



Gender and Forest Biomass Terminals

The forest biomass supply chain is male-dominated, and women are rarely involved in terminal operations. However, a better gender balance at work place has been linked to innovation and economic growth. A report by the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten about gender equality and the forest sector also found that gender equality can be a factor determining a branch's legitimacy from the viewpoint of the wider society. Due to these factors, BioHub set out to study if gender was a relevant factor explaining terminal development. The project also studied possible gender-related perceptions people might have of innovation and the people most suitable to work in the field of forestry as this could have an effect on gender balance.

TWO SURVEYS LINKED TO GENDER

Gender was included in two surveys, a questionnaire and an interview survey, that were carried out among terminal entrepreneurs within the Botnia-Atlantica area, that is, Ostrobothnia, Central Ostrobothnia and Southern Ostrobothnia in Finland and Västerbotten and Västernorrland in Sweden in 2017.

The questionnaire survey focused on business models and included multiple-choice questions with the possibility for open-ended answers. The gender of respondents was asked for as background information. 21 terminal entrepreneurs took part in the survey.

The interview survey focused on terminals' development needs and was semi-structured. The survey structure included questions linked to gender (e.g. division of roles and resources between men and women at terminals and the reasons behind the division, etc.). 18 respondents took part in the survey.

GENDER REPRESENTATION

There was only 1 woman among the total amount of respondents. The respondents in both surveys were terminal entrepreneurs or managers. There were, in most cases, no women involved in the terminal operations in any other role either.

DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES AND TASKS

Terminals only seldom employ more than 1 person (part- or full-time). It is usually the terminal entrepreneur or manager who is employed by the terminal. The entrepreneurs and managers coordinate the terminal operation, but mostly work is outsourced to contractors.

The contractors are responsible for most of the hands-on tasks, and work is relatively self-guided and independent.

From the terminal entrepreneurs' perspective it is more relevant that the quality and price of the job are appropriate, than whether it is a man or a woman doing the job.

Most of the terminals had not experienced problems with lack of workforce. When invitations to tender were sent out for a specific work contract, plenty of tenders were received.

When asked, terminal entrepreneurs considered both men and women equally capable of doing the work, for example, as one respondent put it: "Both men and women know how to drive machinery. Practically nothing is done by hand. So, the actual work done at the terminal shouldn't have an effect on this."

FACTORS BEHIND GENDER REPRESENTATION

The terminal entrepreneurs had not encountered and were not aware of any specific reason why women would be discouraged from taking part in terminal operations. As the terminals usually did not have own employees, they considered this more of a question to be posed to the contractor companies and their workforce. The factors the terminal entrepreneurs brought up that might influence people's choices (both men and women) on this matter could be linked to issues such as:

- Terminals rarely employ workforce full-time but rather buy services from contractors. Contractors are mostly employed by terminal operations part-time due to which they are forced to seek supplementary employment. This might be problematic for some.
- The interviewed terminals (especially in Finland) often served heating plants due to which work was seasonal (high peaks / rush vs low / no demand). Workload also varied based on weather which affected working hours in a relatively short notice

(2-3 days in advance). This is in contrast to today's trend where people prefer to plan their life in good time in advance, and can deter some people from the line of work.

- Many terminals are located in sparsely populated areas. This is especially so in Sweden, where terminals are often located inland far away (100-200 km) from the more populated coastal areas. The situation is even more prevalent for machine entrepreneurs working in forest operations. For machine entrepreneurs, the working conditions at forest sites can be rough and demand time apart from family life which can make some people less inclined to take up this line of work. As more women tend to stay home with small children than men, the longer periods of time spent away from home can affect women to a bigger extent than men.
- On the other hand, contractors' work is rather independent and responsible which can attract people. For terminal managers, terminal operations provide work that includes aspects of both, a desk job and more hands-on handling of wood and a work environment close to that of a forest environment.

GENDER AND TERMINAL DEVELOPMENT

According to the questionnaire survey, gender is not a factor explaining the terminal entrepreneurs' choice over business model components and does not explain terminal profitability (Luoma & Claydon, 2018). However, the number of respondents was relatively small (21 respondents) to draw conclusions on gender.

Based on the interviews there are only few women involved in terminal operations. However, some terminal entrepreneurs mentioned that over the past 5 years women truck drivers have become more frequent.



DISCUSSION

Gender equality is a worthy pursuit in its own right, as part of basic human rights aiming to guarantee each individual person equal opportunities to life despite their gender.

Improved gender balance at workplace can also have additional positive impacts linked to the perceived legitimacy of the branch from the viewpoint of wider society, economic gains, and innovative capacity. How, then, can one try to initiate change toward a more equal gender balance within the forest biomass supply chain?

When recruiting new personnel it is important to highlight that all are most welcome to apply. Recruitment announcements highlighting any specific group (men, women, etc.) often have a negative response from the public. Due to this it might be more advisable to describe the working environment of the company if the company has, for example, taken measures to provide employees an inclusive environment where each can rely to be accepted as a valuable member of the company as they are. Belonging to any minority at work place can be a deterrent for some and an employment announcement taking a stance on inclusion can help to overcome some barriers related to this.

Change often starts at school. Schools for machine entrepreneurs are in a key position when it comes to envisioning better ways to encourage and attract both men and women to the field of work.

Over the past decade, female truck drivers have been more frequent and they can better be communicated in schools and during recruitments as role models to other women. Both men and women know how to drive machinery and driving is a job well suited for both genders. Many terminals as well as machine entrepreneurs are located in sparsely populated areas, and it is important not to exclude 50% of the potential workforce.

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More information on gender:

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