

Rooted on the Coast: Ecofeminism and Ecological Resilience in the Mangrove Forests of Tanjung Siambang, Kepulauan Riau Province, Indonesia

¹Damai Vistiani Gulo, ²Siti Arieta, ³Nikodemus Niko

^{1,2}Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, Tanjungpinang, Indonesia

³Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This study explores ecofeminism in the sustainable management of mangrove forests in Tanjung Siambang. Employing a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The research focused on women who are actively involved in mangrove conservation, environmental activists, and community members with local ecological knowledge and skills. The findings reveal a significant connection between women and nature, where women play a central role in mangrove management based on traditional ecological knowledge. Their practices emphasize conservation without causing environmental harm and are rooted in a deep understanding of the local ecosystem. Furthermore, women are not only preserving mangrove forests but also transforming them into sources of sustainable livelihoods. Despite facing structural barriers such as patriarchal cultural norms, these challenges have not deterred their efforts. Instead, they serve as motivation for women to assert their agency in ecological governance. This research highlights how women in Tanjung Siambang integrate ecological responsibility with economic empowerment, demonstrating that ecofeminism is not only a critique of environmental degradation and gender inequality but also a practical framework for sustainable community-based environmental management.

Correspondence:

Nikodemus.n@chula.ac.th



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INTRODUCTION

Mangrove forest management is an integral component of natural resource conservation that requires sustained attention and active preservation, much like other ecological resources. Mangroves are a vital component of coastal ecosystems owing to their ecological sensitivity and interdependence with the surrounding environments. Any disruption to their equilibrium may lead to significant ecological degradation (Baiduri et al., 2023). Functionally, mangrove forests serve as coastal buffers, protecting shorelines from erosion, supporting rich biodiversity, and providing habitats for numerous terrestrial and aquatic species. Additionally, their capacity to sequester carbon dioxide positions them as key natural assets in mitigating climate change. Hence, sustainable management of mangrove forests not only safeguards environmental stability but also upholds broader climate-related objectives.

Over time, the mismanagement of natural environments has often been linked to dominant patriarchal systems that exploit both ecological resources and social groups—particularly women. Feminist critiques have long underscored the parallel processes of domination exerted over both nature and women by patriarchal structures (Yatim & Juliardi, 2018). In response, ecofeminism has emerged as a framework that bridges ecological and feminist discourses. Rooted in dialectical theory, ecofeminism interprets the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women as interrelated forms of systemic oppression (Masinambow, 2023). The ecofeminist perspective, therefore, not only critiques patriarchal exploitation but also offers an alternative worldview that advocates a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, foregrounding women's experiences, knowledge, and roles as essential to achieving environmental sustainability.

Within this framework, the connection between women and the environment is not merely symbolic but material and experiential. Women, particularly those in rural and coastal settings, often interact directly with the land and forests in their daily roles, even when these are categorized as domestic tasks (Rahma et al., 2022). These interactions foster a unique ecological sensibility and position women as active agents in environmental stewardship. Their involvement in forest and natural

resource management extends beyond subsistence, encompassing ecological protection and sustainability practices rooted in local knowledge and relational understandings of the environment.

Research in various contexts has affirmed the critical role of women in ecological conservation. Studies, such as that of Eva et al. (2023), demonstrate that women's active participation in environmental decision-making significantly contributes to community resilience and sustainability. Similarly, research by Savira and Saipiatuddin (2022) illustrates how waste pickers embody ecofeminist principles through responsible interactions with the biosphere, maintaining ecological balance and advocating for the care of all living beings. These findings point to a broader recognition of the importance of integrating gender perspectives into environmental management, not only as a matter of equity but also as a practical strategy for achieving long-term ecological health.

Moreover, the growing awareness among women regarding their ecological roles and rights has led to a reconfiguration of their relationship with nature. This reconfiguration entails recognizing the adverse effects of environmental degradation—such as deforestation—on food security, access to water, and household economies, particularly for women whose livelihoods depend directly on natural resources (Wati et al., 2023). In many cases, forest damage reduces soil fertility and limits water availability, thereby adversely affecting women's daily lives and survival strategies. Therefore, women's ecological engagement is both a response to lived environmental crises and a proactive effort to cultivate sustainable and regenerative practices.

Tanjung Siambang, a coastal area rich in mangrove ecosystems covering approximately 4,280 hectares, presents a compelling case for examining ecofeminism in action. The region holds substantial ecological, economic, and social value, making it a strategic site for sustainable Development (Humairah et al., 2022). However, like many mangrove-rich areas, it faces environmental threats that require careful and continuous management to ensure long-term preservation (Daulay et al., 2023). Effective mangrove management in Tanjung Siambang,

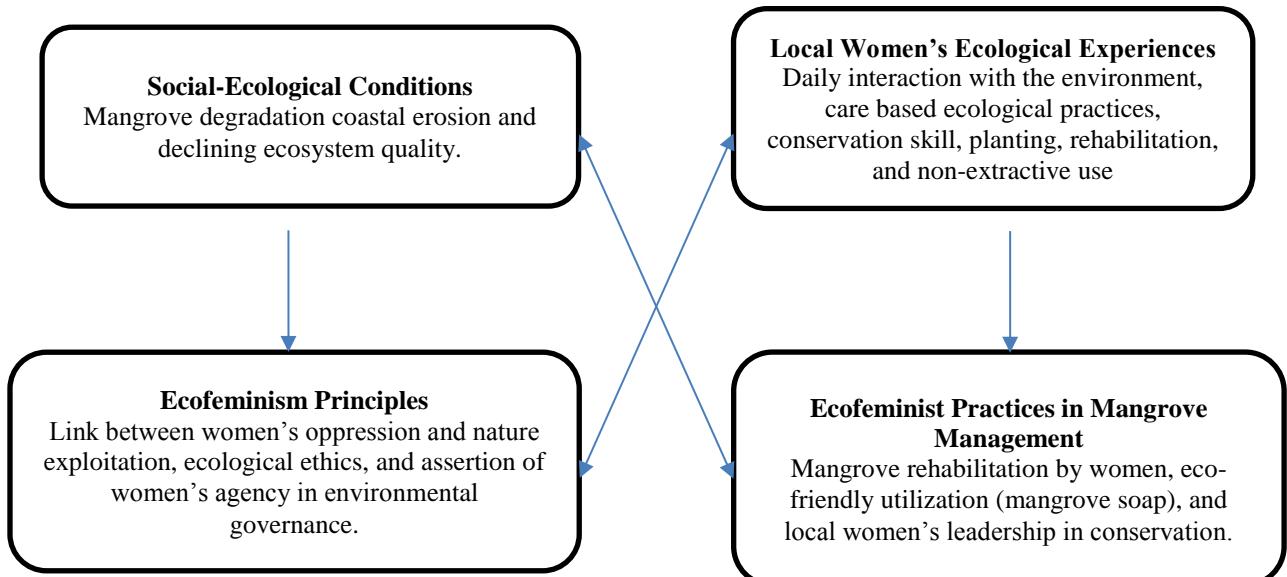
therefore, demands a participatory approach that incorporates local ecological knowledge and community engagement, particularly the involvement of women.

In Tanjung Siambang, women play a central role in both direct and indirect mangrove forest management. Their participation is evident in hands-on conservation activities, such as seedling cultivation, planting, and reforestation, as well as in support for economic ventures that use mangrove-based products. These efforts include the production of mangrove-derived commodities such as coffee, batik dyes, and soap, which contribute to both household and community incomes (Agustira et al., 2023). Women's involvement is rooted not only in necessity but also in a conscious recognition of their role as environmental stewards, driven by a sense of responsibility to sustain the natural resources upon which their lives depend.

Their dual identities—as environmental activists and caregivers—enable women to approach mangrove management holistically. Beyond ecological benefits, their work also supports community health, social cohesion, and gender equity. Women in Tanjung Siambang possess a deep awareness that maintaining mangrove forests helps prevent coastal erosion, supports biodiversity, and enhances the availability of clean air and water. Through their engagement, they contribute to ecological resilience while simultaneously challenging gendered norms that historically limited their participation in public environmental governance.

Importantly, the women of Tanjung Siambang face sociocultural constraints, particularly those stemming from patriarchal systems that marginalize their voices in decision-making processes. Nonetheless, rather than being deterred by these challenges, they have used them as motivation to assert greater agency in environmental affairs. Their leadership in mangrove conservation represents a form of everyday resistance and transformation, aligning with the core principles of ecofeminism. Their experiences reflect the argument that ecofeminism is not simply a theoretical lens but a lived praxis, grounded in local contexts and driven by women's embodied interactions with the environment.

Figure 1. Research conceptual innovation



This study introduces a conceptual innovation by integrating ecofeminist principles with ecological resilience in the context of mangrove management (see Figure 1). Ecofeminism has typically been used to analyze symbolic and structural relations between women and nature, while ecological resilience centers on an ecosystem's capacity to withstand disturbances and recover from degradation. By bringing these two perspectives together and positioning women's ecological experiences as an analytical foundation, the study demonstrates how values of care, regeneration, and environmental ethics contribute directly to ecosystem stability. This integration broadens the understanding of resilience, showing that it is shaped not only by biophysical factors but also by social values and gendered relations embedded in environmental practices.

The theoretical novelty also lies in the argument that women's ecological practices are not merely social activities or community contributions but serve as epistemological foundations for resilience itself. By linking women's local knowledge, experience-based strategies, and ecological skills in mangrove conservation, the study illustrates that ecological resilience is produced through relational socio-ecological interactions. This perspective challenges conventional resilience theories that often overlook gender dimensions, while simultaneously

enriching ecofeminism by demonstrating how its values can be operationalized in coastal ecosystem governance.

Furthermore, this study offers a critical reassessment, showing that ecofeminism should be understood not solely as a critique of patriarchy but also as a practical framework guiding community-based ecological action. At the same time, the concept of ecological resilience must extend beyond technocratic approaches and recognize that resilience is shaped by social agents capable of driving change—particularly women. The integration of these two perspectives yields a theoretical contribution: a conceptual model that explains how women's values, practices, and knowledge organically and sustainably shape ecological resilience. In doing so, the study not only strengthens its theoretical argument but also expands the discourse on the interconnections between gender, ecology, and sustainability.

Ultimately, this research asserts that women are not only beneficiaries of environmental conservation but are also key actors in shaping and sustaining ecological futures. Their knowledge, practices, and leadership offer critical insights into how environmental justice and gender equity can be pursued simultaneously. Through the case of Tanjung Siambang, the study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that recognizes the transformative potential of ecofeminist practices in advancing both ecological sustainability and social justice.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore in-depth understandings of individual experiences, particularly those of coastal women engaged in mangrove forest management. This approach enables direct interaction between the researcher and participants through in-depth interviews, yielding rich, contextual, and narrative data. Consistent with Moleong's (2022) perspective, qualitative research is employed to grasp phenomena from participants' perspectives holistically, encompassing behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions within their natural settings, and is through descriptive language.

Specifically, this research adopts a qualitative descriptive design that seeks to provide a detailed portrayal of a phenomenon within a particular sociocultural

context. This design is especially appropriate for understanding the dynamics between women and their coastal environment, particularly in relation to the sustainable management of natural resources. The data collected include verbal narratives, visual documentation, and field notes, all of which serve as key sources for analyzing women's contributions to mangrove conservation.

Through qualitative inquiry, this study positions the tradition as a cultural logic that informs women's ecological roles: care, protection, regeneration, and moral responsibility toward the environment. These cultural values align with the core tenets of ecological resilience, where stable ecosystems depend on continuous, attentive, and regenerative actions. By foregrounding women's lived ecological experience and cultural practices, qualitative methods allow these rational connections to emerge inductively rather than imposing external theoretical categories.

The key findings derive from observational data, interview narratives, and documentation that reveal three main insights: first, women in Tanjung Siambang apply ecological knowledge deeply embedded in their daily routines; second, their interaction with mangrove ecosystems is guided by ethics of care and responsibility that echo both ecofeminist and resilience frameworks; and third, social constraints—particularly patriarchal norms—shape but do not silence their ecological agency. The selection of informants employed purposive sampling, focusing on women with long-standing involvement in mangrove conservation, local environmental activists, and community members recognized for their ecological knowledge. These individuals were chosen for their direct engagement with the ecosystem and their ability to provide detailed, experience-based narratives that illuminate the cultural and gendered dimensions of environmental management.

Mangrove Forests of Tanjung Siambang, Kepulauan Riau Province, were selected as the research locus because the site represents a socially, ecologically, and culturally significant landscape experiencing ongoing environmental degradation. Its uniqueness lies in the active participation of local women in conservation efforts, the persistence of longstanding cultural values associated with environmental care, and

the mangrove's economic and ecological importance for household survival and coastal protection. This combination of environmental fragility, cultural depth, and gendered engagement makes it an ideal site for examining how ecofeminist practices materialize in everyday contexts. Interviews were conducted in natural community settings—homes, mangrove sites, and communal gathering spaces—to maintain authenticity. Each session generally lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, allowing informants to speak freely about their experiences, daily routines, and ecological beliefs. The flexible, dialogic format enabled the researcher to explore nuanced cultural meanings embedded in their practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Women's Local Knowledge in Mangrove Forest Management in Tanjung Siambang

Community knowledge of mangrove ecosystems constitutes an essential form of both social and ecological capital in supporting sustainable environmental governance. The combination of local wisdom and scientific understanding creates a more adaptive and effective framework for responding to ecological challenges in coastal regions such as Tanjung Siambang. A strong awareness and deep comprehension of mangrove dynamics are crucial foundations for ensuring long-term sustainability (Gunawan et al., 2025). Conversely, limited ecological knowledge within communities often accelerates the degradation of mangrove forests. When people do not fully understand the ecological functions and strategic importance of mangroves, unsustainable practices are more likely to persist, placing the long-term use and conservation of these ecosystems at significant risk.

In the face of limited community involvement, several women have demonstrated their participation through practices rooted in local knowledge. Consistent with ecofeminist perspectives, these women apply their environmental knowledge to safeguard the mangrove ecosystem without compromising their livelihoods. As articulated by Shiva (2005), knowledge—especially local knowledge held by women—is fundamental to the sustainable management of natural resources. Such knowledge must be acknowledged and empowered. Women engaged in forest

management not only embody their ecological knowledge through hands-on practices but also demonstrate a deep, sustained commitment to the care and preservation of the environment, reflecting both cultural understanding and a sense of responsibility toward future generations (Briggs, Krasny & Stedman, 2019).

The activities undertaken by women in Tanjung Siambang highlight the need to balance environmental conservation with the sustainable use of natural resources. Their practices reflect a lived concept of ecological engagement that bridges preservation and daily livelihood. From planting and nurturing mangrove seedlings to protecting them from human disturbances, these actions embody ecofeminist values and signal a collective ecological consciousness. When ecosystem damage occurs, these women assume responsibility and undertake efforts to restore and rehabilitate the environment.

Rooted in ecofeminist principles, these women also use mangrove resources without causing harm, transforming them into value-added products such as batik, soap, and mangrove-based coffee. While some are no longer directly involved, they continue to apply their experience and skills in the use of mangrove-derived products. Those who remain actively engaged not only contribute to environmental sustainability but also reinforce eco-based management through continued participation and innovation.

The women involved in mangrove conservation in Tanjung Siambang possess strong local values that have long been integrated into their daily lives and sociocultural systems. These values, passed down through generations, shape their worldview and define their relationship with nature, the environment, and their societal roles. One participant explained during an interview:

"The values we've held since before instill a sense of responsibility toward nature. It's not just about protecting it, but also about using it as a source of livelihood—catching fish, crabs, or processing mangrove products, and so on. The women's role in cultivating and preserving mangroves, particularly in mitigating coastal erosion, is deeply rooted in local wisdom. This knowledge should be shared through education so it can be passed on to future

generations.” (Ibu GN, 34 years old, women mangrove defender—interview 19 April 2025).

The interview highlights a profound integration of local values and environmental stewardship, where the community perceives nature not only as a resource to be protected but also as a vital source of livelihood. This dual perspective reflects a sustainable relationship with the environment, emphasizing both conservation and practical utilization, including fishing, crab harvesting, and processing of mangrove products. Crucially, the role of women in this dynamic is emphasized as central to the cultivation and preservation of mangroves, especially in their function as natural barriers against coastal erosion. This aligns with the broader understanding that indigenous ecological knowledge is a critical asset for environmental management.

Furthermore, the interviewee’s call to disseminate this knowledge through education underscores the importance of intergenerational transfer to ensure the continuity of these sustainable practices. It reflects an awareness that local wisdom is not static but must be actively maintained and adapted within changing social and environmental contexts. This perspective reinforces the value of integrating traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary educational efforts to empower future generations in both environmental protection and community resilience. This highlights how local knowledge forms both a cultural legacy and a practical guide for sustainable environmental management led by women in the coastal zone.

Women’s Involvement and Role in Mangrove Forest Management in Tanjung Siambang

Women’s participation in Tanjung Siambang emerged from a collective awareness of mangrove forest degradation and its impact on coastal livelihoods. In response, women began to take part and contribute to ecological restoration. Their involvement in managing natural resources—specifically mangroves—is essential

not only for environmental preservation but also as a means of improving household economic conditions.

Within the framework of ecofeminism, this involvement represents a shift in environmental ethics. Ecofeminism broadens the scope of environmental responsibility beyond human-to-human relationships to encompass the entire natural world. It underscores the importance of human engagement in addressing environmental crises and positions women as key actors in ecological preservation.

The role of women in mangrove management goes beyond symbolic presence; it is manifested in concrete actions. Their knowledge and skills in sustaining mangrove ecosystems—ranging from conservation to the sustainable use of natural resources—position them as vital leaders in environmental governance. Excluding them from decision-making processes around mangrove forests denies them the opportunity to shape sustainable futures.

Ecofeminist principles assert that environmental restoration requires the application of feminine values—care, nurturance, and regeneration. These principles promote responsible and restorative interactions with nature and challenge exploitative environmental practices. Ecofeminism thus serves as a critique of dominant ecological movements that reduce nature to a resource. Instead, it emphasizes the traditional roles of women as custodians of life and caretakers of the environment.

Figure 2 and 3: Women and Tanjung Siambang Community Planting the Mangrove



Source: Researcher Documentation, 2024

For the women engaged in mangrove conservation, the degradation of these ecosystems is perceived not merely as environmental harm but as a form of violence comparable to gender-based oppression (Purwanti et al., 2025). Field observations reveal that their daily activities—ranging from planting seedlings to monitoring forest health—are infused with a profound sense of responsibility and ethical commitment.

This intimate connection with mangrove ecosystems shapes their perception of ecological threats, prompting them to defend these areas not only as natural resources but as life-sustaining spaces that embody cultural and social value. Theoretical analysis through an ecofeminist lens helps to contextualize this perspective, linking the domination of nature to broader patterns of gender inequity and highlighting women's central role in fostering sustainable environmental practices.

In contrast, male participants such as Mr. MD contribute to mangrove rehabilitation through the application of technical expertise, particularly in nursery management and reforestation efforts. Field data indicate that his involvement extends beyond practical knowledge; it is guided by a conscious awareness of ecological degradation and a commitment to social equity. By integrating technical skills with community-based approaches, he actively promotes shared responsibility, demonstrating that effective environmental governance requires collaboration across gender lines. Theoretical insights from participatory environmental management further underscore the importance of inclusive strategies, demonstrating that sustainable outcomes emerge when diverse stakeholders collectively engage in ecosystem stewardship.

Importantly, Mr. MD's work illustrates a recognition of women's contributions to mangrove management, reinforcing the value of gender-inclusive practices. Interviews and participatory observation suggest that his approach, which deliberately avoids exploitative models of resource use, strengthens local

governance by fostering cooperation and mutual respect among community members. This collaboration aligns with ecofeminist theory, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of social justice and ecological sustainability, suggesting that empowering women in environmental decision-making is both ethically imperative and pragmatically beneficial for ecosystem resilience (Taha, 2024; Chiappelli, 2025).

Women's ethical and emotional engagement with mangroves, combined with men's technical expertise and commitment to inclusivity, exemplifies a model of co-stewardship that challenges conventional hierarchies of environmental governance (Treviño, 2022). This integrated perspective not only advances the protection of mangrove ecosystems in Tanjung Siambang but also provides a framework for understanding how gender, knowledge systems, and community collaboration intersect to promote long-term ecological and social resilience.

Challenges and Strategies of Women in Sustainable Mangrove Forest Management in Tanjung Siambang

Ecofeminism promotes the idea that men and women should participate equally in environmental stewardship. However, patriarchal norms remain a significant barrier. In Tanjung Siambang, gender roles continue to position men as dominant in social, economic, and cultural spheres, limiting women's access to decision-making, resources, and public participation.

Ecofeminism and conflict are closely intertwined, as the movement addresses not only environmental conservation but also resists social and gender injustice in resource management. In the case of mangroves, conflicts arise from competing interests, systemic discrimination, and the exclusion of women from governance. These conflicts present challenges to inclusive participation.

A major obstacle in Tanjung Siambang is the widespread lack of environmental awareness and responsibility among residents. Many locals continue

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to cut down mangroves for personal use without considering the long-term ecological consequences. This behavior undermines collective efforts toward sustainable management.

Figure 4: Mangrove Seedling Cultivation by Women in Tanjung Siambang



Source: Researcher Documentation, 2024

One key figure, Mrs. SY, has actively encouraged other women to get involved in mangrove stewardship. Yet, her efforts are hindered by a lack of interest and a preference for immediate benefits over long-term sustainability. This apathy poses a challenge to the development of a broader environmental movement. The persistence of knowledge gaps and degraded ecosystems threatens the future of mangrove conservation.

Despite these setbacks, Mrs. SY and Mrs. KY remain actively engaged. They have attempted to raise ecological awareness by visiting households and educating local women about the importance of mangroves. However, they report that many women still opt for short-term economic opportunities rather than engaging with environmental issues. This illustrates that ecological consciousness is not uniformly shared among women.

Their movement, grounded in ecofeminist principles, represents a deliberate and strategic effort to empower women and promote autonomy through environmental engagement. Their leadership in mangrove management not only exemplifies best practices but also offers opportunities to disseminate environmental knowledge to other women in the community. As such, they serve not only as role models but as catalysts for broader collective action.

In this context, their actions aim to drive social transformation. By challenging patriarchal norms and promoting gender awareness, they seek to cultivate a more equitable and sustainable community. The promotion of education and empowerment is seen as a pathway through which both women and men can embrace ecofeminist values and contribute to the stewardship of their shared environment.

CONCLUSION

Women's involvement in mangrove forest management in Tanjung Siambang is crucial to preserving and sustaining mangrove ecosystems, particularly through the application of local knowledge and traditional practices. These women are directly engaged in various aspects of mangrove management, including planting activities, ecosystem rehabilitation, and the responsible use of mangrove resources.

Through the lens of ecofeminism, a strong connection can be drawn between the exploitation of nature—such as mangrove degradation—and the lack of ecological awareness surrounding mangrove ecosystems. Adopting an ecofeminist approach offers a framework that emphasizes ecological balance, social justice, and the sustainable use of natural resources in mangrove management.

Ecofeminism also provides a comprehensive understanding of women's involvement in managing mangrove forests. In the case of Tanjung Siambang, there is a need for a shift in community perspectives—moving away from viewing women and environmental activists as mere auxiliaries to recognizing them as key actors in the protection and stewardship of mangrove ecosystems. Ecofeminist perspectives

underscore the dual goal of mangrove conservation and gender equality. They highlight how the domination of women parallels environmental degradation and advocate for women's rights through their active participation in resource management.

In practice, ecofeminism is embodied in social movements worldwide, where women are at the forefront of resisting the exploitation of natural resources. This study is limited by its focus on a single community in Tanjung Siambang, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other mangrove ecosystems or cultural contexts. Additionally, the research primarily emphasizes women's roles in mangrove management from an ecofeminist perspective, potentially overlooking other intersecting social, economic, and political factors that influence resource governance.

Future research could expand comparative analyses across multiple coastal communities to examine how diverse cultural practices and gender dynamics shape mangrove conservation. Investigating the long-term ecological impacts of women-led management initiatives and exploring the integration of local and scientific knowledge systems could further enhance understanding of sustainable mangrove stewardship and inform broader environmental policy and gender-inclusive conservation strategies.

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