

Empowering Indonesian women through UN Women: A Marxist Feminist analysis of policies and their impact

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Article Information	Abstract:
Submitted: 2025-03-24 Revised: 2025-06-18 Published: 2025-12-31	Indonesia continues to face structural gender discrimination that limits women's empowerment, while United Nations (UN) Women programs are constrained by patriarchal norms, unequal resource distribution, and limited access in remote areas. The aim of this study is to analyze the role of UN Women Indonesia in advancing gender equality through advocacy, national campaigns, economic empowerment, and technological innovation, as well as to evaluate the alignment of its programs with Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the global gender agenda. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, focusing on policy advocacy, public education, and multi-actor collaboration, while data validity was strengthened through triangulation of social media, official websites, and academic literature. The findings show that: (1) UN Women Indonesia implements three pillars and three strategic functions, although field-level challenges remain; (2) multi-level programs reach 88 cities across 18 provinces, but local sustainability and impact measurement remain weak; and (3) women's political participation is still at 22%, and Indonesia's position in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) remains suboptimal, indicating the need for stronger and sustained cross-sector collaboration. This study concludes that UN Women Indonesia plays a strategic role in reaching 88 cities; however, substantive gender equality has not been achieved due to patriarchy, class inequality, and unequal access to services. The study contributes by integrating Marxist feminist perspectives and evaluating technological innovation as a form of structural transformation, while emphasizing resource redistribution and men's engagement as essential for substantive gender equality.
Keywords: United Nations Women; Gender Equality; Policy; Violence.	



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia still faces serious challenges in achieving gender equality due to structural, cultural, and institutional discrimination and violence against women. Cases of sexual violence, harassment, and discriminatory practices show that women's rights have not been fully internalized in social systems or public policies (Graham et al., 2022; Galizzi et al., 2024). Gender discrimination not only occurs between individuals, but is also reproduced through social norms, institutional practices, and gender-biased policies (Stamarski & Hing, 2015; Johannesen, 2025). Female labor force participation in 2023–2024 was recorded at 53-54%, much lower than that of men at 84% (Aini & Arif, 2025), while female political representation ahead of the 2024 elections was only 22% of the 30% affirmative target (Birbir et al., 2025). There were 445,502 cases of violence against women (Siregar, 2024), indicating that gender inequality has a multidimensional impact on social, economic, and political development.

Previous studies have extensively examined structural inequality in gender-based divisions of social roles. Betty Friedan analyzed the social construction that confines women to domestic roles and limits their self-actualization (Parry, 2010; Whitaker, 2017). Such constraints suppress individual potential and restrict women's socio-economic contributions (Roy et al., 2024; Javid et al., 2024). Education is recognized as a fundamental right for gender equality (Guinee, 2014) and as an empowerment instrument to challenge structural discrimination in employment, politics, and social life (Ríos et al., 2023; Balasubramanian et al., 2024). Collaboration between UN Women and non-state actors such as Gojek contributes to SDG 5 through digital technology and policy synergy with the government (Ernst et al., 2024; Gultom, 2024). Based on the existing literature, the present study addresses a gap by examining the strategic role of UN Women as a normative and collaborative actor, the implementation of women's empowerment and gender-based violence prevention programs, as well as the impact of UN Women Indonesia's policies and programs on economic empowerment, political participation, and violence prevention against women.

This article aims to analyze the strategic role of UN Women, the implementation of women's empowerment and anti-violence programs, and their impacts on economic, political, and violence prevention outcomes in Indonesia. Accordingly, the research questions are: first, how UN Women acts as a normative and collaborative actor in promoting gender equality in Indonesia; second, how UN Women Indonesia implements programs for women's empowerment and the elimination of gender-based violence; and third, how UN Women Indonesia's policies and programs impact women's economic empowerment, political participation, and violence prevention. Thus, this study contributes theoretically by enriching the literature on UN Women's dual role, and practically by providing evaluation and policy recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of women's empowerment and violence prevention programs in Indonesia.

This study is based on the argument that although UN Women Indonesia performs normative and collaborative roles through advocacy and partnerships, its effectiveness remains constrained by dependence on political commitment and limited funding. Its flagship anti-violence programs have reached many cities; however, coverage remains uneven in remote areas where patriarchal norms are strongly entrenched. Data on violence against women records thousands of cases, with domestic violence being the most prevalent, indicating a systemic failure to protect women in the domestic sphere. Critically, although the gender empowerment index shows improvement, women's political participation remains far below the quota target. UN Women is therefore encouraged to

strengthen male engagement as part of the solution, ensure program sustainability, and address structural barriers such as social stigma and victims' economic dependency in order to achieve substantive gender transformation in Indonesia.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature review and digital content analysis design (Bengtsson, 2016; Bazen et al., 2021). This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of discourse construction, advocacy practices, and digital communication strategies used in gender equality issues (Yin & Binti Abdullah, 2024). The research focuses on the role of UN Women in the digital media space as a normative agent promoting gender equality. This research design is relevant for capturing the dynamics of contemporary digital advocacy, particularly in the Indonesian context. This approach is in line with previous studies that position social media as a strategic space for women's activism and public opinion formation (Mede & Schroeder, 2024; Battisti et al., 2024).

Data Sources and Collection

Research data were collected through systematic searches of credible secondary sources, including academic literature, institutional documents, official websites, and social media content (Chigbu et al., 2023). The analysis of social media focused on the official Instagram accounts of UN Women at the global and Asian levels, as this platform has a wide reach and serves as the organization's main channel of public communication. In addition, data were obtained from websites and online media with high authority and relevance to gender issues and public policy, such as GoodState, Kumparan, Liputan6, and Komnas Perempuan. The selection of data sources was based on considerations of credibility, consistency of publication, and relevance to the gender equality agenda (Mancuso et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

A Marxist feminist perspective was used as an analytical framework, which emphasizes structural inequality and power relations in patriarchal social systems that impact the position of women (Fakier et al., 2024). This perspective was used to analyze how UN Women's digital narratives represent efforts to transform social structures through policy advocacy, public education, and cross-actor collaboration. Data analysis was conducted thematically by identifying key issues, discourse patterns, and communication strategies that emerged in digital content. Digital media is understood as a space for discourse production that enables public discussion, social participation, and collective mobilization on gender equality issues (Maximova & Lukyanova, 2020).

Data Validity

To improve the validity and reliability of the data, this study conducted source triangulation by comparing UN Women's social media content with information from official websites and credible online media (Carter et al., 2014). This approach aims to minimize institutional bias and strengthen the consistency of findings. In addition, the use of previous academic literature serves as a conceptual foundation and analytical comparison in interpreting digital data (Snyder, 2019).

Methodological Considerations

A qualitative approach based on literature review and digital content analysis was chosen because it is capable of representing the reality of gender advocacy in the digital age

(Bryda & Costa, 2023). This method allows for a comprehensive understanding of how UN Women utilizes social media as a strategic instrument in women's empowerment and public opinion formation. However, this study recognizes the limitations in reaching direct empirical experiences at the grassroots level. Therefore, the findings of the study focus on discourse analysis and institutional practices in the digital space.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

UN Women normative and collaborative actor advancing gender equality Indonesia

UN Women, established in 2010, plays a strategic role in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment at the global level. The organization addresses structural gaps in global governance, including the limited recognition and funding of women-related issues, while institutionalizing women's rights within the United Nations system. Through its normative platform, UN Women strengthens women's voices and positions gender equality as a central agenda of human rights and development.

Figure 1

The Main Focus of UN Women Internationally

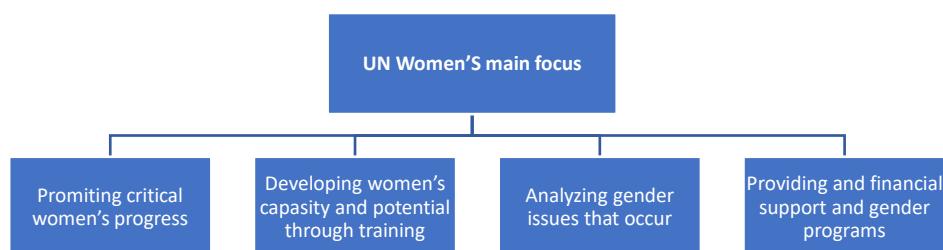


Figure 1 illustrates that the core focus of UN Women is implemented through three pillars: normative advocacy, policy integration, and programmatic intervention. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives is highly dependent on national political commitment and the availability of funding. In Indonesia, programs such as the Safe Cities Project demonstrate UN Women's contribution to gender-responsive development, although their coverage remains limited. This indicates the need for stronger integration with national policies, broader outreach, and improved local-level gender literacy to ensure more effective institutionalization of UN Women principles.

At the national level, UN Women Indonesia operationalizes its mandate by promoting meaningful participation, women's leadership in decision-making, peacebuilding, and resilience-building. Empowerment efforts focus on enhancing women's access to skills development, supportive ecosystems, and strategic resources. Table 1 summarizes the key functions of UN Women Indonesia in advocacy, socialization, and partnership.

Table 1

The Role of UN Women in Indonesia

The Role of UN Women	Government Policy	Programs
Advocacy	Pro-women laws and protection of human rights victims	CEDAW Convention, RESPECT 2019
Socialization	Training, health, and legal services in accordance with national law	RAN P3AKS (improving understanding of key actors in equality and peace)
Partnership	MSME assistance and promotion of WEP-compliant companies	Kartini Blue Bird, Elevate Program (capacity-building for human rights defense and

environmental conservation)

Source: Compiled by the authors, 2025.

Table 1 explains that UN Women Indonesia performs three main roles. First, advocacy through pro-women regulations and human rights protection for victims, implemented via CEDAW and the RESPECT 2019 program. Second, socialization through training, health services, and legal support aligned with national frameworks under the RAN P3AKS program. Third, partnership through MSME assistance and the promotion of Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEP) based companies, such as the Kartini Blue Bird initiative and the Elevate Program. These three roles contribute synergistically to strengthening gender equality in Indonesia.

UN Women operates through three pillars: normative advocacy, policy integration, and programmatic intervention, with success depending on national political commitment and funding. In Indonesia, the Safe Cities Project demonstrates UN Women’s role in promoting gender-responsive development, though its reach remains limited, indicating the need for stronger policy integration, expanded coverage, and improved community gender awareness. UN Women Indonesia has three core functions: advocacy through pro-women policies and CEDAW implementation; socialization through training and RAN P3AKS; and partnerships through MSME support and the Kartini Blue Bird program. These functions reflect a structured, cross-sectoral role, though field-level implementation challenges persist. Overall, UN Women’s effectiveness requires addressing these gaps to achieve substantive gender equality.

UN Women Indonesia’s multilevel initiatives women empowerment gender violence

This study identifies three core initiatives implemented by UN Women Indonesia in 2024 aimed at advancing women’s empowerment and eliminating gender-based violence. These initiatives combine national-level symbolic actions, advocacy campaigns, and community-based educational activities, varying in scale, geographic coverage, objectives, and stakeholder involvement.

Table 2
UN Women Indonesia Action Movement Summary 2024

Type of Action	Time & Location	Objectives	Stakeholders
National Women’s Day Action	March 8, 2024, Jakarta Horse Statue area	Advocacy for women’s empowerment and human rights-based legal protection	UN Women, government institutions, hundreds of women’s organizations
16 Days of Activism (16 HAKtP)	November 25 December 10, Bangkok and Indonesia	Elimination of violence against women and declaration evaluation	UN Women International, NGOs, community leaders, youth
National 16 HAKtP Activities	November–December 2024, 88 cities across 18 provinces	Campaigns, training, seminars, visits, and human rights discussions	UN Women Indonesia, Komnas HAM, local activists, media

source: Compiled by the authors, 20245.

Table 2 shows that UN Women Indonesia implemented three major initiatives in 2024. First, the National Women’s Day action on 8 March 2024 in Jakarta promoted women’s empowerment and legal protection of human rights through collaboration between UN Women, the government, and women’s organizations. Second, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign, held from 25 November to 10 December 2024 in Bangkok and Indonesia, aimed to combat violence against women by involving NGOs, community leaders, and youth groups. Third, national 16 Days of Activism programs across

88 cities in 18 provinces included campaigns, seminars, training sessions, and human rights discussions involving UN Women Indonesia, the National Commission on Human Rights, activists, and the media. These initiatives reflect a multi-level strategy combining symbolic action, advocacy, and community-based education.

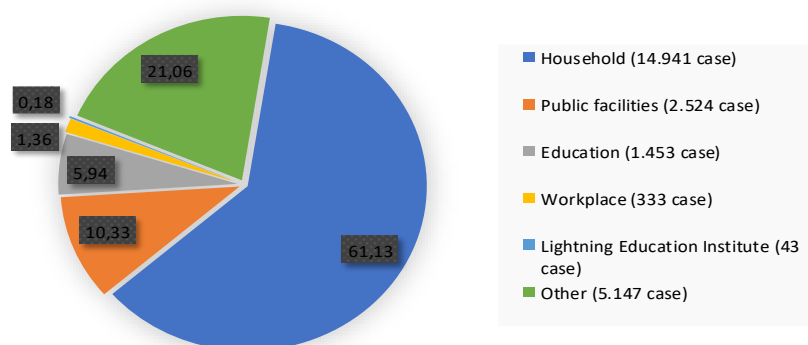
Based on the findings, UN Women Indonesia implemented three action movements in 2024 using a multi-level approach. The National Women's Day initiative was symbolic and centralized in Jakarta, involving government and women's organizations. The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign ran in both Bangkok and Indonesia, targeting violence against women with actors from international organizations to youth groups. The national 16 Days activities were the most extensive, reaching 88 cities across 18 provinces through campaigns, training, seminars, and human rights discussions. UN Women Indonesia combines centralized symbolic action, regional advocacy, and broad community-based education. Despite wide geographical reach, challenges remain in program sustainability and measuring tangible local impacts. Effectiveness largely depends on cross-stakeholder coordination and sustained commitment from local governments and civil society.

Patterns and prevalence of violence against women Indonesia 2024

CEDAW, adopted by the United Nations in 1979, provides a normative framework for eliminating discrimination and advancing substantive gender equality. In Indonesia, 2024 data on violence against women reveal persistent structural gaps between these commitments and their implementation, particularly in domestic violence cases. The RESPECT framework supports multi-stakeholder coordination; however, underreporting, social stigma, and victims' economic dependence continue to shape the patterns and prevalence of violence nationwide.

Figure 2

Percentage of Cases of Violence Against Women in 2024



Source: Compiled by the authors, 2025.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the latest data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA) in 2024 recorded 24,441 cases of gender-based violence, with women constituting the majority of victims. As of December 2, 2024, 14,941 cases of domestic violence had been documented, making it the most prevalent form of gender-based violence. This finding indicates that the domestic sphere remains the most vulnerable space for women in experiencing violence.

The results further suggest the presence of systematic underreporting, as many cases remain concealed due to social stigma, unequal power relations, and victims' economic dependence on perpetrators. The percentage distribution of violence cases presented in Figure 2 is based on data compiled by Goodstats.com, drawing on official statistics from

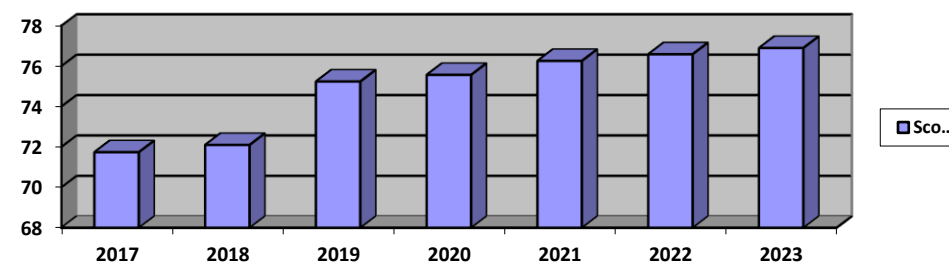
KemenPPPA, and reflects the overall pattern of violence against women over the past year. Overall, these findings demonstrate that despite the existence of legal and normative frameworks, violence against women in Indonesia persists as a structural issue, necessitating more integrated, sustained, and multi-level interventions.

UN Women Indonesia: Policies, programs, and impacts on empowerment

Based on the researcher's findings, Indonesia ranks 87th out of 146 countries in women's empowerment, which encompasses education, health, economic participation, and political representation. Although women's educational attainment is relatively high, economic empowerment and political participation remain limited. According to the Gender Empowerment Index reported by GoodState, Indonesia's score shows a gradual annual increase: 71.74 in 2017, 72.10 in 2018, 75.24 in 2019, 75.57 in 2020, 76.26 in 2021, 76.59 in 2022, and 76.90 in 2023.

Figure 3

Gender Empowerment Index Diagram from 2017-2023



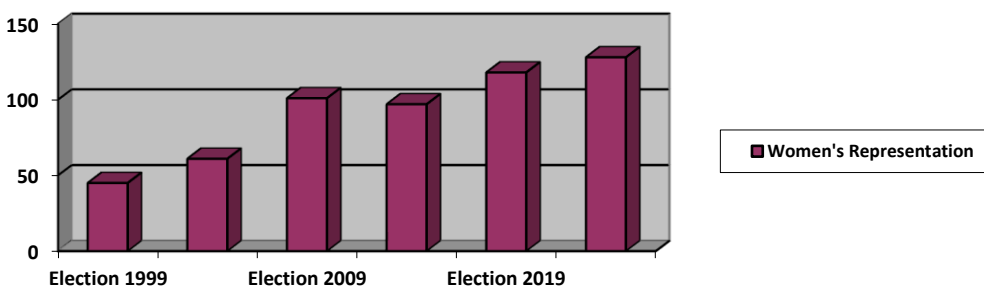
Source: Compiled by the authors, 2025.

Figure 3 shows that women's political participation in Indonesia remains at 22%, slightly below the global average. Although the government has established a 30% quota, women's representation in parliament in 2024 reached only 128 seats, reflecting gradual progress from 45 seats in 1999 to 128 in 2024. The increase in the Gender Empowerment Index indicates improved access for women to education and resources; however, patriarchal norms continue to limit women's economic and political empowerment.

At the regional level, Indonesia ranks 6th among ASEAN countries, indicating the need for more targeted interventions. UN Women Indonesia continues to strengthen women's empowerment through advocacy, policy engagement, and capacity-building programs. Globally, only 28 women serve as heads of state or government. Projections suggest that achieving full gender equality in political leadership may take more than 130 years based on current trends.

Figure 4

Women's participation in Indonesian parliamentary politics, 1999–2024



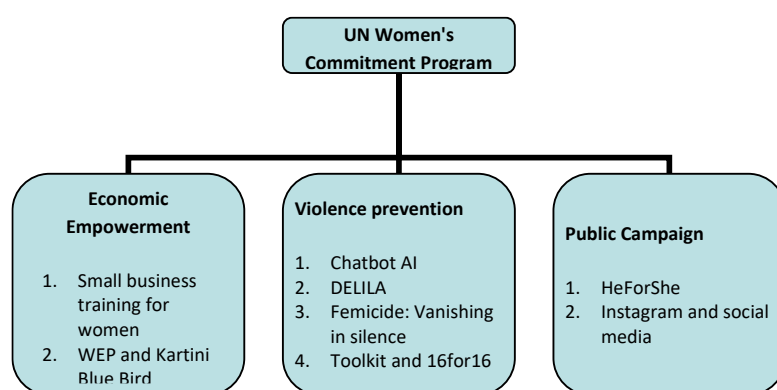
Source: Compiled by the authors, 2025.

Figure 4 explains that UN Women Indonesia demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality through programs focused on economic empowerment and violence prevention. In the economic sector, UN Women supports women in micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), for example in Bangka Belitung, where 60% of MSMEs are managed by women. Regulatory frameworks, including Regional Regulation No. 9/2016 and Governor Regulation No. 22/2018, further strengthen these initiatives.

In terms of violence prevention, implemented programs include an AI chatbot, DELILA (Listen, Protect, Report), which has been deployed across 10 provinces, as well as the HeForShe campaign conducted in collaboration with the National Commission on Violence Against Women, producing reports such as “Disappearing in Silence” on femicide. These programs aim to transform patriarchal mindsets and address gender inequality by utilizing social media for public education, advocacy, and mobilization.

Figure 5

UN Women Indonesia Commitment Programs, 2020–2025



Source: Compiled by the authors, 2025.

Figure 5 illustrates that UN Women Indonesia simultaneously advances economic empowerment while combating gender-based violence through training, campaigns, technological innovation, and cross-sector collaboration. Program effectiveness is highly dependent on coordination with government agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and civil society. However, challenges remain in ensuring program sustainability and reaching remote or vulnerable populations.

Women's political participation in Indonesia remains far below government targets despite gradual growth in parliamentary seats. Regionally, Indonesia's ASEAN position is still suboptimal, highlighting the need for sustained interventions. Global projections indicate that achieving gender equality in political leadership may take a long time without policy acceleration. UN Women Indonesia shows commitment through MSME-based economic empowerment, technology-driven violence prevention, and social campaigns. However, these programs face significant challenges in sustainability and outreach to vulnerable and remote populations. Therefore, stronger cross-sector collaboration is essential to ensure more effective and inclusive gender equality outcomes.

Discussion

The findings of this study can be summarized into three main conclusions. First, UN Women Indonesia plays a strategic role through three pillars normative advocacy, policy integration, and programmatic intervention as well as three key functions, namely advocacy, socialization, and partnership, although implementation challenges at the field level still need to be addressed. Second, program implementation demonstrates a multi-level

approach that combines symbolic action through National Women's Day, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign, and community-based education reaching 88 cities across 18 provinces; however, the main challenges lie in program sustainability and the measurement of tangible local impacts. Third, women's political participation in Indonesia remains far below the target, and the country's position within ASEAN is still suboptimal, highlighting the need for stronger cross-sector collaboration and sustained commitment from local governments and civil society in order to achieve substantive gender equality.

Amid 24,441 reported cases of violence against women in 2024, the dominance of domestic violence indicates that legal protection has not yet penetrated the most private spheres of life. UN Women Indonesia programs such as the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and National Women's Day have reached 88 cities across 18 provinces; however, women in remote and strongly patriarchal areas remain underserved. Low political participation of women (22%) and limited economic access through initiatives like Kartini Blue Bird and Elevate reflect persistent structural inequalities experienced by women from lower socioeconomic groups. This issue is highly relevant as it directly affects women's access to justice, decent work, and freedom from violence. Therefore, gender equality must go beyond national slogans and be realized through equitable services reaching remote areas, including accessible psychological support and legal assistance (Faisal et al., 2024; Aulia et al., 2024).

From a Marxist feminist lens, these findings suggest that women's empowerment initiatives by UN Women Indonesia are inseparable from class relations and control over economic resources. Programs such as MSME support in Bangka Belitung and the DELILA AI chatbot are innovative; however, their effectiveness is moderated by patriarchal norms and women's economic dependency (Rioux, 2015). Theoretically, successful interventions depend on resource redistribution and recognition of women's reproductive labour, which has historically been undervalued (MacArthur et al., 2022; Kwachou et al., 2025). The analysis critically argues that although UN Women acts as a mediator between global mandates and national policies, local class inequalities may reproduce systemic inequality if not addressed (Pelletier et al., 2024). Thus, gender transformation requires not only normative advocacy but also fundamental changes in economic structures and power relations, including men's involvement as part of the solution (Mojab & Carpenter, 2019; Kim et al., 2025).

This study highlights that the gender equality agenda cannot be substantive if limited to symbolic campaigns or national advocacy. The main insight is the importance of local contexts, particularly patriarchal norms and class disparities, as determinants of program effectiveness. Technologically, innovations like AI chatbots and DELILA still require supportive social and economic infrastructures to avoid creating new access inequalities. The limited reach in remote areas shows that cross-sector collaboration must include fair resource redistribution. Another key lesson is that recognition of women's reproductive labour and men's involvement (e.g., HeForShe) is not supplementary but a structural necessity (Rioux, 2015; Kalt, 2024). Thus, this study encourages a critical and humble stance, emphasizing that meaningful change must begin by addressing the smallest barriers at the community level rather than relying solely on global mandates (Munive et al., 2023; Widiastuti et al., 2024).

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that views UN Women as a normative agent of change (Bodur, 2019; Bryan et al., 2024), with key strategies including legal advocacy, public campaigns, and cross-sector partnerships. However, the

novelty of this study lies in highlighting how local class disparities and unequal resource distribution significantly moderate the effectiveness of women's empowerment programs in Indonesia. In contrast to earlier studies that emphasize macro-level policy success, this research critically evaluates technological innovations such as AI chatbots and DELILA. Moreover, prior literature has often overlooked the role of reproductive labor and men's involvement within patriarchal contexts such as Indonesia. By integrating a Marxist feminist perspective (Rioux, 2015; MacArthur et al., 2022; Kwachou et al., 2025), this study adopts a more critical scholarly position, emphasizing that substantive gender equality can only be achieved through resource redistribution and transformation of power relations (Pelletier et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2025).

Based on the findings, this study proposes several key recommendations. First, budget and resource redistribution should prioritize remote communities through needs-based approaches. Second, economic empowerment programs such as Kartini Blue Bird and Elevate should be integrated with one-stop legal and psychological support services. Third, women's political participation needs to be strengthened through affirmative quotas, capacity building, and village-level mentoring. Fourth, AI-based innovations such as chatbots and DELILA must be supported by adequate internet infrastructure and digital literacy in underserved regions. Fifth, male engagement through HeForShe should be expanded by involving customary and religious leaders to transform patriarchal norms. For policymakers, these efforts require stronger implementation of frameworks such as CEDAW and RESPECT with community-based monitoring. Overall, gender equality in Indonesia must move beyond symbolic commitments toward a substantive, multi-level, and inclusive approach.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, the findings of this study confirm that UN Women Indonesia plays a strategic role through normative advocacy, policy integration, and programmatic intervention reaching 88 cities across 18 provinces. However, these achievements remain partial, as women's political participation is only 22 percent and cases of violence against women remain very high, predominantly domestic violence. The main barriers stem from strong patriarchal norms and local class inequalities, which limit the effectiveness of programs such as Kartini Blue Bird and Elevate in remote areas. A Marxist feminist perspective suggests that economic empowerment without resource redistribution and recognition of reproductive labor merely reproduces structural inequality. Therefore, the critical conclusion is that the gender equality agenda in Indonesia is not yet substantive, as it remains constrained by symbolic actions and insufficient attention to class relations and unequal access to services.

This study contributes to the integration of a Marxist feminist framework with the analysis of international organizations as agents of normative change. Unlike previous macro-oriented studies, this research critically demonstrates that program effectiveness is moderated by class inequalities, patriarchal norms, and local resource distribution. Methodologically, the study offers novelty by evaluating technological innovations such as AI chatbots and DELILA as instruments of structural transformation rather than merely technical tools. The multi-level approach, which combines national policy analysis, program implementation, and dynamics in remote communities, enriches the field of gender and international development studies. By recognizing women's reproductive labor and men's engagement through initiatives such as HeForShe as structural necessities, this research strengthens the theoretical discourse that substantive change requires resource redistribution and transformation of power relations.

The limitations of this study include the absence of long-term impact measurement of programs in remote communities, limited quantitative data based on social class, and insufficient empirical exploration of patriarchal norms in areas with strong customary cultures. Future research directions include longitudinal studies to evaluate the sustainability of programs such as Kartini Blue Bird and Elevate in high-inequality regions; comparative studies on the effectiveness of AI chatbots and DELILA versus conventional services; and ethnographic research on the role of local actors (customary leaders, religious figures, and men) in transforming or maintaining patriarchal structures, in order to produce more contextualized and evidence-based policy recommendations.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Shofi Thowil Umur: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Writing Original Draft. **M. Nur Rofiq Addiyansyah:** Conceptualization; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Supervision; Writing Review & Editing. **Ammar Salem Khan:** Formal Analysis; Visualization; Writing Review & Editing.

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