

SESSION 3: Changing the image of forestry by inclusion of women

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Rooted inequalities in Forest Education. Insights from a students' perspective

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Extended summary

Gender inequalities, harassment, and sexism persist in forest education, where specific masculine or feminine traits are often assigned to roles, tasks, and professions. Although gender in forestry has gained attention in research and organizations, gender-aware forest education remains underappreciated. Outdated notions of gender, upheld by cis-heteropatriarchy, dominate education and research, excluding non-binary and other genders. Increased FINTA*¹ representation in forestry and an intersectional approach to discrimination are crucial for the future of the sector and society.

The International Forestry Students' Association (IFSA), the largest international network of forestry students, is student-led and dedicated to enhancing its members' education. IFSA actively advocates for a more gender-aware learning environment in forestry. In 2021, IFSA published an open letter (IFSA 2021), highlighting the role of education in fostering gender equality in forestry, sparking conversations within and beyond the organization. These discussions, often unavailable within university settings, allowed students to share their experiences, particularly in gender-related challenges.

This presentation focuses on insights gathered from IFSA students through focus group discussions and workshops. Students consistently reported a lack of gender equality and diversity in forest curricula across various countries and regions. For example, a participant in a 2023 workshop shared: "I couldn't practice in chainsaw class because the (male) instructor felt that girls are slow in learning and sometimes they overreact, which will put the class in danger" (IFSA 2024). Such testimonies underscore the unequal opportunities faced by FINTA* in forestry education.

The key areas for achieving gender equality in forest education emerging throughout the discussion were:

1. **Mandatory Gender Equality Education** for all students, promoting awareness of gender dynamics and respectful behaviour.
2. **Inclusive Curricula and Opportunities**, ensuring that teaching materials and research reflect diverse genders and are accessible to all.

¹FINTA* 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 marginalized in the patriarchal society

3. **Gender-Specific Safer Spaces**, offering female-only environments for students to share experiences without judgment.
4. **Mentorship Programs** with trustworthy senior members to provide guidance and support.

In summary, while students across the world experience unique challenges, common themes include the need for education on gender discrimination, safer spaces, and access to trustworthy mentors. IFSA's work, including informal exchanges and guided discussions within its Gender Sub-Commission, continues to provide an inclusive platform for students to address these issues. Additionally, the Sub-Commission was engaged in the development of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) centred on Gender Equality and Diversity in forest-related sectors. This effort underscores IFSA's advocacy for crucial reforms in forest education to address gender and diversity concerns effectively and contributes to closing existing gaps.

References

IFSA. 2021. Gender and Forest Education: An Open Letter by IFSA. Available online at: <https://ifsa.net/gender-open-letter/> [last access: 7 October 2024]

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