



Gender and Forest Education

AN OPEN LETTER

To forestry universities and departments, policymakers and organisations,

We, the International Forestry Students' Association, call for gender equality in forest education, and a gender-aware learning environment. We want students and young professionals of all genders to have the same opportunities in education, their choice of study and personal development¹. We call for a higher acceptance and visibility of all genders in forestry science and practice, through gender-aware education and accountability for lack of accessibility due to gender-related structural oppression. More FINTA*² within the forestry sector and an intersectional perspective on discrimination are essential for the future development of the sector and society at large.

¹Grubbström A, Powell S (2020) Persistent norms and the #MeToo effect in Swedish forestry education. *Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research* 35(5-6): 308–318

²FINTA* is the abbreviation of Female, Inter-sex, Non-binary, Trans and A-gender. The * stands for all those who do not find themselves in any of the letters in the designation and are marginalised in the patriarchal society

Gender disparities in forestry

The forestry sector is globally affected by gender disparities and has been generally regarded as an arena mainly for cis men's³ work, business and governance⁴. Masculine culture within forest education is maintained by formal and informal power, hierarchical structures and antiquated traditions. Gender inequalities, harassment and sexism still persist in forest education, and often, specific masculine or feminine qualities are attributed to certain roles, tasks, positions or professions⁵.

Even though gender in forestry is increasingly addressed by research and introduced into forest education to a limited extent, efforts are still far from the weight they should have according to the importance of these issues in the forestry sector⁶. Finding lectures who are not cis men is still rare. Outdated understandings of gender roles displayed by cis male-dominated faculty and professionals prevail and result in a non-integration of other genders such as cis-women, trans women, trans men and non-binary people, to name a few. This gatekeeping, often due to a lack of awareness, in the field of study and profession further causes a drastic lack of role models of all other genders. Issues of inclusion and equality are highly significant for both the knowledge produced within networks in forest education and the professional sphere and the perceived relevance of networks from a societal perspective. Hence, there is a strong need to understand the gender structures throughout the sector; together with students, teachers and policymakers.

A call for change

As representatives of forestry students and the next generation of forestry professionals, we call for a gender-aware learning environment, gender mainstreaming in forest education and accountability for the lack of accessibility based on many forms of structural oppression, such as, but not limited to, sexism and transphobia. We are currently ill-equipped to unravel the social dimensions of forestry. Gender must be addressed more openly and forestry curricula revised, in order to challenge the norms, counteract structural oppressions and transform the forestry sector to a more equitable one.

Gender mainstreaming can help to rephrase the conversation around the sustainability of careers of FINTA* in forestry, with important consequences for forestry-related institutions and policymakers. Forestry students should be able to perceive the use and conservation of all forest ecosystem services from a gender-aware perspective, identify and analyze problems, and develop solutions. A gender-aware learning environment could thereby shape the forestry sector towards an understanding of society's current norms. In order to establish a gender-aware learning environment in education and capacity building, the gendered and social processes of knowledge and its interrelation with various conceptions and understandings of nature, practices and governance must be introduced and explored

³Cis, or cisgender, include people who have a gender identity that is associated with their sex assigned at birth. Transgender is when the gender identity differs from the sex on the birth certificate.

⁴FAO (ed) (2006) Time for action. Changing Gender Situation in Forestry. Report of the UNECE/ FAO Team of Specialists on Gender and Forestry

⁵Ibid

⁶Ibid

Demands

1. **Counteract structural discrimination through establishing courses on gender awareness within the forestry sector**
 - a. Elaborate on major theories, conceptions and perspectives on gender and gender mainstreaming in relation to forests in a local and global context
 - b. Support students in submitting papers on topics of gender in forestry
 - c. Reinforce internships that support experiences of gender-specific differences across forestry and non-forestry cultures
2. **Implement a gender-aware learning environment**
 - a. Raise awareness about the need to challenge gendered norms
 - b. Use gender-aware language in teaching
 - c. Make physical and digital spaces more accessible by reducing sexist and/or transphobic barriers (e.g. sanitary needs, equipment and clothes suitable for all genders)
3. **Introduce and highlight role models for FINTA* students**
 - a. Promote FINTA* positions in educational institutions
 - b. Implement safer spaces through FINTA* contact persons or programmes
 - c. Mentor FINTA* graduate students
4. **Increase existing knowledge and networks**
 - a. Share knowledge and resources from other vocational trainings and university programs on how to develop and perform gender-aware education
 - b. Establish networks across the globe to empower and support each other, and to create opportunities for FINTA* in forestry

A time for change

The process towards a more gender-aware forest learning environment needs to be encouraged to strengthen and support FINTA* within forest science and the forestry sector.

Gender equality in forest education is dependent upon much deeper changes than merely looking at numbers and improving the share of FINTA* among students and staff. It is the responsibility of educational institutions and people in decision-making to lay the foundation for those changes.



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