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## Epistemic Justice in the Blue Economy: Recognizing Coastal Women's Knowledge for Inclusive and Sustainable Ocean Development

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Anindya Aryu Inayati<sup>1</sup>,

Richa Angkita Mulyawisdawati<sup>2</sup>

UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia<sup>1</sup>, STEBI Al-Muhsin Yogyakarta, Indonesia<sup>2</sup>

Email: [anindya.aryu.inayati@uingusdur.ac.id](mailto:anindya.aryu.inayati@uingusdur.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [mulyawisdawati205@gmail.com](mailto:mulyawisdawati205@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>

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#### Corresponding Author:

Name: Anindya Aryu Inayati

E-mail:

[anindya.aryu.inayati@uingusdur.ac.id](mailto:anindya.aryu.inayati@uingusdur.ac.id)

### Abstract

*Women are central to sustaining the blue economy, yet their ecological knowledge is often marginalized in coastal development policies. This exclusion reflects a form of epistemic injustice, revealing a sharp contradiction between women's vital role in ecological sustainability and the failure of policy frameworks to acknowledge their contributions. This study seeks to analyze the forms of epistemic injustice experienced by coastal women and the sustainable practices they pursue, while proposing an alternative and more inclusive framework grounded in the principles of Islamic economic. This study employs a qualitative critical-interpretive approach using a systematic review of academic literature, policy documents, and case studies from coastal communities engaged in Blue Economy initiatives. Data are thematically analyzed to uncover patterns of epistemic injustice, the marginalization of women's knowledge systems, and opportunities for more inclusive and sustainable ocean governance. Based on field data, coastal women experience multiple forms of epistemic injustice, ranging from the undermining of their credibility when sharing knowledge, difficulties in articulating their lived experiences, to limited participation in decision-making processes. These findings highlight that, despite their vital contributions to marine resource management and the Blue Economy, their knowledge and voices remain systematically marginalized by social structures and local power hierarchies. In Islamic economics, epistemic justice in the blue economy reflects al-'adl (justice) and al-musāwah (equality), ensuring that local knowledge especially women's experiences are recognized and taken into account in policy-making. This study concludes that coastal women face systemic epistemic injustice in the Blue Economy, implying the urgent need for gender-responsive and Sharia-based frameworks that recognize their knowledge to achieve al-maslahah and truly just maritime development. Sustainable ocean governance cannot be achieved without centering women's knowledge and agency as a foundation of epistemic justice in the Blue Economy.*

## Introduction

Enhancing the economics and development of coastal regions is the foundation for harmony with natural features (Rahmiyati & Rachmawati, 2023). The sustainable use of marine resources, or the "blue economy," has drawn more attention recently due to its potential to improve the financial well-being of coastal communities (Rizky et al., 2025). Our oceans are experiencing a sharp acceleration of economic development.(Jouffray et al., 2020) Oceans, which were once vast and isolated areas primarily used by commercial fishing and transportation ships, are now the focus of an incredible array of new actors and companies.(Bennett et al., 2020) The ocean's resources are progressively being developed by energy prospectors, biotechnology firms, deep-sea mining operations, and fishing and aquaculture businesses, among others.

The Blue Economy is a framework for governance as well as an economic model that calls for close consideration of power relations and geographical rationalities (Choi, 2017). Conflicts over resource usage and management may result from the Blue Economy's emphasis on commercial methods that control access to marine areas (Satizábal et al., 2020). This emphasizes the necessity of critically analyzing the operationalization of Blue Economy projects to make sure they don't reinforce current disparities or ignore local communities' perspectives (Voyer et al., 2022).

In this regard, the economic prosperity of coastal communities has benefited greatly from the incorporation of traditional knowledge into Blue Economy methods. Utilizing local knowledge can lead to improved resource management and the creation of new business prospects (Arzaman et al., 2022). Women's involvement, especially in small-scale fisheries (SSF) management, is a crucial element of sustainability and social fairness in the Blue Economy (Rizky et al., 2025). The advantage of engaging women's perspectives in governance frameworks, arguing that performing so will strengthen marine resource management and advance "blue justice," which aims to overcome social injustices in ocean governance (Chambon et al., 2024). Furthermore, women's contributions to the Blue Economy can be further increased by providing them with specialized training and financial resources, which will support inclusive growth (Rizky et al., 2025). So that in the context of epistemic justice, it means ensuring that all groups, including those who are often marginalized, such as coastal women, are recognized and valued for their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives in decision-making or development processes.

A study conducted by Alharthi and Hanif that the Blue Economy is predicted to contribute between \$3 trillion and \$5 trillion a year to worldwide economy through industries like tourism and fishing (Alharthi & Hanif, 2020). This socioeconomic potential emphasizes how essential it is to involve women in decision-making in order to optimize the advantages of marine resources (Ekstedt et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, there are number research gaps about the Blue Economy's financial. The general objective of this study is to enhance the findings of previous research, and specifically to answer the research questions that have not yet been addressed by prior studies. It urgently aims to examine how Blue Economy programs and initiatives frequently ignore or undervalue the traditional and local knowledge systems of coastal women and also to explore how ocean governance can use the knowledge systems of coastal women to promote environmental

sustainability and inclusivity.

Lastly, The Blue Economy can operate in harmony with inclusive ocean development if the knowledge of coastal women is recognized. It is a critical call to change the way we think about marine development, by placing social justice and the recognition of marginalized knowledge at the core of true sustainability. This critique challenges the dominant perspectives in the Blue Economy, which often focus on technology, large-scale investment, and economic growth while neglecting aspects of social justice. The message conveyed is that marine economic development will not be truly sustainable or inclusive without considering knowledge justice.

## **Literature Review**

Sustainable ocean governance is realized when women's knowledge and agency are placed at the heart of the Blue Economy as a foundation of epistemic justice. The key concept of this research include the following:

### **1. Blue Economic Justice**

The promise of the blue economy as a pathway to sustainable ocean development is undermined when economic gains are concentrated in the hands of a few, while coastal communities, the true custodians of marine ecosystems remain marginalized (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2022). Blue Justice and its economic dimension, blue economic justice, emerge as critical frameworks to ensure that ocean governance not only pursues growth but also fairness, inclusivity, and resilience.

Blue justice emerged as a critical response to blue economy agendas that often emphasize marine economic growth while neglecting the rights of coastal communities, particularly small-scale fishers, women, and other marginalized groups (Germond-Duret et al., 2023; Morrissey, 2023). It highlights the importance of fairness in benefit distribution, the recognition of local knowledge, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Within this broader framework, Blue Economic Justice provides a more specific focus on economic dimensions, addressing issues such as fair market access, protection of fishers' prices, equitable distribution of profits, and the strengthening of sustainable livelihoods for coastal communities. While Blue Justice serves as an overarching concept encompassing social, political, epistemic, and environmental dimensions of justice, Blue Economic Justice ensures that the economic benefits of the Blue Economy are not captured solely by large industries but are shared inclusively to enhance the well-being and resilience of local communities.

The concept of Blue Justice emphasizes the need to amplify the voices of small-scale fisheries in global ocean agendas. Drawing on Fricker's framework of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2017), such exclusion manifests in two forms: testimonial injustice, when credibility is denied due to social prejudice, and hermeneutical injustice, when experiences cannot be adequately expressed or understood because of the absence of appropriate concepts or language (Schreiber et al., 2022). In the context of coastal women, epistemic blue justice arises when their knowledge and lived experiences of marine ecosystems are excluded from Blue Economy agendas. Their voices are often dismissed not because of a lack of relevance, but due to biases against their social status, reliance on local wisdom, or traditional practices. Meanwhile,

powerful actors such as large industries or academics are granted excessive credibility, leaving coastal women with limited participation in decision-making, pressured to conform to negative stereotypes, and increasingly doubtful of their own knowledge (Blythe et al., 2023). This situation often evolves into hermeneutical injustice, as their experiences are absent from the dominant policy language and development narratives of ocean governance. Without access to the institutions that shape knowledge—such as policy documents, government agendas, or academic publications—their perspectives remain marginalized.

Addressing this gap requires the creation of new and widely recognized vocabularies, such as blue justice, that can articulate their experiences of injustice (Bennett et al., 2020). Such efforts must be driven by collaboration among researchers, activists, and coastal women's communities to ensure their voices are meaningfully included in global conversations on the future of the oceans.

## **2. Justice in Islamic Economics**

Establishing justice was, in fact, the central mission entrusted to all God's messengers (Qur'an 57:25). The Qur'an identifies the absence of justice as a major cause of societal decline and fragmentation (20:111) and cautions that a community cannot sustain peace and harmony if injustice corrupts the faith of its people. Through these and other verses, the Qur'an makes it clear that justice is an absolute moral imperative, essential to the very identity of a Muslim society. Without justice permeating every aspect of life, such a society cannot authentically embody the spirit of Islam (Chapra, 2014).

The Qur'anic imperative of justice is reinforced in the Prophet's Sunnah, which describes the absence of justice as "absolute darkness" in the Hereafter—a reflection of the injustices perpetuated in this world. Injustice not only inflicts individual suffering but also fuels social conflict, crime, and the erosion of brotherhood and solidarity, which constitute the core ethos of Islam (Qur'an 3:103–105). Consequently, it obstructs development, entrenches poverty, and exacerbates human problems. Muslim scholars across centuries have emphasized this imperative: al-Mawardi (d. 1058) warned that nothing destroys the world and human conscience faster than injustice; Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) categorically prohibited injustice toward anyone, regardless of identity; and Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) placed justice at the heart of his philosophy of history, asserting that no society can achieve or sustain development without it. This intellectual continuity affirms justice as not merely a moral principle but the essential foundation of civilization itself.

In the Islamic perspective, the justice demanded by the Qur'an is understood within the framework of ultimate success in the Hereafter. This teleological dimension underscores that any violation of divine law inherently constitutes injustice, as it diverts human beings from their true purpose of attaining paradise and instead subjects them to the possibility of hellfire should they fail to attain God's forgiveness (Askari, 2020). Acts of injustice may also incur worldly consequences, though such suffering remains incomparable to the ultimate repercussions in the Hereafter. Philosophically, this renders the Islamic conception of justice both teleological and utilitarian, as it seeks the greatest benefit for the widest number of people, with an orientation that transcends worldly life toward eternal salvation (Choudhury, 2024a). In line with this vision, the *sharī'ah* places the protection of humanity's religious and spiritual

dimension—*ḥifẓ al-dīn*—as its foremost objective, while all other aims are directed toward supporting this overarching goal. Accordingly, any activity, including economic endeavors, can only be deemed “just” if it meaningfully contributes to the realization of the *maqāṣid*, whether at the micro or macro level. Conversely, activities that divert humanity from the *maqāṣid* stand in direct contradiction to the very principle of justice (Javaid & Hassan, 2013).

Islam firmly prohibits economic activities rooted in *riba* (usury), *gharar* (excessive uncertainty), and *maisir* (gambling). These prohibitions are intended to channel investment into the real sector, thereby fostering genuinely productive activities. Within Islamic teachings, justice and the eradication of exploitation occupy a central position. Justice serves as the foundation for maintaining moral order grounded in Islamic values. In the economic domain, this principle implies that wealth should not be concentrated solely among the affluent but must be distributed fairly so that it also reaches and empowers the vulnerable (Syibly & Purwanto, 2021). It is this very conception of justice that becomes the key pillar for shaping an inclusive economy, where prosperity is shared more equitably across society.

### 3. Previous Research

A major issue is the limited inclusion of women's viewpoints in wider conversations around the Blue Economy. Despite the fact that industries like tourism, aquaculture, and fishing are essential to the Blue Economy, there is still a lack of critical engagement with social equality, particularly for women. (Harris & Thompson, 2023) This inequality affects the comprehension of how women's involvement in these fields might improve social fairness for inclusive and sustainable ocean development.

Rahmiyati, et al (2023) investigated that coastal women have not contributed to the implementation of the blue economy. Some of the challenges are the fact that many fishermen's wives, who are producers, still lack proper competence, mainly about the blue economy. (Rahmiyati & Rachmawati, 2023) A study also found that women contribute significantly to the coastal economy, yet through activities that are frequently "invisible." For example, in the fishing industry, where women are thought to contribute for almost half of the workforce, their contributions are frequently ignored, underpaid, or unrecognized. (Kripa et al., 2019) Again, another research which is taken in India examined that numerous coastal resources there have the potential to increase women's employment and Blue Economy participation. Nonetheless, the women's role in coastal activities that received priority under the Blue Economy framework is quite low. Women typically engage in less profitable, secondary, and informal Blue Economy activities. (Reis-Filho et al., 2024)

Furthermore, the economic contributions of women in the Blue Economy are not well supported yet by empirical data. Although some research has looked into the broad advantages of gender equality (Rizky et al., 2025), it frequently ignores how these advantages are particularly apparent in the Blue Economy. (Diachkova & Kontoboitseva, 2022) It emphasizes how important is to conduct studies that specifically connect the epistemic justice with coastal women equality in the framework of the Blue Economy for the sustainable ocean development.

### Research Methods

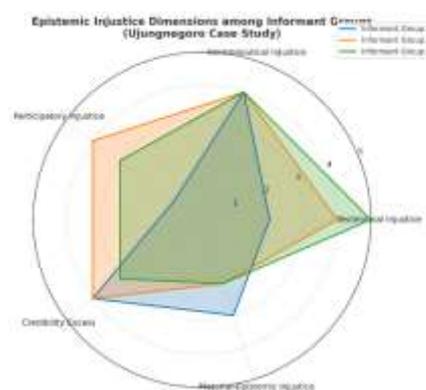
This study employs a qualitative research design with a critical-interpretive approach. In

qualitative research, concepts, viewpoints, or experiences are understood through the collection and analysis of nonnumerical data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It can be applied to produce fresh concepts and obtain in-depth understanding of issues. It used to examine how Blue Economy programs and initiatives frequently ignore or undervalue the traditional and local knowledge systems of coastal women and also to explore how ocean governance can use the knowledge systems of coastal women to promote environmental sustainability and inclusivity. For the data collecting methods, the authors used a systematic review of academic literature, policy documents, and reports related to the Blue Economy, gender, and epistemic justice, and also case study approach. Case studies from coastal communities where Blue Economy initiatives have been implemented are chosen, with an emphasis on situations where women are heavily involved in the management of marine resources. To find trends pertaining to epistemic injustice, the undervaluation of women's expertise, and chances for inclusivity in the Blue Economy, the data will be coded and subjected to thematic analysis. To identify underlying power dynamics and knowledge hierarchies, policy documents and project reports will be examined.

## Result and Discussion

### Epistemic Injustice Experienced By Coastal Women

Based on field data, coastal women experience various forms of epistemic injustice, ranging from the undermining of their credibility when conveying knowledge, difficulties in finding adequate language to articulate their experiences, to limited opportunities for participation in decision-making processes. These findings underscore that, despite their vital role in managing marine resources and contributing to the Blue Economy, their knowledge and voices are often marginalized by prevailing social structures and local power hierarchies. For example, we have conducted in-depth interviews with 3 groups of coastal women informants in Ujungnegoro, Central Java. The results of our analysis can be illustrated as shown in the following diagram:



The interviews reveal three distinct yet interconnected patterns of epistemic injustice experienced by coastal women. Informant Group 1 emphasized testimonial injustice, where women's credibility was frequently undermined when they attempted to share ecological knowledge or fishing practices. Their contributions were often dismissed or considered less valid compared to men's experiences, even though women possess in-depth knowledge of post-harvest management and coastal ecosystems.

Meanwhile, Informant Group 2 highlighted hermeneutical injustice. They reported difficulties in expressing their lived experiences, particularly concerning environmental degradation and economic pressures, due to the absence of appropriate linguistic, cultural, or institutional frameworks. As a result, their knowledge was rendered invisible in formal discussions, leaving their ecological insights unrecognized and their economic struggles inadequately represented.

Lastly, Informant Group 3 reflected participatory injustice, where structural and cultural barriers limited their involvement in community decision-making processes. Despite their significant role in sustaining household economies and supporting marine-based livelihoods, women were rarely invited to deliberations on coastal resource management or Blue Economy initiatives. Their exclusion not only diminished their agency but also reinforced the dominance of male-centered power hierarchies.

Taken together, these findings indicate that coastal women, while integral to ecological sustainability and economic resilience, remain systematically marginalized through overlapping forms of epistemic injustice. This structural exclusion hinders the realization of inclusive development within the framework of the Blue Economy.

Within the framework of Islamic economics, such injustices reflect a violation of the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*, particularly in relation to justice (*al-‘adl*), inclusivity (*musyārahah*), and the ethical use of knowledge (*‘ilm*) (Hashem, 2024). Since Islamic economics is not limited to the prohibition of *riba*, *gharar*, and *maisir*, but is essentially oriented toward realizing the common good (*al-maslahah*), it demands the recognition of marginalized voices and the equitable distribution of both material and epistemic resources (Choudhury, 2024b). Hence, ensuring that coastal women’s knowledge and participation are fully acknowledged is not merely a matter of social equity, but a theological and teleological imperative in Islam. Only through such recognition can the Islamic economic paradigm contribute to the realization of an inclusive economy grounded in the *maqāṣid* framework.

### **Coastal Women’s, Inclusivity and Sustainable Blue Economic Development**

The maritime economic practices of coastal women can be strongly correlated with the principles of Islamic economics, particularly in advancing a sustainable blue economy. Within Islamic economic thought, justice (*al-‘adl*) and the realization of public interest (*maslahah*) are fundamental objectives that guide all forms of economic activity. Coastal women’s engagement in resource management, seafood processing, and environmentally conscious practices reflects these principles, as their work not only generates income but also safeguards marine ecosystems for future generations (Rizky et al., 2025).

From the perspective of *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*, the active participation of coastal women in maritime economies contributes to the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-naḥs*), the preservation of wealth (*ḥifẓ al-māl*), and the safeguarding of the environment as part of the broader trust (*amānah*) bestowed upon humankind. By ensuring that economic benefits are not concentrated among elites but instead distributed more equitably within the community, their practices embody the Qur’anic injunction that wealth should not “circulate only among the rich” (Qur’an 59:7).

Consequently, the empowerment of coastal women aligns with the Islamic vision of an

inclusive and sustainable economic order. Their roles in balancing ecological stewardship, social justice, and economic productivity demonstrate how Islamic economics and the blue economy framework can mutually reinforce one another. In this way, the integration of women's maritime practices into policy and development agendas not only strengthens local livelihoods but also advances a model of growth that is ethically grounded, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable (Reis-Filho et al., 2024).

One meaningful step toward building truly inclusive and sustainable blue economic development is by grounding it in Islamic economic values, where justice (*'adl*), balance (*tawazun*), and public welfare (*maslahah*) are placed at the heart of economic governance. These principles offer not only an ethical compass but also a participatory framework that can help address persistent challenges such as regional inequality, the marginalization of vulnerable groups, and structural imbalances in policymaking. When translated into practice, they can inspire policies that distribute resources more fairly, strengthen the resilience of underdeveloped regions, and encourage development programs that are both just and inclusive. Practical tools such as *zakat*, productive *waqf*, and partnership-based financing models like *mudharabah* and *musyarakah* provide concrete ways to expand economic opportunities for those most in need. In this sense, internalizing Islamic economic values should be seen not simply as a moral complement, but as a foundational approach to shaping an economy that is inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the common good (Ali et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSION

The lived experiences of coastal women reveal that epistemic injustices—testimonial, hermeneutical, and participatory—systematically undermine their credibility, visibility, and agency within the framework of the Blue Economy, despite their central role in sustaining household livelihoods and ecological resilience. Addressing these forms of marginalization requires more than socio-economic reform; it necessitates grounding development strategies in Islamic economic principles that prioritize justice (*al-'adl*), inclusivity (*musyarakah*), and the realization of public welfare (*al-maslahah*). By embedding women's ecological knowledge and economic practices within the *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* framework, sustainable blue economic development can transcend mere productivity and become an ethically grounded model of growth that safeguards life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), preserves wealth (*ḥifẓ al-māl*), and ensures environmental stewardship as a divine trust (*amānah*). Such an approach not only challenges entrenched power hierarchies but also advances a participatory, equitable, and resilient economic order that aligns with both Islamic teleology and the global pursuit of inclusive sustainability.

These findings highlight the need for policy frameworks that actively integrate coastal women's ecological knowledge and economic practices into Blue Economy governance. Grounding policies in Islamic economic values of justice (*al-'adl*), balance (*tawazun*), and public welfare (*maslahah*) can foster inclusive decision-making, ensure equitable resource distribution, and strengthen community resilience. Practical instruments such as *zakat*, productive *waqf*, and partnership-based financing (*mudharabah*, *musyarakah*) should be mobilized to expand women's access to capital, amplify their agency, and embed ethical sustainability in maritime development strategies.

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