

Economy Reimagined: Development through Sustainability and Inclusion

Noranita Kasih

UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, Indonesia. E-mail: 240105020178@mhs.uin-antasari.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, as the climate crisis has become major topic in global discourses, green economy emerged as a revolutionary approach for balancing economic transformation with environmental responsibility. Although worldwide awareness of this idea has accelerated, recent discussions on green economy framework often overlooks the role of women and girls empowerment (Sustainable Development Goal 5) in enabling long-term resilience. The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of gender-equal development strategies in enhancing perseverance and innovation in environmentally conscious economic growth. Through integrative, literature-based analysis across relevant fields, this study highlights the connection between innovation and resilience within the green economy and the principles of sustainable development, particularly those promoting women's and girls' empowerment. In many Muslim-majority contexts, interpretations of Islamic teachings have historically constrained women's participation in economic spheres. This paper argues that reinterpreting gender equality through an Islamic feminist lens can strengthen women's contribution to the green economy by expanding access, participation, and leadership in sustainable sectors. It identifies three key mechanisms: ethical reinterpretation of Islamic teachings, recognizing women's agency through economic empowerment, as well as resilient transformation through gender-inclusive development aligned with SDG 5 and green economy principles.

Introduction

As the world faces heightened effects of climate change and global warming in recent years, which threaten ecosystems, economies, and human well-being alike, the dire need for a new concept of growth has never been more urgent. The United Nations Environment Programme (2023) reports that environmental degradation currently costs the global economy up to 6% of its GDP each year, while unchecked climate change could push an additional 130 million people into poverty by 2030 (World Bank, 2023). In response to these challenges, the green economy emerges as a revolutionary approach that aims to redefine progress by giving equal weight to economic transformation and environmental responsibility. Other than promoting sustainability and resource efficiency, this new model of development also offers what scholars describe as a “double dividend”—a term that refers to simultaneous gains in economic growth and environmental conservation. Eventhough the consequences of these global shifts reach every corner of society, they manifest unevenly across gender and socioeconomic lines. This disparity is particularly evident in the ways environmental and economic pressures intensify existing gender inequalities, making the question of inclusion central to any sustainable development.

Despite growing global awareness of the green economy's potential, gender equality remains underrecognized as a key driver of sustainable and inclusive growth within both

policy design and implementation. Beyond the fact that climate change, especially those caused by economic activities, disproportionately affects women and girls, empowering them—as emphasized in Sustainable Development Goal 5—is crucial for fostering resilience and innovation (Ojaghlo et al., 2023; UN Women, 2023). Yet, in many Muslim-majority contexts, traditional interpretations of Islamic teachings have restricted women's participation in economic decision-making, often sidelining their potential contributions to emerging green sectors. Islamic feminism, however, offers an alternative framework that reinterprets these teachings in ways consistent with Islam's ethical principles of justice and equality—aligning religious values with the goals of sustainable, environmentally conscious economic transformation.

While existing studies on sustainable development goals often emphasize environmental and policy dimensions, there remains limited scholarship that explores the intersection of gender equality, the green economy, and the role of Islamic teachings. By centering on the socio-cultural aspects of resilience, this paper aims to analyze how women-empowering development frameworks can amplify innovation and resilience within the broader context of the green economy. This objective is pursued through an integrative, literature-based approach that draws insights from multiple disciplines, including economics, environmental studies, and Islamic thought. Furthermore, by employing Islamic feminist theory as a conceptual lens, this paper seeks to offer a culturally grounded and normative framework for reimagining inclusive and environmentally responsible growth.

The central argument of this paper posits that enhancing women's participation in the green economy—thereby strengthening the foundations of innovation and resilience in sustainable development—can be achieved through reinterpreting gender inclusivity from an Islamic feminist perspective. To begin with, a moral reevaluation of Islamic doctrine reframes economic participation as a shared ethical obligation, challenging patriarchal interpretations that constrain women's agency. In addition, empowering women by recognizing their economic autonomy enables a more equitable distribution of skills, creativity, and decision-making power within green industries. Finally, promoting resilient change through gender-equal economic development principles ensures that progress toward sustainable growth aligns with the goals of the green economy, SDG 5, and the foundational values of Islamic feminism.

The conceptual scope of this paper is outlined as follows. It focuses on the interconnection between the green economy, sustainable development, and gender equality within Muslim-majority contexts. The subsequent section develops the theoretical integration between Islamic feminist thought and environmentally responsible economic growth. Following that, the paper discusses broader implications for policy and practice, emphasizing gender-inclusive sustainability as a framework for fostering resilience. Lastly, it concludes with reflections on how culturally grounded gender perspectives can enrich global dialogues on innovation, adaptability, and sustainable transformation.

Research Methods

This study adopts an integrative, literature-based approach designed to explore the theoretical synthesis between development and resilience within the framework of the green economy, Sustainable Development Goal 5 (gender equality), and Islamic feminist thought. This conceptual approach is appropriate because it allows the researcher to examine how gender-inclusive perspectives—particularly those rooted in Islamic

feminism—can strengthen the social and ethical foundations of sustainable economic transformation. Rather than addressing a single case or dataset, this method emphasizes the interpretation, comparison, and integration of insights across disciplines such as economics, environmental studies, and Islamic studies. To ensure analytical precision, the following section outlines the criteria for literature selection and thematic analysis.

The literature analyzed in this study consists of peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, and scholarly books addressing the intersections of the green economy, gender equality, and Islamic feminism. To ensure analytical rigor and reliability, the sources were selected based on their relevance to the central focus of this paper and contribution to both theoretical discussions and practical applications. The analysis centered on identifying recurring notions of sustainability and empowerment, comparing interpretations of gender roles within Islamic feminist thought, and synthesizing cross-disciplinary insights to illuminate the conceptual relationship between inclusivity and economic resilience. Subsequently, the reviewed works were organized into three thematic mechanisms—ethical reinterpretation, economic empowerment, and resilient transformation—which collectively constitute the conceptual foundation of this paper’s analytical framework.

Results

A. Ethical Reinterpretation

Historically, Islam granted women considerable economic rights and autonomy, as represented by Khadija bint Khuwaylid, the Prophet Muhammad’s wife and a successful businesswoman. Nonetheless, patriarchal cultural and societal structures, as well as traditional interpretations of Islamic law have often obscured or restricted these rights. In a lot of cases, women’s economic roles have been positioned as secondary to their domestic responsibilities (Fitria, 2025). Furthermore, cultural norms and familial expectations have sometimes discouraged or even prohibited women from entering the workforce, often under the guise of religious obedience. This has produced a double burden for women, and cause significant economic insecurity—restricting their financial independence and restraining their capacity to contribute to broader sustainable development efforts. Within this context, Islamic feminism emerges as a critical framework to challenge and reinterpret these limiting narratives.

Islamic feminism tackles these issues by revisiting the ethical foundations of Islamic theology. This religiously grounded, gender-inclusive perspective centers it reinterpretation of Islamic texts on the principles of tauhid (divine unity) and khilafah (stewardship), which establish that all human beings, regardless of gender are equal moral agents entrusted with the care of the Earth by God (Malik et al., 2025; Barlas, 2002). By returning to these fundamental concepts, Islamic feminist scholars argue that gender equality is not an imported ideology from the West but an intrinsic part of Islamic belief. This approach provides the theological justification for women’s active participation in economic life, aligning faith-based values with the goals of inclusivity and sustainability.

Further complementing theological reinterpretation, the values of ‘adl (justice) and maslahah (collective welfare) act as guiding principles for reform. These concepts encourage the creation of social systems and economic policies that serve the welfare of all members of society rather than reinforcing strict gender hierarchies (Ramadhania, 2025). On this matter, public disseminations of Islamic feminist

thought—especially the historical examples of women’s economic participation during Prophet Muhammad’s time—plays an important role in reshaping community perceptions by raising awareness. Such initiative supports a broader ethical transformation that recognizes women’s economic agency as a form of worship and stewardship. While ethical reinterpretation lays the faith-based understructure, the next mechanism, economic empowerment, translates these values into concrete participation and agency.

B. Economic Empowerment

In Indonesia, gender inequality in economic participation remains prevalent, with an average pay gap of around 23% (UN Women Asia & the Pacific, 2020). Furthermore, women are disproportionately represented in low-paid informal sectors, which are often characterized by job insecurity, poor working condition, limited access to legal protection, and minimal opportunities for financial advancement. According to the International Labour Organization (2023), approximately 58% of women’s work globally takes place in the informal sector—where benefits and social protections are scarce. Apart from that, women are more likely to occupy the lowest tiers of informal economic hierarchies, both in terms of pay and authority. Not only disproportionate pay, these disparities also reflect deep structural, social, and cultural obstacles that restrict women’s access to formal and higher-paying sectors.

These imbalances not only constrains women’s financial independence, but also impact economic growth, resilience and sustainability. In the context of green economy, it lose out on valuable insights that could strenghten environmentally conscious innovation, leadership diversity, more inclusive forms of growth, as well as limits collective resilience. This persistent inequality also undermines the stability of the labor force and the inclusiveness of economic decision-making. Therefore, addressing these systemic disparity requires transformative approaches that move beyond surface-level reforms.

Achieving gender equality in economic systems requires more than legal reform, it also demands structural revolution grounded in equity and shared opportunity. In this study, empowerment refers to ensuring women’s access to fair work opportunities, acknowledgement of their unpaid labor, and meaningful participation in economic decision-making. Policies that encourage fair wages, women’s representation in both economic and political spheres, and gender-sensitive economic planning are essential to building an economy that truly serves all (OECD, 2025; World Economic Forum, 2023). Within the framework of Islamic feminism, these goals align with the principles of ‘adl (justice) and maslahah (public welfare), reinforcing a shared ethical responsibility to pursue inclusive and sustainable development.

C. Resilient Transformation

Resilient transformation within green economics paradigm refers to a fundamental and holistic metamorphosis of systems toward models that prioritize public welfare and collective well-being above mere profit. It emphasizes adaptability, equity, and long-term sustainability as the foundation of development. Rooted in gender equality and inclusive growth, this transformation recognizes that a just and resilient economy must integrate the needs and contributions of all members of society. In this sense, other than surviving crises, resilience is also about evolving through ethical, inclusive, and sustainable principles that ensure no one is left behind. Building upon this foundation, the active inclusion of women emerges as a critical driver in translating these values into tangible social and economic progress.

When women's participation in the green economy expands and supported by the ethical framework of Islamic feminism, it leads to greater representation in decision-making spaces and more inclusive, equitable policymaking. Such participation broadens perspectives in economic planning and contributes to provisions that better address the needs of diverse communities (OECD, 2014). This inclusivity, in turn, strengthens societies' ability to withstand and recover from economic and environmental shocks, fostering both social and ecological perseverance. Hence, gender-inclusive development is not only a moral obligation, but also a practical pathway toward sustainable and adaptive economies. This interconnectedness between ethics, participation, and resilience highlights that genuine transformation must also be rooted in shared spiritual and moral commitments.

A truly resilient transformation is one that places women's empowerment—guided by the Islamic feminist principles of *tawhid* (divine unity) and *'adl* (justice)—at the heart of economic recovery and environmental care. In alignment with SDG 5 and the Islamic values of *khilafah* (stewardship) and *maslahah* (collective welfare), this vision reimagines growth as a shared responsibility to sustain both people and the planet. By bridging spiritual teachings, gender equality, and sustainability, it establishes a framework of resilience grounded in policy, moral and social transformation. Such a model envisions progress that is enduring, compassionate, and inclusive—ensuring that resilience is both a human and ecological achievement. Together, these three mechanisms demonstrate how the integration of Islamic feminist ethics within the green economy framework promotes both gender equality and sustainable development. The following discussion will further elaborate on how these conceptual linkages contribute to a more inclusive understanding of resilience and outlines their broader implications for theory, policy, and practice in advancing gender-responsive green economy development.

Discussion

This study set out to explore the role of gender-equal development strategies in strengthening perseverance and innovation in environmentally conscious economic growth, particularly within Islamic contexts. Through a literature-based analysis, it identified three key mechanisms: ethical reinterpretation of Islamic teachings, women's economic empowerment, and resilient transformation. They demonstrate the transformative potential of gender-inclusive sustainability. The findings suggest that Islamic feminist ethics can serve as both a moral and practical framework for achieving equitable participation in the green economy. These insights reinforce the main argument that gender equality is not merely an ethical concern, but a structural necessity for fostering long-term transformation and perseverance in sustainable development. This synthesis thus places gender inclusivity as a foundation of both ethical reform and economical adaptability.

These findings align with previous research highlighting the connection between gender equality and sustainable growth. However, this paper extends existing scholarship by situating these discussions within an Islamic ethical framework by demonstrating how concepts such as *tawhid*, *khilafah*, *'adl*, and *maslahah* can enhance the moral legitimacy of inclusive development policies in Muslim societies. Unlike many sustainability studies that address environmental and economic factors separately, this analysis integrates socio-cultural and ethical perspectives, offering a more comprehensive understanding of

resilience in the green economy. By integrating socio-cultural and ethical dimensions, this analysis bridges the gap between moral reasoning and structural policy design. In doing so, it underlines that sustainability, when grounded in justice and spiritual stewardship, transcends environmental and economic boundaries and becomes a holistic societal endeavor.

The implications of this study are twofold. For policymakers, it emphasizes the importance of embedding gender inclusivity in green economic planning, ensuring that women's contributions are integrated at every level of decision-making. For Muslim-majority societies, it suggests that faith-based ethics can harmonize with global sustainability agendas such as the SDGs rather than contradict them. Culturally, this perspective encourages a reconnection with Islamic values as a living source of social innovation, justice, and environmental care. Therefore, by aligning gender equality with spiritual and developmental objectives, Islamic feminism provides a pathway for transforming sustainability into a shared spiritual and civic responsibility.

This study is conceptual in nature and thus limited by the absence of empirical validation. Future research could examine how the proposed mechanisms—ethical reinterpretation, economic empowerment, and resilient transformation manifest in real-world policy or community contexts. Comparative studies across Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority nations could also provide valuable insights into the cultural adaptability of these frameworks. Despite these limitations, the conceptual model proposed here establishes a foundation for further exploration, inviting interdisciplinary dialogue on how gender-inclusive sustainability can evolve as both a spiritual commitment and a developmental imperative.

Conclusion

This paper aims to examine the role of gender inclusive development strategies in strengthening resilient and transformation within green economic growth. The analysis revealed the potential of integrating Islamic feminist ethics into the green economy framework as a means of promoting both gender equality and sustainable development. This finding is particularly significant because women are often among the groups most affected by environmental degradation and economic inequality—issues that are deeply interconnected. Addressing these challenges through inclusive and ethically grounded development not only advances equity but also strengthens the structural resilience of economies. This study highlights the importance of integrating gender equality into green economic planning and suggests that Islamic ethical frameworks is compatible with global sustainability goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), rather than stand in contradicts them.

This study, however, is conceptual in nature. Hence, it is limited by the absence of veriviable evidence. Therefore, future research could investigate how the proposed mechanisms manifest in real-world contexts. Furthermore, comparative studies between Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority contexts could also provide valuable insights into the adaptability and practical result of these structure. Finally, this paper envisions a model of development rooted in justice ('adl), stewardship (khilafah), and collective welfare (maslahah), where empowering women is not only an act of equity, but also a cornerstone of innovation, sustainability, and global resilience.

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