



CALLING FOR GENDER-AWARE AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES IN FOREST EDUCATION – AN OPEN LETTER BY IFSA



AUTHORS

BARBARA ÖLLERER, THERESA KLARA LOCH (BOTH: INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION)

INTRODUCTION:

In 2022, the International Forestry Students' Association – IFSA, the biggest international network of students of forestry and related fields, published the IFSA Open Letter on Gender and Forest Education, strongly supported by its members. IFSA wants students and young professionals of all genders to have the same opportunities in education, their choice of study and personal development. The open letter calls 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* within the forestry sector and an intersectional perspective on discrimination are essential for the future development of the sector and society at large.

The open letter addresses forestry universities and departments as well as policymakers and organisations as the forestry sector is globally affected by gender disparities.



Scope and main objectives

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 professions (FAO 2006).

Even though gender in forestry is increasingly addressed by research, organisations and forest certification processes – among them the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) –, the role of gender-aware forest education is not seen to its full extent (Grubbström 2020). Outdated understandings of gender roles displayed by cis male-dominated faculty and professionals prevail and result in a non-integration of other genders. Issues of inclusion and equality are highly significant for knowledge produced within networks in forest education and the professional sphere (Follo 2002, Grubbström 2020, Larasatie, Barnett et al. 2020).

IFSA, following its mission of enriching its members' education, actively highlights the importance of the topic and demands key stakeholders to take proactive steps towards a more gender-aware learning environment.



Innovative approach / Results

With the publication of the Open Letter, IFSA calls for a swift transformation towards more gender-aware and inclusive practices in forest education on behalf of forestry students and the next generation of forestry professionals, through demanding to:

- Counteract structural discrimination through establishing courses on gender awareness within the forestry sector;
- Implement a gender-aware learning environment;
- Introduce and highlight role models for FINTA* students;
- Increase existing knowledge and networks.

All four main demands are supported through sub-demands that further characterise the demands and provide examples for measures that should be taken by universities and departments as well as policymakers in the field of forest education.

The full text of the open letter as well as a video version of the open letter featuring a large number of IFSA members can be found at <https://ifsa.net/gender-open-letter/> or see the QR Code.



Lessons Learned

The IFSA Open Letter on Gender and Forest Education has synergies with FSC's Green Paper for Gender Equality, such as calling to proactively integrate gender actions, address structural problems and strongly support gender mainstreaming. Acknowledging that today's students in forest education will constitute a considerable part of tomorrow's forestry professionals, the role of gender-aware forest education is not sufficiently addressed in FSC's Green Paper. While education is indeed mentioned in the Green Paper, the matter remains relatively unexplored, missing out on the opportunity to encourage efforts for more inclusive forest education.

IFSA's open letter addresses this gap, highlighting education as a crucial dimension of gender equality and thereby complements FSC's Green Paper. It gives impetus to look and account for gender disparities within the forestry sector as a whole, and to increase efforts in forest education as the foundation for a more gender-equal future of the sector. IFSA encourages FSC to acknowledge the importance of forest education and to address it, thereby communicating gender-aware forest education as an integral part of sustainable forest management in the perception of the forestry sector and the general public.



References: FAO (ed) (2006) Time for action. Changing Gender Situation in Forestry. Report of the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Gender and Forestry. Follo, G. (2002): A hero's journey: young women among males in forestry education. In: Journal of Rural Studies 18 (3), S. 293–306. DOI: 10.1016/S0743-0167(02)00006-2. Forest Stewardship Council (2021): Green Paper for Gender Equality: Benchmarking the Global State of Gender and Forests. Online available at: <https://fsc.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Final%20Green%20paper%20on%20gender%20issues%20in%20forests%20PDF.pdf> [Last access: 22 August 2022]
Grubbström, A., Powell, S. (2020): Persistent norms and the #MeToo effect in Swedish forestry education. Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research 35(5–6): 308–318. Larasatie, P.; Barnett, T.; Hansen, E. (2020): Leading with the heart and/or the head? Experiences of women student leaders in top world forestry universities. In: Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research 35 (8), S. 588–599. DOI: 10.1080/02827581.2020.1825787.
Öllerer, B., Loch, T. K. (2022): IFSA Open Letter on Gender and Forest Education. International Forestry Students' Association. Online available at: <https://ifsa.net/gender-open-letter/> [Last access: 22 August 2022]
* FINTA 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.

The views expressed in this information product are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of FSC. FSC® F000100.



International
Forestry
Students'
Association



FORESTS
FOR ALL
FOREVER