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*Young Women's leadership for
Collaborative Sustainable
Communities*

ON THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GENDER AND SUSTAINABILITY

THE #WECOLEAD
ARTICLE SERIES





WHAT ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY? HOW IS THIS CONNECTED TO GENDER?

This question was one that raised new questions, especially related to the issue of stereotyping. In relation to entrepreneurship and business creation, what came out was that, while on one hand it is a stereotype that women are more environmentally oriented, on the other this tendency is a result of gendered structures. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse this complex topic very carefully and closely. Several reports and academic research have proven that addressing climate change and gender equality go hand in hand. However, our research showed that many of the participants had not previously reflected upon the connection between the two topics, although they were generally aware of and concerned about environmental issues. Nevertheless, the analysis of our research results has led to several ideas on what kind of methodologies and tools could be used to achieve a greater collective impact for both gender-related inequalities and environmental sustainability.

We asked young women and civil society organizational representatives what ideas they had to improve the current situation:

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO SUPPORT YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINABILITY?

Young women tend to lack role models, access to platforms, an adequate educational support, and finally – they lack support from other diverse groups of women. The heterogeneity of this target group calls for an intersectional approach. Empowerment seems to be this collective process of women “gaining power back”, fighting patriarchal structures, and building sustainable communities to advocate for their rights and protecting the environment. However, at the same time, empowerment is also an individual process that each one of us undertakes singularly, for our own self-awareness and self-reflection of our social position and individual needs. This is where feminist sustainable leadership starts from! ([#WeCoLead Toolkit 1](#), 2023).



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: THE FUTURE OF WORKING WITH GENDER AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Research shows that climate change and environmental issues are interlinked with gender oppression issues, going hand in hand with socioeconomic inequalities and oppressive patriarchal structures (Gabrielsson, 2015). However, despite the interconnectedness and presence of these issues, there is a need to raise awareness, educate and discuss in practice what needs to be done to support young women's leadership to achieve more inclusive and sustainable communities in Europe. The target group of "young women" is very heterogeneous and broad, with diverse needs, socioeconomic backgrounds, and different access to both economic and educational resources. For this reason, we emphasize the need to put intersectionality at the centre as a key concept and approach to be used when discussing female leadership and climate change issues. It is not possible to generalize and capture all young women's experiences, knowledge and needs together. However, there is a need to look at both the individual and the collective experiences of young women, using a non-critical and open-minded approach to the most relevant issues presented.

GENDER INEQUALITY IS STILL A CONSIDERABLE CHALLENGE IN MOST EU COUNTRIES, and sustainability here is understood as both environmental, social, and economic. Although the connection between gender and climate change and environmental degradation is not always clear and differs greatly between EU countries, **RESEARCH SHOWS THAT CLIMATE CHANGE HAS A GREATER IMPACT ON WOMEN, BEING LINKED TO GENDERED SOCIOECONOMIC AND CULTURAL STRUCTURES** (Alston, 2011; Pearse,

2017). At the same time, political decision-making as well law-making are still characterized by a masculinist discourse on climate change and environmental degradation.

Patriarchal structures, sexism, discrimination, gender gaps in all sectors, and gendered stereotypes result in **SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES AND INEQUAL ACCESS TO POWER**



POSITIONS AND DECISION-MAKING. These, in addition to a lack of psychological support and financial insecurity are all barriers that stand in the way of women having a more prominent and broader social and environmental impact ([#WeCoLead International Report](#), 2022).



Our research shows that empowering young women can be achieved by PROVIDING INSPIRATION AND ROLE MODELS AS WELL AS ACCESS TO PLATFORMS, ADEQUATE EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT, AND SUPPORT FROM OTHER DIVERSE GROUPS OF WOMEN ([#WeCoLead International Report](#), 2022).

Thus, the importance of women obtaining leadership positions to promote sustainability is emphasized. In other words, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR FEMALE LEADERSHIP TO BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH AND AN INTEREST IN BEING OPEN-MINDED AND IN HEARING ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE'S REALITIES AND THEIR ISSUES.

It is also important for female leaders to be aware THAT CLIMATE CHANGE DOES NOT AFFECT EVERYONE IN THE SAME MANNER, BUT THAT THE DEGREE OF ITS IMPACTS OFTEN DEPENDS ON THE NUMBER OF RESOURCES ONE HAS AT THEIR DISPOSAL TO ADAPT TO AND FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE (Gabrielsson et al., 2013; Gabrielsson, 2015).

In terms of labour market and employment, it is noteworthy how the challenges related to sustainability and climate change also impose an adaptation of the logic of the labour market. The latter, however, still seems to be characterized by strong inequalities, which are structural in terms of gender discrimination. Women in fact earn less for the same position and, in general, hold fewer leadership positions than their male peers. In addition, they are often disincentivized from advancing their careers due to patriarchal structures and challenges.

Inequality decreases as levels of education and training rise, but it remains structural in the labour market and affects the basic economic conditions of people from ethnic minorities, those with disabilities, women, and young people. In any case, OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING THE WORKING CONDITIONS OF WOMEN, YOUTH AND ALL MINORITIES DEPEND ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION, which is the key to their social and economic status. Studying, informing oneself, networking, traveling, and not ceasing to be curious are good antidotes for one's growth, both economic-financial as well as social and personal. The education and labour market for young women play crucial roles in shaping their prospects and opportunities. Education is essential for young people as it equips them with knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to succeed in the job market.



The #WeCoLead project and especially its resulting [e-booklet](#) provide insightful information as well as tools and methods that can be used by different actors that work with young women to explore and encourage their leadership potential.

In the e-booklet as well as throughout the #WeCoLead project, the partnership has also explored the potential of social media, critical thinking, storytelling, and leadership skills in promoting gender equality and supporting young women's empowerment. **SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS** have provided a powerful venue for women to speak out, raise awareness, and demand change. **CRITICAL THINKING** allows youth but also other individuals to challenge gender stereotypes and discrimination. **STORYTELLING** is an innovative method that creates connections, challenges traditional norms, and inspires others to act. It is therefore important to equip young women with the necessary tools and leadership skills that empowers them to act and contribute to a more equal, inclusive, and sustainable society. Exploring the role of critical thinking and storytelling as tools for young women, we concluded that organizations need to support young women interacting in social media and public spaces ([#WeCoLead e-booklet](#), 2023).

In the final chapter of [the #WeCoLead e-booklet](#), we explore the key role played by **ADVOCACY**, which can bring bottom-up change not only in civil society, but also involving individuals, informal groups, organizations, and institutions. A **BOTTOM-UP APPROACH IS A COLLECTIVE APPROACH**, the power of many that work together, coordinate, communicate and set collective strategies for change. While researching the impact on people, organizations and institutions have on the field of women empowerment, we concluded that one of the most necessary actions for advocacy, is the need to "create space" for connections and networks, for inspiration (through groups of young women, mentoring sessions, storytelling events), for education and information.



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