



Safeguarding nature and biodiversity through women and Indigenous communities

ESG voices podcast

Musical intro

Host:

Hello, and welcome to another episode of ESG Voices. This podcast series addresses the opportunities and challenges within ESG through interviews with ESG specialists from KPMG and beyond.

Throughout this series, we will discuss a broad range of environmental, social, and governance issues, aiming to support governments, businesses, and communities in creating an equitable and prosperous future.

In today's podcast, I'll be handing over the mic to Camilla Fontenelle, Supervising Consultant, KPMG in Brazil, and Chair of Leaders 2050, a KPMG-led, external facing network for young professionals interested in climate, energy transition and ESG.

Camilla will be sitting down with Sarah Nelson, Global Lead, Nature & Biodiversity at KPMG International, to discuss the role that women, and local and Indigenous communities, have to play in safeguarding nature and biodiversity around the world.

Camilla and Sarah, welcome. We are thrilled to have you with us and look forward to hearing this discussion. Without further ado, Camilla, I'll pass the mic over to you to kick-off this conversation.

Camilla Fontenelle:

Greetings and thank you for having me. So happy and humbled to be part of the discussion as just one member of the global community of practitioners led by Sarah.

The relationship between gender, local traditions, and safeguarding nature may not be immediately obvious, which is why I'm so excited to explore this topic.

So, Sarah, to kick off this conversation could you please explain the important role that women play in safeguarding nature and biodiversity? And if this relationship is one sided in terms of causality? How do women contribute to this effort, especially in local and Indigenous communities?

Sarah Nelson:

Yes, thank you and delighted to be here. Thank you, Camilla, for joining us for this conversation. So, on this question I recently came across a report from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN),

which quoted women hold up half of the sky. And that report went on to say that, as a matter of fact, due to the gender roles assigned to them by society, women actually shouldered more than half the responsibilities, which include the work outside the limited domain of homes which are usually considered to be that area of work.

And this is really the same for nature as well, where traditionally women have been stewards of the land, particularly in rural areas where they are often responsible for things like farming, gardening and preserving natural resources.

But as you've alluded to Camilla, this is not a one-sided relationship. And women really rely on nature to get their food or medicines and for their livelihoods and nowhere is this relationship more stark than what we get in Indigenous communities. And Indigenous peoples have long been successful stewards of the world's biodiversity and their knowledge, innovations and practices ensure the sustainable use of biological resources, carbon sequestration, food security and crop diversity.

And an often quoted figure that we hear is that through Indigenous peoples, they comprise only around 5 percent of the global population, but they protect over 80 percent of biodiversity left in the world, which is just an amazing stat when we think about it.

And more importantly than that, when you delve into those statistics and you start to look at some of these figures around Indigenous people, you find out the areas managed by Indigenous peoples are the oldest form of biodiversity conservation and now has been scientifically shown to often be the most effective. So, women within Indigenous communities have been shown to play a really key role in this space. So this is a super important topic for us to be discussing today.

Camilla Fontenelle:

Actually, your comment just reminded me of our colleague Maria Oenoto, who shared in the KPMG publication how Indonesia women often serve as guardians of nature because they are the primary caregivers and resource managers. So I really could relate to your speech.

This leads me to my next question for you. As a leader of such a diverse community of experts and practitioners in a global firm, the workforce includes qualified women from very different backgrounds.

Could you please share some examples of where you have personally witnessed the impactful role of women in protecting our planet?

Actually, this topic is particularly close to my heart as my family has a great part of it that is rural and includes members of Indigenous descent. So I can acknowledge that in those environments women may face limited opportunities to become experience and pursue higher education.

Sarah Nelson:

Thank you. And it's a great question and it's a real privilege actually, to lead such a brilliant group of experts across KPMG in this space. And we have many, many brilliant women across KPMG and particularly in the KPMG nature biodiversity space, so like Camilla, yourself, but also you referenced the great work of our colleague Maria Oenoto from Indonesia as well, who is also pioneering work in this space in Indonesia. And a few other concrete examples actually from across the network of just how and where our women are playing such a great role in this space.

So I'm going to call out first my colleague Carolin Leeshaa, who really kickstarted this work in the nature space for KPMG and has been a real driving force on the TNFD taskforce and really instrumental both in that role but as well as like the pioneering work that she's done for clients in Australia in this space as well.

And we're really lucky to also have Dr. Daiane Faeller, who represents KPMG for us in Singapore, who sits on the VERA board specifically focused on the role of blue carbon, recognizing her background and her academic work in oceanography and marine issues.

And then another really great example I think comes from colleagues in Europe and one of our colleagues, Elisabeth Bakker, from our Netherlands firm, has spearheaded a relationship between KPMG and Naturalis. Naturalis is one of the world's leading scientific institutions, and the work that Elisabeth has done there has really tried to bring together the expertise and the commercial expertise from KPMG with Naturalis biodiversity expertise and scientific knowledge in this space to really ensure scientific integrity to our nature and biodiversity projects.

But really right across my career, I can say working in a number of different sectors across the UN, Business, Government, ENGO, women have always been really front and center in terms of driving nature and biodiversity solutions and whether that be one of my former inspirational bosses, Angela Cropper, who is the former deputy executive director at UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and who was also the first executive Secretary of the Convention of Biological Diversity and who did so much throughout her career to really drive forward works in this space.

Or inspirational women like Patricia Zurita, who was the first female head of the global conservation NGO in that case, BirdLife International, who was from a developing country background and really, really inspirational women, those two.

And then, you know, there are also people and we shouldn't forget this, key conservation scientists who are working every day on the ground. In some of the most

demanding and difficult conditions and two of my former colleagues, Juliet Vickery and Emily Woodfield, working in the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the UK partner of BirdLife International, have really done a huge amount of work in this space, working in very difficult conditions in forests in West Africa and Indonesia, so that we can all gain a better understanding into the reasons behind key bird species declines.

And I could go on forever name checking brilliant female colleagues in this space. But I agree, as women we sometimes feel really limited in the space occupying roles, at anything like middle management positions where often the men in more senior roles in organizations actually have less experience than us. But I do feel like this has started to change. And I was really delighted to hear the news that the new CBD Executive Secretary, Astrid Schomaker, was a woman, which is great news because she will be spearheading efforts now to drive forwards the implementation of the global biodiversity framework. So yes, more work is needed, but I think we should also recognize how far we've come as well.

Camilla Fontenelle:

Sarah hearing that is quite refreshing actually. So I'm aware of your expertise, background in public policy when only a few people had that experience and expertise.

With that in mind, I would like to ask you three questions in a row, dun,dun,dun. Do you believe that the role of women and rural and Indigenous communities strongly translates to the setting of policies surrounding protection of our planet?

Second, are there enough women at the decision making table and what needs to change to ensure their presence?

Lastly, do you feel that economic and social policies could play a role in achieving these objectives?

Sarah Nelson:

So great questions and I'll see what I can do to answer them. So I think the good news is that I do think we have good female representation and I've talked about that in this sector and across all sectors that I've worked in, and particularly in the policy side as well. And I think whilst efforts have been made in recent years to ensure that decisions include and properly integrate Indigenous and local communities, there is still actually a long way to go on that.

So I think on the sort of female front and representation, we're doing okay, we could do better. But in terms of properly integrating Indigenous and local communities, I think there is still a long way to go and I think most of the work is needed when it comes to the engagement of women and in particular the engagement of Indigenous and local communities when it comes to senior decision making both in government and across policy and public policy, but also in businesses.

And here the balance could definitely be better. And I think that is particularly the case when we look at, for example, sectors such as the finance sector, which is of course, as we all know, money talks. And so that is where the real decision making happens and where women and in particular voices from the Indigenous and local communities still do not have an equal representation or voice at the table.

So what do I think needs to change? Well, I think perhaps change is needed on both sides. So change is needed from those key decision makers to properly acknowledge and integrate the voices and representation of women and Indigenous communities into decision making at the top table discussions. But also I think change is needed by us women and Indigenous peoples to be more bold about speaking up and ensuring and actually insisting that we are part of that conversation.

So let's take a leaf out of our male counterparts books on this and start to insist that we are part of that conversation.

And then finally, you ask the question, a really good question actually around how we feel that economic and social policies could play a role in achieving these objectives. I think that's absolutely critical and for me that's the, you know, the real rationale behind the entire ESG agenda coming together in the way that it does for businesses.

And also that way back in 2015, the world governments agreed to come together and agree the Sustainable Development Goals that really brings together the social, the environmental and the economic perspectives into one global framework. And I think, you know, the reason that that happened was actually exactly what you said, recognizing that environmental objectives can only be achieved if they're effectively underpinned by social and economic policies and that actually those are needed when it comes to conversations like we've just had, which is that diversity conversation and ensuring that diversity of views is actually fed into environmental decision making.

Camilla Fontenelle:

Thank you so much. I appreciate this point Sarah. Regarding the challenges in this space, could you please cover some of those barriers that women especially from Indigenous communities face in playing an impactful role in protecting nature? Do you think that these barriers have been overcome or are they still present?

Sarah Nelson:

So I think some of the biggest barriers that women in particular face in this space are actually quite similar to those that women face across all sectors. So whether that be things like smashing through the glass ceiling in order to have a seat on the most senior decision making boards, but importantly when they get there, being treated then as an equal, where they may be at a minority in their space and then making sure they drag as many other women through as possible so that they are not alone at that top table.

It's still one of the key issues. I think, you know, the juggling their roles in this space with childcare and other caring responsibilities cannot be ignored. Nor do I think that sort of equal access to this issue makers as well. So I think these barriers are, you know, sort of not dissimilar for females as they are across, across all sectors.

And I think those barriers are even greater when it comes to the challenges that Indigenous and local communities have in terms of playing an impactful role in nature. So in many cases, the stewards of the land, all of their actions have an impact on nature. But when it comes to the decisions around how that land might best be managed or used often those decisions are taken right out of their hands and are made in other decision making forums where they're either not invited or they're not properly listened to. And so these are people who have managed and taken care of land for years and they know how to manage it best.

Camilla Fontenelle:

Thank you. Before we wrap up, do you have any final thoughts you would like to share? Also, what message would you like to convey to young generations?

Sarah Nelson:

Thank you. So I think two things. I'm going to say for a third time because I think it's so important. And just another reminder of that statistic that I set up at the start that Indigenous peoples protect up to 80 percent of the world's biodiversity. And many of these are women. So we need to make sure they have a voice at the table.

And my message to the younger generation would be really simple, be bold and if you are not invited into discussions, invite yourself.

Camilla Fontenelle:

Oh Sarah. The lesson I learned from today's episode is that we should root for equality as it is not just about trees anymore. Sarah on behalf of our biodiversity community and KPMG Leaders 2050. I would like to express our gratitude for the time you spent sharing the expertise with us. Thank you once again for sharing this valuable insights.

Sarah Nelson:

Thank you, Camilla, and thank you for participating as well.

Host:

Camilla and Sarah, what a fascinating discussion. Thank you for joining us today to provide our listeners with insights on the role women, and local and Indigenous communities, can play in protecting the nature of our planet.

Join us again next time for more insights from ESG leaders and innovators. You can also find our latest insights covering a range of ESG topics by visiting kpmg.com/ESG.

Thanks for listening.

Musical exit

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