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Gender equality and nature management



Nature management is an area with conflicts of interest. Whoever decides over nature is a question of democracy – and thus also equality.

Introduction

Environmental crisis and destruction of nature are among the most significant threats to global economy and welfare. To reach climate targets, it is essential to utilise natural resources on land and in the oceans in a more sustainable way. Both the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services emphasise that untouched nature is central for securing a balance between nature and the climate and limiting the consequence of climate change. Nature also has significant value for biodiversity, animal life, and humans. Whoever participates when decisions are made about nature, wildlife and the ocean is a question of democracy and participation on equal terms. This is why equality and representation are essential.

What is gender equality?

Equality means that all human beings have equal rights and opportunities to participate in society regardless

of gender, functional ability, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity and religion. Here, we focus on gender equality, meaning equal opportunities and conditions for women and men for economic, political and social participation. Gender equality and women's rights are recurring topics in the UNs sustainable development goals (SDGs). SDG number five emphasises that gender equality includes a fair distribution of power, influence and resources between the genders.

What is nature management?

The term nature management refers to public bodies responsible for nature management at state, regional and municipal levels. It concerns issues such as conservation of natural areas, investigating consequences of encroachments on nature, measures for biodiversity, and facilitating the use of nature and the general public's freedom to roam. Nature management is also a specific discipline of its own and is offered as a degree programme at several Norwegian universities.

What 'green transition'?

The 'green transition' concerns the shift to a low-emission society in which growth and development happen within nature's tolerance limits. However, the use of the term has been questioned several times:

- **Green colonialism?**

Former president of the Sami Parliament Aili Keskitalo has referred to the transition to 'green' energy as a new type of green colonialism. She compares the development of wind farms in reindeer grazing areas with the Norwegian colonisation of Sami areas in previous times. Despite long-lasting Sami mobilisation, Folkeaksjonen mot utbygging av Alta/Kautokeino-vassdraget ('The people's movement against the construction of the Alta/Kautokeino hydroelectric power plant') lost their battle against the Norwegian state in the 1980s. At the same time as traditional Sami businesses are under pressure due to the need for a new green production of energy, these businesses are particularly vulnerable to climate change. However, the connection between indigenous status, gender and nature management has received little attention.

- **Grey transition?**

The green transition has been criticised for being a grey shift, as climate measures may involve extensive destructions of nature. Researchers from Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA) emphasise the importance of protecting and restoring natural

carbon in ecosystems. This is because disturbance on terrestrial ecosystems, such as peatlands, wetlands, and old forests, cause significant losses of carbon from soil to the atmosphere. They call for what they refer to as a 'nature cure' in addition to the state authorities' 'climate cure' as a measure to halve the greenhouse-gas emissions within 2030.

- **Male-dominated technology sector to solve the climate crisis?**

Technology is highlighted as one of the key factors to the green transition, and the trade and industry sector is emphasised as an important actor. There are massive expectations for technological innovations, and approximately half of the Norwegian population believes that this will solve the climate crisis. However, sectors developing technology and innovation are still primarily dominated by men. The share of women in ICT professions in Norway is approximately 23% and has been stable since 2012 (Statistics Norway, 2019). According to OECD, the low share of women in technology education prevents women from participating and contributing to the green transition.

Bygland in Setesdal, Agder Norway.
Photo: Istockphoto.



Nature and wildlife resources

Norway is an outstretched country rich in nature and natural resources. Our access to and use of these common goods are regulated through a comprehensive and complex nature management.

This management consist of bodies such as the Ministry of Climate and Environment, The Norwegian Environment Agency and County Governors. Norwegian nature management also consists of a number of boards, tribunals and associations concerned with outfields, wild animal populations and nature conservation. Some central actors are conservation boards, wild reindeer tribunals, carnivore tribunals, and land ownership associations.

Nature is essential for leisure, recreation, and quality of life to many of us. Nature management secures the general public's right to roam and opportunities for outdoor life, hunting and fishing, as well as the preservation of biodiversity and protection of endangered carnivores populations. However, nature management also concerns the development of industry and trade – also for renewable energy industries such as wind power and hydroelectric power. Due to the many incompatible interests, nature management conflicts are only to be expected. It is perhaps more remarkable that, according to research, Norwegian nature management is dominated by men.



Nordmarka in Oslo.
Photo: Istockphoto.

Nature management dominated by men

Norwegian nature and natural resources management is governed by men over the age of fifty," says Aase Kristine Lundberg, researcher at Nordland Research Institute, in an interview with Kilden genderresearch.no. Lundberg has studied the conservation boards. These boards are responsible for large areas of protected lands, such as the use of national parks. Her research shows that although these boards have been subjected to the Gender Equality Act's regulations on gender balance in officially appointed boards, women are often given a weaker position internally within the boards. Representatives from the municipal level are often considered to be closest to the decisions concerning the areas under discussion, and their views and opinions are therefore ascribed particularly great value. Lundberg's study demonstrates a systematic gender difference. Women were in the minority among the municipal representatives and in a clear majority among the representatives on the county level.

Lundberg also points out that there is a clear gendered distribution of leadership positions within the conservation boards. Among a total of forty-five leaders in the protected area boards, there were twelve women and thirty-three men.

"Our findings show the same systematic gender differences also in the composition of mountain boards, rural commons, river ownership associations and outdoors councils. Women are in the minority, and men hold the leading positions."

In the research project OutGen Lundberg and her colleagues also investigate which topics receive attention in the local newspapers and who gets to speak in the public debate about the outfields. They wish to expand the narrative about the natural resource management.

"A gender perspective contributes to making gender, as well as age, ethnicity and class, more visible in all these decisions. These are aspects that Norwegian nature management has not paid sufficient attention to earlier."



Aase Kristine Lundberg is a researcher at Nordlandsforskning.
Photo: Silje Lundberg.

The Fosen case: Windfarms in a reindeer grazing area

In 2021, the Norwegian Supreme Court stated that two windfarms were illegally established in the reindeer grazing districts at Fosen, Fovsen-Njaarke, in Trøndelag County. Reindeer herders suing the Norwegian state claimed that they had been dispossessed of historical winter grazing areas and that the development of the wind power plant was in conflict with their right to enjoy their own culture under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The Sami reindeer herders at Fosen in Trøndelag were awarded a compensation of 90 million Norwegian kroner for destroyed reindeer grazing areas.

Gudrun E. E. Lindi, leader of the SNF Sámi NissonForum (Sami Women's Forum), calls for an indigenous perspective and women's experiences with how encroachments on nature affect Sami cultural practices and social life.

"The indigenous perspective is not involved anywhere, and thus neither is a Sami women's perspective. As Sami people, we often enter the processes of social change in their last phase and are therefore unable to stop the planned encroachments. However, they are tried at a later stage through protests and costly and delayed legal processes," says Lindi to Kilden genderresearch.no.



Roan windfarm i Fosen.
Photo: Statkraft, Ole Martin Wold.

Representation and legitimacy

As the Fosen case demonstrates, it may have major consequences if specific groups – and thus also interests – are absent when decisions are being made. Nature management’s ability to balance conflicting interests also concerns who are represented in the

management and who are not. Representation of different interests in Norwegian nature management has traditionally been understood as representation of landowners, hunters and nature interests. Gender has not been given much attention.

Did you know that...

Norwegian authorities’ regulation of reindeer herding was one of the most important reasons for the mobilisation of the Sami women’s movement?

In 1978, Norwegian authorities decided that the management of reindeer herding were to be based on licensing. The judicial changes said that only one person per family was allowed to have a reindeer mark, a proof of reindeer ownership. This was decided despite the fact that all Sami family members were allowed to own reindeer. The draft legislation involved a favouring of men in the reindeer herding industry. When women lost their right to an independent economic base, this undermined their economic and social rights. This draft legislation was one of several cases motivating mobilisation of the Sami women’s movement. In 1988, Sáráhká was established, the first Sami women’s organisation in modern times. Women’s mobilisation against the draft proposal did not fully succeed, but the resistance led to a change in the legislation. An opening was made for those who already had their own reindeer mark to apply for permission to keep their own mark even if they married a principal owner.

Civil society's role in nature management

Statistics Norway show that women and men use nature in different ways and that outdoor life in Norway is gendered. But how does this matter? Personal interests matter for what we consider valuable and for what we engage in. For instance, is it favourable to have hunting and fishing experience listed on your CV if you wish to be appointed to nature management's boards and committees?

Special interest organisations are important actors in Norwegian nature management. Tourist associations, landowner associations, and nature and environment associations may have conflicting interests regarding nature. Many of these special interest organisations have traditionally been male-dominated. Maren Esmark, secretary-general of Norges Naturvernforbund ('Friends of the Earth Norway') (2012-2022), gives the following description:

"If you turn back time twenty years, the leaders of the major environmental organisations were called Kurt, Fredrik, Steinar, Truls, Marius and Rasmus. The environmental spokespersons in the political parties were mostly men, many of those working in the former Directorate for Nature Management were men, and the county leaders of environmental preservation at the County Governor's, like the section managers - were also mostly men.



Maren Esmark. Photo: Friends of the Earth Norway

The environmental management responsible for the destruction we have seen as a result of the development of energy over the past twenty years, for instance, has largely been led by men." - Maren Esmark, secretary-general of Norges Naturvernforbund ('Friends of the Earth Norway') (2012-2022).

Kilden genderresearch.no asked Håvard Skjerstad Andersen, Head of sales and communication at Norwegian Association of Hunters and Anglers, if gender equality could have any significance for how we solve conflicts related to nature management?

"Part of the answer lies in the degree of diversity, both in the management agencies and in civil society agencies. As a basic democratic principle, the governing agencies and the interests influencing them needs to look like a cross-section of society," says Skjerstad Andersen.



Håvard Skjerstad Andersen.
Photo: Norwegian Association of Hunters and Anglers.

The ocean and the 'Blue Economy'

Norway has one of the longest coastlines in the world, and people have lived off the sea for thousands of years. Today, the fishing and maricultural industries are among Norway's most important economic industries. Additionally, sustainable marine management is key to renewable energy and renewable resources when fossil fuel is phased out.

Male-dominated fishing industry

The fishing industry in Norway is male-dominated. Norges Fiskarlag's ('The Norwegian Fishermen's Association') national board has no female representative in 2022. Norwegian Coastal Fishermen's Association (Norges Kystfiskarlag) and Bivdu, the Sami fishers' association, each had one woman on their boards. It is not an exaggeration to say that men govern the Norwegian fishers' associations. This inequality is also financial, as male fishers earn on average twice as much as their female colleagues.

The lack of gender equality in the fishing industry is a challenge for securing local communities along the coast. Fish is a sustainable resource contributing to significant economic growth in coastal Norway. The future of coastal societies depends on equal opportunities for women and men. The share of female fishers has increased over the past years, but women who wish to go into the fishing industry still encounter cultural and structural obstacles. For instance, it was

not until 2018 that female fishers gained a legal right to take breaks during pregnancy and breastfeeding after birth without losing their welfare rights.

'The hidden fishery'

Historically, 'the fisherman farmer' has been the core of Norwegian coastal culture. The fisherman farmer was not one person; it was a couple: a husband responsible for the fishing and a wife responsible for running the farm. Without this work distribution, it would have been impossible to survive in a Norwegian coastal society.

Women's crucial historical role in the fisheries received increased attention among female researchers in the 1970s and 1980s. Terms such as 'the hidden fishery' and 'ground crew' were launched to highlight women's important work for the fisheries onshore. Women supported men's activities as fishers through unpaid work in the home, producing food and clothes and caring for children and animals. Although it was recognised that life as a fisherman was nearly impossible without a woman at home, women's work and effort were not considered in the formal fishery accountancy. One consequence of women's informal role in the fishing industry was a loss of welfare rights.

Ulsteinvik in Møre og Romsdal, Norway.
Photo: iStockphoto.



Equality challenges in Norwegian fishing industry

Three per cent of Norwegian full-time fishers are women. Culture and traditional gender roles in the family and the local communities may be a part of the answer to why so few women become fishers. At the same time, female fishers describe a culture characterised by bullying and sexual harassment. The report 'Bedre likestilling i fiskeriene' ('Improved equality in the fisheries') from 2021 states that the low share of women in the fisheries is partly caused by a male-dominated and sometimes rough culture and that women encounter bigger challenges than men in terms of combining their occupation with child-care responsibilities. The report recommends several measures such as networks for female fishers, better arrangements for apprentices, the introduction of additional scholarships for girls choosing fishery as a subject in school and raising awareness to counteract sexual harassment of female fishers.

Possibilities for a new, Blue Economy?

As the leader of the international High-level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, Norway is committed to



Madeleine Gustavsson, researcher at Ruralis.
Photo: Susanne Dietrichson.

securing sustainable management of 100 per cent of its marine and coastal areas within 2025. This commitment also has a clear economic ambition; sustainable management of healthy and clean oceans will contribute to financial growth and employment in a new, 'Blue Economy'.

The term 'Blue Economy' refers to the possibilities within marine-based business activities such as fishery, fish farming, aquaculture, shipping, tourism and energy production, but also infrastructure onshore. Researcher at Ruralis, Madeleine Gustavsson, warns against small-scale coastal fishing being under pressure from prominent, influential actors and warns that environment and biodiversity may be destroyed. She also points to the danger of women being marginalised further within the coastal communities. This makes it relevant to ask what type of values are created within a blue economy? And who benefits from this economic growth?

“What kind of role will coastal communities have within the new, growing blue economy? Demographic changes and its consequences for settlement in the districts is a major challenge. Unless we manage to consider this complex topic as a whole, including gender perspectives and equality, only limited parts of the blue economy will succeed.” Madeleine Gustavsson, Ruralis Institute for Rural and Regional Research, 2021

The relevance of equality for the blue economy also has to do with rights and economic growth having a broad foundation in the entire population. The ocean, including the fishing industry, will become increasingly important if Norway phases out fossil fuels. Economic growth in the ocean space also takes place onshore. Coastal Norway and continued settlement in the districts depend on both men and women living there. The new value chains created onshore as part of the blue economy must take this into consideration.

Did you know that 97 per cent of all Norwegian full time fishers are men?



Henningsvær in Lofoten. Photo: iStockphoto.

Summary

- Nature management is characterised by incompatible considerations and conflicts of interest. Whose opinions are represented and who gets to participate when decisions about nature are being made, is a democratic issue. This includes a gender and equality perspective.
- Nature management's task is to balance a number of considerations. Therefore, it may have major consequences if individual groups – and thus also interests – are absent when decisions are being made.
- Men dominate in Norwegian nature management. How does this affect the decisions that are made?
- The fishing industry in Norway is male-dominated. 97 per cent of all fulltime fishers are men. Researchers highlight a rough male culture and sexual harassment as reasons for this.
- 'Blue Economy' refers to marine-based industrial activities founded on the principle of sustainable economic growth and sustainable utilisation of resources. Researchers have warned that human rights and indigenous rights may be neglected due to economic growth in this sector.

About Kilden kjønnsforskning.no

Kilden genderresearch.no is a national knowledge centre for gender perspectives and gender balance in research. We disseminate and promote research on gender, and we function as a hub for gender researchers and all others interested in research on gender and equality. On 18 November 2021, Kilden organised the conference 'Gender equality in the green transition', with participants from research, authorities and civil society. This policy brief is based on the session on nature management, gender equality and democracy held at the conference.

Questions or comments? Please feel free to contact us at post@kilden.forskningsradet.no

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