

## Gender equality and diversity

*How can we include a diverse range of people in the growing bioeconomy and how can we use gender equality as a tool? The forest plays an important role in the transition from a fossil-based economy into a bio-based economy. We are three organizers working to develop the entire chain from forest to new exciting products. A key to our success is that everyone feels included. At the 2018 Swedish Rural Parliament in Örnsköldsvik, we organized a seminar to discuss gender equality with over forty participants. The focus was on gender equality and diversity and how we can build attractive communities and workplaces. The purpose was to inspire and air new thoughts and ideas for continued efforts.*



Anette Hedqvist, Johanna Engström, Vkna, Bengt Aldén, Carolina Lindberg, RISE Processum, Lena Jonsson, Linda Nyström, Skogstekniska Klustret, Barbro Kalla, BioFuel Region



Johanna Engström, Anette Hedqvist, Vkna, introduced the seminar and moderated the workshop.

### 2018 SWEDISH RURAL PARLIAMENT

The seminar was organized by BioFuel Region, Skogsteknisk Klustret and RISE Processum. Anette Hedqvist and Johanna Engström from Vkna began by explaining how we can discuss the workplace and the community from a gender equality and diversity perspective.

### GENDER EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND WORK

Today we know that working with gender equality and diversity offers many benefits for individuals and groups. For individuals, it is of course important not to be discriminated against and to have opportunities to be seen and to influence their lives like everyone else.

Research shows that when companies have significant diversity, this increases creativity and leads to more innovations that contribute to increased profitability. Most companies that choose to work with diversity do so based on the need to find the right talent, to attract the right individuals and to make them feel comfortable so they will stay.



### GENDER EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND THE COMMUNITY

We also need to work with gender equality and diversity so that many different people want to move to, live and work in, and be happy in a community.

We think of and associate different places with different characteristics and values that lead to the development of identities. This allows people to find a way to talk about a place in a mutually accepted way and that we continue to talk about the place in a certain way. How we talk about and describe places also impacts how we feel when we are there and who feels accepted there and feels that they can travel there.

An example of this is the dichotomy of big cities and rural areas. What interests and activities do we associate with big cities and rural areas? The language we use is quite similar to how we talk about and describe men and women. Rural areas, for example, are often associated with farm equipment, hunting and fishing, while big cities are often associated with services, fashion, culture and education. How we describe and think about a place also assigns a gender to that place. That is, the place becomes associated with either masculine or feminine values.

This also means that we create a relationship to the place based on gender norms. And this affects who feels they belong to that place. For example, statistics show that large numbers of young women move from rural areas to big cities.

It is challenging to maintain a sense of community. For example, maintaining what my village "is" because these thoughts and feelings are also so strongly linked to identity. This is why it can be so sensitive to challenge ideas about a place. But this challenge is necessary so that more people can be included. How can we challenge ideas about communities so that they can attract and include more people?

**WORKSHOP**  
**– HOW CAN WE CREATE ATTRACTIVE LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND WORKPLACES**

The participants were divided into groups where they discussed how to build attractive local communities. The groups were asked to discuss different perspectives: social, workplace and individual.



Linda Nyström from Skogsteknisk Klustret speaking

The exercises asked the participants to reflect on the representation of rural areas on tourism websites, watch short films with scenes from a coffee room to discuss workplace culture, and reflect on their own privileges based on discrimination.

Then the groups presented their results. The conclusion was that all these parts are needed to build attractive local communities that appeal to and include many different people.

**IDEAS FROM THE WORKSHOP**

**PICTURES OF RURAL AREAS AND BIG CITIES**

Who is shown in the pictures and in which places?  
 Get help in noting this.  
 Listen to the small signals and avoid the standard norms.

**SCENES FROM A COFFEE ROOM**

Organise activities like this one today with the help of experts.  
 Talk about this at your workplace.  
 Remember that language communicates a message.  
 Make sure everyone is seen.  
 Call out individuals who try to dominate others.  
 Consider how recruitment ads are designed.  
 What language and images are used?  
 Ask questions about who gets what information about the company.  
 Describe what is needed to allow you to do a good job.

**REFLECTING OVER NORMS AND PRIVILEGES**

Do not accept macho culture, rough language, condescending attitudes or the exclusion of individuals.  
 Demand/be a clear leader and role model that sets the agenda for behaviour.



Author: Barbro Kalla  
 BioFuel Region  
 barbro.kalla@biofuelregion.se