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Feminist Theory and Practice: Efforts to Maintain Human Values

Editor:
L. Dyah Purwita Wardani SWW



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AND FEMINISM (ICOGEF)

“Feminist Theory and Practice: Efforts to Maintain Human Values”



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PREFACE

Higher education has the responsibility to (1) make the life of the nation intelligent through developing abilities, forming national character and civilization with Pancasila character, (2) implementing the Tridharma to create an academic community profile that is innovative, responsive, creative, skilled, competitive and cooperative, and (3) developing science and technology with an insight into humanistic values. In this context and as a form of Universitas Jember's commitment to help build a dignified human civilization, the Center for Gender Studies at Universitas Jember has held an International Conference with the theme Feminism Theory and Practice: Efforts to Maintain Human Values on 21-22 October 2023 in Jember.

This chosen theme brings higher education attention to the importance of developing and strengthening feminist practices in facing the increasingly massive development of social, economic and political globalization. It involves actions, strategies and initiatives to raise awareness, overcome discrimination and work towards a more just society. Higher education has great potential to change this condition through organizing forums that facilitate scientific development with a gender-equitable perspective, placing women and men equally as essential subjects. Ideally, women's voices, which tend to be marginalized because they are considered unscientific, must be ensured to receive a particular place and attention because women's specific experiences regarding their bodies, the oppression experienced in their daily lives are valid, worthy of being used as a source of knowledge. This situation will encourage the development of scientific knowledge that is no longer masculine, which is colored by empathy and an ethic of care. Ultimately, this knowledge should also be considered as a reference for preserving and engineering culture, creating technology, and formulating gender-responsive policies.

This international conference activity was attended by various participants from within the country and abroad who work as lecturers, researchers, practitioners, observers, and students in various fields of science related to and relevant to the conference theme. This proceeding contributes to disseminating research results from the academic community who have participated and presented their articles at the conference. It is hoped that the various scientific papers produced and discussed during this conference will inspire the academic community to be more productive and create opportunities for improving the quality of Tridharma's work in the field of gender studies in the future.

As a closing introduction to these proceedings, we would like to express our deep gratitude to all the committee, presenters, participants and sponsors who have made extraordinary contributions to the success of this international conference. May Allah SWT, God Almighty, always bless all our reasonable efforts.

Jember, 20 November 2023
Rector of Universitas Jember
Dr. Ir. Iwan Taruna, M.Eng.IPM

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The Role of Women Activists in Improving Environmental Conditions in Kenya

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Abstract: In overcoming efforts to damage the environment, there are several difficulties that women activists must face because of their gender identity. This research aims to determine the role of women activists in improving environmental conditions. The transformational ecofeminist perspective helps describe this phenomenon by showing the behaviors that humans should carry out to overcome environmental damage. In many cases, women are often oppressed due to the dominance of power held by men. On the other hand, nature also often experiences oppression due to the domination of human power and an economic system that utilizes natural resources unsustainably. Transformative ecofeminism describes the connection between women and nature. Women and nature are often in the same position to utilize their resources and abilities, but they do not have the right to be empowered. Therefore, it is important to stop all forms of domination that have a negative impact on human life and nature. If women have the right to be equal in various areas of life, then nature also has the right to be equal through sustainable resource use. This condition will suppress all forms of inequality for women and make humans better than creatures other than humans.

INTRODUCTION

This research discusses the efforts of women activists to improve environmental conditions. These efforts include ideas and innovations that are poured into the environmental empowerment movement by women. As we know, environmental damage has become a serious warning for human security today. However, the fact is that the majority of environmental damage is caused by human behavior. On the other hand, women's efforts to play a role in improving environmental conditions become more difficult because women often experience discrimination due to their gender status. This then becomes the basis for selecting research objects that focus on women and the environment.

On the other hand, actions to improve the environment can be found all over the world, one of which is in Kenya. Kenya is a country located in East Africa. Kenya is an appropriate example to illustrate the complexity of problems resulting from environmental degradation, especially those that must be faced by women. Kenya is the center of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), but this has not had much influence on the development of environmental improvements in Kenya, which is in a midway position among other African countries.[1] Meanwhile, economic development and infrastructure development in Kenya also affect the sustainability of natural resources and the environment. This condition has quite an impact on the ecosystem in Kenya, which has an uneven distribution of natural resources and regional typology.[2]

The threat of natural damage in Kenya has a significant impact on people's welfare. However, this condition tends to be more threatening for women than for men. This is caused by the need for access to resources such as clean water, firewood, and food crops. Women tend to need these resources more directly, as part of their duties in managing the household and the physical conditions they have to go through, such as during menstruation and postpartum. At the same time, women also have to accept pressure due to improvement efforts made only because their gender status is considered weak. However, this condition does not stop female environmental activists in Kenya, who continue to build solid synergies with various parties to repair environmental damage.

METHOD

This study shows the relationship between women and nature, as well as the similarities in forms of oppression against women and nature due to certain domination. Women as a group that is vulnerable to accidents, have a similar situation to nature, which is also vulnerable to exploitation and destruction. By using transformative ecofeminism theory, which believes that women and men are an interrelated system and are better than creatures other than humans, this research describes the interactions and behaviors that women and men should have to maintain and improve environmental conditions.[3]

The theory of transformative ecofeminism is then combined with the concepts of environmentalism and social movements to analyze the behavior of women activists in Kenya in their efforts to improve the environment. According to Vandhana Shiva, forms of oppression against nature exist because of the capitalist economic system, which does not take nature conservation into account. The relationship between capitalist economic activity, which requires natural resources as raw materials and production areas, and the capitalist system, which relies on power and money to dominate resource use, has had an impact on nature and environmental sustainability. At the same time, there is a domination similar to that of the capitalist system, namely patriarchal culture, which affects women's welfare.[4]

In contrast to most feminist theories, which demand equality and individual freedom, ecofeminist theory works by placing strict limits on human behavior towards nature and men's

behavior towards women. Transformative ecofeminism works in the following ways: (a) views men and women as an interrelated system to protect the environment; (b) rejects the logic of domination; and (c) views that the rationality of thinking possessed by humans should make humans better than creatures other than humans, (d) adhere to traditional feminist values, which view "feminism" values not as weakness but as a link between individuals to respect each other, and (e) view science and technology to preserve nature.[5]

RESULT

The Condition of Environmental Damage in Kenya and its Impact on Surrounding Communities

Kenya is a country with a tropical climate that has several different regional conditions, such as dry and arid lowlands, mountains and highlands, valleys, and grasslands or savannas.[6] According to Environmental Performance Index data by the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy, which is published every two years, Kenya has a fairly low Environmental Performance Index. The Environmental Performance Index considers several assessments, such as the sustainability of green areas or forest cover areas, air quality, water and sanitation availability, marine sustainability, solid waste management, and others. In 2018, Kenya had an Environmental Performance Index that ranked 130th out of 180 countries studied and 14th among Sub-Saharan African countries.[7] In 2020, Kenya's Environmental Performance Index declined and ranked 132nd out of 180 countries and 15th among Sub-Saharan African countries.[8] Furthermore, according to the latest data for 2022, Kenya's Environmental Performance Index continues to decline, ranking 148th out of 180 countries and 35th out of 46 sub-Saharan African countries.[9]

The decline in the Environmental Performance Index was caused by various environmental damage events. The majority of environmental damage occurs in mountainous and forest areas. Forest land is widely used as agricultural, residential, mining area, and industrial areas.[10] Illegal land clearing is often found, especially in open agricultural and residential areas. This is considered beneficial, especially for poor people, because it can reduce the cost of purchasing land. This threat is increasingly worrying as the area of Kenya's forest cover decreases every year. In 2018, Kenya lost 15,908 ha of forest cover. Meanwhile, in 2019, Kenya lost 15,950 ha of forest cover, while in 2020, Kenya lost 19,045 ha of forest cover. Data shows that Kenya loses an average of 15 thousand ha of forest cover every year. This situation makes forest areas increasingly vulnerable to disasters such as forest fires, floods, landslides, and land degradation, which trigger erosion and drought in several areas.[11]

Forest destruction has had a significant impact on the lives of Kenyan people. As a country that does not have abundant water reserves, Kenya really needs green areas as catchment areas that can increase groundwater reserves. The increasingly narrow forest area has a big impact on people living around forest areas and in areas with dry temperatures. This is because during the summer, hot weather and dry air temperatures can trigger droughts and forest or land fires.

Meanwhile, during the rainy season, fewer catchment areas trigger floods and landslides. In 2022, there will be a drought due to a long drought, which will cause 205 elephants to die.[12] This phenomenon also causes 4.5 million people to starve due to crop failure and a lack of water reserves. This incident is one example of various disasters due to natural damage that occurred in Kenya.[13]

On the other hand, Kenya's urban areas are also experiencing threats due to environmental damage caused by waste and pollution. This condition causes many residents in several large cities to have a low quality of living environment. According to the 2020 Odhiambo report, as quoted from the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) research in 2018, Kenya produced 44,000 metric tons of electronic waste.[14] Meanwhile, in 2020, in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, it is estimated that there will be more than 2,400 tons of waste, dominated by plastic and textile waste. Only 45% of this amount has been managed and recycled.[15] This condition certainly triggers increasingly severe environmental degradation, especially in densely populated areas. At the same time, various threats resulting from environmental damage are exacerbated by threats resulting from the climate crisis and global warming that are hitting the entire world. This means that Kenyan people have to face higher risks in the event of a disaster or epidemic caused by environmental damage and the climate crisis.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN ACTIVISTS IN KENYA IN IMPROVING FOREST ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Women in Kenya have an important role in efforts to improve environmental conditions in the country. One of them is the reforestation action initiated by Wangari Mathaai, a female environmental activist who won the Nobel Prize in the field of peace in 2004 for her contribution to forest conservation and sustainable development in Kenya.[16] Wangari Mathaai carried out reforestation actions by mobilizing mass groups through a movement called the Green Belt Movement, which is a non-governmental organization and was founded in 1977 under the auspices of the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK). Apart from seeking forest restoration, this movement is also used as a form of protest forest conditions that are increasingly barren and have an impact on the lives of the surrounding community, especially women. Through the Green Belt Movement, Wangari Mathaai invites women, especially those living around forest areas, to plant tree seedlings. The aim is to improve soil conditions so that it can produce quality groundwater supplies, improve the quality of nutrients, and provide fuelwood reserves in the future.[17]

As the Green Belt Movement developed, Wangari Mathaai realized that the problem was not limited to difficulties caused by damaged forests. However, problems resulting from gender inequality are also one of the causes of damage to ecosystems and the environment in forest areas in Kenya. The dominance of male power at that time was very strong, meaning that women's opinions were often considered weak, incapable, and unimportant by men. So many decisions within the government sphere regarding rapid development do not take into account the negative impacts that women have to accept due to changes in environmental conditions. Seeing

this fact, Wangari Mathaai then expanded the goals of the Green Belt Movement to become a movement to empower women and local communities, as well as provide advocacy services to communities in Kenya that experience discrimination in any form. On the other hand, Wangari Mathaai is also trying to influence central government policy by considering the concept of sustainable green development. Even though these efforts failed, Wangari Mathaai succeeded in raising the awareness of several government officials to consider sustainable development.[18]

Apart from Wangari Mathaai, many women activists are also pioneers of the environmental movement in Kenya. Some of them focus on restoring mangrove forests in coastal areas. Some of them are Zulfa Hassan and Rahma Rashid. They are women activists who play an important role in efforts to improve mangrove forests and coastal ecosystems in the northern and southern coastal areas of Kenya. Zulfa Hassan is the head of a community called the Mtangawanda Women's Association. This community has approximately 30 members who participate in improving the mangrove forest area in Mtangawanda village, Lamu Regency.[19] Since its founding in 2018, this community has succeeded in repairing more than 13 hectares of the 30 hectares of degraded mangrove land. Zulfa Hassan and her community also continue to strive to provide 100 hectares of productive land to be managed together by monitoring, preventing, and improving the land to avoid degradation and abrasion. This effort has also succeeded in improving the crab's habitat.[20]

In another area, specifically Gazi Bay, Rahma Rashid is one of the women coordinating a mangrove forest conservation project together with the Mikoko Pamoja Community Organization. Rahma Rashid is tasked with leading the coordination of a mangrove conservation project in an area called Gazi Bay, which is located on the southern coast of Kenya, in collaboration with residents and members of their group consisting of men and women. Since starting action in 2013, the Mikoko Pamoja community has succeeded in conserving more than 117 hectares of mangrove forests on the southern coast of Kenya, involving most of the local population.[21] These conditions improve the quality of the ecosystem in the Gazi Bay area. The Gazi Bay region has succeeded in becoming one of the regions that plays a role in reducing the amount of carbon gas to prevent the impact of the crisis due to global warming and climate change. Improving mangrove conservation areas also has an economic impact on the community through the use of mangrove forests as tourist attractions, trading mangrove wood, and the benefits of mangrove trees as herbal medicine.[22] The synergy that has developed between Rahma Rashid and the Mikoko Pamoja community has demonstrated the close relationship between women and nature, as well as the cooperation needed by each individual to preserve the environment. This is in line with the fact that women, men, and nature are an interrelated system. Thus, the relationship that exists between Rahma Rashid and local residents and male members of her community is proof that women's leadership has had a significant impact on efforts to improve mangrove forests. Meanwhile, the absence of domination and the patriarchal system in the Mikoko Pamoja community means that the relationship between nature and humans is balanced by utilizing the diversity of experiences that members have for the sake of improving the environment.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN ACTIVISTS IN KENYA IN MANAGING WASTE

An inadequate waste management system makes many places polluted. Mountains of rubbish that are often found in several regions of Kenya have affected the quality of clean water supplies and sanitation. On the other hand, piled-up waste also releases pollutants into the surrounding environment. According to UNEP data for 2020, only 8% of waste has been properly managed throughout Kenya, while the other 92% has not been managed and pollutes settlements. To overcome this problem, several women play a role in managing waste to turn it into useful recycling products.[23] One of them is an innovation carried out by a woman named Nzambi Matee. Managing plastic waste is a priority for Nzambi Matee to reduce the amount of waste around her.

Nzambi Matee founded a startup company called Gjenge Makers in 2017. In the first year after being founded, the company recycled 500 kg of plastic waste every day to turn it into 500 to 1000 environmentally friendly bricks. Nzambi Matee's steps are the right example of implementing a circular economy. These efforts have also reduced the amount of plastic waste in Nairobi City by around 9.6% in the first production. This number is increasing rapidly as it develops. In 2021, Gjenge Makers has succeeded in managing around 20 tons of waste per day to make around 10,000 to 15,000 plastic bricks.[24] Through this innovation, Nzambi Matee also seeks to empower the local community with 10 employees ranging in age from 21 years to 30 years. As well as impacting the environment, Nzambi Matee's innovations also contribute to the construction industry.[25]

Apart from Gjenge Makers, there is a company called Ecopost, which also focuses on managing plastic waste. The company, founded by Lorna Rutto in 2009, produces environmentally friendly fences and traffic light poles from a mixture of plastic. Lorna Rutto's innovation has succeeded in reducing the amount of plastic waste and the number of trees cut down for buildings. However, Lorna Rutto's steps were rejected by people around her because she did not understand the concept of a circular economy. Lorna Rutto currently has 300 workers and has saved around 250 hectares of forest from illegal logging. Ecopost has succeeded in recycling more than 3000 tons of plastic waste since it was founded by Lorna Rutto. The impact provided by Ecopost's production activities not only improves the environment but also provides economic value for the surrounding community.[26] In this way, Lorna Rutto, through Ecopost, has contributed to the sustainable development plan, or SDGs, especially number 8, namely decent work and economic growth, and number 12, namely responsible consumption and production.[27]

EFFORTS OF WOMEN ACTIVISTS TO INFLUENCE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY INDUSTRIAL POLICIES IN KENYA

“Feminist Theory and Practice: Efforts to Maintain Human Values”

Center of Gender Studies, Universitas Jember, Indonesia

Kenya has several female figures who have influenced policy changes related to the environment and sustainable development in Kenya. One of them is Phyllis Omido. Phyllis Omido has contributed to actions that have influenced Kenyan government policy regarding environmentally friendly industries. Phyllis Omido is a 2015 Goldman Prize winning female environmental activist and director of the Center for Justice, Governance, and Environmental Action (CJGEA).[28] CJGEA is an environmental and human rights advocacy organization based in Mombasa, Kenya, with the aim of realizing the environmental and human rights of economically marginalized communities around industrial areas with inappropriate waste management. Phyllis Omido founded this organization to provide criticism and demands for improvements to the Standard Operational Procedure. Every smelter factory that carries out production near residential areas must have an adequate waste disposal system so that it does not produce pollutants and harm the surrounding community.

Phyllis Omido demanded that the government close the smelter because it threatened the health of the local community. In her efforts, Phyllis Omido sacrificed many things, from work to property. However, her efforts were successful after causing the factory to close in 2014. Phyllis Omido's efforts were not easy; she spent around 12 years since 2008 trying to win her son's lead poisoning case. Phyllis Omido and her community, named Owino Uhuru, are committed to seeking justice and improving the quality of the surrounding environment so that they are not constantly threatened with poisoning due to smelter activities.[29]

The campaign carried out by Phyllis Omido together with CJGEA in 2016 regarding environmental conditions, especially in Mombasa City, succeeded in triggering national protests in Kenya. This action received a response from the Kenyan government, which was demonstrated by the formation of a parliamentary task force to address the pollution problem. In the same year, Phyllis Omido also filed a lawsuit with the Kenyan High Court on behalf of 3,000 victims of pollutant poisoning from smelting factories. Phyllis Omido's demands are not just about closing the factory but also demanding the responsibility of the government and related parties to restore the environment from remaining pollutants, as well as providing compensation to the victims. This resulted in the closure of smelters located very close to residential areas throughout the country and the provision of compensation of USD 12 million to victims of lead poisoning. The compensation is used for medical treatment and compensation for deceased victims. This step is a major achievement for Phyllis Omido in her efforts to play a role in improving environmental conditions from the threat of pollutants, as well as fulfilling the rights of victims. [30]

However, the attorney general's office and Kenya's National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) appealed. This is because the demands made by Phyllis Omido regarding funding are considered too high and are the responsibility of the smelter company, not the government. Meanwhile, demands for the government to improve the condition of all polluted environments are also considered burdensome. In 2022, the appeal efforts carried out by NEMA and the attorney general's office have not yet reached a conclusion. In fact, by 2022, at least 300 children and 50 adults are believed to have lost their lives due to lead poisoning, and more than

60 children are in dire need of medical attention. However, Phyllis Omido, through CJGEA, remains consistent in demanding that the government carry out campaigns and advocacy for anyone who has suffered losses due to pollutants from factories. This effort succeeded in gaining the support of the majority of the Kenyan public and international non-governmental organizations.[31]

Phyllis Omido's demand regarding the closure of smelters located near residential areas throughout Kenya is a firm step to avoid greater damage. The pollutants produced by smelters will cause the climate crisis and global warming to get worse. Phyllis Omido's steps do not only impact environmental sustainability in residential areas or compensation to victims of lead poisoning. This step is also classified as a climate response step, which has the impact of reducing adverse health impacts and providing medical care with significant costs that must be borne by the community. This is because an increase in pollutants can also cause the emergence of new types of diseases due to bad bacteria that reproduce through pollutants and erratic climate and temperature conditions. This condition also indirectly affects the decline in the economic level of the affected communities. Thus, NEMA and the Attorney General's concerns regarding Phyllis Omido's prosecution should not cause the case to drag on. This is because the amount of compensation and improvement efforts that need to be made by the government are more necessary to avoid greater losses in the future.

CONCLUSION

The condition of environmental damage is getting worse. Environmental destruction behaviors such as deforestation, careless waste disposal, activities that produce pollution, etc. are common causes. Efforts to overcome this damage have been made by many parties, however, efforts made by women generally have greater pressure because women are often marginalized due to their gender status. Several female environmental activists in Kenya have succeeded in carrying out environmental improvement actions that have had a real impact on improving the environment in Kenya. This fact shows that women have a vital role in empowering the environment and improving domestic policies for various green and sustainable development strategies.

Based on the discussion described in this article, in the early 2000s, one of the biggest challenges for women activists to play a role in improving the environment in Kenya was government policy and societal stigma regarding women's gender status. This condition is based on the dominance of leadership, which is predominantly male, and rapid development, which is a priority in many countries, including Kenya. At the same time, society's paradigm regarding women's leadership has not received the spotlight and tends to be ignored. However, the role of women activists in Kenya in improving environmental conditions has had a significant impact on improving the environment and public awareness in Kenya. In the period 2018–2022, several women activists in Kenya have succeeded in improving the condition of forests and mangrove

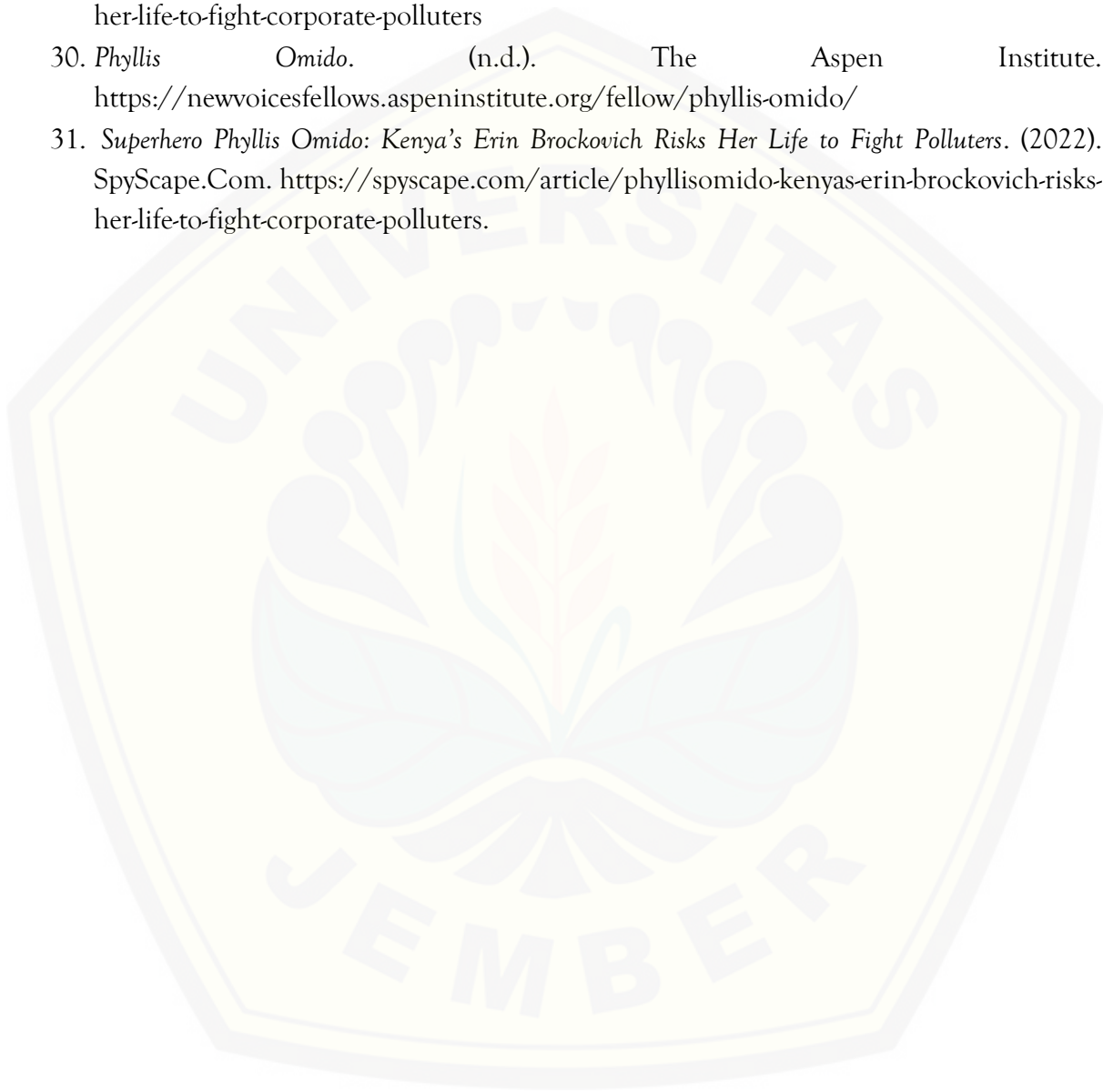
lands, which has had an impact on improving the quality of the surrounding ecosystem as well as increasing public awareness of the impact of waste and pollution.

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