

Chapter 14

Women as Environmental Change–Makers in Civil Society

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ABSTRACT

Women have played vital roles as environmental leaders within civil society across the globe. Women's participation in environmental decision-making promotes gender equality and environmental action. Involving women in political decision-making leads to more aggressive climate objectives and policies. Women in civic society form formidable networks to resist environmental degradation and address climate-related injustices. Women's environmental leadership offers a myriad of benefits, contributing to both environmental sustainability and societal progress. By occupying leadership roles, women inspire others, particularly young women, to pursue careers and activism in environmental fields, thereby fostering greater diversity and inclusivity within these sectors. Women leaders are increasingly influential in shaping environmental policies and agendas at local, national, and international levels. This chapter will aim to look into the various roles of women as vital change makers and leaders in the domain of environmental protection and sustainable development in the civil society.

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INTRODUCTION

Women play a pivotal role in environmental conservation through their various contributions and activities that promote sustainable development and ecological balance. Empowering women and integrating gender perspectives into environmental conservation efforts are critical for achieving sustainable development goals. Women's unique knowledge, skills, and leadership are indispensable for preserving the environment and ensuring a sustainable future for all. Women have played vital roles as environmental leaders within civil society across the globe. Their contributions span various domains, including advocacy, policymaking, grassroots activism, research, and education. Women often face intersecting forms of discrimination based on gender, race, class, and more. This intersectional perspective enables them to understand environmental issues through diverse lenses and advocate for inclusive solutions that address the needs of marginalized communities. Women bring diverse leadership styles to the table, including collaborative, transformational, and servant leadership, which can be particularly effective in addressing complex environmental challenges that require adaptive and innovative approaches. Women leaders serve as role models and mentors, inspiring future generations of environmentalists and empowering women and girls to pursue careers in STEM fields and environmental advocacy.

Examples abound of women making significant contributions as environmental leaders. For instance, **Wangari Maathai**, founder of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, empowered rural women to plant trees, combat deforestation, and promote sustainable development. **Vandana Shiva**, an Indian environmental activist, has campaigned against genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and advocated for sustainable agriculture and biodiversity conservation. **Gro Harlem Brundtland**, a former Prime Minister of Norway, Brundtland chaired the World Commission on Environment and Development, which produced the landmark report "Our Common Future" in 1987. This report introduced the concept of sustainable development and called for global action to address environmental and developmental challenges. **Christiania Figueres**, as the former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Figueres played a key role in negotiating the Paris Agreement in 2015. Her leadership and diplomacy were instrumental in securing commitments from nearly 200 countries to combat climate change. **Greta Thunberg**, the Swedish environmental activist gained international recognition for her climate strike outside the Swedish parliament in 2018. Since then, she has inspired millions of young people worldwide to join the Fridays for Future movement, demanding urgent action on climate change from political leaders and policymakers.

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