

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, encompassing economic, political, and social inequalities that limit women's empowerment. Although UN Women Indonesia has initiated policies and programs, their effectiveness is constrained by patriarchal norms, unequal resource distribution, and limited access in remote areas, resulting in suboptimal gender transformation. This study analyzes the role of UN Women Indonesia in empowering women from a Marxist Feminist perspective, highlighting violence reporting technologies (AI Chatbots, DELILA) and strategic collaboration with non-state actors. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, focusing on policy advocacy, public education, and cross-actor collaboration, with data validity strengthened through triangulation of social media, official websites, and academic literature. The findings indicate that UN Women Indonesia promotes women's empowerment and addresses gender-based violence through advocacy, social programs, cross-sector collaboration, and technology. From a Marxist Feminist perspective, women's empowerment must be understood within the context of economic structures, class relations, and reproductive labor, requiring the integration of advocacy, community education, and structural policies to achieve substantial and sustainable gender equality. The results underscore the need for integrative, technology-based, and inclusive women's empowerment policies that address resource redistribution, reproductive labor, and male engagement to effectively reduce patriarchal domination in Indonesia.
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 policy (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.

Academic scholarship on gender equality has developed extensively through feminist thought, which highlights structural inequalities in the gendered division of social roles. Betty Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique*, critically examined social constructions that confine women to domestic roles while denying them opportunities for self-actualization in both public and private spheres (Parry, 2010; Whitaker, 2017). Such role restrictions not only suppress women's individual potential but also constrain their broader social and economic contributions (Roy et al., 2024; Javid et al., 2024). Education is widely recognized as the most fundamental right for women in advancing gender equality (Guinee, 2014). Quality education serves as a primary instrument of women's empowerment, enabling them to challenge structural discrimination in employment, politics, and social life (Ríos et al., 2023; Balasubramanian et al., 2024). This feminist literature emphasizes that achieving gender equality requires both normative transformation and systematic, sustained institutional intervention.

In the global context, international organizations are understood as normative agents that disseminate gender equality values at the national level. UN Women, a UN entity with a specific mandate on gender equality and women's empowerment, has been operating in Indonesia since 1992 (Saputri, 2024) and occupies a strategic position in global gender governance. Studies by Ernst et al. (2024) and Gultom (2024) show that UN Women's collaboration with non-state actors, such as Gojek, contributes to SDG 5 through digital technology and policy synergies with the government. However, these studies view technology only as a tool to support programs, not as a strategic instrument for gender governance transformation. Thus, there is a research gap on how technological innovations are systematically used by UN Women Indonesia to drive structural and cultural change in reducing discrimination against women.

This study analyzes the role of UN Women Indonesia in women's empowerment from a Marxist Feminist perspective, highlighting the use of technologies such as AI Chatbots and DELILA for reporting gender-based violence. The study also emphasizes strategic collaboration with non-governmental actors, including Blue Bird, RESPECT, CEDAW, and the National Commission on Violence Against Women. The Marxist feminist approach views women's empowerment not only as access to the law, but also in relation to economic structures, resource distribution, and neglected reproductive work. The findings of this study enrich gender studies and public policy by positioning international organizations as agents of structural change, while supporting inclusive, technology-based women's empowerment policies that emphasize resource redistribution and the protection of women's rights.

Based on the social context, literature review, and research gaps, gender discrimination in Indonesia is a structural problem related to economics, culture, and class inequality, so it cannot be overcome through a national approach alone. UN Women Indonesia's involvement is strategic in bridging the global agenda and national policy implementation through technological innovation and collaboration among stakeholders. This study aims to answer the main question: how does UN Women contribute to women's empowerment through policies and initiatives from a Marxist Feminism perspective. This study also highlights the effectiveness of AI Chatbots and DELILA in strengthening gender-based violence reporting systems, as well as the extent to which collaboration with non-state actors influences more equitable, inclusive, and resource redistribution-oriented policy and institutional practice changes for women in Indonesia.

METHOD

Approach and Design

This study uses 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 was collected through systematic searches of credible secondary sources, including academic literature, institutional documents, official websites, and social media content (Chigbu et al., 2023). The social media analyzed 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 was obtained from websites and online media with high authority and relevance to gender issues and public policy, such as GoodState, Kumparan, Liputan6, and Kompas 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).

Theoretical Framework and Data Analysis

The analytical framework in this study uses a Marxist feminist perspective, which emphasizes structural inequality and power relations in patriarchal social systems that impact the position of women (Fakier et al., 2024). This perspective is 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 uses 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, so the findings of the study focus on discourse analysis and institutional practices in the digital space.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

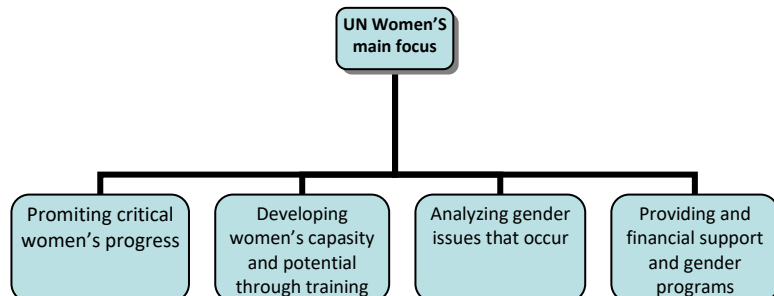
Results

UN Women normative and collaborative actor advancing gender equality Indonesia

This study highlights UN Women's strategic role, established in 2010 to advance global gender equality and women's empowerment. It addresses structural gaps in governance, including limited recognition and funding for women's issues, and institutionalizes women's rights within the UN system, providing a normative platform that amplifies women's voices and positions gender equality as a central human rights and development agenda.

Figure 1

The Main Focus of UN Women Internationally



As shown in Figure 1, UN Women's core focus operates through normative advocacy, policy integration, and programmatic interventions. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives is highly dependent on national political commitment and funding availability. In Indonesia, programs such as the Safe Cities Project demonstrate UN Women's contribution to gender-responsive development, yet their scale remains limited. This indicates that stronger integration with national policies, expanded outreach, and improved gender literacy at the local level are necessary for UN Women's principles to be institutionalized more effectively.

UN Women does not replace existing institutions but adopts a partnership-based approach to address gender discrimination across sectors. This strategy aligns with the normative view that gender equality is a fundamental human right, enabling women to participate fully and productively in society. In the Indonesian context, this mandate is supported by the 1945 Constitution, which emphasizes human rights protection, governance based on the rule of law, and administrative justice as core elements of the state.

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. These roles are summarized in Table 1, which outlines UN Women Indonesia’s key functions across 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: Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (2023), and UN Women (2022; 2023)

Despite the holistic design of these initiatives, the findings reveal persistent challenges related to program reach and equity, particularly in remote areas and communities with strong patriarchal norms. Therefore, achieving sustainable and systemic gender transformation requires not only program continuity but also deeper local engagement and the active involvement of men as part of the solution. Strengthening inclusivity and long-term institutional commitment remains crucial for translating UN Women’s normative agenda into substantive outcomes in Indonesia.

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: Liputan6.com, (2024)

As shown in Table 2, UN Women Indonesia adopted a multi-level implementation strategy integrating policy advocacy, public mobilization, and cross-sector collaboration. The 16 Days of Activism campaign functioned as the primary nationwide mechanism,

encompassing over 100 community-based activities in 88 cities across 18 provinces, indicating extensive territorial reach and decentralized participation (Faturahmah, 2024). The campaign prioritized improving women's access to protection services, including safe shelters, legal assistance, and psychological support.

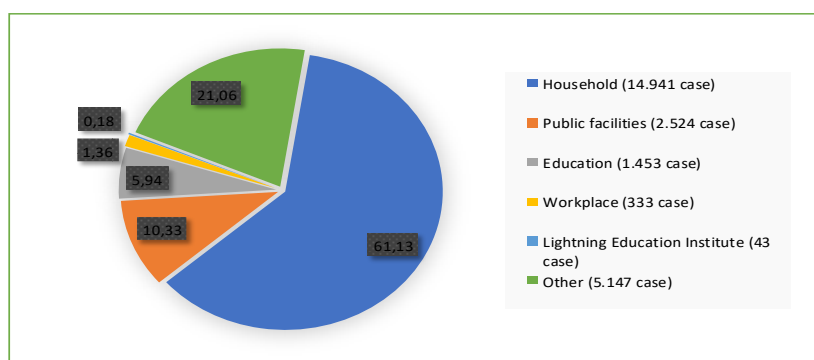
The findings show that UN Women Indonesia's initiatives are reinforced by national laws, including CEDAW (Law No. 7/1984) and Law No. 7/2012, yet challenges remain in sustainability and measurable outcomes, particularly in underserved regions. Overall, UN Women acts as a normative actor and coordination hub, promoting gender equality and combating gender-based violence in 2024.

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: GoodStats Data, 2024

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.

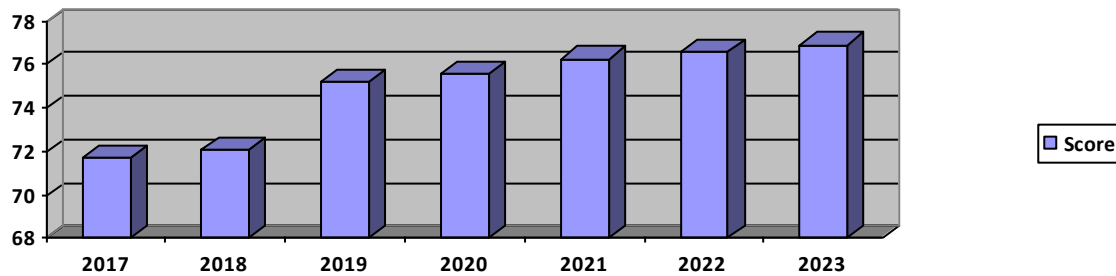
The results further suggest the presence of systematic underreporting, as many cases remain concealed due to social stigma, unequal power relations, and victims' economic dependence on perpetrators. The percentage distribution of violence cases presented in Figure 2 is based on data compiled by Goodstats.com, 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 UN Women Report on the Global Gender Gap from the World Economic Forum, Indonesia ranks 87 out of 146 countries in women's empowerment, considering education, health, economic participation, and political representation. Although educational attainment for women is high, economic empowerment and political participation remain limited. According to the Gender Empowerment Index reported by GoodState, Indonesia's scores have gradually increased over the years: 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



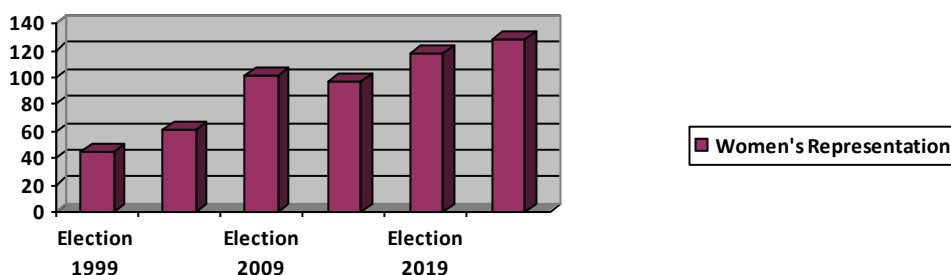
Source: GoodState, 2024

Women's participation in parliamentary politics remains at 22%, slightly below the global average. The incremental improvements in the index reflect gradual enhancement in women's access to education and resources, though patriarchal norms continue to limit economic and political empowerment. Compared regionally, Indonesia ranks 6th among ASEAN countries, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. UN Women Indonesia continues to strengthen empowerment initiatives through advocacy, policies, and capacity-building programs.

UN Women actively promotes women's political participation, both as voters and as prospective leaders. Despite the Indonesian government setting a 30% quota, women's representation remains at 22%, with 128 women occupying parliamentary seats in 2024 (Figure 4). Historical data show gradual progress: General election 1999 (45), 2004 (61), 2009 (101), 2014 (97), 2019 (118), and 2024 (128). Globally, 28 women serve as heads of state or government in 26 countries. Projections indicate that achieving full gender equality in political leadership may take over 130 years given current.

Figure 4

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



Source: Kumparan.com, 2024

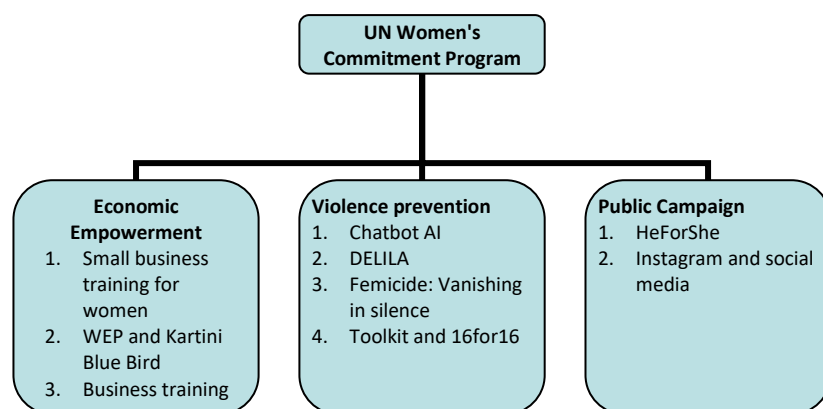
UN Women Indonesia demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality through economic empowerment and violence prevention programs. Economically, UN Women supports women in MSMEs, e.g., in Bangka Belitung, where 60% of MSMEs are women-

managed. Regulatory frameworks, including Perda No. 9/2016 and Pergub No. 22/2018, strengthen these initiatives.

In violence prevention, programs include the AI Chatbot, DELILA (Listen, Protect, Report) across 10 provinces, and the HeForShe campaign, in collaboration with the National Commission on Violence Against Women, producing reports such as “Lenyap dalam Senyap” on femicide. These programs aim to shift patriarchal mindsets and address gender gaps, using social media for public education, advocacy, and mobilization.

Figure 5

UN Women Indonesia Commitment Programs, 2020–2025



Source: United Nations Indonesia, 2023

Findings indicate that UN Women Indonesia simultaneously advances economic empowerment and combats gender-based violence through training, campaigns, technological innovation, and cross-sector collaboration. Program success depends on coordination with government agencies, NGOs, private sector, and civil society. Challenges remain in ensuring sustainability and targeting remote or vulnerable populations. Over 177 businesses have implemented the Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEP), including initiatives like the Kartini Bluebird Program, which enhances women’s productive skills for household and educational needs.

Discussion

UN Women Indonesia: Addressing gender inequality from a marxist feminist perspective

The study findings indicate that UN Women Indonesia plays a strategic role in women's empowerment through legal advocacy, social programs, and cross-sector partnerships, including the implementation of CEDAW, RESPECT, RAN P3AKS, as well as economic initiatives such as the Kartini Blue Bird and Elevate Programs. Nevertheless, program achievements remain limited, particularly in remote areas and communities with strong patriarchal norms. From a Marxist feminist perspective, women’s empowerment cannot be separated from economic structures and class relations, as women often experience marginalization due to patriarchal dominance and control over resource access (MacArthur et al., 2022; Kwachou et al., 2025). Limited program reach reflects the systemic reproduction of structural inequality (Pelletier et al., 2024).

Cross-sector collaboration and program innovation act as mediators between UN Women’s global mandate and national policy implementation. Advocacy and partnerships enhance women’s access to education, economic opportunities, and legal protection, yet their effectiveness is moderated by patriarchal social norms and unequal resource distribution. These findings align with previous literature portraying international

organizations as normative change agents (Bodur, 2019; Bryan et al., 2024), while adding novelty by highlighting how local class and economic disparities influence the success of women's empowerment programs at the national level.

The success of gender transformation in Indonesia heavily depends on social, cultural, and institutional contexts, including the role of the constitution and national regulations supporting women's rights. The Marxist feminist perspective emphasizes the necessity of resource redistribution, recognition of reproductive labor, and male involvement to reduce patriarchal dominance (Mojab & Carpenter, 2019; Kim et al., 2025). Therefore, the sustainable implementation of UN Women programs requires an inclusive approach, addressing structural barriers and expanding reach to remote communities, ensuring that the gender equality agenda becomes substantive rather than merely normative (Munive et al., 2023; Faisal et al., 2024).

Gender-based violence and women's empowerment in Indonesia: Marxist feminism

The study findings indicate that UN Women Indonesia implements women's empowerment and gender-based violence elimination initiatives through a multi-level strategy, including national symbolic actions, advocacy campaigns, and community-based educational activities. Programs such as the 16 Days of Activism, National Women's Day, and activities across 88 cities in 18 provinces enhance women's access to protection services, including safe shelters, legal assistance, and psychological support. However, 2024 data shows 24,441 cases of violence against women, with domestic violence being the most prevalent, reflecting that patriarchal structures and economic inequalities continue to hinder effective protection. From a Marxist feminist perspective, program success depends on resource redistribution and changes in economic structures and power relations (Rioux, 2015).

Women's empowerment through cross-sector collaboration, legal advocacy, and public mobilization functions as a mediator between UN Women's global mandate and program implementation at national and community levels. Program effectiveness is moderated by patriarchal social norms, stigma, and victims' economic dependence. These findings are consistent with prior literature emphasizing international organizations as normative change agents (Bodur, 2019; Bryan et al., 2024) but add novelty by highlighting local structural gaps, unequal service access, and the reproduction of class-based inequalities in the context of women's empowerment in Indonesia.

The findings underscore that successful gender transformation requires supportive social, cultural, and institutional contexts, including the strengthening of national regulations such as CEDAW and RESPECT. Marxist feminist perspectives stress the need for sustained multi-level interventions, resource redistribution, recognition of women's reproductive labor, and male involvement as part of the solution (Rioux, 2015). Accordingly, the gender equality agenda in Indonesia requires integration of advocacy, community education, and structural policies to ensure that the elimination of gender-based violence is both substantive and not merely normative across all societal layers (Aulia et al., 2024).

Advancing gender equality in Indonesia: Insights from marxist feminism

Research findings show that UN Women Indonesia simultaneously promotes women's economic empowerment and the elimination of gender-based violence through training, campaigns, technological innovation, and cross-sector collaboration. Programs such as MSME support in Bangka Belitung, Kartini Bluebird, AI Chatbot, DELILA, and HeForShe improve productive skills, access to protection services, and advocacy for equality. However, women's political participation remains low (22%), and structural challenges, including

patriarchy and unequal distribution of resources, limit the achievement of programs. The Marxist Feminist perspective emphasizes that the success of women's empowerment depends on the redistribution of resources, economic structural transformation, and recognition of reproductive work, which is still underrepresented in the field (Rioux, 2015).

Cooperation in the women's empowerment agenda between UN Women, the government, NGOs, the private sector, and civil society serves as a mediator between UN Women's global mandate and national policy implementation, while its effectiveness is moderated by patriarchal social norms, economic access, and regional infrastructure. According to Bodur (2019) and Bryan et al (2024), international organizations act as agents of normative change, but this study adds novelty by highlighting local structural gaps and class inequalities that affect the achievement of women's economic, political, and protection empowerment in Indonesia. The Marxist Feminist perspective emphasizes the need for a multi-level, inclusive, and sustainable approach (Kalt, 2024), with resource redistribution, recognition of reproductive work, and male involvement as part of the solution. Thus, the success of the gender equality agenda requires the integration of advocacy, training, technological innovation, and structural policies so that change is substantial, not just normative, especially for women in remote areas and vulnerable groups (Widiastuti et al., 2024).

The study provides both theoretical and practical contributions by emphasizing a Marxist Feminist perspective in women's empowerment, demonstrating that UN Women plays not only a normative but also a strategic role in influencing resource distribution, transforming local economic structures, and challenging patriarchal domination. This research adds dimensions of class, economic structures, and reproductive labor as critical variables and interprets technological innovations and cross-sector collaborations as mediators between global mandates and national policy implementation. Practically, the study recommends a multi-level and inclusive approach, integrating legal advocacy, skills training, community education, violence reporting technologies, resource redistribution, male engagement, and cross-sector coordination to ensure gender equality becomes substantive and impactful across Indonesia.

The study has several limitations that should be noted. First, the data primarily rely on quantitative reports from UN Women and government sources, which may involve underreporting or unaggregated data, particularly in remote areas. Second, the research does not deeply explore the subjective experiences of women program beneficiaries, which could provide qualitative insights into program effectiveness and implementation challenges. Future research is recommended to adopt mixed-method approaches, examine long-term impacts of empowerment programs, and analyze the role of technology and cross-sector collaboration in local contexts. Additionally, future studies should emphasize the analysis of class structures, economic inequalities, and patriarchy to further advance the Marxist Feminist understanding of gender transformation in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that UN Women Indonesia plays a strategic role in promoting women's empowerment and eliminating gender-based violence through multi-level strategies, including legal advocacy, social programs, cross-sector collaboration, and technological innovations such as AI Chatbot and DELILA. These programs improve women's productive skills, access to protection services, and public participation. However, the success of these programs is still limited by patriarchal norms, unequal distribution of resources, and infrastructure constraints in remote areas. The Marxist Feminist perspective

emphasizes that women's empowerment must be viewed in the context of economic structures, class relations, and reproductive work, so that structural inequalities remain a major obstacle. Overall, this research underscores the need for integration between advocacy, community education, and structural policies to achieve substantial and sustainable gender equality in Indonesia.

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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. **Ammar Salem Khan:** Visualization; Writing Review & Editing.

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