

The Guardian of East Borneo: Indigenous Women in Gender Equality, Local Culture, and Language Preservation in the Surrounded Area of Indonesia's New Capital City

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to reveal the position of indigenous women in Indonesia's capital city in terms of gender equality, culture, and local language preservation. The research is done through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using a phenomenological approach. There are 19 participants selected from two indigenous ethnicities: Dayak, and Paser. The participants reveal that gender equality has long been applied in their community, which can be seen from the equality of education, jobs, domestic affairs, rituals, and representation in government or organization. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate the crucial role of women in preserving culture and language, as they serve as initiators, instructors, mediators, and executors. Looking at women's vital role, their existence and influences should be supported and made prominent.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous Women; Gender Equality; Local Culture; Local Language; Indonesia's New Capital City.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a developing country in Southeast Asia with its archipelagic area laid from west to east (Hadisantosa & Johnstone, 2010). This region and its location led to uneven development, as the capital city is located in the west, resulting in the eastern part of the country experiencing less development. Furthermore, Jakarta has long been vulnerable as a capital city, prompting a transition to East Borneo—a unique region centrally situated in the country—to encourage equitable growth (Syaban & Appiah-Opoku, 2023). The decision to move their capital city impacts many aspects not environmental issues but also social and economic ones (Baniargi et al., 2022). The relocation of the capital city from Jakarta to East Borneo impacted the mass urbanization starting from the development of the new capital also known as Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) since most laborers are from outside East Borneo. Talking about the mass urbanization, the impact will not only that the indigenous people should compete with people outside their area in terms of economic aspects, but the urbanized people culture and local language can also threaten the culture and local languages from indigenous ethnicities.

East Borneo is an image of multiculturalism where it is a region in which many ethnicities, religions, and races living together harmoniously. Among those ethnicities there are several indigenous tribes such as Dayak (with its sub-ethnics), Paser (with its sub-ethnics), and Kutai. These indigenous people with their own culture will be the most impacted when the mass urbanization happen in Indonesia's new capital city. They should compete with more people to defend their culture, language, or land. What is also the case is that for these indigenous communities, they have always had a deep relationship with the forest. Furthermore, their cultural, traditional subsistence, and

ancestral languages are closely connected to the forest ecosystems they dwell in and defend. The forest is not a commodity, but a living part of their identity and sustenance, history and heritage (Carson et al., 2018; Fa et al., 2020). Loss or decline of forest through resources, resulting from demographic or urban incursions constitutes the main danger creating conditions so that they are no longer able to maintain their cultural and even linguistic heritage. Therefore, their role should be affirmed and sharpened in the middle of mass urbanization.

Indigenous people are the most impacted even marginalized by the development of their area. The study of Indigenous people confirms that they usually become the victim intentionally or unintentionally (Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Burnette et al., 2011). The impact will be more visible to women whom in many references are depicted as marginalized and out of consideration (Burnette, 2013; Burnette et al., 2011; Prodan-Bhalla, 2001; Ruiz & Menocal, 1998). However, the role of women is vital for the preservation of culture since women who usually teach their children about their culture, especially in Indonesia since a man is depicted to be away to earn for the family. In the twenty-first century where the role of women somehow overlaps with the man and in another part of the world, discrimination to women still happen to date. Many researchers have studied about women's role for years, but few of them take indigenous women's voice to be the focus of the study. Moreover, for minority indigenous ethnicity in which they face the vulnerability of endangered culture and local languages from year to year. Then, this research aims to describe the gender equality experience by the indigenous women living surrounded Indonesia's new capital city and their roles in local culture and languages preservation.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research employs a phenomenological design which aims to describe what the people perceive in the context of their living. This qualitative method can provide more comprehensive and visualized feedback from those experiencing it. The participants of this research are taken based on several criteria such as 1) From two indigenous ethnicity—Paser and Dayak regardless their sub-ethnics, 2) involving in an indigenous community actively or passively, the leader of tribe, or head of village. Initially, the researchers requested the participants to give their consent to participate in the interview. The participants then were interviewed with semi-structured questions for one to two hours. After that, the recordings undergone the process of transcription. To ensure accuracy and clarifying ambiguities, the researchers went back to the participants to review the transcription as part of the researchers' ethical accountability. This transcription then is used to be analyzed in further detail following the steps of phenomenological study.

Four steps are usually involved in phenomenological research:

- 1) The first step is Bracketing which involves identifying and suspending preconceived views and attitudes about the issue under study. In this step, the researchers wrote reflecting memos about their assumptions regarding the indigenous women's role to minimize bias.
- 2) After bracketing, the intuition steps guide the researcher to focus on the significance of the phenomenon based on previous study. In the intuition step, the researchers read the interview's transcriptions many times to grasp the emotional and thematic patterns. This procedure leads to a shared knowledge of the subject under study.
- 3) The third step is analyzing which is related to the coding process which involves categorizing and interpreting significant meanings of the phenomenon. During this stage, the researchers coded the participants' statements into initial categories

corresponding to gender equality, environmental, local language and cultural preservation.

- 4) The last step is Describing. This is the most important step in phenomenological study. The description step involved synthesizing the coded data into overarching themes, which were later validated through participant confirmation.

3. RESULTS

Following the steps of data analysis based on phenomenological study, the researchers answered the research questions and organized the findings based on the emergent themes. Three main themes were identified from the interviews: upholding gender equality, culture and local language preservation and threat and challenges in culture and local preservation. The findings of this study are presented using direct quotations from participants to illustrate and support each theme

3.1 Gender equality in education, politics, and decision making

Gender equality is such a never-ending discussion brought up since there are many cases that prove that women have a weak stand in the society (Burnette, 2013; Burnette et al., 2011). However, according to the participants interviewed in this research, gender equality has long been implemented in Dayak and Paser community as participant 1 said:

“Dayak tribes have many sub-ethnicities which are different in language and customs. They do have similarities, but the differences are a lot because actually we are from different tribes but when the colonizer comes, they label all indigenous people as Dayak to make it easy to call us. Then, the people said “Dayak”. So, Dayak is nowhere in our vocabulary, we don’t have the word “Dayak” or “Dayak” because it is given by Dutch at that time. But to make it easy, we just say Dayak nowadays. Then, because they are from different tribes initially, they have different values and beliefs on gender equality; some implement gender equality and some do not. For example, in my sub-ethnic, Bahau, we implement matrilineal. After marriage, the groom moves to the bride’s home and follows her family’s custom. While in Kenyah, it is patrilineal” (Participant 1).

This statement is also clarified by Participant 12 as follows:

“In Paser community, there is no such division of work, such as men go to work and women stay at home cooking and cleaning, all the work are done together. Even though people in the past went farming and did house chores together. Patriarchal culture comes to the community through religion and acculturation with other culture such Javanese and Buginese. Women have a higher position in the Paser community in the past. They even lead the kingdom such as Princess Petung and Princess by Mubar Mayang, the famous princesses from Sadurengas Kingdom. Not only that, the leader of Beliatn ritual so called Mulung is usually a woman. But now, women are limited to be Mulung” (Participant 12).

Based on the participants, it can be seen that gender equality has long been implemented in Paser and Dayak community as a “cultural heritage” from their ancestor. They put women in an equal or even higher position in the community before religion and other tribes come to Borneo Island. Many of indigenous community are matrilineal (Burnette, 2015; Olson et al., 2022) meaning that people are seen as descending from their matriarchal lines (Jaimes & Halsey, 1992; LaFromboise & Heyle, 1990; Langston, 2003; Pesantubbee, 2005; Reeves, 1985). For example, is in Burnette (2015) who reported that Choctaw (indigenous ethnic in United States) community was

women centred which implement matrilineal and matrilineal before colonization. After colonization which brings religions force the indigenous people to be more patriarchal since matrilineal and matrilineal are seen as against the religion (Deer et al., 2008; Guerrero, 2003).

The change of community structure also happens in Paser when their leader, Princess Petung married a Javanese Muslim man. After the Paser people embraced Islam, some of them began to refuse being called as Dayak. Historically, Dayak, which means primitive (Ulva, 2024) is a label given by colonizer Dutch to gather all the indigenous people in Borneo. The goal of this labelling is to end the people's tradition of head hunting called as "mengayau". By giving the label Dayak, these indigenous people are encouraged to avoid head hunting because they are all one as Dayak tribes. Therefore, Paser has similar traditions and customs to Dayak because they are initially derived from the same ancestor.

The gender equality can also be seen from the role of women in rituals. Women are entrusted to be the leader of the rituals, as the mediator of human and other entities. As participant 1 said:

"In the Bahau community, female leaders are a common occurrence. Even the leader of the ritual must be a woman. However, the political leader can be male or female. However, the priest was a woman in the Bahau community" (Participant 1).

Moreover, Dayak and Paser also know several deities who are described as women which shows how important is the role of women in Dayak and Paser people as other matrilineal indigenous people believe (Nelson, 2019; Reeves, 1985). Gender equality can be seen first in the domestic area, where in mainstream patriarchal communities, men are depicted as the one who earns for the family, while women are responsible for house chores such as cooking and cleaning (Pesantubbee, 2005; Reeves, 1985). This division is what does not exist in the Dayak and Paser monoethnic family. Women are allowed to go to the farm and forest to collect earnings, while men are also responsible for the house chores. The Dayak and Paser family teach their sons to do house chores so they can be responsible for their own well-being and do not rely on the women. As participant 12 said:

"There is no division of domestic duties, so all family members are required to do house chores. It is clear that all members will be involved regardless of gender. Culturally, Paser does not have a clear division of gender roles. Everything is done by mutual cooperation. In reality, parents in the past collaborated on tasks such as farming, household maintenance, laundry, cooking, and more despite the gender" (Participant 12)

Based on Participant 12's statement, Paser family did not divide the responsibility based on the gender. Therefore, women can go to work and farm while men should be able to handle house chores. The Paser families teach their son to do house chores so they can ensure their well-being as their own responsibility and do not rely on their mother, sister, or wife to do the house chores. A similar statement comes from the Dayak Community when it is related to marriage customs as Participant 1 said:

"I will use the Bahau community in Mahakam Ulu as an example. In Bahau, the average male and female are equal and tend to adhere to matrilineal beliefs. So, the custom is taken from the mother's or woman's side. The custom of marriage, on the other hand, originates from the female side. Therefore, men tend to follow women when they get married. Men move to women's villages. Therefore, this phenomenon is unique to the Bahau community in Mahakam" (Participant 1).

The Dayak Bahau community, which is matrilineal and matrilocal, has the groom to follow the bride and live in the bride's house or hometown (Pesantubbee, 2005; Reeves, 1985). It is different from other patriarchal cultures where the bride is the one who moves to the groom's house and lives with the in-laws. The gender equality in domestic affairs extends to the choice women have whether they want to have a child or not. In a patriarchal culture where women are expected to have children regardless their will, this kind of freedom is still struggled. Their freedom is in the form of using herbs to prevent pregnancy (Agadjanian, 1999; Moroole et al., 2020) and their society accepts that without judgment like what Participant 9 said as follows:

“Paser people rarely have many children, usually 4 children at most; some have children up to 10, but usually they intend to do it. But some do not have children. They don't want kids, so they use herbs to avoid pregnancy. Usually, the economic condition at that time was not good. And it doesn't matter” (Participant 9)

Participant 9's central statement is that the women have the right to have a few children or no children at all, and society did not judge them (Islam & Thorvaldsen, 2012; Moroole et al., 2020). It is a rare phenomenon in a patriarchal culture which expects women to have children and blames them if they do not have one. This kind of freedom and the guarantee of gender equality are rooted deeply in the community of Paser and Dayak people, which can be seen from the equality of education, politics, and decision making as Participant 1 said:

“Now, women's groups are also given opportunities; many women are enrolled in schools and can perform in public. Positive changes have occurred, particularly since the late 90s, when women's groups began to conduct gender training, thereby strengthening them. From there, women's groups have begun to open. In the village, there are active women's groups and female village leaders. In the past, he tended to be less active, so he was forced; now there are a lot. Even at the village level, the number of female politicians has increased significantly. We have started to see it” (Participant 1).

Participant 1 experienced the movement of women who struggled to have the same opportunities in education in the late 90s. She witnesses that nowadays, women can pursue higher education, which makes them have more capability to talk and to represent their community (Dillabough, 2014; Greene, 2008; Moyo et al., 2020). Then participant 5 believed that education is her children's rights regardless of their gender as a way to get better lives.

“We must first educate children at home and then provide them with the necessary education. There is no difference between men and women. I have the principle that only parents have no education, but our children should be educated so they will have better lives” (Participant 5).

Equality in education is one of the most wanted equalities that women have struggled for years (Cole & Blair, 2022; David, 2015, 2017; Unterhalter, 2007). Through better access to education, it is believed to have a better impact on her life. According to all participants, they have access to education since their parents believe that education is very important. There is also no difference between women and men in getting access to education. Equality in education can lead to a better quality of human resources so that women can be involved in decision-making process, not only as a complement for the quorum, but they can give a significant difference to the decision made in their community (Anderson, 2000; Dennis & Bell, 2020; Green, 2017; Monchalain, 2016). Typically, indigenous women are involved in an indigenous people's

alliance or a non-profit organization based on their ethnicity. This statement is supported by Participant 5's utterance as follows:

"Typically, representatives of AMAN (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara) women participate in decision-making processes within traditional institutions" (Participant 5).

AMAN (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara) is an independent community organization with a vision to realize a just and prosperous life for all Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia. AMAN works at the local, national, and international levels to represent and advocate for Indigenous Peoples' issues. Through AMAN, indigenous women can actively participate in their community issues (Anderson, 2000; Dennis & Bell, 2020; Green, 2017; Monchalín, 2016). Some of the women are doing ethnographic research as a requirement for claiming their customary forest which is very important for them. This statement is strengthened by Participant 13 as follows:

"In the Dayak community itself, research was conducted by Chili Kriwut, a national hero of Central Kalimantan, a Dayak person, and the governor of Central Kalimantan. He made global conclusions and wrote a book about Dayak women, Bawing Dayak, in which he stated that Dayak women in the Dayak community were equal. Dayak women can play a role and actively participate in the community. In my personal experience, I play a role in aiding the family's decision-making process. As the chairman of the organization, I am responsible for making decisions and exerting influence in the community or areas where I am present" (Participant 13).

From the participants' statements, it can be seen that Dayak and Paser women are actively engaged in ethnographic research to collect everything that has to do with their tradition in order to preserve it so they can share it with their next generation (Anderson, 2000). The similar statements are also shared by Participant 12 as follows:

"When it comes to applying for recognition of indigenous peoples in my village, it's the indigenous women who put in the most effort. Because from the preparation of ethnography and the preparation of plans, more women are done. Even during the mapping process to identify key points in the region, women actively participated" (Participant 12).

From Participant 12's statement, it is clear that women play an important role in their ethnographic research, as they did more of the work. They are involved in preparation, mapping to the final process. Therefore, Dayak and Paser women's communities are encouraged to be actively involved in community activities and even make decisions on their issues. Here, women's voices are not only heard, but they are also taken into account, a rare standpoint that women in other parts of the globe strive for. Equality in decision-making can be prominent when women are entrusted to a vital position in the society (Anderson, 2000; Dennis & Bell, 2020; Green, 2017; Monchalín, 2016). Several participants witnessed that in their community, the proportion of women in political positions, working in the government, or being a head of village is relatively high. As participant 16 said:

"In this village, one of Ketua RT is a woman. Women can also be head of village because our people are flexible with the gender. Even, three out of five members of BPD (Badan Permusyawaratan Desa) are women" (Participant 16).

In the Dayak community, women are seen as capable as men so that they can sit in vital positions in their community. As participant 16 said, the proportion of women in

BPD (in English is Village Consultative Body), whose functions are similar to those of the legislative branch, that is to control the implementation of village policies, Village Budget and Expenditure Revenue (APBDes), and the implementation of decisions of the Village Head. Not only being BPD, but women are also entrusted to be a head of village as Participant 9 said:

“Indeed, Mahakam Ulu currently boasts a number of female cadres. There are village heads who are women; there are traditional heads who are women. In Mahakam Ulu, women are generally present as leaders. In my own community, female leaders are common. As I mentioned earlier, the Bahau community plays a significant role in promoting equality between men and women. The customs of the Bahau community are influenced by the customs of women, making them predominantly matrilineal. Well, where many women in my tribe are traditional heads, village heads, or hipuy. Not much, there is now. So hipuy is a noble, a nobleman who leads. Before the village regulation changed, it was the village head, right? During that period, men were considered dominant and held positions of power. But traditionally, women here, in Dayak Bahau, have become leaders; it is common” (Participant 1).

Women in the Dayak community are respected and entrusted to such vital positions politically (Whyte, 2014). They are seen as capable of leading a village or controlling the implementation of the village policies. Besides, Dayak women also struggle in their own role in the community, such as being craftsmen, businessmen, and working for the government, as a result of their better education qualities. As participant 13 said below:

“Dayak women have a quite significant role in society. Because they are given various roles that suit their interests and potential. So, there are weavers, there are groups fostered by the government, and there are various crafts products; these can be produced by Dayak women. But that's not all; it's not just traditional things. Dayak women also play a role in the world of science or the modern world; they can also work in government, become businesswomen, and so on” (Participant 13).

From the aforementioned statements from all the participants, it can be seen that gender equality is not a new concept for Dayak and Paser women; it is a cultural heritage that they have managed to preserve for their generation. The assurance of gender equality within their community fosters a sense of equality in domestic affairs, thus enhancing their access to quality education. By obtaining higher levels of education, Dayak and Paser women can achieve equality in political participation and community decision-making. They can do much by conducting research, advocating for their communities' rights, and safeguarding their cultural heritage (Anderson et al, 2013; Dennis & Bell, 2020; Harper, 2018; McGregor, 2005; Simpson, 2017; Whyte, 2014).

3.2 Women rules in culture and local language preservation

As the gender equality of Dayak and Paser has been assured, it leads to such responsibility to preserve their culture and local language. In this theme, the researchers figure out how women's roles are in cultural and local language preservation such as initiators and instructors.

3.2.1 Women as initiators

Indigenous women in their community have a role in initiating the movement to preserve their culture and local language as a defense against globalization. Globalization has been reported to have negative impacts on the Indigenous people,

especially the women, because globalization leads to environmental degradation, the loss of identity and values, and the loss of traditional activities among members of the community (Harcourt & Escobar, 2005; Kuokkanen, 2008; Wiewiorka, 2003). To address the negative impacts caused by globalization, Indigenous women do several things, such as making a dictionary as Participant 1 said:

“There is a dictionary available for the Bahau language. A customary institution initiated the process. So, some villages with different languages also began to identify existing languages, write down their meanings, and then put them in the database. As a result, several sub-tribes have started publishing their own dictionaries” (Participant 1).

As is commonly the case with most Indigenous languages, there is no dictionary to document the languages, as they are traditionally only taught within the family and community. Initially, this practice seemed acceptable because there were still many speakers of the language. However, with the impact of globalization, the number of language speakers has declined (Boyer, 2009; Karidakis & Kelly, 2018; Norris, 2007), making it increasingly important to create a dictionary to ensure the language can be learned and preserved for future generations. The mass urbanization is also one of the causes of the decline of indigenous speakers, as mentioned by the Participant 9 as follows:

“Indeed, I am concerned about the declining number of Paser language speakers, particularly in light of the introduction of the IKN, which could potentially lead to an increase in immigration. But I always use the Paser language wherever I am while in the Paser district. Because for me, this Paser language will still exist if we always use it” (Participant 9).

Then, participant 12 also added:

“I happen to be compiling language documentation, and I ask my daughter to translate it into English” (Participant 12).

The people from outside Borneo came to East Borneo and mingled with the indigenous people. This will lead to acculturation, and it is like a war. There will be one that is defeated and another that is victorious. The sustainability of an indigenous language can be ensured if the language wins the war. However, it is not always the case that when the urban people are more than the indigenous people, the speakers of the language will decrease over time (Boyer, 2009; Karidakis & Kelly, 2018; Norris, 2007). It is what worries the indigenous women and leads them to make a dictionary for each of their languages.

3.2.2 3.2.1 Women as instructors

As previously mentioned, Indigenous women usually initiate the movement to preserve the local culture and language. Besides, the women also teach and share their knowledge with others who entrusted them as instructors (Anderson, 2000; Dennis & Bell, 2020; McGregor, 2005; Simpson, 2017; Whyte, 2014) as mentioned by Participant 7 as follows:

“I used to teach the women here to weave. Most of them are old; many young women are not interested in learning to weave. We must preserve this tradition” (Participant 7).

Participant 7 is trusted to be an instructor to weave since she knows that most of the elders who know how to weave have already passed away. She devoted her life to

teaching weaving because she knows it is their cultural heritage that needs to be preserved so that their future generations understand their culture. However, very few of her students are young; most are around the same age as she is. This becomes one of her concerns that no future generation will have the ability to weave like she does. The same concerns also belong to Participant 11, who started her traditional dance studio. With all limitations she has, she believes that Ronggeng dance should be preserved by teaching it to whoever wants to learn it, as she said in the following quotation:

“I began preserving Ronggeng Dance 12 years ago. At that time, this dance studio was called Bungo Kombat. Besides taking care of the oil palm plantation, I also teach a typical Paser dance, the Ronggeng dance. Usually, we train at 12 pm. Most of the people who practice are elementary and junior high school children or middle-aged mothers. Young individuals typically remain occupied” (Participant 11).

Cultural heritage, such as weaving and dancing, is important for the Dayak and Paser communities. It is what they want to pass down to their children and future generation so it will last long (Anderson, 2000; Dennis & Bell, 2020; McGregor, 2005; Simpson, 2017; Whyte, 2014). However, as mentioned above, globalization changes the structure of life in the community, making young people care less for their own culture. This constraint burdens the instructors when there are no longer people of their own who know their culture, it is like the end of their civilization.

4. DISCUSSION

This article aimed to learn from the experiences of indigenous women in a rapidly growing region of Indonesia's new capital in promoting gender equality and protecting local culture, language, and environment. Results indicate that the swift urbanization resulting from IKN's development will exacerbate the socio-economic marginalization of indigenous women, who will play a crucial role in preserving the cultural and linguistic continuity inherent in their forest-based environment.

This study specifically identifies gender equality as a cultural inheritance for Dayak and Paser women, as it is intrinsically integrated into their social existence (Nelson, 2019; Reeves, 1985). Women are not deemed inferior to men; rather, they are afforded equal treatment in various domains, including family responsibilities, education, professional opportunities, rituals, and freedom of expression (Dillabough, 2014; Moyo et al., 2020). Dayak and Paser women are entrusted with obtaining higher education, advocating for their community, and pursuing their rights. Educated women constitute a more effective advocacy force for the community (Anderson, 2000; Dennis & Bell, 2020; Green, 2017; Monchalin, 2016). This is evidenced by the involvement of Dayak and Paser women in several ethnographic studies, wherein they save their customary forests, promote their traditions globally, and advocate for their rights as indigenous people (Anderson, 2000; Dennis & Bell, 2020; Green, 2017; Monchalin, 2016).

The gender equality experienced by indigenous women necessitates a commitment to safeguarding their language, culture, and environment. Globalization endangers indigenous populations through environmental deterioration, erosion of identity and values, and a decline in traditional community activities (Harcourt & Escobar, 2005; Kuokkanen, 2008; Wieviorka, 2003). Indigenous women, as initiators, should proactively address the repercussions of globalization, particularly in safeguarding their local language and culture. They initiate the development of a dictionary in their own language, guaranteeing that future generations can acquire it. Once IKN is fully established, an influx of individuals from outside Borneo is expected to occur, resulting

in acculturation that may diminish the use of native languages (Boyer, 2009; Karidakis & Kelly, 2018; Norris, 2007). Indigenous women assert that the local language is at risk, prompting them to create a dictionary as a measure to preserve it.

Besides being the initiators, the indigenous women also assume the position of instructors or educators (Anderson, 2000; Dennis & Bell, 2020; McGregor, 2005; Simpson, 2017; Whyte, 2014). They teach their people in traditional handicrafts and arts. Mothers transmit traditional handicrafts to their progeny across generations. Mothers play a significant role in imparting handicrafts, traditions, and artistic skills to their offspring. Globalization disrupts the knowledge transfer process, resulting in a decline in the number of people proficient in arts and handicrafts. The remaining individuals should take their roles as instructors to safeguard the preservation of their culture.

Deforestation, in addition to the scarcity of teachers, contributes to the distortion of knowledge transfer in indigenous cultures. For indigenous women, forests are not merely resources; they are environments they regard as home (Carson et al., 2018; Fa et al, 2020). Forests supply indigenous people with natural dyes, foliage for weaving, herbs for traditional medicine, and plants for their rituals. Consequently, their culture is significantly dependent on forests. Forests enable them to perpetually engage in rituals and customs, which they might subsequently impart to their offspring. Indigenous women fear that their culture will vanish like the forests. They seek to assert their rights to customary forests, not for the purpose of monopolization, but to conserve them for future generations, demonstrating that their culture is deeply intertwined with these forests. With the advancement of IKN (Ibu Kota Nusantara), their concerns intensify on the potential loss of forests due to its growth. With the extinction of the forests, their associated civilizations also vanish.

5. CONCLUSION

This research highlights the vital roles of indigenous women in East Borneo in maintaining gender equality, preserving local culture and language, and safeguarding their forest-based environment amidst the development of Indonesia's new capital city. The findings reveal that gender equality is not a new struggle, but a cultural heritage embedded in Dayak and Paser communities, allowing women to lead in education, rituals, politics, and decision-making.

As initiators and instructors, these women take proactive roles in documenting endangered languages, reviving traditional arts, and transmitting ecological knowledge to future generations. Their cultural practices and identities are intricately tied to the forest ecosystem, making environmental degradation a direct threat to their existence and heritage. The expansion of Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) raises concerns over deforestation, cultural erosion, and linguistic decline—issues these women actively resist through knowledge preservation and community leadership.

This study emphasizes the need for inclusive and sustainable development policies that protect indigenous rights, especially those of women as custodians of ecological and cultural continuity. Future research should further explore the intersection of gender, indigenous knowledge, and environmental conservation to inform national planning that is both equitable and ecologically responsible.

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APPENDICES



Figure 1. Women are entrusted in solving community issues. Source: Yurni Sadariah's Personal Collection



Figure 2. Women are involved in rituals. Source: Yurni Sadariah's Personal Collection



Figure 3. Women are involved in decision-making in the community. Source: Yurni Sadariah's Personal Collection



Figure 4. Women are the executors for Ethnographic research for their community. Source: Yurni Sadariah's Personal Collection

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