

Supporting rural women in Arctic low-carbon transitions: a knowledge network

POLICY SPOTLIGHT Supporting rural women in Arctic low-carbon transitions: a knowledge network

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CONTEXT

Rural economies are undergoing significant change as countries seek to meet international climate targets. While this brings new economic opportunities, for example related to renewable energy or forestry, it also brings challenges for those directly or indirectly reliant on carbon-intensive industries.

Scientific research on Just Transitions tends to focus on the impacts of low-carbon transitions on those in traditionally male-dominated professions, especially coal miners or oil workers. Yet, international evidence shows that previous rounds of economic restructuring have produced distinctive new labour markets: places most affected by decline in male-dominated, energy intensive industries have also seen a rise in female employment in flexible service industries. However, these roles are often insecure and low paid. We also know that women are key contributors to the rural economy and their empowerment is crucial to unlocking talent that can help rural communities become more resilient.



THE KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

- This project brought together female researchers, policy makers and community practitioners from across Scotland, Sweden, Norway and Canada to share knowledge about how best to support rural women during the transition to a net-zero economy in the Arctic region
- The project was also an opportunity for actors from across different sectors to network, learn from practice, and influence future policy development and support.
- The inclusion of policy, public sector and community-based actors/entrepreneurs within the network will ensure direct impact within the work of these members.

WHAT HAVE WE DONE SO FAR?

- Established a knowledge network comprising women from across Arctic research, policy and practice in Scotland, Sweden, Norway and Canada.
- Organised two online network meetings (inception meeting; workshop to discuss case studies).
- Examined potential case studies to provide overarching policy recommendations distilled by the network coordinators.
- Recorded a podcast with the initial founders of the network.
- Prepared an initial draft of concept for a longer-term funded project.

ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES

- Met with Gillian Martin MSP, who represents Aberdeenshire East who invited us to a future meeting of the Cross Party Group in Scottish Parliament on Women in Enterprise.
- Prepared a research bid with Kelly Vodden and Amy Hudson focusing on the preservation of the cultural landscape and heritage in the face of climate change.
- Engaging with InspirAlba and Scottish Rural Action to support an in-person female entrepreneurship event in Scotland.
- SRUC joined the University of the Arctic.

THIS PROJECT ADDRESSES FOLLOWING THEMES:

- **Just transition and clean energy:** focusing on the changes that rural economies are going through as countries seek to meet climate change targets and recognising the challenges this brings for those reliant on carbon-intensive industries.
- **Rural development and wellbeing:** recognising that low-carbon transitions present an opportunity for tailored support for women in rural communities so they can develop new businesses or take up new roles in the rural economy.
- **Gender equality:** noting that female employment roles in flexible service industries are often insecure and low-paid, with the empowerment of women crucial to unlocking talent that can help rural communities become more resilient.

Since forming the network we have also seen additional themes presented such as:

- *Collaborative approaches to leadership and collective ownership of entrepreneurial activities.*
- *The lack of good paying, permanent jobs available for women in the net zero sector.*
- *Geo-political tensions when moving towards net-zero and the effect this has on rural communities*

CASE STUDY SELECTION CRITERIA AND EXAMPLES

During the second meeting, the Knowledge Network discussed key criteria for case study selection. This was collated by the research team below. With all of the criteria listed it is pertinent to consider intergenerational and intersectional elements as well as the geopolitical context of the study area.

Case studies of successful entrepreneurial efforts to promote a net-zero transition led by women could include:

Collaborative leadership as unique tool used in supporting women entrepreneurs.

Policy frameworks which support entrepreneurial action.

Public/private partnerships which support decarbonisation and green job transitions.

Sector-specific initiatives that are female-dominated, for example zero-waste and refill grocery shops.



In Scotland, Leadership Training courses have been co-designed between the teams at InspirAlba, Art of Hosting practitioners from Connecting Scotland and experienced stewards from Denmark. The participants developed a deeper understanding of their local issues and learned how to build connections with others to build confidence capacity.

The Scottish government was going to release a Rural Entrepreneurs Fund for £70 million which included a bottom-up design and supported peer learning. The policy-process can be a very positive element in helping female rural entrepreneurs succeed. The policy framework used to prepare the funding could be something to consider as a positive case study.

In Norway, through the public/private partnerships there was successful resistance in preventing new oil exploration to support decarbonisation strategies.

In Sweden, megaprojects in net-zero industries such as Northvolt's car battery gigafactory are locating to the arctic circle. Private industries need help from public ministries to attract domestic and international workers.

In rural Scotland, female entrepreneurial efforts are focused on zero-waste and recycling. Examples include, EcoOrkney and EcoSavvy (Arran). Women are more likely to own shops which focus on waste-reduction and refilling oftentimes because they are the ones more attuned to domestic household waste.

In Arctic Finland there is an emergence of immigrant women engaging in creative, craft and hospitality-based industries.

LITERATURE REVIEW: WOMEN AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There are three main barriers to success for female and indigenous entrepreneurs in rural areas: institutional, spatial, and social (see Figure 1).

The institutions which support entrepreneurs are gendered. For males, markets, money, and management are the main areas of concern when setting up a business. For women there are the added pressures of motherhood and meso/macro socio-cultural factors and norms.

Women also encounter administrative and bureaucratic challenges when they are interested in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities in countries like US, Canada and Ireland.

Social, spatial, and institutional context simultaneously provides opportunities and sets boundaries for immigrant entrepreneurial activities in multiple and situational ways (Welter, 2011).

In rural Norway, partners have been a crucial factor for women's success, due to enhanced access to loans, accountants, banking and the ability to share administrative tasks.

Most market interventions focus on “fixing” individual skills gaps between men and women. However, they do not focus on developing programs which could cater for the specific needs of entrepreneurs.

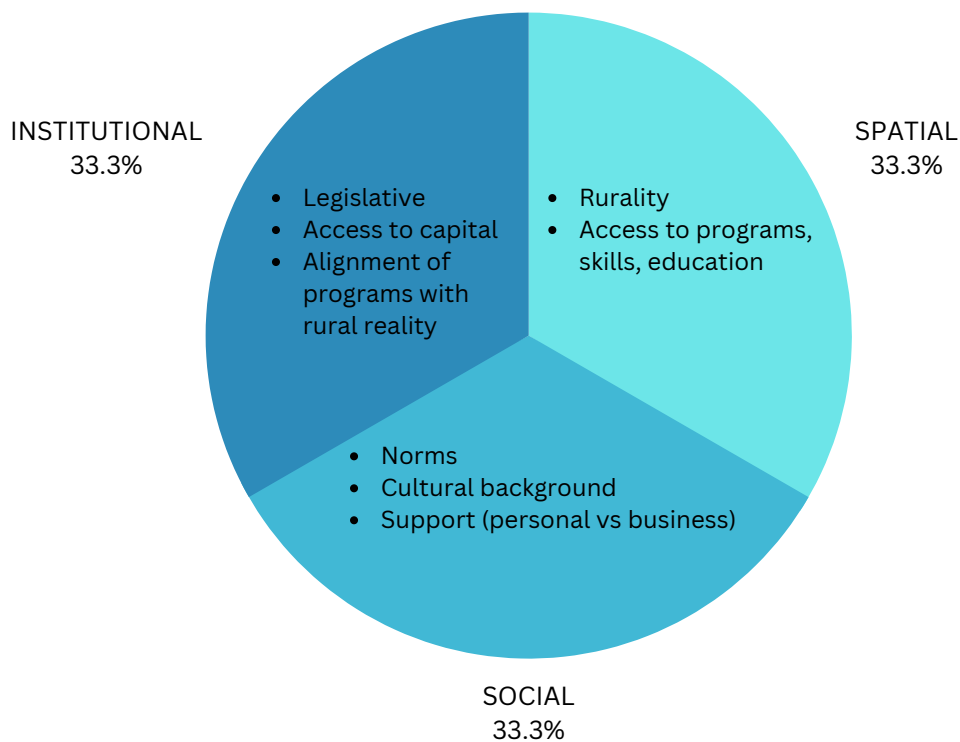


Figure 1: Barriers which prevent female entrepreneurs in rural areas from receiving financial support.

‘There is a conflicting images of women entrepreneurs. One image is that of economically emancipated, urban, privileged, White (often Western) women. Another is that of racialized, rural, third-world women who are reliant on donors and micro-loans.’

CONCLUSIONS

- There are gaps in knowledge both in the practical sense and in the literature. The scope of this project did not allow for sufficient exploration of these gaps, but rather has brought them to our attention.
- General strategies for prompting entrepreneurship are detached and often non applicable to female entrepreneurs in rural areas because they do not acknowledge for example that some businesses are meant to remain micro enterprises, are run from the household and are often-part time activities so therefore will not adhere to the normal growth trajectories.
- Digital technologies are seen as helpful solutions for female entrepreneurs in rural areas however they are highly inaccessible for several reasons. When applying to access funding for these technologies, companies use terms like 'diverse' or 'disadvantaged' in their eligibility forms without defining what these mean. Lack of access to technology and internet, knowledge and skills in using technology, and lack of financial and language literacy provide barriers particularly for (immigrant) female rural entrepreneurs.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The just transition and net zero discussions are typically centred around scientific and technical solutions that are not always bottom-up and community led. Funding and skills training to support a just transition and movement towards net zero must account for collaborative leadership and bottom-up methods to ensure rural females have a place in this process.
- Policies which support female entrepreneurs in the transition to net-zero must consider the intergenerational, intersectional and geo-political barriers to engagement and success.

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