world of work, her role in the kitchen is replaced by a household assistant who is usually also a woman (Simulja et al., 2014). The women have to deal with their kitchen waste every day and they have to be able to process it in an environmentally friendly manner. This can be done if the women master the 3R skills, namely reduce, reuse,

recycle (Harahap et al., 2019). Reduce means the skill to reduce the use of plastic food packaging so that waste production is reduced. Reuse means reusing items that have been used so that the life of the item becomes longer and waste production is reduced. An example is reusing plastic shopping bags from supermarkets. Recycle means recycling items that can be recycled, for example making compost from kitchen waste.

The reality in everyday life, household waste is still not managed properly (environmentally friendly). The composition of household waste is 60% in the form of organic waste, 16% plastic waste and the rest is other types of waste (paper, iron, glass, cans, cloth, and so on) (Yasin et al., 2021). The waste is not sorted by type, but is handed over to the waste officials who then dispose of it in a TPA (Final Disposal Site) based on the open dumping method or just piling it up. In 2016, Indonesia was ranked second of food waste because the disposal was 300 kg/person/year. The first rank is Saudi Arabia which disposes of food waste of 427 kg / person / year (Kementerian PPN / Bappenas, 2021). This situation shows that female figures are still not able to process waste based on 3R behavior, and they tend to prefer to hand over their waste to waste officials without sorting it first.

Household waste that is not sorted must be managed immediately, because it gives off a foul odor and is a source of disease. Even plastic waste that is used as fuel for stoves in the kitchen (combustion below 1000°C) produce smoke that threatens human health. Diseases caused by incomplete plastic burning include skin irritation, impaired respiratory tract, increased menstrual problems, miscarriage and the child born is likely to experience growth disturbances up to 12 months of age (Karuniastuti, 2013).

This paper aims to discuss the opportunities and challenges for Indonesian women in environmentally friendly waste management. Environmentally friendly waste management is necessary to discuss because women are very vulnerable to become victims. Culturally, women are also familiar with sources of waste (eg. kitchens), so women have the potential to become heroes or queens of the environment. Furthermore, this article is also important because women occupy a strategic role in the family, namely as educators of their children. It is hoped that through this paper, women can educate their children, both women and men, to be responsible for the waste they produce.

### **Why Do Women Become Environmental Heroes?**

The phenomenon of women as the main figures in the environmental field is part of the ecofeminism movement. Ecofeminism is a movement that discusses the relationship between women and nature without being dominated by either. Compared to men, women are considered to be more sensitive to nature, have better expertise and knowledge about nature and have high ecological awareness (Asnani, 2021; Mago&Gunwal, 2019). Women are also considered capable of being leaders in dealing with ecological problems, including environmentally friendly waste management. Women are also more capable of carrying out an ecological revolution to solve various environmental problems through the communities they form. The communities are flexible in involving ecological issues in everyday life. This eco-feminism is a movement to encourage women to be active in managing the environment and gain economic benefits without destroying the environment. This ecofeminism movement was put forward by Vandana Shiva from India (Mago&Gunwal, 2019; Yasin et al., 2021).

In women's communities, the main emphasis on caring for the environment is its sustainability, rather than financial gain (Mago&Gunwal, 2019; Yasin et al., 2021). Concern for the environment actually also provides financial benefits, but it is indirect and not instantly. For example, when the environment is clean because the waste is managed in an environmentally friendly manner, the people around us become healthy so we don't have to spend money to buy medicine. This healthy condition is certainly saves family finances. The women's community also plays a role in forming regulations, but their role is not significant. This is because the number of women sitting in legislative and executive seats is still small.

In patriarchal culture, men get more opportunities for various things than women. In terms of environmental management, men get the first opportunity to utilize natural resources. The first opportunity makes men earn more and faster money. For example, on the issue of tin mining, the majority of workers are men. After the natural resources run out, the mining pits will be abandoned. When it rains, the pits become very deep and dangerous swamps. By the miners, the swamp is not being conserved but simply abandoned for financial reasons and maybe they feel it doesn't need to be conserved. Hollow soil situations like this often occur in Kalimantan. This means that men's responses to environmental issues emphasize financial gain. The impact is that nature is used optimally without the awareness for conservation efforts (exploitation), most likely because these conservation efforts require very high costs (Yasin et al., 2021).

Do men also care about waste management issues? Compared to the issue of natural resource management, men tend to be reluctant to appear first in terms of waste. This is because waste is perceived as something bad and does not generate intrinsic values or internal motivation (Yoda et al., 2019). This perception means that no matter how sophisticated the waste is processed, the processing will not provide any benefits at

all. Even so, men still play a role in waste management. Their role includes making regulations, transporting waste (garbage men), and processing waste using large and heavy equipment. This is because these types of jobs are perceived as masculine jobs. This shows that men's involvement in the waste sector is a profession where the consequence is money.

The role of women in waste management is different from that of men. Women prioritize more environmentally friendly waste management by implementing 3R behavior. For women, managing waste is a matter of behavior, not technology. Even though adequate equipment is not available, women are still willing to manage their waste. This is because women have a high awareness of waste management (Mago&Gunwal, 2019). Examples that are often seen are women as reliable waste bank administrators (Ama, 2022), become compost queens (Diana, 2017), and make crafts from plastic waste (Chalifah, 2022). This situation shows that women's involvement in waste management tends to be non-financial and sustainable.

### **Opportunities and Challenges for Women as Queens of the Environment**

Culturally women have a high chance of becoming queens of the environment. This is because women's daily activities are closely related to the kitchen, and the kitchen is a source of kitchen waste. In addition, women are also very familiar with children, so they better understand the needs of their children. They become decisive figures in purchasing goods needed by family members (Astuti, 2013). This situation shows that the female figure has a high chance of making household waste manageable in an environmentally friendly manner or on the contrary producing huge pile of waste.

In society, women also have a high chance of becoming queens of the environment. This is because women are skilled at creating citizen empowerment communities (Mago&Gunwal, 2019; Yasin et al., 2021). One of the communities related to waste management is the waste bank. An example of a superior waste bank is the Mutiara Timor Waste Bank in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara (Ama, 2022). The head of the Mutiara Timor Garbage Bank is a woman. At its inception, April 2020, they were able to send 2 tons of plastic waste per month to Surabaya via ship. Now, they are able to send 20 tons of plastic waste per month. More than 80% of the waste bank employees are housewives. The waste bank does not pursue financial gain, but prioritizes the cleanliness of the city of Kupang.

The opportunities and performance of women to become queens of the environment, unfortunately, are not followed by the existing reality. Household waste is not yet managed properly (environmentally friendly). In fact, Indonesia became the world's 'second champion' for the amount of food waste production in 2016. This shows that Indonesian women are not yet able to implement the 3R behavior routinely. Women are still lack in waste management knowledge and skills (Yunita, 2019). Recycle behavior (recycling of goods) is still perceived as unpleasant and even troublesome (Chaesfa&Panjaitan, 2013). This situation is a challenge for women to care more about the waste that their household produces.

Based on the experience in SitiMulyo Village, Piyungan District, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta, it was revealed that women lack participation in managing household waste (Setyawati&Siswanto, 2020). The lack of participation is more due to external reasons, rather than individual internal reasons (i.e. laziness and feeling short of time because women are preoccupied with household management or other domestic affairs). Those external reasons that hindered the low participation included two things such as there is no optimal socialization from community leaders about waste processing skills. Furthermore, people are less interested on circular economy; therefore recycle and upcycling articles do not have prestigious values. Accordingly, women are not attracted to produce handicraft items made from waste.

For a society with a collective culture like Indonesia, the role of the authorities (community leaders, regional leaders) is crucial in order to create behavior change. This can be seen from the experience of managing waste in Manokwari Regency, West Papua province (Waliki et al., 2020). The variables of directions and role models from community leaders have a strong influence on the willingness of residents to manage their waste. The lack of facilities and infrastructure for waste management has apparently not had a strong effect on the willingness of residents to manage their waste.

The condition of Indonesian society, which is collective in nature, is a challenge for Indonesian women who happen to occupy positions as leaders. An example is the leader of the PKK organization (women organization in villages). If PKK leaders want their area to be clean, healthy and comfortable, then its members, both women and men, must also be willing to manage their waste in an environmentally friendly manner. Things that women leaders can do include two things. Firstly, they could invite experts from the nearest tertiary institution to get involved in improving the surrounding environment. They are expected to conduct training in the community about waste management through 3R behavior. Typically, the involvement of tertiary institutions is through their regular students' KKN activities (students' community service program) or through lecturer activities in community service. The activity of inviting higher education institutions does not require a fee, unless there are consequences for expensive equipment. In situations of financial constraints, universities are challenged to create methods and equipment that are affordable, easy and fast to operate. This strategy can be

implemented especially if the area does not yet have a TPST (Integrated Waste Management Site), a waste bank, or the existence of a suspended waste bank. The presence of the tertiary institution is expected to provide understanding to residents, both women and men, that waste management is the responsibility of the government and also the community. The role of the community will be stronger when the role of local government is inadequate.

Secondly, asking the nearest company for help can also be done by female leaders to participate in building 3R behavior for local residents. This has been done, for example, by the Unilever Company which fosters waste banks through its CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) program. Drink companies such as Coca Cola and Aqua have also coached the community to manage inorganic waste, especially plastic bottles. This strategy can be carried out when there is already a waste bank in the area but the waste bank is underdeveloped. To penetrate a company's CSR is not very easy, because usually the company asks for activity proposals. Not many female leaders can contact corporate CSR. In this situation, university students and lecturers have very strong role because they are accustomed to making activity proposals.

## II. Conclusion

Women have a huge opportunity to play the role of environmental heroes or queens of the environment, especially in terms of waste management. This role is strongly supported by cultural factors. This happens because the area of the house that generates the most waste is the kitchen, and activities in the kitchen such as cooking are the activities most often carried out by women. In addition to cultural factors, the ecofeminism movement is also a factor that supports women as queens of the environment. In this view, women have strong potentials such as being sensitive to natural conditions, having high knowledge and skills to manage the environment without dominating it, and having high ecological awareness. Managing the environment including waste cannot be done alone, but must be done in communities. A successful community in managing waste in an environmentally friendly manner is the Mutiara Timor waste bank in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara. The community manager of the waste bank is a woman who has an educational background as a bachelor of environmental and regional planning from Griffith University, Australia (Ama, 2022).

Women also face challenges in terms of waste management. Even though women are good at managing waste, the amount of food waste in Indonesia is ranked second after Saudi Arabia in 2016. This means that the potential of women in managing their waste based on 3R behavior has not been explored optimally. Blaming the government for neglect in this waste matter is an unwise move. There are two strategies that can be used by women leaders so that their communities are willing to manage their waste in an environmentally friendly manner. The strategy is to invite universities to train skills for 3R behavior and ask for company assistance through their CSR activities on waste management

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