



FACT SHEET

Women and Sustainable Decision Making

Women's full participation in sustainable decision-making is essential for effective, inclusive, and just climate solutions. This Fact Sheet outlines why women must be involved at all levels of climate leadership, the barriers they face, the strategies required to overcome those barriers, and the practical steps Zontians can take to drive change.

Why We Need Women in Sustainable Decision-Making

Women bring unique insights, experiences, and expertise to climate and sustainability decisions. Women leaders are more likely to advocate for stronger environmental, social, and governance (ESG) outcomes.

Countries with a higher proportion of women in political leadership tend to adopt stronger environmental policies. In business, gender-diverse leadership is associated with better ESG performance and increased innovation. In communities, women lead grassroots initiatives that protect biodiversity, conserve resources, and build resilience to climate shocks.

Yet, across all sectors, women remain underrepresented. Elevating women into leadership roles is not only fair—it is strategic. It improves decision quality, strengthens democracy, and builds climate resilience for all.

Barriers to Women's Participation

Despite their critical role, women face persistent barriers that limit their influence in climate and sustainability decisions. These include:

- **Gender Stereotypes and Social Norms:** Deeply ingrained beliefs about women's roles restrict leadership opportunities from an early age. Media, education systems, and cultural expectations often reinforce these limits.
- **Institutional and Political Barriers:** Women are underrepresented in climate negotiations and science, and are often excluded from decision-making bodies. Bias, tokenism, and gender-based violence further hinder progress.
- **Limited Access to Education and Skills Development:** Girls and women have less access to STEM education, digital technology, and leadership training, particularly in low-income and rural areas. Time poverty and caregiving responsibilities add further obstacles.
- **Economic Barriers:** Women have less access to finance, land, and business opportunities. They receive a tiny fraction of global climate finance, limiting their ability to lead or scale sustainable solutions.

These barriers are systemic and interconnected. Addressing them is vital to ensuring that climate solutions are effective, inclusive, and just.

Solutions and Strategies for Inclusion

Removing barriers to women's participation requires coordinated action across policy, education, finance, and community leadership. This is also central to achieving Zonta International's mission to empower women worldwide. The following strategies highlight key areas for action.

- **Gender-Responsive Policies:** International agreements such as CEDAW, the Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework provide strong mandates for women's equal participation. National and local policies must embed gender equity into climate planning and budgeting.
- **Capacity Building and Education:** Training programs, mentorship, and feminist leadership development can equip women to lead. Climate literacy and digital access are crucial tools for bridging gender gaps.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Investing in women-led enterprises and funding gender-equitable climate solutions benefits both communities and ecosystems. Gender-responsive budgeting and finance mechanisms, such as the Green Climate Fund, are starting points.
- **Community and Intergenerational Leadership:** Women are already leading through grassroots movements, Indigenous knowledge systems, and youth climate advocacy. Engaging male allies and dismantling structural inequalities is essential to sustainable progress.

By building pathways for women's leadership, we build stronger, more equitable systems for everyone.

What Zontians Can Do

Zontians have a unique opportunity to lead the change by applying the practical Framework for Action:

1. **Gather the Facts:** Stay informed through credible sources. Explore local and national policies to identify gender gaps in climate planning. Attend educational events that raise awareness and promote understanding.
2. **Lead by Example:** Encourage leadership within clubs and promote Zonta's awards and fellowships. Celebrate and support local sustainability champions and integrate environmentally conscious practices into Zonta activities.
3. **Use Our Voice:** Speak out through social media, blogs, and public letters. Utilize campaigns like Zonta Says NOW to amplify messages and support women and youth leading the charge on climate justice.
4. **Advocate:** Call for gender-responsive climate policies and investments in women-led solutions. Support women candidates who prioritise sustainability and advocate for education policies that encourage girls to pursue STEM fields.
5. **Collaborate:** Partner with other Zonta clubs, Z and Golden Z clubs, and like-minded organizations. Host joint forums and intergenerational events to build solidarity and expand reach. Celebrate global days, such as International Women's Day and Earth Day, that highlight women's leadership and environmental stewardship.



For more information, see the Research Paper that informs this Fact Sheet, and the infographic of key facts available from the resources page at zonta.org/zontasaysnow

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