



GENDER EQUALITY AND THE FOREST

- WHAT IS EXACTLY A FOREST?
- AND HOW TO BEHAVE AS AN FORESTERS.

Publication from Independent Green Women (Fria Gröna Kvinnor) based on participation in IUFRO World Congress in Stockholm Sweden June 2024. Thoughts about how the association can work further with forest as a part of the whole and how women relate to forests.

IUFRO, INTERNATIONAL UNIONS OF FOREST RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS, IS AN INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL UNION THAT ORGANISES RESEARCH ON FORESTS AND BUSINESS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE. RESEARCHERS FROM UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES ARE INVITED TOGETHER WITH THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS. IUFRO HAS 700 MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS AND 15000 RESEARCHERS REPRESENTING 123 COUNTRIES, MAKING IT THE WORLD'S LARGEST ASSOCIATION FOR FOREST RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT.

THE WORLD CONGRESS IS HELD EVERY FIVE YEARS AND THIS YEAR IT WAS SWEDEN THAT HOSTED THE EVENT TOGETHER WITH NORDIC AND BALTIC UNIVERSITIES THROUGH SLU, THE SWEDISH UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES. INDEPENDENT GREEN WOMEN PARTICIPATED TOGETHER WITH 4000 OTHER.

EWA LARSSON, SOCIAL SCIENTIST AND THE ASSOCIATION'S PRESIDENT, PRESENTS HERE HER REFLECTIONS FROM THE CONGRESS AND EXPLAINS THE ASSOCIATION'S INTEREST IN FOLLOWING AND INFLUENCING HOW FORESTS ARE MANAGED IN SWEDEN, IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES, IN THE EU AND GLOBALLY FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE.



WHO WE ARE Green Women have a holistic perspective. We connect men's violence against women to the violence over Nature, our Mother Earth, and see it as a patriarchal practice based on a hierarchical order. Our aim is a gender equal transformation of economic structures based on the rights of nature, social durability and biological diversity. By illuminating the connections between people, society and nature we organize women to be active in the great transformation. www.gronakvinnor.se

WHO WE WORK

Independent Green Women has a long-standing interest linked to how forests and forest policy have developed in EU, the European union. Historically, today's forest policy began as early as the 1950s, when forestry was steered over to become purely industrially organized. The politics and culture surrounding forests have gone from the forest owner's selective felling to state control through a Forestry Agency. Now, clear-cutting, ploughing, fertilization and monoculture planting often apply with chemically hardened and modified seedlings. Industry has become part of an old European identity, especially in Swedish and Finnish identity, that needs to transition to a sustainable society with a circular economy in order to cope with and adapt to ongoing climate change.

Common rules for sustainable use are developed and determined by the EU, but country's has received fewer and fewer financial resources for control and follow-up of political decisions in the field. A surprising number of mistakes occur where large forest companies clear-cut protected forests. A patriarchal approach dominate where caution and concern for a living cycle have come to be associated with a civil society and indigenous peoples who cause trouble when they point to other ways of managing forests. Industry, civil society and indigenous peoples all lean on research and scientific analyses, but have completely different time perspectives and views on what a forest is and the importance of a living ecological system.

Green Women see it as a crucial gender equality issue that all voices are given equal value which UN Human Rights stipulates. The EU's precautionary principle to be applied and that consideration is given to the UN's Agenda 2030 – goal 5 to achieve Gender Equality.



Picture: Flowers and herbs from Swedish forest.

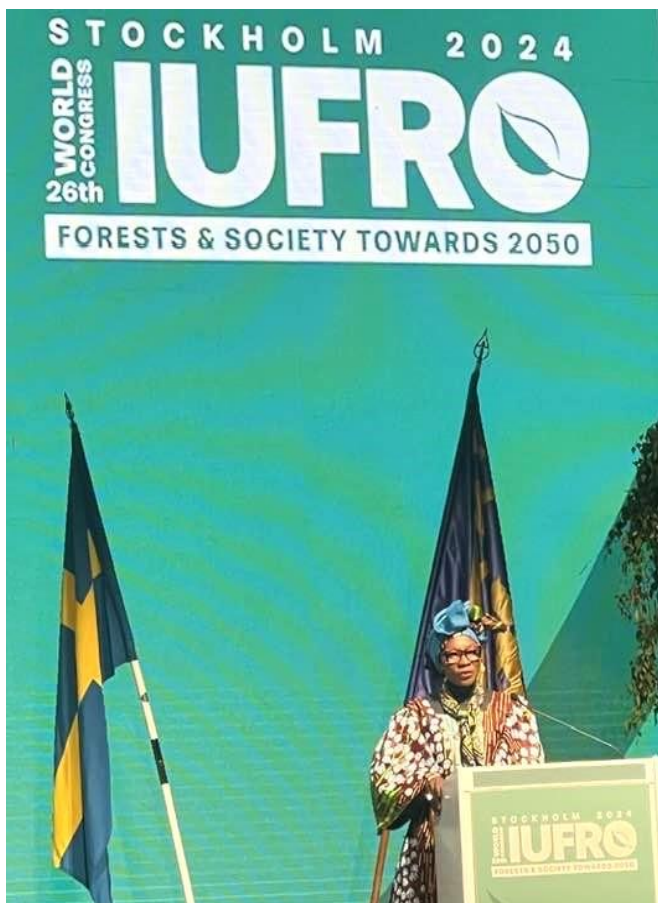
Goal 5 § 5a To implement reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, the opportunity to own and control land and other forms of property, and access to financial services, inheritance and natural resources; in accordance with national law.

§ 5.5 To ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life,

In the Beijing declaration from 1995 “Platform for Action”, you can read In section K, Women and Environment, that women should play a more active role i decision connected to environmental, specially in the local aria where women´ s knowledge is of decisive scarce resources.

Green Women has made visible a gender perspective on the development that is taking place. The association's starting point is to work for equal cooperation, interaction and community development where the restoration of biodiversity in the forest is included based on a holistic view.

TO MEET



IUFRO's opening keynote speaker Dr. Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo from Benin, Head of the UN Secretariat UNFSS, the UN Forest Forum, calls on women for visibility and calls for recognition that women should be involved all the way to decisions. Under the heading "No glass ceiling", women's influence was highlighted as crucial in decisions at all levels of society in order to reach society's full potential. In fact, 45 % of all forest research worldwide is conducted by women. Women are competent, seen and heard, it is time that decisions also been based on what women put forward and propose.
Picture: Cecile Ndjebet

Cecile Ndjebet, also one of the opening speakers, is an Agronomist from Cameroon with a degree in Social Forestry. Cecile founded 2009 “African Women’s Network for Community Management of Forests” (UEFACOF), a regional network that includes seventeen countries. Cecile has worked at different levels for more than thirty years to include women in forest work. One of Cecile Ndjebet’s statements is that things are not going so well as the obstacles for women to participate have not become fewer over the years. Women look at forests in a different way, have knowledge of the forest’s different opportunities to provide health and want to take care of forests so that they remain," says Cecile, and believes it is high time to include women in all forestry work on women's own terms. Cecile Ndjebet criticizes the work on the "Platform for Action", the UN's Beijing document from 1995, as she believes that what women think is constantly being politically excluded and concludes with both a metaphor and a statement:

- Care about the forest as you care about your children. It is the women who have the solution!

Cecile's image of the forest as a child seems to have increased the insight into today's seriousness of ongoing global deforestation. The audience did not want to stop applauding the speech.

During the conference we took the opportunity to talk to Cecile Ndjebet about her criticism of the UN's work with “Platform for Action”. The official criticism of CSW, the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and it’s almost thirty years of follow-up work with the "Platform for Action" felt justified also based on the experience of Green Women.



Picture: Ewa Larsson and Cecile Ndjebet

The so-called Beijing document was adopted by almost all UN member states at the UN's Fourth Conference on Women on 15 September 1995 and has since been followed up every year at all the UN's annual CSW (Commission on the Status of Women) meetings in New York. Under the Platform's chapter K, "Women and the environment", it is stated that women should play a more active role in decisions about the environment. It also states that women should be more involved in decisions concerning the management of natural resources, the protection and preservation of the environment. The issue should be raised at Beijing + 30 2025 on a webinar Gender and Forestry.

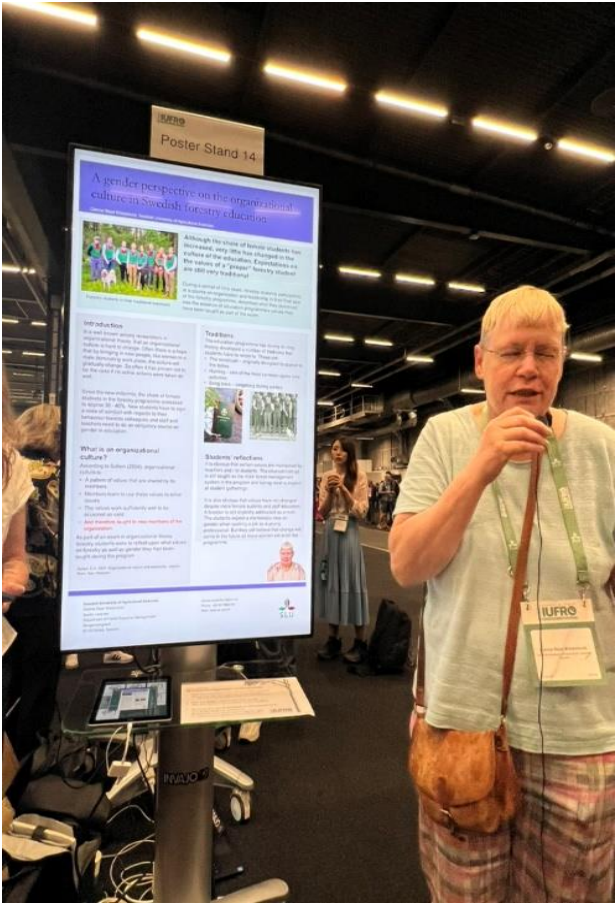
In Europe in our immediate area and together with some countries in Africa, women are organizing themselves in the field of forestry.



Here, knowledge and support for each other can contribute to influence and change in the EU's policy area. The association WOFO, Women Forestry International, aims to include star-marked countries to seminars in the

based on the statement: - *Gender equality and diversity in the forest will change the image of what a forest is and how it can be cared for and managed* -.

The picture to the right shows Dianne Staal Wästerlund, Senior Lecturer at SLU, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Umeå, who gives a speech about how difficult it



is to include Gender equality, to “mainstream” in the various educations. To mainstream Gender equality means that Gender equality must be included in all work in accordance with the "Platform for Action" that Sweden has ratified, i.e. adopted.

Dianne teaches gender equality to aspiring hunters as well as agronomists and foresters. In recent years, more and more women are applying for training in forestry, but when they get out into the field and encounter stereotypical attitudes, they quit.

SNS, the Swedish Business Studies Association, has produced gender-disaggregated statistics that show women and men's different attitudes to what a forest is. Women seem to see the forest more as a living biotope to interact with, while men seem to see the forest more as a product to manage. Despite different basic views, students may find it difficult to understand what difference gender equality can make. It testifies to a fundamental ignorance of the importance of gender equality in society.

TO DAY

The interaction between politics, universities, business, civil society and indigenous peoples is crucial for the possibility of democratic development of the way forests are managed. A positive relationship between policy and practice relating to specific gender equality is generally lacking today, i.e. where gender equality initiatives are included within the broad framework of governance so that gender mainstreaming becomes a matter of course.

Gender equality work has proven to meet major challenges and obstacles, but are both numerically, culturally and symbolically dominant in the forest industry with all its organizations and they are generally not interested in gender equality. In addition, today's democratically uncertain political situation entails a change in the function of politics as a legislator in relations processes between the state, international actors, markets and civil society.

Work on climate and sustainability is marginalized in corrupt countries and in dictatorships in favor of unlimited deforestation. This affects attitudes, approaches and the reception of proposals for solutions from women, which dominate in civil society organizations. Multinational forest companies can also use law to drive felling, and the trend in recent decades has been for



companies to not sign national trade agreements without regional agreements directly with those in power. This results in that professional legal assistance from the World Trade Organization, WTO, cannot be obtained. Which in itself makes it easier for the forest companies to enter financial exemptions from responsibility for environmental destruction.

The answer to what a forest is depends on who you talk to. The forest industry likes to talk about how well forests grow, they then talk about the volume of wood. In Green Women's comment letter to the government, we wrote that the forest industry produces plantations where often only one tree species grows, monocultures. Civil society organizations that work for the preservation of biodiversity see a forest as a living organism where what is above ground can interact with what is underground. The balance of power between the two ways of seeing is great.

It is high time that democratic steps out of the trenches and seeks gender-equal conversations for solutions that go in a long-term sustainable direction. Law-breaking criminal behavior must be punished. Because anyone can see that the number of clear-cuts with ploughing, so-called land preparation, is increasing, as is the extraction of forest. Only the volumes of planted timber remain.

TAKE CONTROL OF WHAT YOU SEE

It is clear that the concept of forest has existed for as long as humans have existed. But the forest industry have twisted the picture by talking about the volume of wood. It is not possible to walk, hear the whistling of the wind, pick mushrooms or hunt in a volume of wood and timber. But it is possible to harvest and make money from it. This means that when the forest industry presents scientific evidence that more forest exists, it does not correspond to perceived reality.



When reality and science do not go together, feelings of unease and doubt about what constitutes scientific truth are created. We perceive it as a threat to democracy. The fact is that different interests have been at odds with each other for several hundred years, but the balance of power between people and industry may never have been as great as it is today, and the rate of clear-cutting has never been as fast as it is now, thanks to investments in large machine parks. Out on the forest plantations planting is a labor-intensive, low-paid job that immigrants are offered.

THE FUTURE

Independent Green Women wants to take the debate about the forest beyond plantation, beyond carbon sequestration and beyond an either/or reasoning (I'm right and you're wrong) to a conversation about the society we want. We want value-based conversations that look at the whole, with the understanding that everything exists together, and with a holistic perspective where forest and biodiversity is included as an independent actor on its own.



Picture: Green Women in the forest where we found a women's grave from the 3000 BC

The future is here. Ewa Larsson, social scientist and president Green Women