

# GENDER



According to a 2017 publication<sup>1</sup> from the European Institute for Gender Equality, gender should be considered particularly relevant in climate protection policies, specifically in the design and implementation of adaptation and mitigation strategies as responses to climate change<sup>2</sup>. The same consideration holds true about the intersection between gender and biodiversity, both in terms of the ways women are leading the conservation and restoration of landscapes<sup>3</sup> and the linkages between women's rights and environmental issues<sup>4</sup>. The question “*what does gender equality have to do with the environment?*” is one that continues to be asked from environmental sciences classrooms to international meetings, despite the mounting evidence<sup>5</sup> articulated by academia, think tanks, activism spaces and others, which clearly showcase that addressing the environmental crisis must go hand in hand with addressing the systemic, deep-rooted issues around gender.

This brief seeks to open a discussion around biodiversity policy in the EU, that is designed in a gender-sensitive way, and aims to destabilize prevalent dichotomies that are often used to exclude language relevant gender, human rights and other intersections from spaces that seek to address the environmental crisis. Biodiversity policies that embrace and address the complexity and cross-cutting nature of the biodiversity crisis, have the potential to call for a profound socio-ecological transformation towards an environmentally just and socially sound society.

### The EU Biodiversity Strategy

The values upon which the EU is built are enshrined in its fundamental legal pillar, the Treaty on the European Union. Article 2 recites: *The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail*<sup>6</sup>. Gender equality is thus both an objective and a key prerequisite to join the EU, something agreed upon by all its Member States. Nonetheless, despite some progress compared to the rest of the world, we are still far away from a gender-

equal society. On March 5th 2020, the European Commission (EC) renewed its efforts in this area by publishing the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, a document which strives to “*systematically include a gender perspective in all stages of policy design in all EU policy areas, internal and external*”<sup>7</sup>. However, it is rather curious how this commitment has been widely neglected in documents published by the Commission only two months later, especially in the environmental policy arena. While in the abovementioned strategy a few explicit references to gender and climate were made, it remained silent on biodiversity.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 mentions **women** only once, in the context of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework negotiations, and the word **gender** appears at the very end of the strategy in a vague and generic commitment<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, in the Farm to Fork Strategy, gender is to be found on a single occasion in the “Promoting the Global Transition chapter”<sup>9</sup>. From reading these two components of the EU Green Deal, one would think that gender-equality in the environmental sector is to be achieved solely outside the EU. As stakeholders call for coherence between the EC strategies, GYBN Europe calls for coherence between the gender and biodiversity commitments.

### UN Convention on Biological Diversity

To improve gender mainstreaming in the environmental policy arena<sup>10</sup>, the EU could follow the well-established programmes of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In 2008, the CBD became the first<sup>11</sup> multilateral environmental agreement to have a Gender Plan of Action<sup>12</sup>, developed by the CBD Secretariat in collaboration with the Senior Gender Advisor at IUCN. The plan was then followed by the Parties in 2014 with the 2015-2020 Gender Plan of Action, adopted through decision XII/7<sup>13</sup>. This document outlines the role that the CBD Secretariat will play in stimulating and facilitating efforts to overcome constraints, as well as take advantage of opportunities to promote gender equality within its work<sup>14</sup>. As the 2015-2020 plan came to a conclusion, parties decided to continue the promotion of a gender-based approach to conservation and thus agreed to review the implementation of the plan by drafting a gender

plan of action for the post-2020. This is a crucial component of the ongoing negotiations to agree on a new way forward for the CBD and its Parties. Furthermore, Draft 1 of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework includes several references to women and gender.

The theory of change that underpins the plan acknowledges the need for appropriate recognition of gender equality, women's empowerment and the need for gender-responsive approaches in the implementation of the plan. Target 21 states: "*Ensure equitable and effective participation in decision-making related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities, and respect their rights over lands, territories and resources, as well as by women and girls, and youth*". Lastly, the achievement of gender-equality and the empowerment of women are described as key conditions for a successful outcome in the enabling conditions sections<sup>13</sup>.

Despite these developments in international policy, there is the need to step up efforts at the national level. Member States must mainstream gender in all of their environmental policies and take bolder actions to recognise the vital contribution that women play in biodiversity conservation. A recent analysis of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans by IUCN<sup>14</sup> showed how 93% of the countries did not have gender equality as a primary goal, only 18% of them had gender equality within objective, and 4% described women as agents of change. If we are to achieve the 2050 vision of living in harmony with nature, recognising the role of women and girls will be fundamental.

### Case study: The CBD Women Caucus

The CBD Women Caucus<sup>15</sup> is a self-organized network with around 400 organizations from all over the world which continuously provides input into the global policy processes of the Convention on Biological Diversity. This platform has the objective to bring into attention women's human rights and works towards strengthening a gender perspective in the policy framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The main objective of the platform includes strengthening the voices of women that are grounded in the local and

national realities through advocacy, policy and capacity building; in order to adopt good governance processes and lead to gender equality and equity. The caucus also aims to bridge the various knowledges and experiences to amplify the voices of women from all over the world on biodiversity to ensure a just and equitable participation of women in any process under the CBD at international and national levels.

Amelia Arreguin, representing the CBD Women Caucus, shared in the interview conducted for this policy brief (June 2021), that the integration of gender perspectives in biodiversity policies could be beneficial for people and the planet. "*First, it must be done for justice;*", she mentioned, "*to recognize, honour and reward the unique knowledge, practices and contributions that women and girls have, resulting from socially assigned gender roles*". Due to this cultural dynamic, women generally have a very strong care ethic, and therefore the decisions, attitudes and actions they undertake are more prone to sustainability. By integrating their voices and hands into the work of the CBD, the contributions of half the human population to conservation and sustainability can be officially recognized.

The CBD Women Caucus is working to ensure that the people involved in and the processes around the CBD are aware of the impacts and differentiated needs of women with respect to the objectives of the Convention due to the socially constructed gender. Parties to the CBD should be developing a post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) that addresses the violence and burdens those women and girl already face. The post-2020 GBF should be an instrument of international public policy that fully integrates respect for women's rights, recognizing their differentiated knowledge and practices and acknowledging women as key agents of implementation, not just as beneficiaries or victims.

When asked to share some learnings that could support the mainstreaming of gender in biodiversity discussions in Europe, Amelia brought up the collective knowledge and the learnings that the CBD Women Caucus holds, predominantly rooted in the work that women in the Global South have so far led.

The first is *to raise awareness for the women defenders of biodiversity around the world*. Indigenous, local, Afro-descendant, from the urban periphery, women defenders are violated and killed for defending nature, their territory, their community, and life for all species.

The second is *to centre intersectionality in environmental policy*. It is urgent to think about the violence and different burdens that women experience in their bodies and spirits, which tends to increase when combining oppression faced from gender together with discrimination by ethnic origin, age and class.

The third is *to create spaces for ecofeminism and anti-capitalism discourses to be explored*, since according to the data the CBD Women Caucus holds, the environmental crisis and violence against women are the result of an economic and political system that prioritizes extraction, wealth and dispossession.

And last but not least, *the Global North needs to make concrete steps towards post-coloniality in biodiversity policy*. This can be done by recognizing and valuing with the same weight the different systems of knowledge, as well as prioritizing the rescue of traditional knowledge and practices that Indigenous, local and urban women possess.

### **GYBN Europe Priorities**

Taking into consideration the fundamental rights of women and girls, their role in safeguarding biodiversity, as well as the need to realize social justice, GYBN Europe has identified key areas requiring concrete actions to improve environmental governance and achieve gender equality.

#### **Strengthening gender and biodiversity intersections in EU policy**

Realizing the biodiversity ambitions of the EU by 2030 will require the complete recognition of women's and girls' rights, as well as the centering of the fundamental role they play in protecting and restoring landscapes and seascapes. This makes the mainstreaming of rights, gender issues and biodiversity intersections in EU biodiversity strategies critical for a successful implementation. To this end, we are calling on the European

Commission to add a specific action to the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy on establishing a platform similar to the Climate Pact for biodiversity that specifically includes the role of women.

#### **Mainstreaming gender strategies in the environmental sector**

All international environmental organizations that operate in the EU and abroad need to develop, if not already present, a gender strategy, striving for equal internal opportunities as well as external representations. Furthermore, we encourage all environmental organizations to invest in building gender strategies that go beyond the dominant discourse of dualism that is used to describe gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics and sexual orientation, to hold space for the proper participation and representation of LGBTQIA+ folks in the environmental movement. Moreover, organizations should monitor the implementation of these strategies to ensure goals are being met and progress is being made towards gender equality and equity within and beyond the biodiversity and climate realm.

#### **Learning from and supporting movements in the Global South**

Generations of women across cultures and places in the Global South are holding roles as harvesters, collectors, farmers, specialists in medicinal plants, as well as ecologists, conservationists, activists, defenders and many more. Women of colour and women in the Global South, including Indigenous women, have been and continue to be leaders of defending biodiversity. The same women are often systematically excluded from biodiversity governance mechanisms, poorly represented in budget allocations, strikingly underrepresented in academia and are experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination including but not limited to gender, race, ethnicity and class. And yet they are persisting and leading the environmental justice movements in the Global South.

GYBN Europe encourages the EU bodies of governance, the European Universities and the

international environmental organizations operating in the EU and beyond, to create safe spaces for the participation of women in the international spaces that the EU participates in, centre their voices and genuinely interact, seek collaboration in equal foot and learn from the unique bodies of knowledge, skills and experiences that women in the Global South hold

