



# GRASS CEILING

## D6.9

Practice abstracts  
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Sweden



# SWEDEN

## Women rural entrepreneurs in farming and forestry: Lessons from the GRASS CEILING Project

### Introduction

The Swedish Living Lab (LL) of the GRASS CEILING project was conducted in Jönköping County, characterised as a region having a ‘traditional gender contract’, and which is close to the bottom of ‘gender equality lists’ in Sweden. Men own four out of five farms, while forestry is more evenly distributed among women and men. A feature of the Swedish context is the publicly funded childcare, health care, elderly care and social care.

### Case study results and learnings

#### Composition and organisation of the Living Lab

The LL involved seven women engaged in farming and forestry. To recruit engaged and motivated women for our LL, we arranged a nomination and selection process. We developed the Living Lab process as a participatory method, as we viewed the women’s knowledge as key to the process and therefore included exercises in the workshops for them to reflect on each other’s farm business, ideas and challenges. We held all LLs in person and visited each participants’ business to build trust and to inspire them in the development of their own business.

#### Innovation process and observed changes

The participants have (continued to) develop their ideas and businesses – in parallel with the LL process but perhaps not tightly connected to it, or directly due to the content of the LL workshops. We also developed a broader set of issues besides innovation – thus including gender equality, rural development and sustainability – and have therefore sought to provide a space for the participants, and us as co-leads, to learn together. Early on in our discussions on the LL-process we discussed the ambition of the participants potentially developing something together, which materialised in the form of the last LL being a larger event for women in farming, forestry and rural areas, attracting over 100 participants and 15 stakeholder representatives, including the Swedish prime minister.

#### Stakeholder interaction

Based on the discussions throughout the LL-process we identified different stakeholders who seemed meaningful to invite to different LLs. Stakeholders came to five of the nine LLs and we made study visits during one LL. All the interactions with stakeholders led to lively discussions. At two LLs the thematic focus was on gender-equal economy, the importance of farm ownership and having an income, and the gendered division of care work, which led to interesting and eye-opening discussions.

### Perceptions and collective learning

The overall impression was that the women were positive to having been part of the LLs. In short, their experiences were:

- “I have new energy. I get ‘peppered up’ by hearing from everyone else”.
- “To be able to reflect – the megatrend task helped to lift our gaze from our own little home. New reflections and new inspirations”.
- “That we went around to each other’s has meant a lot, because as a self-employed person you become a bit isolated in your own little world”.
- “I like it when it’s not so controlled. It’s during the conversations when things happen”.
- “You get new ideas all the time when you see how others are doing. You reflect on each other”.
- “It has been positive to be only women”.
- “When we talked about parental leave, the family situation and equal economic conditions, it would have been very different if we had been a mixed group”.

### Conclusion

We think that the LL-process has been a fantastic tool to support women entrepreneurs. We conclude that the women entrepreneurs need the following support:

- Services in rural areas – childcare, schools, mail services etc. perhaps especially for women in families with young children.
- Visibility, making women in farming, forestry and rural areas visible, as farmers, forest-owners and rural entrepreneurs.
- Funding and economic support for women-dominated sectors of the economy.
- Spaces to discuss and reflect, networking, inspiration from other women and stakeholders, and women role-models.
- Knowledge about how societies, particularly in farming, forestry and rural areas, are gendered, and marked by gender inequalities.
- That the national strategy plan (CAP and RDP) should not just pay lip service to gender equality but integrate it.

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Sweden

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