

Education, the future workforce, equal opportunities, Bio economy - Challenges and opportunities

CHAIR'S SUMMARY: THE BARENTS FOREST FORUM 2019
– THE BARENTS REGION IN A BIOBASED FUTURE

Education

Interest to apply for professional level education in forestry is declining. One reason for the declining interest is that the sector does not appear attractive enough to young people because of the lack of competitive employment opportunities compared to other sectors. Educational institutions need to broaden the career opportunities of forest education. To be attractive education programmes need to have a more comprehensive approach, including the input from stakeholder like businesses, research and policy makers. Programmes must also be multidisciplinary in order to tackle global challenges such as climate change.

In order to retain the current workforce and ensure skills are updated and fit to use there is also a need to provide good opportunities for professionals for continuous capacity building.

Recommendation

The BFSN should

Facilitate the sharing of perspectives and knowledge on forest education and capacity building

The future workforce

The forest sector is getting more diversified and multi-sided sector. This offers new opportunities for providing new forest-based services and products. At the same time employment in traditional forestry, focussing on timber production will most likely continue to decline. The existing workforce will be critical for achieving effective and sustainable management of forests. When preparing the workforce for future demands we should consider the current trends with regard to digitalization, new entrepreneurship, seasonality of forest work and the innovative nature of the forest sector.

At the same time the ageing workforce combined with continued urbanization make it both more urgent and difficult to attract the talent needed for the future. Forestry need to find solutions to retain existing workforce and attract new high potential workers in a more competitive labour market in the future. This requires long-term plans, based on a thorough assessment of current skills and age profiles and identification of current and future skills needs.

Recommendation

The BFSN should

foster increased cooperation in the region to get experience on how to facilitate mapping on future labour needs and to develop strategies to ensure a skilled workforce for the future. This could include data collection, educational programmes etc.

exchange experience on approaches to challenges and solutions with regard to digitalization, entrepreneurship and the seasonality of forest work etc.

Equal opportunities

It has been increasingly recognized that forestry is not about trees and forest but about people. Forestry therefore needs both men and women. Awareness of this fact and of the what contributions women could and should make to forestry is still low among male foresters. Forestry continues to be a “men’s world”, in spite of the progress towards more participation of women that has been made over the last decades, major imbalances persist. Overall the share of women in the workforce continue to be rather low. While there are signs of improvement women are still strongly underrepresented in management and decision making. Women will be needed in the workforce, for the forest sector to be competitive and attract young people to enter the sector. A sustainable sector needs sustainable people.

Recommendations

The BFSN should

- promote the collection of data and case studies into specific aspects of women’s involvement in forestry
- disseminate information about national experiences, in particular successful measures and good practices to foster equal opportunities including gender, age, nationality etc,

Forest bioeconomy - Challenges and opportunities

The Barents region is a stronghold for forest-based innovations and technical development in many sectors, for example food, medicine, construction etc. Bioeconomy provides us with the opportunities to develop these sectors. Further development has the potential to contribute to solutions for major global issues.

To seek consensus between environmental, economic and social aspects and increase the understanding of trade-offs between these is a prerequisite to advance the transition. Forest will make an important contribution but will not be enough for every purpose. We need more scientific evidence on the role of forest in the transition to a circular bio economy, including its role in climate change mitigation.

There is need to improve the awareness of what forest can contribute in terms of new products, services and solutions. Hence there is a need to shift focus away from bioenergy alone.

Digitalisation is a game changer as it offers new tools to improve efficiency in the forest value chains and may also open avenues for the development of new products, services and jobs.

Recommendation.

The BFSN should

Raise awareness and facilitate exchange of experience and cutting-edge technology and solutions

Foster science/policy dialogues in its activities for example by increasing cooperation with relevant research networks.