

Beyond Participation: Structural and Cultural Barriers to Women's Decision-Making in Local Disaster Governance

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Abstract: This study examines the structural and cultural barriers limiting women's access to local-level disaster management decision-making in Bantul Regency, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study involved eleven informants from Wukirsari, Canden, and Trirenggo Villages and the Bantul Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD), and collected data through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. The findings indicate that women's access to decision-making is shaped by male-dominated formal authority structures, the concentration of women in administrative, logistical, and other supporting roles, and cultural assumptions that associate operational disaster response with masculinity. Work and caregiving responsibilities further constrain women's availability, while social expectations regarding women's domestic roles may affect their opportunities to participate in public disaster governance. The findings also show that women's involvement in disaster-related activities does not necessarily translate into access to strategic positions or meaningful decision-making influence. Document analysis did not identify specific affirmative mechanisms to strengthen women's representation in strategic disaster decision-making within the institutional and program documents examined. Drawing on Gender Governance and Feminist Institutionalism, the study concludes that women's participation in local disaster governance remains more procedural than substantive. Strengthening substantive participation requires institutional mechanisms that expand women's access to strategic positions and decision-making forums, alongside gender-responsive participation arrangements and efforts to address gendered social norms.

1. Introduction

Disaster management governance increasingly emphasizes inclusive participation, particularly integrating gender perspectives into decision-making processes (Favetti et al., 2025), because successful disaster risk reduction (DRR) and mitigation require the active participation of all genders and age groups (Abdalla et al., 2024). Women often experience disasters differently than men because of differences in community roles, responsibilities, and access to resources, and they are also vulnerable to disasters

(Mahbub et al., 2025). Therefore, their representation in disaster governance is essential to ensure equitable, responsive, and community-based disaster risk reduction. Within Disaster Risk Reduction, gender inclusion is widely acknowledged as a key principle for strengthening community resilience and improving disaster management outcomes, both now and in the future (Lagunas & Jackson, 2025).

Despite global recognition of gender equality principles, women remain underrepresented in decision-making positions in many disaster management institutions (Napsiah & Fakhriati, 2025). This disparity is recurrently shaped by structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that limit women's participation beyond symbolic involvement (Baker, Ngonyama-Ndou, & Skosana, 2025). Patriarchal culture significantly shapes women's limited access and opportunities (Sadiyatunnimah and Purba, 2025). In many local contexts, disaster response activities are often associated with physical strength and field operations, which are socially constructed as masculine roles (Cvetkovic et al., 2018). As a result, women's contributions tend to be limited to administrative or supportive tasks rather than strategic decision-making roles, although gender governance in disaster management is considerably needed (Ariyabandu & Miran, 2021).

Previous studies have examined gender and disaster management from several perspectives, including women's vulnerability, women's contributions to community resilience, gender-responsive disaster risk reduction, and institutional barriers to participation. Research shows that women can contribute substantially to social support, resource management, local coordination, and community resilience, but their participation does not necessarily translate into equal access to strategic decision-making positions (Stewart et al., 2021; Adisa et al., 2024). At the same time, disaster governance literature emphasizes the importance of collaboration among government institutions, communities, and other stakeholders in disaster mitigation. Lestari et al. (2024), for example, demonstrate that collaborative governance in disaster mitigation requires communication, trust, resources, and institutional capacity. However, the existence of collaborative arrangements does not necessarily indicate that all participating groups have equal access to authority or influence.

Indonesia is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, encouraging disaster risk reduction governance particularly important (Faturrahman, 2025). Bantul Regency in the Yogyakarta Special Region has experienced significant disaster risks, including earthquakes, floods, and other natural hazards. Local disaster management institutions such as the Bantul Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD Bantul) play a crucial role in coordinating disaster risk reduction, preparedness, and emergency response at the local level. However, the extent to which gender perspectives are incorporated into decision-making processes at the village and institutional levels remains insufficiently explored.

While previous research has documented gender vulnerability and women's contributions to community resilience (Hartono, 2021), it has paid limited attention to the institutional dynamics that shape women's participation in local disaster governance. Specifically, empirical research remains limited in examining the distinction between women's participation in disaster-related activities and their meaningful influence on decision-making. Women may participate in disaster-related activities without access to strategic positions, decision-making forums, or meaningful authority. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how structural hierarchies, cultural narratives, and organizational practices interact to shape women's access to and influence in decision-making at the village level.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing gender representation in disaster management decision-making in three villages in Bantul Regency: Wukirsari, Canden, and Trirenggo. The research explores how structural arrangements, cultural assumptions, and institutional practices shape women's participation in disaster management governance.

2. Literature Review

Gender Governance in Disaster Management

Gender governance refers to how institutions, policies, and decision-making structures integrate gender perspectives into governance processes. The idea that disasters are socially and physically constructed gave rise to the discipline of gender and disasters. Over the last three decades, gender has been developed and applied in disaster policy and practice because women's status in society and the household increases vulnerability to disasters (Acanga et al., 2025). In disaster situations, gender studies have been crucial to ensuring that women's concerns are recognized and help is given appropriately. However, because persistent structural disparities extend into disaster management, "gender and disaster" has come to be associated with women's concerns and interests (Rushton et al., 2020).

A growing body of literature highlights that gender governance is essential for strengthening disaster risk reduction, as public institutions are not gender-neutral but tend to reproduce existing power relations between men and women (Yusuf et al., 2025). Gender-sensitive governance is considered crucial in disaster risk reduction to ensure that disaster policies account for the needs, experiences, and abilities of every member of society (Lwamba et al., 2022). Several studies demonstrate that Effective disaster governance involves inclusive decision-making arrangements that recognize women not only as susceptible groups but also as active agents of resilience. Women's participation can improve risk communication, community mobilization, and social preparedness because women often possess strong local knowledge and community networks (Mulyasari & Shaw, 2013). In addition, inclusive governance that recognizes women as active agents of resilience has been shown to improve the effectiveness of disaster management and community resilience outcomes (Yumarni, 2025).

However, gender governance frameworks also highlight that the presence of women alone does not guarantee meaningful participation. In various contexts, research on gender and disaster management has covered different phases and sectors, including community-based disaster risk reduction, emergency response, and post-disaster recovery. These studies generally indicate that women play significant roles at the community level, particularly in social support, resource management, and local coordination. However, their participation tends to remain concentrated in informal or supportive roles rather than in strategic decision-making positions (Stewart et al., 2021; Adisa et al., 2024). Furthermore, disaster management governance structures often remain hierarchical and male-dominated, particularly in operational and emergency-response roles socially constructed as requiring physical strength and leadership authority (Elkady et al., 2024).

Despite these contributions, existing studies also reveal several persistent challenges. Gender perspectives in disaster governance are often insufficiently operationalized and remain fragmented across policies and practices (Acanga et al., 2025). Institutional arrangements, cultural norms, and patriarchal power structures continue to limit women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes. As a result, although gender inclusion is widely recognized at the normative level, implementation often falls short, particularly in ensuring women's influence in formal governance structures. Moreover, decision-making processes in disaster contexts still tend to rely on hierarchical approaches, whereas effective disaster governance increasingly requires flexible, inclusive, and nonhierarchical arrangements (Kapucu & Garayev, 2011). Women's participation in disaster governance should not be understood solely as their presence or involvement in disaster-related activities. Participation can occur at different levels, from involvement in implementation and support activities to participation in deliberation, agenda setting, and strategic decision-making. Therefore, women's presence in disaster-related activities does not necessarily indicate equal access to decision-making authority or influence.

Previous research shows that women contribute significantly to community-based disaster management through social support, resource management, local coordination, communication, and community resilience building (Stewart et al., 2021; Adisa et al., 2024). However, these contributions do not necessarily translate into representation in strategic decision-making structures. Women may be actively involved in disaster management while remaining concentrated in administrative, logistical, caregiving, or other supporting functions.

This distinction can be understood through the concepts of procedural and substantive participation. Procedural participation refers to women's formal involvement or presence in disaster-related activities, meetings, programs, or organizational structures. Substantive participation, by contrast, concerns women's ability to access decision-making spaces, articulate their interests, contribute to deliberation, and influence decisions and outcomes. Thus, meaningful participation requires more than physical presence or formal inclusion; it requires opportunities to exercise voice and influence within governance processes.

Cultural and Patriarchal Influences

Cultural norms and patriarchal values play a central role in shaping women's participation in disaster governance. Male domination in access to resources and decision-making can reduce women's dynamic roles in disaster preparedness, response, rehabilitation, and recovery (Azad & Pritchard, 2023). Patriarchal culture and religious beliefs can limit women's roles in disaster resilience governance and DRR decision-making (Hemachandra et al., 2018). In a particular community, men typically performed hard and critical jobs, while women did household chores and cared for children during disasters (Doloso Jr., 2025).

These gendered conventions legitimize the marginalization of women from operational roles and decision-making spaces. Patriarchal culture significantly shapes women's limited access and opportunities. Socially, domestic responsibilities impose a heavy burden on women, restricting their ability to participate in public activities and political organizations (Sadiyatunnimah & Purba, 2025). Moreover, social expectations concerning women's domestic responsibilities further control their participation. They have not participated in intentional meetings or structured programs because of gender stereotypes, lack of government support, and internal factors (Susanti et al., 2025).

Such cultural barriers are deeply embedded and often normalized, making them difficult to challenge without broader social transformation. However, women social workers demonstrated adaptability and perseverance by establishing agreements with community elders, leveraging religious or cultural influences to legitimize their participation, and organizing understated support groups for women survivors. These strategies allowed women to continue delivering crucial services and psychosocial support despite skepticism or resistance (Saleh et al., 2025). In fact, leadership styles rooted in empathy, participation, and communication help women leaders promote work-life balance, inclusive decision-making, and adaptive organizational structures (Pradani et al., 2025).

Feminist Institutionalism

Feminist Institutionalism (FI) provides a framework for understanding how gender relations are embedded within formal and informal institutions. Feminist institutionalist scholars argue that institutions are not necessarily gender-neutral because institutional rules, norms, practices, and organizational arrangements can shape opportunities and constraints differently for women and men (Mackay et al.,

2010). Institutions therefore influence not only individual behavior but also the distribution of power, authority, and access to decision-making.

A central concern of Feminist Institutionalism is the interaction between formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions include organizational structures, positions, rules, procedures, and authority arrangements, while informal institutions involve norms, expectations, practices, and socially accepted understandings that shape behavior within and around formal institutions (Waylen, 2014). Informal institutions matter because they can reproduce gendered patterns even when formal rules do not explicitly restrict women's participation. Examining these informal dimensions helps explain the gap between formal institutional arrangements and actual gender-equality outcomes (Waylen, 2014).

In disaster governance, Feminist Institutionalism helps explain why women may remain under-represented in strategic decision-making even when formal institutions do not explicitly exclude them. Organizational hierarchies may determine who holds formal authority, while informal gender norms may associate operational disaster response, physical strength, leadership, or availability with men. Similarly, expectations concerning women's domestic and caregiving roles may affect their opportunities to participate in decision-making forums. Thus, the interaction between formal institutional arrangements and informal gendered norms can shape whether women's participation becomes substantive or remains largely procedural.

Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on gender and disaster management, several critical gaps remain. Existing studies predominantly focus on women's vulnerability rather than their roles as active agents in disaster governance (Rushton et al., 2020; Acanga et al., 2025). Furthermore, gender perspectives are often insufficiently operationalized and remain fragmented within disaster management systems (Acanga et al., 2025; Lwamba et al., 2022). Empirical evidence also indicates that while women play significant roles at the community level, their representation in formal decision-making structures remains limited (Stewart et al., 2021; Adisa et al., 2024). In addition, studies examining how gender mainstreaming translates into local policy implementation remain scarce, particularly in developing country contexts (Yusuf et al., 2025; Lwamba et al., 2022). More specifically, limited attention has been given to how structural, cultural, and institutional dynamics interact to shape women's access to strategic decision-making and their ability to influence disaster governance processes.

In practice, this gap is reflected in the ongoing mismatch between the normative principles of gender governance and their implementation in disaster management. Normatively, disaster governance emphasizes inclusive participation and equal opportunities for women and men. Women's involvement in disaster-related activities does not necessarily translate into access to strategic positions or meaningful influence. Previous studies have not sufficiently explained how hierarchical organizational structures, gendered cultural norms, and institutional arrangements interact to shape this gap. This study therefore examines how these structural, cultural, and institutional factors shape women's access to and influence in disaster decision-making at the local level.

3. Research Methods

Research Design

This research used a qualitative case study approach to examine gender representation and women's access to decision-making in local-level disaster management. A qualitative approach was chosen

because it allows researchers to explore the processes, meanings, experiences, and institutional dynamics that shape women's participation in disaster governance, which quantitative measurement cannot fully explain. The case study approach was used to examine the empirical context of disaster governance at the village and district levels, particularly the gap between formal institutional frameworks and actual practices of gender inclusion in decision-making.

The analytical framework drew on Gender Governance and Feminist Institutionalism. Feminist Institutionalism was used to examine how formal institutional arrangements, such as organizational positions, authority, and decision-making procedures, interact with informal institutions, including gender norms, patriarchal expectations, and gendered divisions of roles, in shaping women's access to and influence in disaster decision-making. The research was conducted in three villages in Bantul Regency, namely Wukirsari, Canden, and Tirenggo). These locations were selected purposively because they actively participate in disaster risk reduction initiatives, particularly through the Disaster Resilient Village Program (*Desa Tangguh Bencana Destana*), and represent varying levels of institutional engagement in disaster governance.

The research process began with a conceptual study to construct an analytical framework based on gender governance and disaster governance theories. The next stage involved identifying key informants and conducting preliminary field observations to understand institutional structures and gender dynamics within the disaster management process. Data were then collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The collected data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of gender representation, gendered role allocation, access to decision-making, cultural and institutional barriers, and the interaction between formal and informal institutional arrangements. The final stage involved validating the findings through triangulation and informant confirmation to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research results.

Research Subjects and Informants

This research included actors involved in disaster governance and community participation at the village and district levels. The researchers purposively selected informants based on their roles, involvement, experience, and relevance to disaster governance and decision-making processes. Women informants were also purposively included to ensure that the analysis of women's participation and access to decision-making was informed not only by institutional and community actors but also by women's own perspectives on their involvement in disaster governance.

Eleven (11) informants participated in this study. The initial group included nine informants: two village heads, two village officials, four representatives from the Disaster Resilient Village Program (*Destana*), and one representative from the Bantul Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD Bantul). Among the four *Destana* representatives, two were women. Two additional women informants were subsequently included to provide direct perspectives on women's participation, access to decision-making, and their roles in disaster governance.

The informant composition was intended to capture diverse perspectives from formal institutional actors, community-based disaster management actors, and women involved in disaster-related activities. Including women informants was particularly important because the study examines women's participation and the institutional, cultural, and social factors that shape their opportunities to access and influence decision-making processes.

Data Collection Technique

The study collected data using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. The study conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore informants' perspectives on decision-making structures, gender roles, participation mechanisms, and institutional policies related to disaster management. Interviews with women informants also explored their experiences of participation, opportunities to express their views, involvement in decision-making, access to strategic roles, and perceived barriers to their participation.

Observations were conducted to understand institutional practices, interaction patterns, and women's positioning within disaster management activities. Observations also examined how formal roles and gendered interaction patterns were reflected in actual disaster management practices. Meanwhile, the researcher used document analysis to examine official regulations, village decrees, disaster risk reduction program documents, and institutional reports related to disaster governance and gender participation. Together, these techniques allowed the researcher to obtain comprehensive, contextual, and complementary data. Documentary evidence was particularly important for examining institutional arrangements and determining whether specific provisions or mechanisms concerning women's representation and participation were formally established. Therefore, claims regarding the presence or absence of institutional policies were not based solely on the absence of statements from informants but were cross-checked against the relevant documentary evidence.

Together, these techniques allowed the researcher to obtain comprehensive, contextual, and complementary data and to triangulate participants' accounts with observed practices and documentary evidence.

Data Analysis Techniques

The researcher conducted thematic analysis using Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, which includes data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data condensation stage, the researcher coded and categorized data based on key themes related to gender representation in disaster governance, including structural representation, functional roles, cultural narratives, decision-making access, and institutional policies. The researcher then presented the categorized data in an analytical narrative to identify recurring patterns and relationships among themes. Conclusions were drawn iteratively by continuously comparing findings with empirical data to ensure analytical consistency and depth of interpretation.

The coding process proceeded through initial coding, category development, and thematic interpretation. Initial codes emerged from recurring statements, observations, and documentary evidence on women's representation, gendered divisions of roles, access to decision-making, domestic and caregiving responsibilities, cultural expectations, and institutional arrangements. The initial codes were then grouped into broader analytical categories and developed into themes based on recurring patterns across informants and research locations.

The coding process began by identifying recurring patterns in the informants' accounts. Statements about the dominance of men in formal decision-making positions were coded as "male-dominated formal authority" and grouped under "formal institutional arrangements." Similarly, accounts of women's concentration in administrative, logistical, and supportive tasks were coded as "gendered role allocation" and categorized as "gendered functional roles."

Statements concerning domestic responsibilities, caregiving, and participation based on individual availability were coded as "domestic and caregiving burden" and "availability-based participation." These

categories were then interpreted as gendered barriers to participation, illustrating how institutional arrangements and social roles can shape women's opportunities to participate in disaster decision-making.

Data Validity and Validity

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings, the study applied several validation strategies, including source and technique triangulation, member checking, and referential adequacy. Triangulation involved comparing data from different informants and data collection methods (Sugiyono, 2019). Member checking involved reconfirming the main findings with key informants to ensure accurate interpretations (Sugiyono, 2019). Source triangulation involved comparing perspectives from village heads, village officials, Destana representatives, BPBD Bantul, and women informants. This was particularly important in examining whether accounts concerning women's participation, roles, and access to decision-making were consistently reflected across different groups of actors.

The study triangulated techniques by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documentary evidence. Member checking was carried out by reconfirming the main findings with key informants to ensure accurate interpretations (Sugiyono, 2019). The study maintained referential adequacy by continuously relating empirical findings to the relevant theoretical framework and previous research. The analysis considered claims about gendered barriers and limited access to decision-making when supported by recurring evidence across informants, locations, and/or data collection techniques.

4. Results and Discussion

Structural Exclusion: Male-Dominated Formal Authority

Women's participation in disaster management decision-making is vital to fair and inclusive governance. Interviews with informants from Wukirsari, Camden, and Trirenggo villages, as well as the Bantul Regency Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD), revealed that women's representation in strategic disaster management processes remains very limited, both structurally and culturally. Overall, the research indicates that the decision-making structure remains hierarchical and male-dominated. A source from the Bantul BPBD explained that decision-making in disaster management relies on formal positions, which are almost entirely held by men:

"Struktur komando penanganan darurat bencana itu by jabatan. Jadi ketika jabatan itu diisi oleh laki-laki ya mau nggak mau disitu kan komandannya kepala daerah. [The command structure for disaster emergency response is structured by position. So, when a man fills that position, the regional head is the commander, whether we like it or not]." (Mrs. P, Division Head of the Bantul Regional Disaster Management Agency)

This structural pattern is replicated at the village level. In Trirenggo Village, although women have begun to be involved in the Disaster Risk Reduction Forum, their participation remains very limited, both in numbers and in strategic roles. This involvement generally does not reach decision-making aspects and is more often confined to administrative or support positions. This reflects the continued strong male dominance in local-level disaster management institutional structures. In Wukirsari village, the emergency response team structure demonstrates male dominance. Jogoboyo (Community Safety Officer), Wukirsari, stated that:

"Banyak laki-laki. Untuk keterlibatan perempuan ada namun hanya bagian logistiknya mba dan untuk jumlah juga belum seberapa dibandingkan laki-laki. [There are a lot of men. There is some

female involvement, but it's only for logistics, and the numbers aren't as great as the men]." (Mr. F, Jogoboyo, Wukirsari Village).

Women are involved, but their roles are largely limited to logistics, and their numbers are not significant. Meanwhile, in Candan Village, women's representation is not even visible in formal structures. One informant stated,

"Secara spesifik untuk struktur Forum Penanggulangan Resiko Bencana memang kita belum ada perempuan. [Specifically, for the Disaster Risk Reduction Forum structure, we don't have any women yet]." (Mr. B, Head of Candan Village).

These findings are further supported by a woman informant's direct account. When asked about her involvement in disaster-related decision-making, she explained that she was not part of the management structure because other personnel had already been assigned the roles. She also described difficulties in becoming involved because of her work and childcare responsibilities:

"Itu kan sudah ada petugasnya sendiri, saya tidak gabung jadi pengurus, nggak ketemu waktunya mba, saya bekerja, urus anak juga, sudah repot."

[There are already people assigned to those roles. I am not part of the management structure because I cannot find the time. I work and also take care of my children, so I already have a lot to deal with].

This account matters because it shows how women experience structural exclusion. The informant did not describe an explicit prohibition against women's participation. Rather, she was positioned outside the formal management structure, while her work and caregiving responsibilities further constrained her ability to become involved. Thus, women's limited representation may emerge not only from the composition of formal positions but also from the conditions that shape their ability to enter and remain within those structures.

The distinction between participation and decision-making influence is also evident in the woman informant's account. When asked whether she had participated in expressing opinions or influencing decisions, she responded, "Saya tidak ikut itu, Mbak" *[I am not involved in that]*. Her response suggests that being involved in disaster-related activities does not automatically provide access to deliberative or decision-making processes. In her case, participation occurred mainly through supportive activities rather than through formal forums where decisions were discussed and determined. As stated by an informant from BPBD:

"Ketika dia (seorang wanita) masih menjadi staf kan tidak bisa mengambil keputusan seperti ketika dia duduk sebagai kepala, Tapi kami punya kesempatan yang sama dalam menjalankan pekerjaan kami. [When she (a woman) was still a staff member, she couldn't make decisions like when she was the head. But we have the same opportunities in carrying out our work]." (Mrs. P, Head Division of BPBD Bantul).

This statement reveals an important distinction between equality in performing assigned tasks and equality in accessing decision-making authority. The informant explicitly acknowledged that staff members have the same opportunities to perform their work, but their authority to make decisions differs by organizational position. Thus, formal equality in carrying out duties does not necessarily result in equal substantive influence over strategic decisions.

From the perspective of Feminist Institutionalism, these findings show how formal and informal institutional arrangements interact to shape women's access to decision-making. Formal institutions allocate authority through organizational positions, while informal gendered conditions such as women's simultaneous responsibility for paid work and childcare may affect their ability to participate in those positions. The woman's statement that she could not "find the time" because she had to work and care for her children illustrates how participation is shaped not only by formal organizational arrangements but also by gendered social responsibilities.

Importantly, this does not mean that caregiving responsibilities automatically exclude all women from disaster governance. Rather, the finding shows that when participation depends on individuals' availability to join organizational structures, women with substantial work and caregiving responsibilities may face greater constraints. In this sense, an apparently gender-neutral participation arrangement can have gendered effects. Therefore, equality in disaster governance should not be assessed solely by whether women are formally allowed to participate or are given equal opportunities to perform assigned tasks. It should also be assessed by whether women have meaningful access to organizational positions, forums, and processes through which strategic decisions are made. The findings consequently point to a gap between procedural equality and substantive participation.

Functional Marginalization: Women as Support, Not Decision-Makers

Where women are involved in disaster governance, their participation tends to be concentrated in administrative, logistical, and other supportive functions rather than in direct field-based disaster response or strategic decision-making. This pattern does not indicate a complete absence of women from disaster-related activities. Rather, it points to a gendered distribution of functions in which women's involvement is more visible in supporting roles, while operational and decision-making roles remain less accessible to them.

"...tidak ada perempuan yang ikut serta secara langsung dalam kegiatan penanganan bencana di lapangan." [There are no women directly involved in disaster response operations in the field.] (Mr. F, Jogoboyo, Wukirsari Village).

In Wukirsari Village, their participation largely focused on support functions rather than direct, field-based disaster response. This pattern is also reflected in the following statement:

"Banyak laki-laki. Untuk keterlibatan perempuan ada namun hanya bagian logistiknya mba dan untuk jumlah juga belum seberapa dibandingkan laki-laki." [There are a lot of men. There is some female involvement, but it is mainly in logistics, and their number is still relatively small compared with men.] (Mr. F, Jogoboyo, Wukirsari Village)

This statement indicates that women were involved in disaster-related activities, particularly in logistics, but their participation was functionally differentiated from the operational and decision-making roles more commonly associated with men. A similar pattern was identified in Tirenggo Village, where women's participation was more commonly associated with administrative and supportive activities, including the preparation of training catering and financial administration:

"Yaaa setidaknya dia ngurusi administrasi, menyiapkan konsumsi pelatihan itu sendiri, SPJ, itu kita libatkan." [Well, at least they (women) take care of the administration, prepare consumption for trainings, and do financial-related jobs. Then, we involve them]. (Mr. M, Kamituwo, Tirenggo Village).

The statement demonstrates that women were recognized as contributors to disaster-related activities. However, the functions mentioned were primarily administrative and supportive. Thus, women's participation should not be interpreted only in terms of whether they were involved, but also in terms of where they were positioned within the division of disaster-related functions. This pattern is further supported by a woman informant's direct account. When asked about the types of activities in which she was involved, she explained:

"Kami biasanya bantu-bantu saja dikonsumsi, atau administrasi."

(We usually just help with catering or administrative tasks.)

The distinction between participation in activities and participation in decision-making is further illustrated by the same informant's response when asked whether she had ever been involved in expressing opinions or influencing decisions:

"Saya tidak ikut itu, Mbak."

(I am not involved in that.)

This response suggests that involvement in disaster-related activities did not necessarily provide access to decision-making processes. In this case, the woman was involved through supportive functions but did not participate in the processes through which decisions were discussed or determined. The finding therefore points to a distinction between participation in implementation **and** substantive participation in decision-making.

From the perspective of Feminist Institutionalism, this pattern reflects a gendered distribution of institutional functions. Formal institutional arrangements may not explicitly prohibit women from participating, but how roles and responsibilities are organized can create different opportunities for women and men to engage in disaster governance. At the same time, informal gender norms and expectations may reinforce the association of women with supportive and care-related functions, while operational and strategic disaster roles may be more strongly associated with men.

The findings therefore suggest that women's marginalization in disaster governance operates not necessarily through explicit exclusion, but through the distribution of functions and unequal access to decision-making spaces. Women's involvement in administrative, logistical, or supportive activities demonstrates that they are not absent from disaster governance. However, such involvement does not automatically translate into substantive participation.

Cultural Legitimacy of Exclusion: Gendered Assumptions of Capacity

Structural and functional exclusion is reinforced by strong cultural narratives that associate disaster response with masculinity. Fieldwork, emergency response, night duty, and physically demanding tasks are widely perceived as "men's work". For example, when training or activities are taking place, the majority of field activities such as tree pruning, emergency response, and Wasp Capture Operations are still dominated by men because they are considered to require strength and courage:

"Kalau yang bersifat harus ke lapangan ya tidak dilakukan perempuan, kadang. [For tasks that require going directly to the field, women do not carry them out. Sometimes.] (Mr M)"

Similarly, an informant from Wukirsari explained:

"Relawan identik dengan fisik, mbak, dan harus bawa alat-alat. Itu memang selama ini nyuwun sewu kita memang didominasi oleh laki-laki." [Volunteering is associated with physical strength and having to carry equipment.] Thus, with all due respect, up to now it has indeed been dominated by men]. (Mr F)"

These statements suggest that physical strength and the ability to perform field-based tasks are commonly associated with men. Consequently, women's participation in physically demanding and field-based disaster response activities tends to be more limited. This pattern is not necessarily the result of an explicit prohibition against women, but may be reinforced by gendered assumptions about physical capacity and the suitability of particular roles.

The perception that disaster response activities requiring physical strength, field deployment, and emergency operations are more appropriate for men is not necessarily supported by women's actual capacity to perform disaster-related roles. Hou and Wu (2020), in their study of post-Wenchuan earthquake recovery efforts in rural Sichuan, China, show that women assumed multiple roles as rescuers, decision makers, and leaders. Their findings challenge the assumption that operational and leadership roles in disaster response are inherently male domains. In this sense, the limited involvement of women in field-based and strategic disaster activities identified in the present study should not be interpreted simply as a consequence of women's lack of capacity. Rather, it may reflect gendered institutional and cultural perceptions concerning which roles are considered appropriate for women and men.

A similar pattern also appears in the distribution of operational duties at the institutional level. As explained by a BPBD Bantul informant:

"Di kami itu, yang standby malam-malam seperti pemadam kebakaran dan TRC (Rapid Response Teams) itu lebih banyak laki-laki. (In our place, those who are on standby at night, such as firefighters and the Rapid Response Team, are mostly men.)" (Mrs P).

The predominance of men in these roles suggests that gendered assumptions also shape the distribution of operational responsibilities. They indicate that disaster-response work involving physical demands, field deployment, and night operations remains strongly associated with men. From a Feminist Institutionalism perspective, these patterns show how informal gender norms can interact with institutional practices.

However, such gendered patterns should not be interpreted as evidence that women are inherently less capable of performing operational or leadership roles in disaster contexts. Hou and Wu (2020), for example, found that women assumed roles as rescuers, decision makers, and leaders in post-disaster recovery efforts following the Wenchuan earthquake in rural Sichuan, China. Their findings challenge the assumption that operational and leadership roles in disaster response are inherently male domains. From a Feminist Institutionalism perspective, these patterns show how informal gender norms can interact with institutional practices. Even without an explicit rule preventing women from participating, assumptions about physical strength, safety, and the suitability of certain tasks may shape who is considered appropriate for operational roles. In this sense, cultural assumptions can reproduce gendered patterns of participation in disaster governance.

Time, Availability, and the Myth of Gender Neutrality

Several informants described participation in disaster activities as dependent on willingness and availability ("whoever has free time"). On the surface, this logic appears gender-neutral. However, the findings suggest that this seemingly neutral arrangement may affect women and men differently because women may face greater domestic and caregiving responsibilities. An informant from Trirenggo stated:

"Kalau yang krusial itu ya yang mau dan pas selo... [For critical matters, it's those who are willing and who have free time.]" (Mr. M, Kamituwo, Trirenggo Village)

This is in line with the statement from Wukirsari:

"Sebenarnya tidak harus perempuan atau laki-laki mba siapa yg selo gitu aja. [Actually, it doesn't have to be women or men, just whoever has free time]" (Mr. F. Jogoboyo, Wukirsari Village)

Although this approach appears gender-neutral, the direct account of a woman informant illustrates how women's availability may be constrained by responsibilities outside disaster governance:

"Itu kan sudah ada petugasnya sendiri, saya tidak gabung jadi pengurus, nggak ketemu waktunya, Mbak, saya bekerja, urus anak juga, sudah repot. [There are already people assigned to those roles. I am not part of the management because I cannot find the time. I work and also take care of my children, so I already have a lot to deal with.]" (Mrs. K)

On the surface, the logic of "whoever has free time" appears gender-neutral. However, the findings suggest this arrangement may affect women and men differently, particularly because some women also carry domestic and caregiving responsibilities. Rather than indicating direct discrimination, the findings suggest that an apparently gender-neutral participation arrangement may produce gendered effects on women's opportunities to participate. Because of childcare responsibilities, some women may have difficulty attending meetings, training activities, or emergency-related activities. The Candan informant also noted that women who are unable to participate regularly may feel discouraged from becoming involved

"Ibu-ibu kan kadang momong putunya, momong anak yang tidak bisa ditinggal sehingga yang rapat itu-itu saja kemudian minder. [Women sometimes have to look after their grandchildren or children who can't be left alone, so those who come to the meetings are only similar people. Women feel discouraged]." (Mr. B).

The statement suggests that women may feel discouraged when caregiving responsibilities prevent them from participating regularly in meetings. When the same people repeatedly participate, women who cannot attend regularly may have fewer opportunities to become visible in these processes and contribute to decision-making. This may also reinforce feelings of discouragement or reduced confidence in participating. Thus, an apparently gender-neutral "availability-based" approach may produce gendered effects when it operates within unequal social and caregiving conditions.

These findings illustrate how apparently neutral institutional arrangements can interact with informal gender norms and socially assigned caregiving responsibilities. The requirement that participation depends on individual availability does not explicitly distinguish between women and men. However, when unequal social responsibilities shape availability, the arrangement may create different opportunities for participation. This highlights the importance of examining not only formal equality in participation, but also the conditions that enable or constrain substantive access to decision-making.

Psychological and Social Barriers: Gendered Expectations of Women's Public Roles

Beyond institutional and structural barriers, women also face social and psychological constraints. In Tirrenggo, women who try to participate in field activities face social scrutiny and moral judgment, particularly around their domestic responsibilities. Questions about childcare and household duties may reinforce gendered expectations that women's primary responsibilities lie within the home. Informants from Tirrenggo highlighted the public's tendency to question women's involvement outside of domestic roles, as interviewed:

"Ketika seorang perempuan mau ikut kegiatan lapangan pasti ada yang ngomong 'la koe melui bo-jomu ora tok liwetne po? Anakmu ora kok urusi po? [When a woman wants to take part in field activities, there are always people who say, 'Why are going out instead of cooking for your husband? Aren't you taking care of your child?']" (Mr. M)

This situation demonstrates that women may face social pressure and questions about their roles outside the household. Such expectations may shape the conditions under which women participate in disaster-related activities. The findings suggest that women's participation in disaster-related activities does not necessarily translate into equal access to decision-making roles. Instead, their involvement may depend on the type of activity, the perceived suitability of the role, and their availability.

The interviews also revealed the perception that emergency response activities requiring physical presence, field deployment, or night-time duties are more suitable for men. In Camden, the stereotype is even more explicit:

"Karena di situ pekerjaan diperlukan pekerjaan yang hanya laki-laki yang bisa. Karena nantinya kurang produktif kalo ada perempuan. [Because the work there requires tasks that only men can do. Otherwise, it would be less productive if women are involved]" (Mr. B)

This statement reflects a gendered perception of capability, in which certain disaster-related tasks are perceived as more appropriately performed by men. Rather than indicating that women are formally prohibited from participating, the finding suggests that assumptions about gender and capability may shape perceptions of women's suitability for particular roles.

These social expectations may create pressure for women who seek to participate in disaster-related activities outside the household. They may also affect women's confidence and willingness to participate, particularly when their involvement is repeatedly questioned or linked to neglect of domestic responsibilities. However, the findings do not indicate that women simply withdraw voluntarily. Rather, women's participation appears to be shaped by the interaction between caregiving responsibilities, social expectations, and perceptions of gender-appropriate roles in disaster management.

This shows that not only structures hinder women's participation, but social constructs also position women in particular roles or as less suited to certain disaster-management tasks. From the perspective of Feminist Institutionalism, these findings illustrate how informal gender norms can interact with formal institutional arrangements to shape women's participation. Although formal arrangements may not explicitly prohibit women from participating, informal expectations regarding domestic responsibilities and assumptions about men's and women's capabilities may influence who is perceived as available, suitable, and legitimate to participate in particular activities. Patriarchal culture and gendered social expectations also contribute to narrowing the space for women's actualization, both in operational contexts and in policy forums.

Furthermore, the document review conducted in this study did not identify specific provisions establishing affirmative measures to increase women's representation in disaster-management decision-making within the institutional and program documents examined. Interview accounts also did not indicate specific mechanisms, such as leadership opportunities or gender-responsive capacity-building, designed to strengthen women's participation in decision-making. Under these conditions, the lack of clearly identified affirmative mechanisms may make it harder to address the social and institutional barriers that constrain women's substantive participation.

Absence of Affirmative Policy and Institutional Commitment

The findings indicate that women's limited access to disaster management decision-making in Bantul Regency is not primarily due to explicit formal exclusion. Rather, it emerges from the interaction of structural hierarchy, functional differentiation, gendered cultural assumptions, unequal time and availability, and social expectations around women's public and domestic roles. Although women participate in various disaster-related activities, their involvement remains more often concentrated in supportive functions and does not necessarily provide equivalent access to strategic decision-making. Thus, the central issue is not simply whether women are present in disaster governance, but whether their participation enables them to exercise meaningful influence over decisions.

First, formal institutional structures shape access to decision-making authority. Disaster management decision-making is closely tied to organizational positions, while strategic positions within government and village structures remain predominantly held by men. Consequently, participation in disaster-related activities does not automatically provide access to strategic authority. This finding aligns with [Anantasari and Davies \(2019\)](#), while [UNDRR \(2025\)](#) and [Widyaningsih et al. \(2024\)](#) show that women's leadership can strengthen participation, mobilization, and inclusive disaster response. These findings suggest that women's limited strategic participation should not be understood simply as a consequence of limited interest or capacity, but also in relation to access to leadership positions and institutional authority.

Second, the findings reveal a pattern of functional differentiation in women's participation. Women are involved in disaster-related activities, but their participation is more commonly associated with logistics, administration, food preparation, and other supporting functions than with operational planning or strategic coordination. Previous research has similarly identified gendered barriers to women's participation in disaster management. Studies in other disaster contexts show that women may face limitations in access to resources, autonomy, education, and decision-making opportunities ([Ida et al., 2025](#); [Mahbub et al., 2025](#); [Azad & Pritchard, 2023](#)). The present study extends these findings by showing that women's participation can remain visible at the activity level while remaining limited in strategic influence. Participation in supportive functions, therefore, should not automatically be equated with substantive participation in disaster governance.

Third, cultural assumptions concerning gender and capacity shape the distribution of operational roles. Field-based response, physically demanding tasks, and night operations remain strongly associated with men. However, this pattern should not be interpreted as evidence that women are inherently less capable of operational or leadership roles. [Hou and Wu \(2020\)](#), for example, found women serving as rescuers, decision makers, and leaders following the Wenchuan earthquake. From a Feminist Institutionalism perspective, this pattern illustrates how informal gender norms interact with institutional practices. Even without explicit rules preventing women's participation, assumptions concerning physical strength, safety, and task suitability may influence who is considered appropriate for operational roles ([Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010](#); [Waylen, 2014](#)). When operational experience is predominantly associated with men, women may have fewer opportunities to develop experience, visibility, and authority in these areas.

Fourth, time availability is not necessarily a gender-neutral condition of participation. The principle of involving those who are willing and available appears formally neutral, but individuals do not necessarily have equal conditions of availability. Women may face competing demands related to paid work and caregiving, particularly childcare, which can constrain their participation in meetings, training, and organizational activities. This interpretation is consistent with [Cvetkovic et al. \(2018\)](#). From a Feminist Institutionalism perspective, an apparently neutral institutional practice may produce different condi-

tions of participation when it operates within an unequal social context. The issue is therefore not that availability-based participation is inherently discriminatory, but that it may generate gendered effects.

Fifth, Psychological and social expectations also shape women's opportunities to participate in public disaster governance. Expectations concerning women's domestic responsibilities, including their roles as wives and mothers, may affect their confidence, willingness, or ability to engage in public activities. Previous research has shown that gender stereotypes can restrict women's access to community planning and decision-making (Mahbub et al., 2025). Thus, gendered institutional effects extend beyond formal organizational structures to social norms that influence whether women's public participation is considered legitimate or appropriate.

These findings can be further understood through the broader framework of Feminist Institutionalism, particularly its distinction between formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions determine organizational positions, authority, procedures, and responsibilities, while informal institutions include norms, expectations, practices, and socially accepted understandings that shape behavior within and around formal structures (Mackay et al., 2010; Waylen, 2014). In the present study, formal institutional arrangements and informal gender norms appear to interact rather than operate independently. Formal authority is linked to organizational positions; informal assumptions associate operational and physically demanding roles with men; caregiving expectations affect women's availability; and social expectations influence the legitimacy of women's public participation. The resulting pattern of inequality therefore cannot be attributed to a single formal rule. Instead, it is reproduced through interactions between institutional arrangements and gendered social practices.

This institutional perspective is also important in interpreting the absence of affirmative mechanisms. The document review did not identify specific provisions establishing affirmative measures to strengthen women's representation in strategic disaster decision-making within the institutional and program documents examined. This does not imply that gender-related policies are entirely absent or that intentional discrimination exists. Rather, it indicates that the documents did not clearly specify mechanisms to address the identified gender-related barriers. Institutional commitment to gender equality therefore requires more than the absence of formal restrictions; it requires mechanisms that address unequal opportunities in practice. This argument is consistent with Yumarni and Amaratunga (2017), who emphasize the importance of local government capacity, women's participation, leadership, resources, and institutional arrangements in mainstreaming gender into disaster risk reduction.

The findings also extend the discussion of collaborative governance in disaster management. Lestari et al. (2024) demonstrate that collaborative disaster mitigation requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders, supported by communication, trust, resources, and institutional capacity. The present study adds a gendered institutional dimension to this perspective. Collaborative arrangements do not automatically guarantee gender-inclusive decision-making. Collaboration may bring multiple actors into the governance process, but it does not necessarily ensure equal access to authority, strategic positions, or influence. A gender-sensitive analysis therefore needs to ask not only *who is involved*, but also *who holds decision-making authority, whose knowledge is recognized, whose participation is sustained, and who can influence strategic outcomes*.

Women's participation in disaster governance should be distinguished between procedural and substantive participation. Procedural participation refers to women's formal inclusion or involvement in disaster-related activities, whereas substantive participation concerns their ability to access decision-making spaces, articulate interests, influence deliberation, and exercise meaningful authority. The findings suggest that women may achieve procedural inclusion without necessarily achieving substantive participation. This distinction is central to the "Beyond Participation" argument: the presence of women in disaster-related activities does not by itself demonstrate gender equality in disaster governance.

Therefore, this study argues that women's limited position in disaster decision-making is reproduced through the interaction of formal institutional structures and informal gendered norms, rather than through explicit exclusion alone. Structural hierarchy shapes access to formal authority; functional differentiation more often places women in supportive roles; cultural assumptions influence perceptions of women's suitability for operational tasks; work and caregiving responsibilities affect their availability; and social expectations shape the legitimacy and confidence associated with women's public participation. Without institutional mechanisms that actively address these interacting conditions, formal inclusion may remain largely procedural. Moving beyond participation therefore requires not merely increasing the number of women involved in disaster activities, but ensuring their meaningful access to strategic positions, decision-making forums, and institutional authority.

This study is limited by its focus on three villages, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other contexts. The qualitative approach also does not quantitatively measure women's representation or its relationship with disaster management outcomes. In addition, limited access to some institutional documents constrained a deeper analysis of decision-making processes and power relations. Future research could use comparative and mixed-methods approaches to examine women's substantive participation across different disaster governance contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that women's access to disaster management decision-making in Wukirsari, Camden, and Tirenggo Villages in Bantul Regency remains limited. The findings indicate that this limitation is not primarily the result of explicit formal exclusion, but emerges through the interaction of formal institutional arrangements and informal gendered norms. Using Gender Governance and Feminist Institutionalism, the study shows that women's participation should be assessed not only by their presence in disaster-related activities but also by their access to strategic positions, decision-making forums, and meaningful influence. Women's participation remains functionally concentrated in administrative, logistical, catering, and other supporting roles, while operational and strategic roles are more commonly associated with men. Gendered assumptions concerning physical capacity and role suitability, together with work and caregiving responsibilities and social expectations, may further constrain women's participation. From the perspective of Feminist Institutionalism, these findings show that formal institutional arrangements and informal gender norms interact to shape women's access to decision-making. Although women participate in disaster-related activities, such participation does not consistently translate into substantive influence. The document review did not identify specific affirmative measures to strengthen women's representation in strategic disaster decision-making within the institutional and program documents examined. Overall, the findings indicate a gap between procedural inclusion and substantive participation, highlighting the need to strengthen institutional mechanisms that enable women to access strategic positions and meaningfully influence disaster governance decisions.

It is recommended that gender mainstreaming in disaster governance be strengthened not only by increasing women's participation but also by promoting substantive participation and meaningful influence in decision-making. This may be supported through leadership and technical capacity building, gender-responsive participation mechanisms, and institutional arrangements that consider women's work and caregiving responsibilities. Local governments and disaster management institutions may also consider appropriate affirmative measures to strengthen women's representation in strategic disaster decision-making forums, supported by clear implementation and monitoring mechanisms.

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