

GRASS CEILING

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Sweden



Sweden

Women's hidden role in Swedish agriculture and rural innovation – the invisible farmers and rural entrepreneurs?

9.1. Introduction

While Sweden is often seen as a gender equality forerunner, gender inequalities persist in agriculture, forestry and other rural businesses.

9.2. Key Statistical Findings

9.2.1. Women's legal position and ownership of capital in agriculture

In Sweden, rather than focusing on the general legal position of women, we emphasise the legal position of women entrepreneurs in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas. Men own nearly four out of every five farms, although ownership in the forestry sector is more evenly distributed between women and men. However, joint management of farms between women and men often goes unreflected in official statistics. This is partly due to the fact that farms and forest businesses are often sole proprietorships, which can only have one registered owner. Additionally, farms are frequently transferred through 'patrilineal inheritance', despite gender-equal legislation.

The number of farms in Sweden is declining, and the average age of farmers is increasing. Almost half of farm owners, including their partners and family members, also have primary occupations outside of farming. Furthermore, women are underrepresented as board members in Sweden's largest farmer association.

Recent quantitative research highlights that women's entrepreneurship is essential for rural viability. Women contribute diverse services crucial for rural areas, yet these contributions are often underappreciated and inadequately reflected in their incomes, which are lower than men's. Women's rural businesses, while comparable in size to men's, are more sensitive to economic fluctuations. Marriage tends to positively affect men's earnings but has the opposite effect on women's.

9.2.2. Women's involvement in innovative initiatives

Interviews and work conducted within the GRASS CEILING project indicate that women in Sweden are entrepreneurial and actively develop socio-ecological innovations in farming and forestry. Despite this, there is a significant lack of data to quantify or showcase these contributions effectively.

9.2.3. Gender dimension in strategic documents

Despite the significant contributions of women to farming, forestry, and rural development, EU and Swedish agricultural policies often neglect to prioritise gender equality. Sweden's CAP Strategic Plan (2023-2027) predominantly targets male farmers and does not integrate gender considerations into its policy framework. The policy fails to challenge gendered divisions of ownership or to address stereotypes.

Research has indicated that the previous Swedish rural development programme did little more than pay lip service to gender equality. Although it stated an intent to promote gender awareness, there were no significant actions taken. The government's rural policy bill acknowledges women's entrepreneurship as vital for economic growth, competitiveness, renewal, and sustainability in rural areas. However, it fails to outline concrete measures to support these goals.

9.3. Conclusion

The GRASS CEILING project underscores the absence of comprehensive data and the resilient, innovative spirit of women in Sweden's farming, forestry, and rural sectors. It calls for a more inclusive understanding of Swedish agricultural, forestry, and rural entrepreneurship, recognising the diverse roles played by both men and women. To achieve true gender equality, robust data collection and targeted policy measures are essential.

Location: Sweden

Contact:

Hela Sverige ska leva: Siv Lindén

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences: Katarina Pettersson & Flora Hajdu

More info:

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