Chapter 12
Women Leaders in Environmental Management

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ABSTRACT

This book chapter explores the significant role of women leaders in environmental management and their impact on sustainable development. Historically, women have been underrepresented in leadership positions in the environmental sector, but in recent years, their contributions and achievements have gained recognition worldwide. The chapter begins by discussing the barriers and challenges that women have faced in accessing leadership roles in environmental management. It examines social, cultural, and institutional factors that have limited women's participation and advancement in this field. Despite these obstacles, the chapter highlights the success stories of pioneering women leaders who have defied societal norms and shattered glass ceilings to make a difference in environmental conservation and sustainability. The chapter then delves into the unique perspectives and approaches that women bring to environmental management.

INTRODUCTION

The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within the environmental sector has been a longstanding matter of concern. Despite their significant contributions to environmental management and sustainability, women have faced systemic barriers and discrimination (Sembiring & Nitivattananon, 2010) hindering their access to leadership roles and decision-making processes. This chapter aims to shed light on the historical challenges that women leaders have encountered in the environmental field and the transformative impact they have had in fostering a greener and more equitable future.

Historical Challenges in Environmental Leadership

Throughout history, the environmental sector, much like many other fields, has been predominantly male dominated. Women faced considerable challenges and biases that restricted their access to leadership positions within environmental organizations, government agencies, and policymaking bodies. The prevailing gender norms and societal expectations relegated women to supporting roles, limiting their opportunities to take on leadership roles and influence environmental policies.

Gender Bias and Discrimination

Gender bias and discrimination have been pervasive in the environmental sector, perpetuating the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Stereotypes about women's abilities and expertise in scientific and technical fields, such as ecology and conservation, hindered their career advancement and recognition (Crandall et al., 2021). Additionally, women have often been overlooked for leadership positions, with decision-makers favouring male candidates, further exacerbating the gender gap in environmental management.

Limited Access to Education and Resources

Historically, women faced limited access to education and professional development opportunities, particularly in the scientific and environmental fields. Unequal access to resources and mentorship programs hindered their career progression, making it challenging for women to break into leadership roles and excel in environmental management (Barkhuizen et al., 2022).

The Glass Ceiling Effect

The glass ceiling effect, a phenomenon where women encounter invisible barriers that prevent them from advancing to top leadership positions, has been prevalent in the environmental sector. Despite their expertise and dedication, women have often found themselves stuck in middle management roles, unable to ascend to top leadership positions, where decisions and policies are formulated.

Social Expectations and Family Responsibilities

Traditional social expectations often placed the burden of caregiving and family responsibilities primarily on women. Balancing family life with demanding leadership roles in the environmental sector posed additional challenges for women, dissuading some from pursuing leadership positions or advancing their careers (Bismark et al. 2015).

Women's Contributions and Resilience

Despite the barriers they faced, women have made remarkable contributions to environmental management and sustainability. Many women demonstrated exceptional leadership skills, pioneering groundbreaking research, community-based conservation efforts, and advocacy for climate action (Shaw, 2006). Their

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