O1.1 Methodology for participatory approach under the gender perspective

Addressing Needs and Bridging Barriers in Forestry Education and Employment

Transnational guidelines for gender-responsive participation

This document is issued by the consortium formed for the implementation of the Fem2forests project by the following partners:

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1   Introduction to the guidelines

Very often, children and young people associate professions with a particular gender, for example, the professions of nurse, babysitter, hairdresser, or HR are most often seen as female, while truck driver, pilot, surgeon, firefighter, or forester are seen as male. When young people consider certain jobs more suited for one gender over the other, they focus on a smaller number of occupations, which considerably narrows their range of career choices. Girls may feel discouraged from pursuing careers in fields like engineering or construction, while boys may be dispirited from pursuing professions like nursing or teaching.

Gender stereotypes, which are often deeply rooted in society, can have a significant impact on young people's career choices. They lead to different experiences and framework conditions of women*, men* and people who do not identify with these genders. They continue to widen gender-specific differences in many areas of social and economic life. They also affect the educational sector, the choice of educational training and qualification and, in the long term, career opportunities, livelihood security and the possibilities for inclusion. To combat gender stereotypes and open a broader range of career choices for young people, it is extremely important to encourage a culture that values diversity and challenges traditional norms. One of the ways this might be achieved is **the gender-sensitive professional orientation** that considers the diverse gender identities, experiences, and needs of individuals and ensures that career advice and opportunities are accessible, equitable, and inclusive, regardless of a person's gender.

What is the best way to find out what careers young girls and boys would like to pursue? – Certainly, by asking them, discovering their interests, strengths, and values, and using a participatory approach that can help them make informed career choices.

The participatory approach to career orientation is an interactive method in which individuals are actively involved in the process of career exploration and decision-making. It is based on engagement and collaboration, when young people take an active role in shaping their career paths rather than simply receiving advice or direction from parents, teachers, and others.

We in the Fem2forest project go one step further – we strongly believe that the participatory approach in career orientation shall be done under the gender perspective. By integrating a gender perspective into career orientation, we can ensure that all genders are equally encouraged, supported, and empowered to explore a wide range of professions, free from limiting stereotypes or biases.

If you, like us, support this approach we gladly share with you these guidelines for the participatory approach from the gender perspective to help you.

These guidelines focus on the methodology of engaging young people in exploring their career options but also embed a gender perspective to ensure that all genders have equal access to opportunities and the freedom to pursue careers based on their interests, rather than on societal expectations.

They are meant for schools, education, training and career orientation centers, forestry organizations and anyone else interested in learning how to embed a gender perspective into participatory career orientation.

We encourage you to integrate these guidelines into your practices for empowering young people to break free from traditional gender roles and stereotypes, allowing them to make more informed, confident career decisions based on their unique talents, aspirations, and interests.

Let's build a future where every young person has the freedom to explore careers without limits.

2   About participation and participatory process (PP)

Educational programs and career guidance measures are successful if they are accepted by their target group(s). This seems simple, but in practice brings challenges. How do we reach our target group(s), how do we meet their needs and how can we make sure that what we offer is what our target group(s) are interested in and need?

There is no recipe for this, but there is an approach, a procedure, a process that helps us better understand our target group(s) - even more, that actively involves the target group(s) as experts in their personal situation in the design of educational measures. - We call this "participatory processes".

Participating means taking part and developing offers and solutions together with our target groups who are affected by the topic and the results of these processes. On the one hand, those involved support the process through their participation; on the other hand, the process also influences them.

Characteristics of participatory processes

- Target group(s) is/are expert(s) in their situation.
- Participatory processes are open-ended.
- Results can be surprising, different and uncomfortable.
- Results, whatever they may be, are appreciated (there is no right or wrong), accepted and at least included in the further procedure.
- Participatory processes require appreciative interaction and trust in the target group(s).
- Designers provide space, resources and framework conditions in which free, open exchange, creative approaches and alternative solution design are possible.
- As a designer of participatory processes, it is important to be aware of your own thought patterns, prejudices, expectations and stereotypes and not to transfer these to joint work.

Key Principles of participatory processes

- We don't talk about our target group(s), we talk with them
- Our target group(s) is/are the expert(s) in its/their life situation.
- Multipliers and stakeholders are valuable door openers and have "insider knowledge" about the needs and reaching of the target group.

Participatory processes are collaborative approaches that engages the target group(s) in decision-making, research, and policy development. These processes enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of outcomes by integrating diverse perspectives and knowledge.

Optimizing the participation process to enhance engagement and inclusivity involves several strategic approaches that address the diverse needs of target groups. By fostering an environment that values collaboration and recognizes the unique contributions of all participants, organizations can create more effective and inclusive participatory frameworks.

The participatory process under a gender perspective emphasizes inclusivity and empowerment, aiming to integrate gender considerations into various institutional frameworks. This approach is vital for fostering equitable participation and addressing systemic inequalities.

3   Using participatory approach in education

The participatory approach to education and training emphasizes collaboration and active student engagement and fosters an environment in which learners can contribute to their educational experiences. This approach can be seen as any inclusive approach where learners are involved in shaping the content, delivery and outcomes of their learning experience. Indeed, this may take endless forms, including collaborative problem-solving, peer-to-peer learning, community-based learning and active engagement in real-world activities. Participatory education is not just about what is taught, but how it is taught to ensure that learning is more relevant, accessible and empowering for all learners.

Such approaches are based on the belief that knowledge creation and learning are most effective when learners are actively involved in the process. This goes beyond traditional top-down teaching methods. The emphasis is on collaboration, shared decision making and learning from experience. This is particularly well suited for improving learning outcomes as students can bring different perspectives and experiences to enrich the learning process. For example, Andewi and Hastomo (2023)[1] note that many collaborative activities in a classroom could be improved in terms of learning outcomes if the use of different perspectives and knowledge enabled each participant to engage in practical problem-solving activities along with classroom discussion activities.

When implementing participatory approaches, there are challenges that can be attributed to collaborative learning, including communication barriers and the dynamics of teamwork. A study by Pang et al. (2018)[2] identified common barriers related to teamwork and communication that students face when collaborating and that hinder the learning process. This requires teachers to plan learning experiences that actively engage students in tasks while providing the necessary scaffolding that fosters effective collaboration (Eliasson et al., 2011)[3].

Advantages of participatory approaches

- Students are more motivated and engaged when they are actively involved in their learning processes (Mahruf C. Shohel et al., 2024[4]);

- Participatory pedagogy promotes critical thinking, creativity and collaboration, which are essential for lifelong learning (Mahruf C. Shohel et al., 2024[5]);

- Students and teachers report higher levels of satisfaction and engagement when they are involved in the design process (Könings et al., 2010[6]; Pedrosa et al., 2020[7]);

- Participatory methods can lead to better understanding and retention of subject matter as students find the learning process more relevant and motivating (Pedrosa et al., 2020[8]; Wright, 2020[9]).

Challenges in implementation

- The effectiveness of participatory approaches can vary depending on the local educational context and challenges, requiring tailored strategies (Mukoviz, Tychyna, 2024[10]);

- Evaluating the impact of participatory methods can be complex and often requires qualitative measures to capture their effectiveness (Mukoviz, Tychyna, 2024[11]);

- Implementing participatory approaches can be challenging due to existing institutional structures and norms (Cumbo, Selwyn, 2021)[12];

- To ensure genuine participation and avoid tokenism, careful attention must be paid to who participates, how and under what conditions (Hansen et al., 2001)[13].

Ensuring participatory approach in forestry

Since forestry is currently still a male dominated industry a participatory approach to forestry education and training has the potential to redefine the learning experience of girls and young women to become leaders and achieve sustainable forest management. Forestry educators can ensure a conducive and interactive learning environment by applying the participatory approach from a gender perspective. This means that involving women in the design, evaluation and delivery of learning processes will help to address some of the deep-seated gender issues, build confidence and hopefully attract more women to the sector. Such participatory approaches are helpful in bridging the gap in gender representation in a male-dominated sector that has multiple socio-cultural challenges for girls and young women, as well as a lack of resources and role models. These approaches not only encourage greater engagement, but also contribute to increased self-confidence, creating an environment in which women can overcome challenges and succeed with forestry education.

For example, a participatory approach to forestry education can enable girls and women to:

- Actively engage in discussions and decision-making processes.

- Acquire practical skills that are directly applicable to forestry work.

- Develop a sense of ownership of the learning process.

- Create a supportive community of learners that promotes solidarity and mutual respect.

- Challenge gender stereotypes and assumptions in a traditionally male-dominated field.

3.1 Key participatory approaches for girls and young women in forestry education and training

Educators in forestry can create a participatory and gender-sensitive environment that empowers girls and young women to see forestry as a viable and exciting career path, ultimately contributing to a more diverse and inclusive forestry industry, by following these practical steps:

a. **Participatory and inclusive curriculum design**

- *Co-designing the curriculum with students*

  Involving students in curriculum design ensures that their learning aligns with their interests and addresses the challenges they face. Surveys and focus groups can gather insights about the topics students want to explore, such as women's roles in sustainable forestry or barriers faced by women in forestry careers. Taking these suggestions into account leads to a more meaningful and impactful educational experience. For example, incorporating role models and success stories into the curriculum is another effective strategy. Case studies and guest lectures by impactful women in forestry demonstrate the possibilities for women in the field.

- *Gender-sensitive curriculum and inclusive resources*

  Designing a curriculum that is both gender-sensitive and inclusive is crucial to ensuring that girls and young women feel respected and valued in forestry education. This includes using materials that reflect the contributions of women in forestry and addressing gender-specific issues that may arise in the learning environment. For example, in the Netherlands, at Wageningen University, intersectional gender aspects are emphasized in the fields of food, agriculture and rural environment, examining how gender is related to other social inequalities. Knowledge and theory of intersectional gender studies are developed and taught from an interdisciplinary perspective, analyzing the historical roots, current challenges and proposing alternative developments (WUR, 2024).

- *Using participatory techniques in class projects and assignments*

  Incorporating participatory approaches into forestry education encourages collaboration, improves critical thinking and involves participants more. Mixed-gender group assignments allow for a wide range of perspectives to be recognized, all opinions to be considered, and all voices to be valued. For example, students can be tasked with developing solutions to forestry challenges such as reforestation methods or biodiversity conservation. Workshops on gender equality or issues facing women in forestry provide an interactive environment for brainstorming and finding solutions. These activities engage students in rich discussions and give them the opportunity to reflect on how gender works in their field of work. This also encourages student engagement in peer-to-peer teaching. Thematic assignments, such as "The contribution of women to sustainable forestry", allow students to learn through exploring and communicating a deeper understanding of forestry in relation to gender issues. A participatory approach encourages collaboration and critical analysis.

b. **Gender-sensitive learning environments**

- *Creating a safe, inclusive learning environment*

  Creating opportunities for open discussions about gender challenges in forestry is important to address issues such as stereotypes, discrimination in the workplace and physical demands. These discussions should take place in a safe, inclusive environment where students can express their experiences and concerns without prejudice. Facilitating conversations about gender inclusion and equity encourages both male and female students to reflect on the importance of these issues for sustainability and effective

resource management. Education on these topics prepares all students to promote gender equality in their future careers. Mentorship programs play a critical role in supporting female students by connecting them with experienced women in forestry. Female mentors provide guidance, inspiration and practical advice on navigating the field, from choosing a career path to overcoming gender-specific challenges. Such mentorship also helps build a sense of community and belonging, especially in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Organizing gender-sensitive field trips and practical sessions

Designing field trips and practical exercises in forestry that consider the needs of male and female students is crucial for promoting inclusion and engagement. For young women, it is especially important to address their physical safety, comfort and accessibility so that they can participate without barriers. Practices should include different roles so that female students can lead tasks or work in mixed-gender teams. Assigning leadership roles breaks down stereotypes about physical labor in forestry and demonstrates that women can excel in all aspects of the profession. This experience helps them build self-confidence and develop important skills for their future careers. It is equally important to build feedback mechanisms. After each trip, participants, especially female students, can point out areas for improvement, such as logistical arrangements or team dynamics. For example, issues such as inadequate safety equipment for women or biases in role assignment can be identified and addressed in future sessions. This iterative feedback loop not only improves the quality of activities on the ground but also demonstrates a commitment to inclusion.

- *Facilitating gender-specific focus groups and discussions*

Facilitating gender-specific focus groups and discussions is a highly effective way to address the unique experiences of female students in forestry. These sessions provide a safe and structured environment in which female students can voice their perceptions, aspirations and concerns, for example in relation to career opportunities, workplace culture and physical demands. By addressing these issues, focus groups help to demystify the career field and combat misconceptions, providing a supportive platform for open dialog. Furthermore, engaging male students in these discussions is crucial as it promotes understanding, advances gender equality and encourages them to be allies for equality. Educating male students about the challenges faced by women in forestry also emphasizes the importance of diverse perspectives in natural resource management. To further enhance these efforts, you can invite former female students or professionals to speak about their careers and experiences to inspire current students, provide role models and highlight the evolving opportunities for women in the field. This approach not only supports female students but also promotes a more inclusive and equitable forestry sector.

c.   **Experiential learning**

- *Local knowledge sharing*

To give participants the opportunity to experience the impact of their education in practice, integrating local environmental knowledge and sustainable practices into formal education could be undertaken.

- *Action-based learning and real-world engagement*

In action-based learning, students are directly involved in forestry activities such as planting trees, forest management or conservation projects, while being encouraged to reflect on the process. By participating in real-life projects, girls and young women can connect their learning to tangible outcomes and develop a deeper understanding of their role in environmental stewardship. One example of this is the "Forest Schools" in Scotland, where students participate in environmental education through outdoor learning. They take part in activities such as habitat restoration and woodland monitoring, learning practical conservation skills while working on local ecological projects. In this way, students learn about sustainable forestry, biodiversity and conservation in a real-life setting (Rowanbank, 2024).

- *Collaborative problem-solving and participatory research*

Collaborative problem solving is an engaging way to develop critical thinking while addressing local forestry challenges. Involving young women in participatory research, where they help identify problems, collect data and develop solutions, fosters both technical know-how and leadership skills. Forest landscape restoration (FLR) is the ongoing process of regaining ecological functionality and improving human well-being in deforested or degraded forest landscapes. FLR uses a variety of approaches adapted to the local social, cultural, economic and ecological values, needs and history of the landscape. It draws on the latest scientific knowledge and best practices, as well as traditional and indigenous knowledge, and applies this information in the context of local capacities and existing or new governance structures. FLR actively engages stakeholders at different levels, including vulnerable groups, in planning and decision-making related to land use, restoration goals and strategies, implementation methods, benefit-sharing, monitoring and review processes.

d. Mentorship and role modeling

- *Peer-to-peer learning and mentorship*

Peer-to-peer learning is particularly effective in creating a safe, supportive environment for girls and young women. It builds confidence and strengthens knowledge by allowing learners to teach each other. Mentorship networks can be established by pairing alumni with current students, fostering continuity and sustained support. Mentorship programs, where experienced female leaders in forestry act as role models, further enhance the participatory nature of the learning process.

- *Developing partnerships with female forestry professionals*

Building partnerships with women professionals and organizations that are committed to the advancement of women in forestry enhances educational programs. Female professionals can serve as guest speakers, mentors or advisors, providing students with real-world insights and career guidance. Partnerships also create opportunities for job shadowing and internships that allow female students to gain real-world experience and get an idea of their career potential. These collaborations not only boost students' confidence but also foster connections between academia and industry.

- *Showcasing career paths in forestry for women*

Highlighting the diverse career opportunities in forestry helps female students recognize opportunities beyond traditional roles. Careers in conservation, environmental policy, education, and leadership roles in forestry can appeal to broader interests. Using narratives and case studies of successful women in forestry reinforces the message that women can excel in this field. Promoting scholarships and support programs for women in forestry breaks down financial and social barriers and makes these careers more accessible.

e. **Gender-focused feedback and monitoring**

- *Integrating feedback mechanisms with a gender focus*

   The integration of feedback mechanisms with a gender-specific focus ensures that the voices of female students are heard and that their experiences are incorporated into meaningful improvements to forestry education. Collecting feedback regularly using tools such as anonymous surveys, focus groups, or informal conversations allows educators to identify specific challenges women face in the learning environment, such as curriculum gaps, lack of inclusivity, or discomfort in the field environment. This feedback provides valuable insights for creating a supportive and stimulating educational experience. Utilizing feedback loops is important for accountability and trust. When institutions demonstrate how student input leads to change, such as improved safety measures during fieldwork or the inclusion of gender-sensitive teaching materials, it fosters a sense of empowerment among female students. Adaptations based on feedback, such as replacing traditional lectures with interactive sessions, can also make the learning experience more dynamic and inclusive.

- *Monitoring and evaluation with a gender lens*

   Tracking the success of gender-sensitive initiatives ensures that programs to promote inclusion are effective. Metrics such as female enrollment, retention, grades and job placement rates can be used to determine whether women are succeeding in forestry programs. This data can be used to make further improvements, such as refining teaching methods or adapting fieldwork protocols. Recognizing female achievement through awards or recognition events reinforces the message that women belong in forestry and inspires others to choose the field.

f. **Promoting equitable participation**

- *Promoting gender-equitable participation in decision-making activities*

   Promoting equal participation ensures that girls and young women have an equal voice in decision-making processes and promotes inclusivity and representation in forestry education. By involving female students in planning activities such as forestry events, selecting guest speakers or choosing field trip destinations, institutions can give them the opportunity to take an active role in shaping their learning experiences. Establishing student advisory boards or committees with a balanced gender representation allows for an ongoing dialog about inclusivity and provides a platform for female students to advocate for their needs and perspectives. Encouraging women to take on leadership roles in projects or forestry clubs not only boosts their confidence but also provides them with

valuable skills for their future careers. Together, these practices challenge traditional gender biases and pave the way for a more inclusive and dynamic forestry sector.

3.2   Real-life stories of participatory approaches in forestry education

The ForGEDI MOOC can be highlighted as a model for fostering inclusive learning environments. This online course explores the important role of gender equality, diversity, and inclusion within forest-related sectors, providing insights and practical approaches to fostering an inclusive environment. Developed under the IUFRO Task Force on Gender Equality in Forestry, it aims to empower participants with the knowledge and tools needed to advance gender equality and promote diversity and inclusion in forestry-related fields. The course's content on gender equality and inclusivity can be utilized to educate students about the importance of creating equitable opportunities in the forestry sector. Incorporating the principles from this course could help in designing a more welcoming and supportive atmosphere for all students, particularly women, to express their concerns, share experiences, and engage meaningfully in the learning process (ForGEDI, 2024).

The Green Belt Movement in Kenya is an example of local knowledge sharing. This community-based environmental organization focuses on empowering women and local communities by teaching them sustainable practices such as tree planting and forest conservation. The movement uses local communities' extensive environmental knowledge about indigenous trees, soil types and climate adaptation to integrate it into formal environmental education programs. By involving local people, especially women, in tree planting, the organization ensures that students not only learn about environmental science but also understand the cultural and traditional importance of trees and forests to local communities. This method of knowledge sharing enables students to combine theoretical learning with practical experience (GBM, 2024).

In **the United States, the SWIFT: Supporting Women in Forestry Today initiative**, led by the School of Forest Resources (University of Maine), provides mentoring opportunities for young women interested in forestry careers. The SWIFT initiative actively collaborates with female forestry professionals and offers mentoring programs that pair female students with experienced women in forestry. This is an example of how partnerships with female professionals can help female students in their career development. The program provides a model for how mentorship can help build confidence, provide career guidance and increase job opportunities for women in forestry (SWIFT, 2024).

Summary

Participatory approaches to forestry education and training can provide new opportunities for girls and young women. Participatory approaches actively engage learners, giving them the opportunity to make arguments, build confidence, take ownership of the process, and develop critical skills in leadership, self-esteem, and environmental stewardship.

Examples show how participatory methods have a positive impact on the forestry sector and empower young women. Such initiatives provide examples of how girls and young women have the potential to develop interactive life skills and become ambassadors of sustainable environmental practices when given the opportunity to participate fully and actively in forestry education. They can include strategies for community-based learning, peer-to-peer mentoring, action-based learning, gender-sensitive curricula, and collaborative problem solving for an inclusive and effective learning environment. These strategies complement the enhancement of learning for the development of a more sustainable and inclusive future both within forestry education and beyond.

Real-life stories show that when given the necessary tools and resources, young women can overcome the barriers imposed by gender inequality and contribute meaningfully to sustainable forestry practices.

4 Using participatory approach in employment

Integrating gender-responsive participatory approaches is essential for creating equitable work environments, enhancing workforce diversity, and addressing challenges faced by women in employment. These approaches foster inclusivity, innovation, and collaboration, enabling organizations to benefit from diverse perspectives and skills.

Forestry, often perceived as a male-dominated field, presents unique challenges to achieving gender parity. Women face barriers such as limited access to leadership roles, gender-insensitive workplace policies, and field conditions that fail to accommodate their needs. To overcome these obstacles, organizations must adopt practices that promote inclusivity across recruitment, workplace culture, and community engagement. Outlined below are practical approaches designed to integrate gender-responsive practices across the multifaceted landscape of forestry employment.

4.1 Examples of participatory approaches for girls and young women in forestry employment

a. **Gender-sensitive recruitment and career outreach**
Effective recruitment is the foundation for building a gender-diverse workforce. Traditional hiring practices often fail to attract women, especially in sectors like forestry, which are perceived as male dominated. To address this, organizations must design job descriptions that highlight their commitment to diversity, equity, and gender inclusion. Clear, inclusive language that emphasizes growth opportunities, supportive workplace policies, and a balanced environment sends a strong message of openness and readiness for change.

Outreach efforts should actively engage young women, positioning forestry as a dynamic and rewarding career choice. Partnerships with educational institutions, women's organizations, and professional networks can help extend the reach of these initiatives. Direct engagement opportunities, such as career fairs, mentorship events, and workshops, provide a platform for young women to interact with industry professionals, gain insights, and envision themselves in forestry roles.

Role models are powerful tools for transforming perceptions. Sharing the achievements of women in forestry through storytelling, case studies, videos, and social media highlights pathways to success and challenges stereotypes. These narratives create a connection between potential recruits and the industry, demonstrating that forestry is not just viable but inspiring for women.

b. **Conducting participatory workshops and gender-sensitive training programs**
Workshops and training programs that prioritize inclusivity are a strong tool for creating an equitable workplace. Participatory workshops bring both male and female employees together to collaboratively address workplace challenges, enabling women to share their perspectives. Training programs must go beyond technical skills and include gender-sensitive sessions. These sessions help employees recognize unconscious biases, challenge stereotypes, and understand the unique obstacles women may face in forestry. This awareness fosters mutual respect and strengthens collaboration across teams.

Empowering women to lead workshops or training sessions amplifies their visibility and positions them as subject-matter experts. It also reinforces the organization's commitment to gender equity. Leadership and technical training programs should be designed to prepare women for managerial roles, creating a clear pathway for career advancement.

c. **Inclusive project design and field activities**
Fieldwork often can be perceived as inaccessible or unwelcoming for women. To address this, organizations must create environments that are both safe and inclusive. Facilities such as gender-sensitive restrooms, private changing areas, and tailored personal protective equipment (PPE) are fundamental. Properly designed PPE not only ensures safety but also sends a message that women's needs are integral to workplace planning.

Participatory fieldwork planning allows women to actively contribute to decisions about assignments, roles, and logistics. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that field activities are designed with inclusivity in mind. Assigning leadership roles to women in field teams further builds confidence, skills, and representation in operational decision-making.

d. **Employee feedback mechanisms through a gender lens**
Open communication is the backbone of an inclusive workplace. Structured feedback systems, such as regular surveys, focus groups, and employee forums, enable organizations to gather insights directly from women about their experiences and challenges. These tools should be specifically designed to capture the unique perspectives of women in forestry.

Confidential reporting mechanisms are equally important. Anonymous feedback channels or suggestion boxes create a safe space for employees to voice concerns without fear of reprisal. Engaging women in analysing feedback and shaping subsequent action plans ensures that their voices directly influence organizational change, building trust and accountability.

e. **Mentorship and sponsorship programs**
    Mentorship and sponsorship programs are essential tools for career development and progression. Mentorship programs pair young women with experienced professionals who provide guidance, encouragement, and practical advice. These relationships not only help mentees navigate industry challenges but also build their confidence and networks.

    Sponsorship programs take advocacy further. Sponsors, typically senior leaders, actively promote women for leadership roles, high-profile projects, and other opportunities that elevate their visibility and career prospects. This active support can accelerate career advancement and foster a pipeline of female leaders within the organization.

f. **Promoting a gender-inclusive work culture**
    A workplace culture that values and celebrates diversity is essential for sustaining gender inclusion. Hosting events such as webinars, open discussions and networking sessions with female leaders provides opportunities for inspiration, learning, and dialogue. These events also reinforce the message that gender equity is a priority for the organization.

    Recognizing and celebrating the achievements of female employees, whether through internal communications or external platforms, further solidifies their value within the organization. Engaging male employees as allies through gender-sensitivity training and mentorship programs strengthens collaboration and fosters a cohesive workplace culture.

g. **Participatory decision-making and policy development**
    Actively involving women in decision-making ensures that workplace policies are both practical and equitable. Internal organizational policies on safety, parental leave, and flexible work arrangements should reflect the diverse needs of employees and be co-created with female input. This participatory approach ensures policies are relevant and impactful.

    Encouraging women to contribute to discussions on what is traditionally male-dominated area, such as resource management and field operations, enriches decision-making processes. By integrating diverse perspectives, organizations can develop innovative and balanced solutions.

h. **Developing community engagement programs with women's input**
    Women can play a transformative role in community engagement initiatives, promoting forestry as a career path to the next generation. Female employees should be involved in school visits, career talks, and community forums to share their experiences and inspire young women. These efforts humanize the sector and provide relatable role models.

    Collaborations with educational institutions to create forestry-focused workshops, internships, and camps tailored for girls help spark interest and build early connections with future talent. Such programs not only strengthen community ties but also position the organization as a leader in inclusivity and engagement.

i. **Creating a monitoring and evaluation system with a gender component in focus**
    Monitoring and evaluation systems are essential for measuring the effectiveness of gender-inclusive policies and initiatives. Organizations should track metrics such as hiring rates, retention, promotions, and job satisfaction among female employees. Regularly reviewing this data allows for informed adjustments to recruitment and HR policies.

Field conditions should also be evaluated through feedback from female employees, ensuring that assignments remain inclusive and supportive. Transparency in reporting progress demonstrates the organization's commitment to accountability and continuous improvement.

j. **Showcasing gender-inclusive best practices**
Promoting success stories and best practices reinforces the value of gender inclusion. Sharing achievements through case studies, social media, and industry platforms highlights the impact of inclusivity on innovation, performance, and employee satisfaction. Advocating for gender-responsive practices in employment further enhances the organization's reputation and inspires other organizations to follow.

4.2 Real-life stories of participatory approaches in forestry employment

Forestry England, a division of the Forestry Commission, oversees the management and promotion of England's state-owned forests. The organization implements an Equality and Diversity strategy to ensure all employees are treated with respect and fairness. Key initiatives include the "Equally Yours" training program, designed to enhance understanding and engagement on diversity and inclusion, and the Women's Staff Network, which provides strategic guidance on workplace inclusivity and offers peer support. These measures cultivate an environment that values diverse perspectives and actively reduces barriers to participation. The company prepares annual monitoring reports that highlight progress in diversity, inclusion, and wellbeing initiatives, workforce representation improvements, and continuous commitment to creating an equitable and inclusive workplace.

Mosaic Forest Management, based in British Columbia, Canada, is dedicated to sustainable forestry practices and fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace. The company has established a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, co-chaired by senior leadership, to oversee relevant programming and initiatives. Through participatory workshops, employee surveys, and confidential feedback mechanisms, the company ensures that women's voices and voices of other underrepresented groups directly influence workplace policies, fostering a collaborative and equitable work environment. The company is also an Employer Partner with the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, further demonstrating its commitment to the DEI principles.

Sumitomo Forestry Group, headquartered in Japan, is a global leader in timber and building materials, renowned for its impactful diversity and inclusion initiatives. The company actively integrates diversity into its employment strategies through robust mentorship programs and leadership development initiatives aimed at empowering women in the workplace. Sumitomo Forestry fosters career advancement by providing guidance, sponsorship, and advocacy, ensuring a clear pathway for women to ascend to managerial roles. In 2014, Sumitomo Forestry set a goal to have women comprise at least 5% of management positions by 2020, a target it exceeded by achieving 6.8% by December 31, 2023. Building on this progress, the company announced in 2022 a new objective to increase the proportion of female managers to 8.1% or more by December 31, 2024. These measurable targets underscore Sumitomo Forestry's commitment to fostering gender

equity and breaking barriers in traditionally male-dominated industries. Recognized for its outstanding progress, Sumitomo Forestry has been included in the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index for multiple consecutive years, further demonstrating its leadership in promoting inclusive practices. By embedding equity into its corporate culture and emphasizing actionable diversity policies, the company sets a benchmark for excellence in creating inclusive and progressive workplaces.

Summary

Integrating gender-responsive participatory approaches in forestry fosters inclusivity, innovation, and collaboration, addressing barriers faced by women in this traditionally male-dominated sector. Key strategies include gender-sensitive recruitment, inclusive training and fieldwork practices, mentorship programs, participatory decision-making, and community engagement. Organizations can promote gender equity by creating supportive policies, monitoring progress, and showcasing best practices, paving the way for diverse leadership and sustainable workforce development.

5 Understanding the needs and challenges of girls and young women in forestry

Assessing needs, opinions, experiences, and ideas is a critical part of any participatory approach, especially when developing inclusive policies or programs. Various methods can be used depending on the target group, context, available resources, and goals. Below are some effective methods commonly used in participatory assessments.

5.1 Examples of methods in participatory assessment

a. Surveys and questionnaires
- *Description:* Surveys and questionnaires are structured tools with closed- or open-ended questions that can be distributed to a large group of people.
- *Uses:* Effective for gathering quantitative data on opinions, needs, and experiences. It allows for comparing responses and identifying trends.

b. Interviews
- *Description:* One-on-one or small group interviews allow for in-depth, qualitative insights. They can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, depending on the objectives.
- *Uses:* Useful for gaining a deeper understanding of personal experiences, individual needs, and ideas. Effective for complex topics.

c. Focus groups
- *Description:* A small group discussion led by a facilitator, focusing on specific questions or topics. It encourages participants to discuss and debate openly.
- *Uses:* Effective for collecting diverse opinions, identifying shared experiences, and generating ideas in a collaborative setting.

d. Workshops
- *Description:* Interactive, structured and hands-on events where participants engage in activities to discuss, brainstorm, or collaboratively create something.
- *Uses:* Useful for generating ideas, assessing needs, and co-designing solutions. Encourages creative thinking and hands-on involvement.

e. Suggestions/Feedback boxes
- *Description:* Boxes placed in accessible locations where individuals can anonymously submit their opinions, ideas, and suggestions.
- *Uses:* Useful for ongoing feedback, especially for sensitive topics where anonymity is crucial. Can help to gather both: positive and negative feedback.

f. Round table discussions
- *Description:* An informal group discussion guided by a moderator around a specific topic where all participants are encouraged to contribute equally.
- *Uses:* Promotes knowledge sharing, helps identify shared concerns, and fosters collaborative problem-solving.

g. World café
- *Description:* A structured conversational process where participants discuss a topic in small groups, then rotate to other groups, building on each conversation.
- *Uses:* Useful for gathering a wide range of ideas, fostering collaboration, and creating a sense of shared ownership.

5.2 Understanding needs and challenges through personas

To effectively design inclusive and impactful initiatives for engaging girls and young women in forestry, it is essential to understand their specific needs, experiences, and challenges. Next to previously presented methods, the use of *personas* stands out as a particularly practical and insightful tool for exploring the diverse perspectives and motivations of girls in forestry.

The idea of personas came from software developer Alan Cooper, who developed a concept where the user is in the focus.: instead of working with an abstract target group, a concrete prototypical user is developed by synthesizing data collected through interviews, surveys, and other research methods. A persona has a concrete profile with a realistic biography and individual characteristics. This brings you closer to real people without limiting yourself to individual, random representatives of the target group. Depending on the target group, 4 to 6 personas should be developed to have a more holistic view of the target group, since every persona has characteristic needs and represents one user type from your group.

Personas are tools that foster empathy and understanding by visualizing typical representatives of your target group, highlighting their perspectives, motivations, needs, and challenges. By

incorporating diverse information about their lives, personas make target groups relatable and help everyone connect with them. While personas offer a unique perspective by humanizing data and making it actionable, they should not replace other research and participatory methods. Instead, they work best when used alongside surveys, focus groups, and participatory workshops to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the audience. Personas provide depth and storytelling, while other methods can offer quantitative data and broader insights.

Benefits of using personas in forestry organizations and education:

- *Empathy building:* Personas help organizations and educators see forestry from the perspective of diverse women, fostering a culture that prioritizes inclusivity.

- *Better program design:* By understanding the specific needs and challenges of female stakeholders, organizations can create more tailored and effective programs, policies, and communication strategies.

- *Improved recruitment and retention:* Personas can identify areas where women might feel excluded or unsupported, allowing organizations to address these issues proactively.

- *Enhanced engagement:* When programs are designed with real user profiles in mind, participants feel seen and valued, which encourages more active involvement and engagement in forestry-related activities.

By using personas under a gender perspective, forestry organizations, companies, and education providers can create more inclusive, supportive, and attractive environments for women. This participatory approach not only helps in understanding the barriers women face in forestry but also actively involves them in shaping solutions that work for them

Example of a persona:

Sara, 14-Year-Old Girl in Secondary School

- *Background:* Lives in a small town, attends a local secondary school. Interested in science, especially biology, and often participates in her school's eco-club.

- *Personality:* Environmentally conscious, outspoken, and enjoys outdoor activities but also likes social media and connecting with friends. She's starting to think about potential career paths but has limited knowledge about opportunities in forestry.

- *Motivations:* Sara is motivated by the idea of making a difference in the world. She's passionate about climate change and biodiversity and wants to find a way to help protect the environment.

- *Challenges:* Sara perceives forestry as a "rough" or "male-dominated" field and isn't sure if it aligns with her interests. She's unsure how her love for science and the environment could translate into a real job.

- *Needs:* Exposure to various forestry career paths, reassurance that forestry careers are inclusive of women, and information on how forestry connects with environmental science and conservation.

- *Preferred engagement:* Interactive workshops, real-life stories from women in forestry, and social media content that showcases the role of women in forestry.

Example of a participatory approach taking into account Sara's persona

Host a "Forestry Careers Workshop" at Sara's school, led by female forestry professionals. They can talk about different career paths in forestry, how forestry contributes to environmental conservation, and give Sara and her classmates a chance to ask questions and learn from women already in the field. The workshop could include short videos or social media clips that break down what different roles look like.

Summary

This chapter emphasizes participatory methods, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, and workshops, to assess the needs and experiences of girls and young women in forestry. Personas are introduced as a tool to humanize data by creating realistic profiles that highlight motivations, challenges, and needs.

Using personas fosters empathy, improves program design, and enhances engagement. Combined with other methods, they help organizations create inclusive and supportive environments, addressing barriers and inspiring young women to participate in forestry.

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7   Appendices

Annex 1: Examples of participatory processes in the context of career orientation

In order to attract young people to a specific occupational area, vocational training or school, they need to feel that they are being met in their own environment. As already mentioned, this is best achieved when other young people who have already decided on this profession or training program design and implement information materials, presentations and public appearances. This can range from the development of slogans to the design of entire appearances at education fairs or the co-design of admission procedures.

Examples of participatory processes in the context of career information:

- → Students/apprentices design slogans.
- → Students/apprentices design and create visual material.
- → Students/apprentices design information material.
- → Students/apprentices design information days in schools and companies.
- → Students/apprentices design career orientation fairs.
- → Students/apprentices help design selection processes and admission procedures.

In these examples, the following approach was chosen to ensure the greatest possible participation of girls (and boys) in the design and implementation of career information activities:

Step 1: Clear assignment to the students/apprentices

- Clearly communicate the purpose and goal of the assignment.
- Explain the gender and diversity perspective - remember that we want to address ALL girls and boys with our offer.
- Set dates.
- Clarify resources (location, size of the stand, available equipment, financial possibilities).
- Clarify responsibilities.
- Contact person for questions or problems.
- Determine procedure in case of obstacles, problems, delays etc.

Step 2: Brainstorming

- The students/apprentices collect ideas for their appearance at the education fair.

- This can take place in a guided setting or in self-organization.

- It is important that in this phase it is possible to record and discuss ALL suggestions and ideas very freely and creatively.

- At the end of the brainstorming phase, the students/apprentices should make an initial pre-selection, either self-organized or in a guided setting, which ideas they would like to pursue further and which should be discarded.

- Adults, responsible persons, educators do not interfere.

Step 3: Presentation of the results

- The selected ideas are presented to the responsible teachers, trainers, managers, etc.

- Together, the ideas are compared with the framework conditions and available resources and checked for feasibility.

- At the end, the young people decide which ideas should and can be implemented.

Step 4: Development phase

- The young people put the selected idea into practice.

- They create the necessary materials and prepare presentations, texts, etc.

- They form teams, define responsibilities and divide the tasks.

- They seek support from teachers, trainers, managers and experts where needed.

- They report regularly to their adult contact person on the progress of their work.

- They inform this contact person of any problems, obstacles, etc. that arise.

Step 5: Concrete implementation

- The young people implement the activities they have developed on their own responsibility.

- They are positioned as experts and contact persons.

- Guidance and support from responsible adults must of course be guaranteed.