

Reimagining Grassroots Women's Leadership: Epistemic Agency and Collective Power in Rural Indonesia

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Article History

Received on 19 December 2025

1st Revision on 12 January 2026

2nd Revision on 22 January 2026

Accepted on 5 February 2026

Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore grassroots women's leadership as a collective and epistemic process rooted in everyday struggles for justice, care, and survival, focusing on women in rural Indonesia.

Research Methodology: This study utilizes participatory methods and feminist-decolonial analysis, drawing on field experiences and reflections from *Her Place, Her Power: Growing Together for Women's Rights and Agency in Rural Communities*. The study examines the leadership of women in rural Indonesian contexts, such as forest-edge, agrarian, and coastal areas.

Results: The findings reveal that rural women develop leadership not as positional authority but as epistemic agency, creating and sharing knowledge based on lived experiences. They challenge exclusionary governance, negotiate recognition, and co-create strategies for gender equality and environmental well-being.

Conclusions: This study concludes that these women's leadership is relational and transformative, rooted in care ethics, intergenerational solidarity, and community-based learning. Epistemic leadership provides a path toward gender-just and inclusive innovation, suggesting a need to rethink leadership development and knowledge systems.

Limitations: This study is limited to rural Indonesia and may not fully represent the experiences of women in other contexts.

Contributions: This study contributes to the fields of gender studies, rural development, and leadership by offering a new perspective on leadership that values local women as co-producers of transformative change. It provides insights for policymakers, community leaders, and scholars focused on gender equality and sustainable development.

Keywords: *Epistemic Agency, Feminist Decolonial Approach, Rural Indonesia, Gender Justice And Inclusive Innovation, Grassroots Women's Leadership*

How to Cite: Hendrastiti, T. K. (2026). Reimagining Grassroots Women's Leadership: Epistemic Agency and Collective Power in Rural Indonesia. *Advances in Public Law and Policy (AiPLaP)*. 1(1), 13-22.

1. Introduction

Women in rural Indonesia, including those in forest-edge hamlets, agrarian valleys, and coastal villages, sustain their everyday lives through care practices, negotiation, ecological stewardship, and collective problem-solving (Prawitasari, Sinaga, & Viajar, 2025). However, these practices are rarely named as "leadership," often treated as informal, auxiliary, or apolitical, and thus remain under-recognized by policy frameworks and mainstream development discourse (Harcourt, 2023). This paper reimagines grassroots women's leadership as an epistemic and collective process: not merely the holding of a

position, but the power to create, interpret, and circulate knowledge grounded in lived realities and to convert that knowledge into community action for justice and ecological well-being (Hendrastiti & Irianto, 2025).

These reframing addresses two persistent gaps. First, leadership initiatives in development and governance often privilege positional authority and individual attributes, measuring progress primarily by the number of women occupying formal roles. Such metrics often overlook how women lead collaboratively, fostering distributed capacity, amplifying voices, and mediating conflicts in ways that positively transform relationships and resource governance in the Arctic. Additionally, dominant knowledge systems frequently dismiss experiential and relational expertise, categorizing rural women's insights as mere "experience" rather than valid "evidence." The result is a double invisibility: women's labor is seen as social support rather than leadership, and their knowledge is seen as anecdote rather than analysis. This study positions epistemic leadership as a corrective: leadership as knowledge-making and knowledge-mobilizing that is inherently relational, care-based, and place-anchored (Hendrastiti & Kusujarti, 2020; Hendrastiti, Setiahadhi, Kusujarti, Pratiwi, & Safrudi, 2024).

The argument builds on field experiences and participatory workshops compiled in *Her Place, Her Power: Growing Together for Women's Rights and Agency in Rural Communities* (Hendrastiti & Irianto, 2025), facilitated by women's groups in Bengkulu, Trenggalek, and Sumba. These sites show women mobilizing shared memory, practical know-how, and relational ethics to name problems, test strategies, and align collective action on forest rehabilitation, coastal stewardship, livelihood negotiation and bodily autonomy. Rather than moving women toward pre-set institutional indicators, these cases show institutions being drawn toward community-held definitions of dignity, care, and ecological balance (Hendrastiti & Setiahadhi, 2022).

A feminist and decolonial lens is essential for interpreting these dynamics. Decolonial critiques ask who gets to define what counts as a problem, solution, or success; whose archives and temporalities are authorized; and how extractive systems govern knowledge (Escobar, 2018; Tiostanova & Mignolo, 2012). Feminist scholarship adds attention to power's movement across bodies, households, customary arenas, markets, and state bureaucracies, making visible the everyday labor through which women hold communities together (Lugones, 2007; Mohanty, 2005). Read together, these perspectives illuminate the politics of recognition: leadership cannot be "inserted" into exclusionary structures without also contesting how those structures know and value. Accordingly, this study uses epistemic agency to describe practices that (a) surface community categories of harm and hope, (b) convene collective interpretation across difference and generation, and (c) translate insight into iterative strategies such as negotiation, quiet refusal, public advocacy, and redesigning daily routines (de Sousa Santos, 2015; Fricker, 2007).

The policy moment in Indonesia makes this inquiry timely and relevant. Recent shifts in village governance, social protection, and environmental regulation have opened channels for participation, whereas national development agendas are tied to the 2030 SDGs. However, formal participation does not automatically lead to epistemic participation. Without attention to how knowledge flows and whose knowledge is legible, consultation can become extractive, harvesting community data without shifting program design. In contrast, the cases highlighted here suggest what becomes possible when rural women are recognized as co-producers of knowledge and co-designers of interventions: rehabilitation plans that respect forest livelihood ecologies, conversations on bodily autonomy translated through local idioms and proverbs, and eco-tourism strategies that balance income with coastal stewardship (Crenshaw, 2013; Nussbaum, 2011).

This paper is animated by a parallel public conversation. At the recent KONEKSI dialogue, many practitioners recognized that they regularly engaged with groups aligning with what feminist scholarship calls "subaltern women's groups," yet they lacked a shared language that honored these groups' epistemic authority. Naming is crucial: when the unnamed are finally given a label, recognition increases and accountability ensues. Programs must listen in new ways, researchers must cite differently, and funders must be more considerate in their design. The publication of *Unlabelled*

Movements: Finding the Subaltern Feminism of Pre-Reform Indonesia Hendrastiti and Irianto (2025) crystallized this shift by giving language to what women have long enacted. This study advances this impulse by tracing how naming, learning, and organizing travel together in contemporary rural sites.

Guided by this context, this study addresses the following questions:

1. How do rural Indonesian women enact epistemic leadership in everyday environmental and social governance?
2. Which practices, including self-reflection, communication, negotiation, care, and documentation, serve to transform individual insights into collective power?
3. How might policies, programs, and research be redesigned to recognize and resource epistemic leadership as a public good aligned with SDG 5, 10, and 13?

The contributions and structure of this study are as follows: Empirically, this study documents how grassroots women's epistemic labor remakes governance from below - often invisible to dashboards yet decisive for outcomes. Conceptually, this study elaborates on epistemic leadership as a bridge between feminist epistemology and leadership studies. Practically, it highlights tools such as community-led monitoring, evaluation, and learning (Co-MEL), consent/data charters, vignettes as evidence, and iterative scorecards, which align evaluation practices with women's definitions of dignity and ecological health. The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 develops the Literature Review and Conceptual Framework; Section 3 details the Methodology; Section 4 presents the Results and Discussion through three site-based vignettes and a cross-cutting synthesis; Section 5 offers the conclusion, including limitations and suggestions, in line with the BGSF proceeding format.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Feminist Decolonial Perspectives and Epistemic Agency

Feminist and decolonial scholarship have long interrogated the intertwining of knowledge and power. Coloniality, as described by Quijano (2000) and elaborated by Lugones (2007), is not only an economic or political structure but also an epistemic regime that decides whose knowledge counts. This power structure relegates women, especially those from rural or indigenous backgrounds, to the peripheries of recognition and authority. Within such systems, women's leadership tends to be misread as community service rather than governance, and their situated knowledge is dismissed as anecdotal (de Sousa Santos, 2015; Fricker, 2007).

Epistemic agency refers to the capacity of marginalized actors to produce, validate, and circulate knowledge about their realities (Fricker, 2007). In feminist-decolonial thought, this is not a purely individual capability but a relational one, formed through social practice, care, and collective reflection (Escobar, 2018; Harding, 1991). As shown in *Her Place, Her Power* (Hendrastiti & Kusdinar, 2025), women in forest-edge, agrarian, and coastal areas transform their lived experiences into community-based strategies for environmental justice and social well-being. Through storytelling, group negotiation, and collaborative decision-making, these women challenge epistemic hierarchies that privilege expert-driven or state-centered definitions of leadership (Mohanty, 2005).

Therefore, decolonizing epistemology involves more than acknowledging local wisdom - it requires restructuring the conditions of knowledge production. Scholars such as Tiostanova and Mignolo (2012) and Escobar (2018) call this a pluriverse approach, in which multiple knowledge systems coexist without a hierarchy. This approach parallels what the present study terms epistemic leadership: a process through which grassroots women collectively interpret experience, reframe problems, and co-create solutions that reflect cultural values and gender justice.

Building on epistemic justice debates in environmental governance Gosselin and Gauquelin (2025) and social work with Indigenous women (Johnstone & Lee, 2021), this paper understands epistemic agency as a relational, located capacity to interpret, name, and act upon harm and hope within specific socioecological regimes.

2.2 Intersectionality and the Politics of Self

Intersectionality provides a second lens for understanding epistemic leadership. Crenshaw (2013) introduced intersectionality to explain how systems of power—gender, race, class, and others—interlock to produce unique forms of subordination. In Indonesia’s rural contexts, these intersections also include ecological location, customary identity, and spirituality (Hendrastiti & Setiahad, 2022). Women’s leadership emerges at the intersection of these structures, where social constraints coexist with relational networks that enable resilience and creativity.

In many Global South contexts, the politics of the self cannot be detached from communal belonging. As Mohanty (2005) argues, autonomy and solidarity coexist in non-Western feminist practices, where empowerment is relational rather than individualistic. This relational ontology underpins leadership practices among women in Bengkulu, Trenggalek, and Sumba, who often express their agency through metaphors of nature - trees, rivers, or birds - representing interconnectedness and continuity (Hendrastiti & Irianto, 2025). Such representations articulate selfhood not as a boundary but as a shared process of care and accountability, challenging Western notions of leadership as individual charisma or authority (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015).

Moreover, intersectional reflection enables women to reinterpret their sexual identity and bodily autonomy within culturally grounded ethical frameworks. As seen in *Hidden Narratives* (Hendrastiti & Kusujarti, 2020), Sumba women reframe bodily autonomy not through confrontation but through the collective ethics of balance (load), dignity, and mutual respect. This demonstrates how feminist–decolonial leadership involves translating universal human rights discourses into context-sensitive practices that preserve cultural integrity while expanding women’s agency.

2.3 Capabilities, Collective Power, and Feminist Ethics of Care

Nussbaum (2011) capabilities approach complements feminist–decolonial theory by situating leadership within the moral obligation to expand people’s real freedoms. For rural women, these capabilities - bodily integrity, affiliation, and practical reasoning - are inseparable from collective well-being. Thus, leadership becomes the act of expanding these capabilities for oneself and others through community-based initiatives, environmental restoration, and negotiation with power holders (Kabeer, 1999)

The feminist ethics of care further deepens this view. Leadership rooted in care practices disrupts hierarchical and extractive paradigms by emphasizing interdependence and mutual responsibility (Tronto, 2013; Gilligan, 1993). Within this study’s sites, women’s leadership emerges through the mundane yet transformative labor of listening, mediating, planting, and maintaining community harmony - actions often overlooked in formal policy discourses but essential for sustainable governance. Such ethics of care illustrate how epistemic leadership intertwines affective labor with political transformation (Escobar, 2018; Hendrastiti & Setiahad, 2022).

Finally, collective power, as described in feminist movement literature (Batliwala, 2011), is not merely the aggregation of individual strengths but a synergy built through trust, shared analyses, and long-term cooperation. The vignettes from Bengkulu, Sumba, and Trenggalek exemplify this process: local women transform reflection into negotiation and negotiation into advocacy, forming what could be called a knowledge commons of leadership. Recent empirical studies in Indonesia and South Africa confirm that women’s empowerment and environmental stewardship are mutually reinforcing when women are recognized as political and ecological actors and not only as beneficiaries (Rahmania, Kertamuda, Wulandari, & Marfu, 2025; Udo, Bhanye, Daouda Diallo, & Naidu, 2025).

2.4 Conceptual Summary

Bringing these strands together, this study conceptualizes grassroots women’s leadership as epistemic leadership: a transformative praxis that combines feminist–decolonial knowledge, intersectional self-awareness, capability expansion, and collective ethics of care. It departs from top-down paradigms of empowerment by emphasizing how women lived experiences produce theory and strategy

simultaneously. In doing so, it contributes to the emerging discourse on epistemic justice and gender-transformative governance, offering a locally rooted yet globally resonant framework for inclusive innovation and policy reform in Indonesia's rural contexts

3. Methodology

This study employs a feminist–decolonial qualitative methodology that centers on rural women lived experiences as sources of knowledge, interpretation, and theory-building. Feminist ethnographers have long argued that research must illuminate how power and meaning are co-produced in everyday life rather than extracted through detached observation (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Behar, 2022). In this spirit, the study treats women not as research subjects but as co-analysts whose reflections, metaphors, and daily strategies illuminate how leadership is enacted through relational and ecological practices. This methodological stance directly supports the paper's conceptual framing of epistemic leadership: women's capacity to interpret their realities, generate shared knowledge, and guide collective action from within their communities.

3.1 Research Design

This research adopts a comparative, site-based qualitative design, drawing from long-term engagement with women's groups across three ecological and cultural contexts:

- (1) forest-edge communities in Bengkulu,
- (2) indigenous agrarian communities in Sumba, and
- (3) Coastal stewardship communities in Trenggalek, East Java.

These sites represent distinct socio-ecological conditions yet reveal shared patterns in how women mobilize relational knowledge to sustain community well-being. Data were gathered between 2019 and 2024 through participatory workshops, reflective dialogues, small group conversations, and field observations conducted during community meetings, training sessions, environmental activities, and ongoing collaborations with NGOs and local women's networks.

This study is grounded in constructivist and relational epistemology, recognizing that knowledge emerges through interaction, shared interpretation, and situated experience (Harding, 1991). This aligns with decolonial research principles that emphasize the legitimacy of local epistemologies and challenge the extractive traditions of data collection (de Sousa Santos, 2015; McDonough, 2013).

3.2 Research Sites and Participants

Each research site contributes to unique socio-cultural and ecological dynamics.

In Bengkulu (Desa Pal 8), women led forest rehabilitation efforts, seedling management, and dialogue with plantation actors. Their leadership is expressed through ecological knowledge, quiet diplomacy, and daily care work, which is embedded in the forest landscape.

In Sumba (Pamonggu hamlet), women negotiate gender norms, water scarcity, and the customary authority. Their agency is articulated through ethical principles such as *loda* (balance/dignity), which guide everyday decisions and promote community harmony.

In Trenggalek (Taman Kili-Kili), East Java, women navigate coastal stewardship, eco-tourism development, and climate adaptation. Their leadership emerges through environmental know-how, negotiations with village officials, and shared care practices.

The participants included women aged from their late teens to their 60s, youth leaders, community facilitators, and customary figures. While men occasionally joined mixed activities, the analysis focused on women's voices and meaning-making.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection unfolded through a layered, immersive ethnographic process consistent with feminist postcolonial methodologies that emphasize relationality, reflexivity, and co-presence in the field (England, 1994; Rose, 1997). Instead of imposing predetermined techniques, this research blended

storytelling, collective reflection, informal conversation, and shared activities, allowing women's knowledge to surface organically within the rhythms of everyday life.

The core of this process consisted of participatory workshops in which women mapped landscapes, traced histories of environmental change, reflected on gendered experiences, and discussed strategies for negotiating with state and customary institutions. Such participatory approaches align with the broader feminist tradition of valuing community dialogue and non-hierarchical knowledge creation (Cornwall, 2008; Hesse-Biber, 2013). Activities differed by site: in Bengkulu, forest access mapping and rehabilitation histories were central; in Sumba, dialogues on bodily autonomy were framed through local idioms and customary ethics, including practices of spring water protection; and in Trenggalek, discussions focused on eco-tourism, climate adaptation, and women's negotiation.

These workshops were complemented by dialogue circles, intimate group discussions where women shared tensions, aspirations, contradictions, and emotional labor, often invisible in formal governance settings. Dialogue circles helped to reveal relational dynamics, such as how women mediate conflicts, navigate hierarchical norms, or sustain solidarity.

In addition, the study incorporated numerous field talks, a core practice in feminist ethnography, where semi-structured conversations unfolded informally during shared activities such as planting seedlings, collecting water, cooking, or walking to the coast. Field talks are recognized as a legitimate source of ethnographic knowledge because they reflect how people naturally theorize their lives in situ (Black, 2021). These conversations illuminated women's personal reflections, interpretations of leadership, and the ways in which they convert everyday practices into collective influence.

Field observations further deepened the data by documenting women's actions in real time, such as guiding eco-tourism guests, negotiating with middle-persons, participating in customary ceremonies, or tending communal spaces. Observational notes captured gestures, affective labor, relational cues, and ecological practices that formal interviews often miss (Musante & DeWalt, 2010)

Vignettes were constructed from these materials as analytical tools to synthesize key insights. Vignettes provide a concise interpretive window into the convergence of experience, context, and agency. Their use is well established in qualitative research, especially for illustrating complex social processes and relational dynamics (Barter & Renold, 1999). The three vignettes representing Bengkulu, Sumba, and Trenggalek are presented in Section 4.

Finally, data collection was supported by a review of community documents, including workshop notes, village meeting minutes, project materials, and prior publications, which helped triangulate narratives and contextualize the long-term evolution of women's leadership.

3.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis followed an iterative, reflexive thematic approach, consistent with feminist and decolonial analytic traditions. The process began with immersion in field talks, observational notes, workshop transcripts and community documents. The initial coding was inductive, tracing themes such as care, ecological expertise, negotiation strategies, relational ethics, and leadership dilemmas. Emphasis was placed on metaphors and idioms that reveal women's epistemic categories and their interpretive frameworks.

Cross-site comparison enabled the identification of convergences, such as distributed leadership, intergenerational learning, and relational ethics, and divergences shaped by ecological and customary contexts. These themes were woven into narrative vignettes that preserved contextual complexity while offering analytical clarity (Ritchie, Spencer, O'connor, & Lewis, 2003).

Throughout the process, the author maintained a reflexive journal following feminist guidance on self-positioning and accountability in knowledge production (Pillow, 2003). This reflexivity helped surface interpretive tensions and mitigate potential bias arising from the dual roles of facilitator and researcher.

3.5 Positionality of the Researcher

The author's positionality as a scholar-activist, community facilitator, and long-time participant in feminist and grassroots networks shaped access, interpretation, and trust at each site. This insider - outsider position aligns with debates on relational ethnography, where researchers navigate shifting identification and belonging (Narayan, 2014). While this positionality enables a nuanced understanding of women's realities, it also demands sustained reflexivity to avoid reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge or overlooking the subtle dynamics of power and conflict.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical practice followed feminist and decolonial principles of reciprocity, care, and community consent (McDonough, 2013). Participants' names were anonymized where necessary, and sensitive discussions were conducted within culturally appropriate boundaries. The findings were shared with the communities through conversations and feedback sessions. Special attention was paid to customary ethics in Sumba, where discussions of gender, water, and dignity require cultural sensitivity.

4. Results and Discussions

Grassroots women's leadership in rural Indonesia emerges from lived experience, social intelligence, and the capacity to maintain relationships across household, community, and ecological spheres. Rather than formal titles, everyday practices demonstrate epistemic agency - the ability to generate, validate, and mobilize knowledge within culturally embedded contexts. The three vignettes below illustrate how this agency evolves into a collective power, shaping local governance and environmental stewardship.

4.1 Vignette 1: Pal 8, Bengkulu - Forest Rehabilitation Knowledge

In Pal 8, women recognized the early signs of forest decline that threatened household water sources and forest products. Acting before any formal intervention, they organized small nurseries, mapped degraded areas, and negotiated with men to participate in the rehabilitation work. Their leadership is expressed through ecological observation, care labor and sustained coordination. This vignette demonstrates how women's environmental knowledge, often overlooked, becomes the basis for organized collective action.

4.2 Vignette 2: Sumba - Local Proverbs and Bodily Autonomy

In Pamonggu Hamlet, Central Sumba, a circle of women used local proverbs and metaphorical storytelling to discuss bodily autonomy, relational harmony, and protection from violence. Through the reinterpretation of adat sayings, they generated a culturally grounded understanding of safety and of dignity. Their approach is neither confrontational nor externally imposed; instead, it reflects symbolic knowledge-making that is rooted in local cosmology. This demonstrates how women construct feminist interpretations within their own cultural frameworks.

4.3 Vignette 3: Taman Kili-Kili, Trenggalek, East Java - Eco-Tourism and Everyday Governance

In Taman Kili-Kili, although subaltern women are marginalized, they have become central actors in developing an eco-tourism model designed to protect coastal habitats. They negotiated with village officials, male fishers, and NGOs regarding zoning rules and benefit distribution. Their leadership is visible in negotiations, hospitality, and consistent presence in daily beach management. This vignette highlights how environmental stewardship can become a pathway to confidence, voice, and everyday governance.

4.4 Bridging Analysis: Everyday Knowledge as Collective Power

Across the three sites, a shared pattern emerged: women lead through forms of knowledge undervalued in mainstream development narratives - care, ecological intuition, cultural literacy, and negotiation within intimate social spaces. These everyday knowledge bases act as epistemic resources, enabling women to speak, act, and influence community decisions. Their leadership is relational, emergent, and collective, challenging the dominant idea that leadership must be formal or hierarchical. The vignettes show how epistemic agency naturally grows into collective power as groups of women reshape environmental management, cultural discourses, and local governance.

This understanding reimagines grassroots women's leadership not as a position but as a continuous process of knowledge creation, relationship building, and community-rooted action. Similar to findings from feminist political ecology and intersectional climate adaptation research in Durban (Udo et al., 2025) the vignettes here show that rural women's adaptation and stewardship practices are grounded in situated, gendered knowledge that is rarely visible in formal governance metrics

5. Conclusions

5.1. Conclusion

This study argues that grassroots women's leadership in rural Indonesia cannot be fully understood through conventional frameworks that emphasize formal authority, institutional positions, or individual charisma. Instead, leadership emerges from women lived experiences, cultural literacy, and everyday ecological and social practices. By foregrounding epistemic agency - women's ability to generate, validate, and mobilize knowledge within their sociocultural contexts - we see leadership not as a title but as a process anchored in community care, negotiation, and collective survival. The three vignettes presented in this paper demonstrate how women's grounded knowledge forms the foundation for broader community action. In Bengkulu, ecological intuition and care labor guided forest rehabilitation efforts. In Sumba, the reinterpretation of local proverbs opened culturally safe pathways for discussing bodily autonomy and relational dignity. In Trenggalek, the long-term stewardship of the coastal landscape became a political entry point for negotiations, decision-making, and everyday governance. These cases illustrate that grassroots women's leadership is deeply relational, intersecting with ecological stewardship, cultural meaning-making and socio-political negotiation.

Reimagining leadership through this lens reveals two key insights. First, women's knowledge, often dismissed as informal or domestic, constitutes a legitimate epistemic resource that shapes community decisions, environmental management, and shared moral frameworks. Second, when women collectively articulate and act on this knowledge, they generate a collective power that subtly restructures local governance. This power does not always manifest itself through confrontational activism. Instead, it grows through cooperation, persistence, relational trust, and the ability to bridge household, community and ecological domains. For feminist scholarship, this perspective enriches the conversation on agency by expanding the analytical focus beyond resistance and overt political action. For development practitioners, this challenges the assumption that leadership must be formalized to be effective. Recognizing grassroots women's epistemic agency offers a more inclusive and culturally grounded approach to understanding and supporting gendered leadership in rural contexts. Ultimately, reimagining grassroots women's leadership requires recognizing that knowledge, care, and community-rooted practices are not peripheral but central to social and ecological resilience. By valuing these forms of agency, we acknowledge the powerful, often unseen leadership that rural Indonesian women enact every day, quietly transforming their communities from the ground up.

5.2. Research Limitations

The depth of this study stems from engagement with three specific sites; as such, the findings may not represent all rural Indonesian women. The author's dual role may have introduced interpretive bias, although reflexive documentation helped mitigate this risk. COVID-19 created temporal gaps in fieldwork in certain areas, but sustained longitudinal engagement enhanced the credibility and richness of insights into epistemic leadership.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Future research should expand the study to include a broader range of rural communities across Indonesia to capture a more diverse representation of women's experiences. Additionally, further studies should address the potential biases introduced by the researcher's dual role by incorporating more collaborative approaches. To overcome challenges such as those posed by COVID-19, future fieldwork should consider more flexible data collection methods, such as virtual interviews or remote ethnography, to maintain continuous engagement. Finally, a more extensive longitudinal approach could further enrich the understanding of epistemic leadership by observing its development over time in different contexts.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the women of rural Indonesia, whose experiences form the foundation of this study.

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