

# WOMEN AND COMMONLANDS GOVERNANCE

Handbook for Gender-Responsive  
Common Land Management

---

Wonder Commonlands Project  
Erasmus+ Programme 2024-2025



# About This Handbook

This handbook synthesizes learnings from the Wonder Commonlands Erasmus+ project webinar series conducted throughout 2025, bringing together practitioners, academics, activists, and community leaders from across Europe.

## Project Partners

- Fundación Entretantos (Spain) - Project Coordinator
- STEP (Bulgaria)
- Norsk seterkultur (Norway)
- ELGO-DIMITRA (Greece)
- Slow Food Abruzzo & University of Teramo (Italy)
- BABALex (France)
- ISEG, University of Lisboa (Portugal)

## Acknowledgements

We extend deep gratitude to the women commoners who shared their experiences, knowledge, and time throughout this project, and all those whose work continues every day in service of more participative models of governance and a more sacred relationship to land.

**Suggested Citation:** Wonder Commonlands Partnership (2025). Women and Commons Governance: A Practical Guide for Gender-Responsive Common Land Management. Erasmus+ Programme.

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein



Co-funded by  
the European Union



Women and commonlands governance handbook © 2026 by Wonder Commonlands Consortium is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

# Contents

|                                                                     |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| About This Handbook                                                 | 1  |
| Project Partners                                                    | 1  |
| Acknowledgements                                                    | 1  |
| Contents                                                            | 2  |
| 1. Introduction: Why Gender Matters in Commons Governance           | 4  |
| Why this is important                                               | 4  |
| <b>Key aspects of the gender-perspective shift</b>                  | 4  |
| Ecofeminism and Care-Based Approaches                               | 5  |
| Core Principles:                                                    | 5  |
| From the Field: Norwegian Budeie Tradition                          | 5  |
| Who This Handbook Is For                                            | 7  |
| 2. Understanding the Foundations                                    | 8  |
| What Are Commonlands?                                               | 8  |
| The 12 Factors Framework                                            | 8  |
| 3. Understanding Barriers to Women's Participation                  | 10 |
| Priority Barriers Identified Across European Contexts               | 10 |
| 1. Time Poverty and the Triple Burden                               | 10 |
| 2. Gendered Public Spaces                                           | 10 |
| 3. Male Control Over Power Structures                               | 10 |
| 4. Self-Censorship and Internalized Limitations                     | 10 |
| 5. Legal Knowledge Gaps                                             | 11 |
| Newly Emerged Barrier: Gender-Based Harassment                      | 11 |
| The Intersectional Nature of Exclusion                              | 11 |
| 4. Strategies for Transformation                                    | 12 |
| Building Women's Networks: "Alone, Invisible; Together, Invincible" | 12 |
| Key Network-Building Principles:                                    | 12 |
| Case Study: Portuguese Women Shepherds Network                      | 12 |
| 5. Practical Tools for Implementation                               | 13 |
| Tool 1: Participatory Barrier Mapping Workshop                      | 13 |
| Methodology:                                                        | 13 |
| Visual Tools:                                                       | 13 |
| Expected Outcomes:                                                  | 13 |
| Tool 2: Forum Theatre for Barriers and Solutions                    | 13 |
| Session Structure:                                                  | 14 |
| Facilitator Tips:                                                   | 15 |

|                                                |    |
|------------------------------------------------|----|
| Expected Outcomes:                             | 15 |
| Adaptation for Mixed-Gender Groups:            | 16 |
| Follow-Up Activities:                          | 16 |
| Tool 3: Developing an Anti-Harassment Protocol | 16 |
| Why This Matters:                              | 16 |
| Essential Protocol Elements:                   | 16 |
| Implementation Steps:                          | 17 |
| 6. Best Practices and Success Stories          | 18 |
| Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)         | 18 |
| Women's Networking: The Power of Solidarity    | 18 |
| Culture-Based vs. Technocratic Models          | 18 |
| 7. Policy Recommendations                      | 18 |
| Moving Forward: From Knowledge to Action       | 19 |
| Key Takeaways                                  | 19 |
| Next Steps for Your Organization               | 19 |
| Resources and Contacts                         | 19 |

# 1. Introduction: Why Gender Matters in Commons Governance

Common lands - forests, pastures, water systems, and other collectively managed natural resources - represent critical social-ecological systems across Europe. These spaces sustain rural livelihoods, conserve biodiversity, and embody centuries of cooperative governance. Yet despite women's historical and ongoing contributions to commons management, they remain systematically excluded from decision-making spaces and leadership roles.

## Why this is important

Integrating a gender perspective into the governance of the commons is essential for achieving both **social justice and ecological sustainability**. This perspective makes visible how **social norms, gender mandates, and entrenched power structures** historically limit women's access to decision-making spaces and the benefits derived from collective resource management.

By recognizing and overcoming structural barriers (such as the "**triple burden**" of care, productive, and community work) governance models can empower women as **agents of change** who possess unique **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)** regarding sustainable resource management and biodiversity conservation.

## Key aspects of the gender-perspective shift

Furthermore, adopting a gender-responsive approach shifts the focus toward **care-centered and reciprocal relationships** with the land, which has been shown to foster more **transparent management and an equitable distribution** of the economic value generated by common lands,. Ultimately, the sources suggest that the sustainability of ecosystems is inseparable from the inclusion of women, as their participation ensures a more **holistic, resilient, and democratic** governance of shared resources.

This gender perspective applied to common land governance reveals that integrating women's views (and other marginalised groups) is not just about fairness, but about a **fundamental and necessary shift in how resources are managed and valued**.

- **Preserving Specialized Knowledge:** Women are primary holders of **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)**, which is often marginalized in formal, technocratic systems. This includes intergenerational expertise in **medicinal plants**, traditional crafts, and **animal welfare**—such as the Norwegian *budeie* tradition, which emphasizes care-centered animal management over industrial efficiency. Integrating this knowledge is critical for **biodiversity conservation** and effective **climate adaptation**.

- **Shifting from Extraction to Reciprocity:** A gender perspective introduces **ecofeminist frameworks** that challenge extractive models treating nature solely as a resource. By centering **care and reciprocity**, governance can move toward **holistic management** that recognizes the

interdependence between humans, animals, and ecosystems. This approach prioritizes **long-term ecological health** over short-term production.

- **Exposing Informal Power Structures:** It is vital to distinguish between **"rules-in-form"** (formal laws) and **"rules-in-use"** (daily practices). Even when legal rules seem neutral, informal barriers like **male-dominated public spaces** (e.g., cafés) and social expectations of **self-censorship** prevent women from exercising their right to participate. A gender lens identifies these "invisible" barriers, allowing for the creation of **safe spaces** and **legal literacy** programs that empower women to defend community rights effectively.
- **Enhancing Governance Transparency and Equity:** Research indicates that the inclusion of women in decision-making often leads to **more transparent management** and a more **equitable distribution** of the economic value generated by the commons. This ensures that the benefits of collective resources—such as timber, grazing fees, or energy revenue—are not concentrated among a few, but support the **sustainability of the entire community**.
- **Addressing the "Triple Burden":** Recognizing the **"time poverty"** caused by women's **triple burden** (unpaid care work, productive farming, and community labor) allows for practical governance reforms. This includes **adapting meeting schedules** and formats to be more flexible, which is essential for ensuring that participation is not a privilege for those with free time, but an accessible right for all.

Ultimately, the sources emphasize that **justice for women and the sustainability of ecosystems are inseparable**; you cannot have a resilient "common" if a significant portion of the community is excluded from its stewardship.

## Ecofeminism and Care-Based Approaches

The Wonder Commonlands project draws on ecofeminist frameworks that link environmental sustainability with social justice. These perspectives reveal how oppression of women and destruction of nature are interconnected through patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism.

### Core Principles:

- Challenging binary thinking: Dismantling false dichotomies between nature/culture, male/female, production/reproduction
- Centering care and reciprocity: Moving beyond extractive efficiency to care-centered relationships with land and animals
- Recognizing interdependence: Acknowledging that humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems are fundamentally interconnected
- Justice as transformative goal: Environmental sustainability and gender equality are inseparable

### From the Field: Norwegian Budeie Tradition

*The Norwegian budeie tradition exemplifies care-centered commons management. Women managing mountain summer pastures develop intimate relationships with livestock through daily care, attention to individual animal needs, and traditional dairy processing. This knowledge encompasses identifying pasture quality, managing herd health, and understanding animal behavior — expertise built through care rather than mechanization.*

## Who This Handbook Is For

This handbook serves multiple audiences with a shared interest in promoting gender equality and inclusive governance in common lands:

- Commons governance boards seeking to strengthen women's participation and leadership
- Women commoners looking for strategies and tools to claim their rightful space in decision-making
- Support organizations and rural development agencies working with common lands communities
- Policymakers at local, regional, national, and European levels
- Researchers and educators studying commons governance and gender



## 2. Understanding the Foundations

### What Are Commonlands?

Commons are not just shared resources, but a social-ecological system (land, water, fisheries, forests...) managed collectively by a community through self-organized rules, rather than solely by the state or private market. They encompass three interconnected elements:

1. **Natural resources (forests, pastures, water, etc.)**
2. **Communities that manage them collectively**
3. **Governance systems (formal and informal rules)**

This integrated perspective reveals that managing commons sustainably requires attending not just to ecosystems, but to social relationships, power dynamics, and knowledge systems.

In the case of this project, most of our work revolves around the management of common land and land systems (agrarian land, pastures, forests...) but most of our conclusions can also apply to all traditional commons, and even the more modern commons.

It is important to notice that the legal framework for common lands varies from country to country, which in turn influences the possibility for the rural population to identify themselves as “commoners”, even when their activities and relationships to each other and to land very much resemble those described for a commons economy.

### The 12 Factors Framework

Bina Agarwal is a prominent academic whose research on gender, participatory exclusions, and community forestry serves as a foundational pillar for analyzing collective resource management. Her methodology is centered on a conceptual framework that distinguishes between various levels of participation, ranging from mere nominal presence to interactive participation, while identifying a specific system of factors that prevent women from reaching levels of significant influence. We have chosen Agarwal as a primary reference because her work provides a "valid and inspiring" lens for distinguishing between "rules-in-form" (formal regulations) and "rules-in-use" (actual practices), allowing the project to address the structural and informal barriers that keep governance systems from being truly inclusive.

Although her work is based on India's communal forestry systems, we have studied how the same principles can be applied to our particular environment. So, building on her categories and expanding them thanks to the Iberian Somos Comuneras network, we identify 12 interconnected factors that shape women's participation in the governance of the commons. Understanding these factors is essential for diagnosing barriers and designing effective interventions.

| FACTOR                         | DESCRIPTION                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Membership Rules            | Who is eligible to participate? Historical exclusions (male representation, widow clauses) continue to shape current patterns. |
| 2. Social Norms                | Gender behavior expectations that dictate how women should act in public spaces and governance contexts.                       |
| 3. Perceptions of Capacity     | Assumptions about women's ability to contribute technical knowledge or leadership.                                             |
| 4. Male Control of Power       | Active resistance from men when women assume governance roles, manifesting as questioning competence or legal challenges.      |
| 5. Personal Attributes         | Individual factors like education, confidence, public speaking skills, and legal knowledge.                                    |
| 6. Household Factors           | Time poverty from triple burden (care work, productive work, community labor) and economic dependencies.                       |
| 7. Resource Type               | Different commons (forests, water, pastures) have varying gender dynamics based on historical use patterns.                    |
| 8. Governance Composition      | Presence of women in decision-making bodies affects comfort levels and influence of other women.                               |
| 9. Knowledge Access            | Who controls technical, legal, and traditional ecological knowledge related to commons management.                             |
| 10. Meeting Characteristics    | Timing, location, format, and facilitation of governance meetings – often designed around male availability.                   |
| 11. Participation Consequences | Emotional exhaustion, family tensions, community backlash, and harassment that result from women's participation.              |
| 12. External Support           | Presence of facilitators, technical support, and professional accompaniment that can enable or constrain participation.        |

### 3. Understanding Barriers to Women's Participation

Before designing interventions, communities must identify which barriers are most significant in their specific context. The 12 factors framework provides a systematic approach to this diagnosis. Through participatory workshops with women commoners from Portugal, Spain, and other European territories, we explained the 12 factors and prioritised which were considered the most critical. These are the ones that were deemed more salient in the Spanish-Portuguese context:

#### Priority Barriers Identified Across European Contexts

##### 1. Time Poverty and the Triple Burden

Rural women face disproportionate responsibility for three types of work simultaneously:

- Unpaid care work: Children, elderly family members, household maintenance
- Productive work: Family farming, animal husbandry, crafts, wage labor
- Community labor: Festival organization, mutual aid, informal social support

This leaves minimal time and energy for participation in governance meetings or public activities. When governance meetings occur during evening hours after a full day of work, or require travel without consideration for childcare, participation becomes impossible for many women.

##### 2. Gendered Public Spaces

Public spaces such as cafés, community centers, and meeting halls remain male-dominated in many rural areas. Women often feel uncomfortable in these spaces or face explicit exclusion through social norms. Even when women are legally entitled to participate in assemblies, family expectations and social pressure push them to defer to male relatives who 'represent' household interests.

##### 3. Male Control Over Power Structures

Direct opposition from men when women assume governance roles takes multiple forms: questioning women's competence, filing legal challenges, spreading rumors about fund mismanagement, and undermining decisions. This resistance reflects both gender bias and threatened power dynamics.

##### 4. Self-Censorship and Internalized Limitations

Women often internalize their exclusion, suggesting that fathers or sons attend meetings in their place. This self-censorship roots in habit, social expectation, and lack of confidence in public speaking or formal roles. Breaking these patterns requires safe spaces specifically for women where they can practice new skills without judgment.

## 5. Legal Knowledge Gaps

Many commoners - especially women - lack understanding of legal frameworks governing common lands. This knowledge gap leaves communities vulnerable to exploitation, internal conflicts, and inability to defend their rights effectively. When women lack legal literacy, they cannot challenge assumptions or advocate for their interests.

### Newly Emerged Barrier: Gender-Based Harassment

During the Wonder Commonlands workshops, participants identified harassment and intimidation as a significant barrier not previously captured in the 12 factors framework (although it could well be considered a subsection of the “consequences” factor). Women leaders reported experiencing threats, verbal abuse, and social ostracism as consequences of their participation. This discovery underscores the importance of participatory barrier mapping: communities know their realities best.

## The Intersectional Nature of Exclusion

These barriers do not operate in isolation. Rural women experience multiple, intersecting forms of marginalization based on gender, class, geographic location, age, and education level. Young women face a double exclusion: by gender and by age. Older women with limited formal education encounter different challenges than younger women with university degrees who have left and returned to rural areas.

Understanding this complexity is essential for designing interventions that work for diverse women rather than assuming a single 'women's experience.'

## 4. Strategies for Transformation

Based on experiences from across Europe, we have identified proven strategies for strengthening women's participation in commons governance. These approaches are adaptable to different contexts while maintaining core principles of empowerment, collective action, and systemic change.

### Building Women's Networks: "Alone, Invisible; Together, Invincible"

Creating women-specific networks emerged as the most transformative strategy across all webinar discussions. These networks break isolation, build collective power, and create safe spaces for learning and mobilization.

#### Key Network-Building Principles:

1. Create women-only spaces where participation is essential, not optional
2. Use hybrid formats combining face-to-face gatherings with digital tools
3. Meet women where they are: whenever possible, go to villages and farms rather than expecting travel
4. Facilitate peer learning through farm visits and knowledge exchange
5. Support digital inclusion patiently, helping women acquire devices and skills
6. Scale gradually from local to regional to national-international networks
7. Make women's work visible through documentation, videos, and public events
8. Combine the sharing of technical knowledge with the building of meaningful relationships

#### Case Study: Portuguese Women Shepherds Network

What began as a simple WhatsApp group transformed daily experience for women shepherds across Portugal. The network provided:

- Constant access to support and information
- Peer-to-peer problem-solving on animal health, pasture management, market access
- Emotional solidarity during challenging times
- Collective advocacy voice for policy changes

Some women acquired their first smartphones specifically to participate. The network facilitated farm visits, hybrid workshops, and documentary videos that amplified women's voices and made their work visible to wider audiences. From individual isolation to collective action, the network built critical mass needed for political influence.

## 5. Practical Tools for Implementation

This chapter provides concrete tools that commons organizations can use immediately to strengthen women's participation.

### Tool 1: Participatory Barrier Mapping Workshop

**Purpose:** Identify which of the 12 factors are most relevant in your community and which are most susceptible to change.

**Duration:** 2–3 hours

**Participants:** Women commoners (preferably non-mixed groups for greater comfort)

#### Methodology:

4. Introduction (15 min): Present the 12 factors framework with local examples
5. Individual Reflection (20 min): Each participant identifies their top 5 barriers
6. Small Group Discussion (45 min): Groups of 4-5 share experiences and find patterns
7. Prioritization Matrix (40 min): Use a large visual matrix to map barriers by importance and capacity for change
8. Action Planning (30 min): Identify 2-3 priority barriers to address first

#### Visual Tools:

**Prioritization Matrix:** Draw a large grid with 'Importance' on vertical axis and 'Capacity for Change' on horizontal axis. Participants place sticky notes representing each barrier in the appropriate quadrant.

**Traffic Light Technique:** Use colored dots (red = critical barrier, yellow = moderate barrier, green = minor barrier) to vote on severity.

#### Expected Outcomes:

- Clear identification of 2-3 priority barriers specific to your community
- Shared understanding of which barriers are community-controlled vs. externally imposed
- Foundation for designing targeted interventions
- Strengthened relationships among women participants

### Tool 2: Forum Theatre for Barriers and Solutions

Based on Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed methodology, this participatory theatre tool allows women to embody, explore, and collectively solve the barriers they face in commons governance. Through dramatization, participants make invisible power dynamics visible and practice new responses in a safe, creative space.

**Purpose:** Use embodied, creative methods to represent barriers to participation, explore their root causes, and collaboratively rehearse solutions through improvisational theatre.

**Duration:** 3–4 hours (can be split into two sessions)

**Participants:** 15-25 women commoners; can include mixed groups in later stages for consciousness-raising

**Materials Needed:** Large open space, simple props (chairs, scarves, sticks), flipchart paper, markers

## Session Structure:

### Part 1: Warm-Up and Body Preparation (30 minutes)

The facilitator leads physical warm-up exercises to help participants relax, build trust, and prepare for creative expression. Activities include:

- Circle walking: Walking in a circle at different speeds, making eye contact, greeting each other non-verbally
- Body sculptures: In pairs, one person 'sculpts' the other into shapes representing emotions (joy, frustration, power, exhaustion)
- Sound and movement: Participants move through space making sounds and gestures that represent different barriers (e.g., being silenced, carrying heavy burdens, being invisible)

### Part 2: Story Collection and Selection (45 minutes)

1. Small groups (4-5 people) share real experiences of barriers they've faced in commons governance
2. Each group selects one story that resonates strongly and represents a common barrier
3. Groups present their stories briefly to the full group
4. Collectively select 2-3 stories to dramatize based on relevance and dramatic potential

### Part 3: Scene Creation and First Performance (45 minutes)

For each selected story:

5. The storyteller becomes the director, selecting participants to play different roles (herself, male board members, family members, etc.)
6. The group creates a short scene (5-7 minutes) showing the barrier in action — what happened, who said what, how it felt
7. Keep dialogue authentic and realistic; avoid exaggeration or caricature
8. Perform the scene once for the full group, ending at the point where the barrier prevailed (the 'problem' ending)

### Part 4: Forum Theatre — Collective Problem-Solving (60 minutes)

This is the heart of the methodology. The scene is performed again, but this time:

9. Any audience member can shout 'Stop!' at any point where they see an opportunity for different action
10. The person who shouted 'Stop!' replaces the protagonist (the woman facing the barrier) and tries a different strategy
11. Other actors respond realistically to the new action — they don't automatically cooperate; they maintain the barrier forces
12. After each intervention, the facilitator pauses to discuss: What changed? What worked? What didn't? What could be tried differently?
13. Multiple participants can try different strategies for the same scene
14. The facilitator encourages participants to be realistic — solutions should be actionable, not magical

## Part 5: Reflection and Action Planning (40 minutes)

After exploring solutions through theatre, the group reflects:

- What strategies emerged that could actually work in real life?
- What do these solutions require (skills, support, resources, courage)?
- What are the risks of trying these strategies? How can we mitigate them?
- What collective actions could support individual courage?
- Create specific action commitments: Who will try what? When? With what support?

### Facilitator Tips:

- Create psychological safety: Emphasize that this is a practice space, not performance. There are no wrong interventions.
- Maintain realism: Encourage actors playing barrier roles (oppressors) to respond realistically, not to suddenly change because someone wants them to. This helps test whether strategies would actually work.
- Encourage body awareness: Often solutions involve changing body language - standing taller, making eye contact, using firm tone. The theatre format lets women practice these physical changes.
- Balance individual and collective: While individuals try strategies, discussion should emphasize collective support needed (e.g., 'I could say that if I knew three other women would back me up').
- Respect emotional intensity: Some scenes may evoke strong emotions. Have co-facilitators who can support anyone who needs to step out. Build in breaks.
- Document solutions: Have someone taking notes on strategies that emerge so they can be compiled into an action list.

### Expected Outcomes:

- Embodied understanding of how barriers operate through power dynamics, body language, and social norms
- Collective repertoire of tested strategies that women can draw on in real situations
- Increased confidence through practicing difficult conversations in safe space
- Strengthened solidarity as women witness and support each other's struggles
- Recognition that individual courage requires collective support structures



- Concrete action commitments with peer accountability

### Adaptation for Mixed-Gender Groups:

Once women have practiced in women-only space, forum theatre can be powerful with mixed groups:

- Women perform scenes showing barriers they face, educating men about realities they may not see
- Men can intervene to play male allies — practicing how they could support women's participation
- Both women and men playing barrier roles helps everyone understand how power operates
- Creates shared language and understanding for governance transformation

### Follow-Up Activities:

- Buddy system: Pair participants who commit to trying similar strategies and checking in with each other
- Monthly check-ins: Gather to share what was tried, what worked, what challenges emerged
- New scene creation: As women try strategies and encounter new barriers, create new scenes to explore
- Documentation: Video or photograph scenes (with permission) to create visual resources for other communities

## Tool 3: Developing an Anti-Harassment Protocol

**Purpose:** Create clear, consensual procedures for preventing and responding to gender-based harassment, discrimination, and intimidation in commons governance spaces.

**Duration:** Two sessions of 3 hours each (development + refinement)

**Participants:** Full commons board plus facilitated input from women members

### Why This Matters:

During Wonder Commonlands workshops, harassment and intimidation emerged as a significant but previously unacknowledged barrier. Women leaders reported experiencing threats, verbal abuse, rumors, and social ostracism. Protocols make clear that such behavior is unacceptable and provide concrete procedures for response.

### Essential Protocol Elements:

#### 1. Clear Definition of Unacceptable Behaviors

The protocol must specify what constitutes harassment, including:

- Verbal harassment: Insults, demeaning comments, dismissive language based on gender

- Intimidation: Threats, aggressive body language, invasion of personal space
- Exclusionary behavior: Deliberately scheduling meetings to exclude women, holding informal decision-making in male-only spaces
- Rumor campaigns: Spreading false information to undermine women's credibility or reputation
- Questioning competence: Systematically challenging women's expertise or authority in ways not applied to men

## **2. Safe and Confidential Reporting Channels**

- Designated reference persons (ideally one woman and one man) who receive training
- Multiple reporting options: in-person, email, phone, anonymous written
- Guarantees of confidentiality with clear limits (when safety requires disclosure)
- Protection against retaliation for those who report

## **3. Step-by-Step Response Procedures**

15. Initial report received and documented
16. Reference person meets with complainant to understand situation and needs
17. Immediate safety measures if needed (e.g., ensuring complainant doesn't have to attend meetings alone with accused)
18. Investigation proportional to severity (informal conversation to formal inquiry)
19. Decision on appropriate response (education, mediation, sanctions, involvement of external authorities)
20. Follow-up with complainant to ensure situation has improved

## **4. Prevention and Education**

- Annual training for all board members on gender equality and respectful behavior
- Code of conduct signed by all participants in governance
- Public communication about the protocol's existence and the organization's commitment
- Regular review and updating of protocol based on experience

## **Implementation Steps:**

21. Facilitate workshop with women members to gather input on behaviors that make them feel unsafe or unwelcome
22. Draft protocol with small working group (including women leaders)
23. Present draft to full board for discussion and refinement
24. Vote to adopt protocol as official policy
25. Train designated reference persons
26. Communicate protocol to all members through multiple channels
27. Post protocol publicly (website, community center, meeting spaces)
28. Review annually and after any incident

## 6. Best Practices and Success Stories

### Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

Success in the Norwegian *budeie* tradition demonstrates that a care-centered approach leads to superior animal welfare and ecosystem health. Integrating this "invisible" knowledge into formal management plans is essential for resilient climate adaptation.

### Women's Networking: The Power of Solidarity

Digital networks, such as WhatsApp groups for shepherds in Portugal, have proven vital. These spaces break isolation, allow for rapid knowledge sharing, and provide the emotional support necessary to withstand the "consequences of participation" in hostile governance environments.

### Culture-Based vs. Technocratic Models

Culture-based solutions, grounded in local identity and community agency, are preferable over technocratic solutions, which tend to be top-down. Examples include:

- **The Welsh Skyline Project:** A co-production model putting community values at the center of forest management.
- **Pitões das Júnias (Portugal):** Using forage improvement as a social-ecological fire prevention strategy, proving that community-led management is the most effective defense against climate risk.

## 7. Policy Recommendations

Strategic reform requires shifting from short-term "project" mindsets to structural institutional support.

1. **Mandatory Gender Analysis:** Integrate gender impact assessments into all European "Green Transition" and agricultural policies.
2. **Sustained Institutional Funding:** Move away from competitive, short-term grants toward long-term support for community-led networks
3. **Rural Service Investment:** Recognize that transport, healthcare, and childcare are not "social issues" but **governance prerequisites**. Without them, women's "time poverty" remains an insurmountable barrier.
4. **Legal Protections and the "Right to Refuse":** Strengthen community management rights, including a **Veto Power** over extractive licenses (such as lithium mining) on common lands.

5. **Redefining Productivity:** Policy frameworks must value the "invisible" labor of care, reciprocity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission that women provide.

## Moving Forward: From Knowledge to Action

This handbook represents just the beginning of a longer journey toward gender-equitable commons governance. The experiences, strategies, and tools documented here come from real communities working to transform entrenched power structures and build more inclusive, sustainable commons management.

### Key Takeaways

1. Gender inequality in commons governance undermines both justice and environmental sustainability
2. Women possess invaluable traditional ecological knowledge that is systematically marginalized
3. Barriers to participation are multiple, intersecting, and context-specific
4. Women's networks transform isolation into collective power
5. Legal literacy, transparent governance, and care-based approaches are essential strategies
6. Systemic transformation requires addressing rural marginalization holistically

### Next Steps for Your Organization

1. Conduct a participatory barrier mapping workshop with women in your community
2. Audit your statutes and regulations for gender bias
3. Connect with existing women's networks (Somos Comunerías, Wonder Commonlands partners)
4. Develop an anti-harassment protocol collaboratively
5. Document and celebrate women's traditional ecological knowledge
6. Advocate for policy changes at local, regional, and national levels

### Resources and Contacts

For additional support, tools, case studies, and connection to European networks:

- Wonder Commonlands Project: [www.wondercommonlands.eu](http://www.wondercommonlands.eu)
- Somos Comunerías Network (Spain): [www.entretantos.org](http://www.entretantos.org), [comunerias@entretantos.org](mailto:comunerias@entretantos.org)