

NORDIC ESG NAVIGATORS

A REVIEW OF SUSTAINABLE
LEADERSHIP PRACTICES



This review of sustainable leadership practices is a part of the **EmpowerHer: Female Leadership for Sustainable Development** project, carried out with funds from the Nordic Council of Ministers and developed by: Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE), Association LIDERE, Fremtenkt, Association of Belarusian Business Abroad (ABBA).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CS3D Directive	Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DOGA	Design and Architecture Norway
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EGD	European Green Deal
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
ESG	Environmental, Social, Governance
ESGM	Environmental, Social, Governance Management
EU	European Union
FL	Futures Literacy
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IT	Information Technology
LLL	Life-long learning
NCM	Nordic Council of Ministers
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
NVL	The Nordic network for adult learning
P&L	Profit and Loss
PRI	Principles for Responsible Investment
RBC	Responsible Business Conduct
SD	Sustainable Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WINTA	World Indigenous Tourism Alliance

INTRODUCTION

This Good Practice Review is a part of the “**EmpowerHer: Female Leadership for Sustainable Development**” project funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The project aims to promote and introduce good Nordic practices related to sustainable development and education for sustainable development in the Baltic countries.

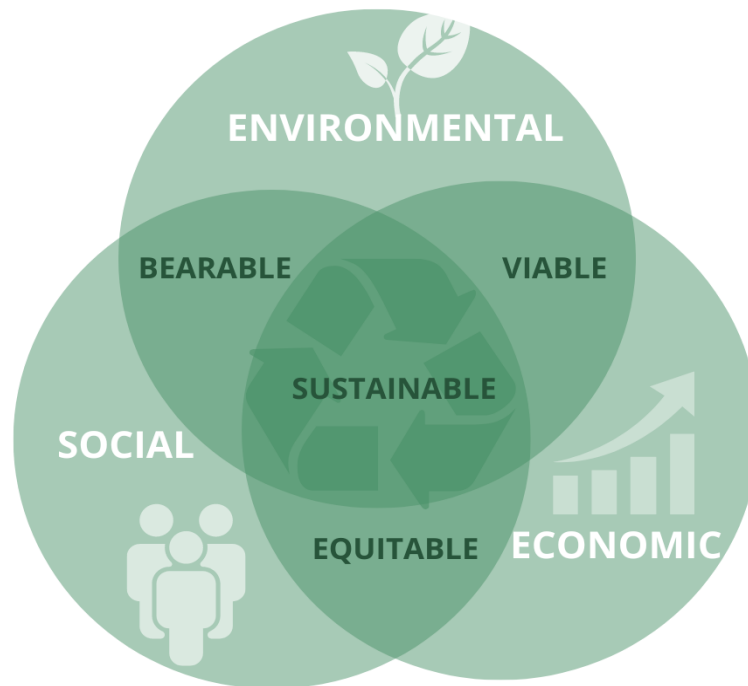
The Review presents good practice examples related to education for sustainable development, women’s leadership skills education in the Nordic countries, as well as organizational sustainability approaches. It is divided into three chapters and the three main domains of ESG leadership chosen for investigation: (1) Women’s leadership education; (2) Education for sustainable development; and (3) Implementing sustainability principles in companies.

This resource is tailored for young and aspiring females who are eager to acquaint themselves with the principles of sustainability, ESG and sustainable development practices. Designed as a handbook, it offers foundational knowledge on these crucial subjects, accompanied by illustrative examples in the form of case studies. The goal is to provide a comprehensive resource that not only educates but also empowers young women in understanding and embracing sustainability principles, leadership skills, and sustainable development practices. As a source of inspiration, this good practice review is also suitable for practitioners and various organizations that collaborate with young females and are oriented towards promoting sustainability, who might be interested in supporting or fostering development of the presented practices. By presenting real-life examples from Nordic countries, the Review aims to inspire and guide the target audience towards a path of informed decision-making and leadership in the pursuit of sustainable development while deciding on their professional carrier path.

Over the past ten years, sustainability and sustainable development have emerged as subjects generating considerable and global discussion. Sustainable development entails meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.¹ Sustainable development is usually presented as a holistic approach with several dimensions (orders, areas and spheres). Despite variations in definitions between different writers, most agree that there are three core dimensions: environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability. The key principle of sustainable development underlying all others is the integration of environmental, social, and economic concerns into all aspects of decision-making.

¹ World Commission on Environment and Development (1987).

Figure 1. Three dimensions of sustainable development.



Source: CASE.

Environmentally sustainable development requires a stable resource base, avoiding over-exploitation of renewable resource systems and environmental sink functions, and depleting non-renewable resources only insofar as there are adequate investments in substitutes. This includes maintenance of biodiversity, atmospheric stability, and other ecosystem functions not ordinarily classed as economic resources.²

Socially sustainable development achieves distributional equity, adequate provision of social services including health and education, gender equity, and political accountability and participation.³

Economically sustainable development must be able to produce goods and services on a continuing basis, maintain manageable levels of government and external debt, and avoid extreme sectoral imbalances that damage agricultural or industrial production.⁴

Aligning the interests of a diverse set of stakeholders is essential when adapting sustainable development principles. This involves bringing together the concerns and objectives of various entities, including local and global initiatives, government institutions, civil society, businesses and industries. Global efforts to fight climate change and pursue sustainable development have manifested through many international agreements and strategies. The Paris Agreement, adopted by 195 Parties at the 2015 United Nations (UN) Climate Change

² Harris J.M. (2000).

³ Harris J.M. (2000).

⁴ Ibidem.

Conference in Paris in December 2015⁵ became a legally binding international treaty on climate change, and laid the groundwork for new growth strategies at regional and national levels.

On 1 January 2016, world leaders adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the UN Sustainable Development Summit as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. SDGs are not legally binding, but governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks that would contribute to the achievement of the goals, as the SDGs offer the most practical and effective pathway for tackling the causes of violent conflict, human rights abuses, climate change and environmental degradation, aiming to ensure that no one is left behind.⁶ Most importantly, the 17 goals reflect an understanding that sustainable development everywhere must integrate economic growth, social wellbeing and environmental protection.⁷

Figure 2. Overview of Sustainable Development Goals.



Source: UN (2015). Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2030 Agenda, as well as other global, regional and national sustainability initiatives, have expressed concerns on sustainability principles in companies’ operations – reflecting the need for the private sector to commit to sustainability of the planet and society.⁸

⁵ The Paris Agreement entered into force on November 4th, 2016.

⁶ UN (n.d.)

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Khatri I. (2022).

In the European Union (EU), the European Green Deal (EGD)⁹ was introduced in 2019, aiming to make Europe climate-neutral and sustainable by 2050. There is widespread belief that, in order to achieve the goals set both regionally and globally, it is necessary to involve and cooperate with all stakeholders, including private companies. Measures are therefore being introduced to ensure sustainable development in the EU, involving all market participants equally. This includes the introduction of regulations such as the reporting of non-financial indicators, the expected entry into force of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CS3D)¹⁰ and amendment of the Gender Balance Directive,¹¹ which came into force in December 2022 and introduced mandatory gender parity in leadership positions in listed companies. Given the legislative trends, the scope of entities covered by the CS3D is likely to be expanded in the near future.

In the decades leading up to the establishment of the 2030 Agenda and the ensuing initiatives, global investors had already been actively pursuing “socially responsible investments”. In early 2005, the UN Secretary-General extended an invitation to a group of major institutional investors to collaborate in formulating the Principles for Responsible Investments (PRI).¹² This effort was supported by a diverse 70-member multi-stakeholder group comprising experts from the investment industry, intergovernmental and governmental organizations, civil society and academia, leading to the formulation of the Principles.¹³

The PRI emerged as a collaborative initiative involving the UN Environment Programme Finance Initiative and UN Global Compact. Its primary objective is to integrate environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations into mainstream investment decision-making and ownership practices.¹⁴ The PRI operates on the foundational belief that institutional investors and asset managers are responsible for acting in the best long-term interests of their investors. Consequently, they should appropriately factor in how ESG issues might impact the performance of investment portfolios. By providing a structured framework for incorporating responsible business conduct into investment strategies, the PRI contributes to advancing ESG objectives within the financial sector.¹⁵

A comprehensive ESG research sector has emerged, employing numerous ESG analysts who gather and scrutinize sustainability data on a company’s environmental practices, its treatment of workers, and its interactions with local communities. While ESG data include certain metrics related to a company’s products, they historically constituted a small portion of the overall dataset, and did not assess the tangible impact of these products on the ground.¹⁶ Until recently, the focus of the sustainable investment industry was primarily on identifying and investing in companies that produced goods and services responsibly, with less

⁹ EC (2019).

¹⁰ The Council of the European Union (2023).

¹¹ EP & The Council of the European Union (2022).

¹² UN (n.d.)

¹³ OECD (2007).

¹⁴ UN (n.d.)

¹⁵ OECD (2007).

¹⁶ Credit Suisse (n.d.).

emphasis on the nature of the products themselves. However, a shift began with the launch of the SDGs, as these goals encompass a wide range of topics including poverty, hunger, health, education, climate change, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, the environment, and social justice.¹⁷

Since 2015, an increasing number of companies and organizations have been actively addressing sustainability principles by introducing innovative products and reporting on their efforts. Investors are now using SDGs as a reference point to align their investments with impact goals, collaborating with investee companies to measure the environmental and societal impact of their products. This shift not only adds an additional layer of analysis beyond traditional exclusion and ESG integration datasets, but also gives rise to a suite of appealing investment opportunities that are explicitly aligned with the SDGs.¹⁸

The Nordic countries are often recognized as leaders in sustainability. The 2023 SDG Index, which evaluates a nation's overall progress towards achieving all 17 SDGs, ranks three Nordic countries – Finland, Sweden and Denmark – at the top.¹⁹ At the same time, studies indicate the Nordic countries as advanced in education for sustainable development,²⁰ mainstreaming it as one of the focus areas in the Nordic Strategy for Sustainable Development.²¹ On a country level, education approaches in the Nordic countries share numerous similarities, reflecting a strong emphasis on certain aspects of sustainability such as equality, democracy and (with the exception of Denmark) a strong focus on environmental education.²² What is more, according to the Global Gender Gap Index,²³ the Nordic countries rank among the most equal in the world. According to the data, 37% of all board directors across the region are women (differences between the region's countries remain notable, ranging from 33% female board members in Denmark to 44% in Norway).²⁴ In addition, the Nordic countries have also been effective in educating young women in leadership skills, providing them with the tools and knowledge they need to succeed in various industries. They have long recognized the importance of investing in the education and empowerment of women, and have implemented various initiatives to promote gender equality, including mentorship programmes, leadership training, and supportive networks.²⁵ Nordic social welfare models have an impact not only on the societal level but also on the growing research sector. In these countries, the idea of social equality is a top priority in higher education.²⁶ This makes Nordic

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Sustainable Development Report database. *The overall performance of all 193 UN Member States*. Norway is ranked 7th for overall performance, and Iceland 29th.

²⁰ EOWB (2022).

²¹ Nordic Council of Ministers (2019).

²² Nordic Council of Ministers (2021).

²³ Global gender gap index 2023.

²⁴ Spencer Stuart (2021).

²⁵ OECD (2018).

²⁶ Silander C. et. al. (2021),

countries stand out as a special group where gender equality is a priority, supported by generous social policy programmes such as paid parental leave and childcare facilities.²⁷

One can expect knowledge of sustainability, as well as non-financial indicators in business, to soon be important for finding one's way in the labour market. Given the introduction of gender balance into companies, this is a great opportunity for young women who would like to develop professionally in larger and smaller companies and hold key positions there in the future.

²⁷ Ibidem.

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS ESG LEADERSHIP?

The term ESG was initially introduced in the report of the World Bank titled “Who Cares Wins: Connecting Financial Markets to a Changing World”.²⁸ This report resulted from the above-mentioned initiative led by the UN Secretary-General to formulate guidelines and recommendations for more effectively incorporating environmental, social, and corporate governance issues into asset management, securities brokerage services, and associated research functions. The target audience for these recommendations includes various stakeholders in the financial sector, such as analysts, financial institutions, companies, investors, pension fund trustees, consultants, financial advisors, regulators, stock exchanges, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The PRI (see: Introduction) treats ESG as an aspect of responsible investment, involving strategies and practices to incorporate environmental, social, and governance factors in investment decisions and active ownership.²⁹ There are several examples of ESG factors illustrated in the report (Table 1).

Table 1. Examples of ESG factors according to PRI

Environmental	Social	Governance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Climate change ● Resource depletion ● Waste ● Pollution ● Deforestation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Human rights ● Modern slavery ● Child labour ● Working conditions ● Employee relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bribery and corruption ● Executive pay ● Board diversity and structure ● Political lobbying and donations ● Tax strategy

Source: CASE own elaboration based on PRI (n.d.) Principles for Responsible Investment.

The PRI established six Principles for Responsible Investment with the goal of understanding the investment implications of ESG issues and supporting signatories in integrating the principles. The PRI’s six core principles require institutional investors to:

1. Incorporate ESG issues into investment analysis and decision-making processes;
2. Be active owners and incorporate ESG issues into ownership policies and practices;
3. Seek appropriate disclosure on ESG issues by the entities in which they invest;
4. Promote acceptance and implementation of the Principles within the investment industry;
5. Work together to enhance their effectiveness in implementing the Principles;
6. Report on their activities and progress towards implementing the Principles.³⁰

²⁸ UN (2004).
²⁹ UN (n.d.).
³⁰ UN (n.d.).

The Principles come with a collection of 35 potential actions that institutional investors and asset managers can adopt to embed ESG considerations into their investment practices. These actions encompass various aspects such as investment decision-making, active ownership, transparency, collaboration, and garnering broader support for these practices within the entire financial services industry.³¹

It is crucial to note that the evolution of ESG standards to assess the sustainability of businesses and their influence on environmental, social, and governance aspects has been ongoing – and extending beyond mere financial performance. Following the PRI classification of ESG factors, a generally broader category of ESG standards can also be adopted:³²

- 1. Environmental standards** concern the influence of businesses on the environment, considering factors such as the energy consumption and raw material utilization essential for their operations. These standards encompass various aspects, including a business's contribution to climate change, pollution, waste generation, and the depletion of natural resources. For instance, strategies to mitigate adverse environmental effects may involve setting goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, investing in renewable energy, and advocating for the use of sustainable resources. However, businesses are inevitably impacted by the state of the environment, including events like floods, droughts, and biodiversity loss.
- 2. Social standards** address the societal impact of businesses, recognizing their embeddedness in diverse communities. The operational and social aspects of companies are intricately connected, involving considerations related to labour and human rights, inclusivity, equality, and community development. Positive social contributions can be observed in businesses that champion workplace diversity and inclusion, uphold fair labour practices across their supply chains, and actively engage with local communities.
- 3. Governance standards** focus on the practices and procedures implemented within a business to ensure adherence to laws and standards established by relevant stakeholders. These standards encompass actions taken by businesses to uphold fair and transparent management, disclose information, prevent corruption, promote diversity (particularly in decision-making roles held by historically marginalized groups), ensure transparent decision-making processes, and address cybersecurity and privacy concerns, among other aspects.

ESG means a significant change in how society perceives businesses, marking a shift in expectations. This change is particularly pronounced among younger generations, who as customers, employees and partners, are increasingly insistent that companies actively contribute to building and sustaining a desirable world. Given the necessity for fresh value

³¹ UN (n.d.).

³² UNDP (2023).

systems in corporate management and the widespread adoption of ESG principles, ESG leadership or ESG Management (ESGM) has emerged as a crucial element in business strategies.³³

ESGM prioritizes value creation and the wellbeing of all stakeholders in its approach, and refers to a paradigm shift in a company's management towards a desirable direction by innovatively solving important environmental, social, and governance issues through entrepreneurial thinking.³⁴ As ESG has transitioned from a mandatory function to a crucial business necessity, top-performing organizations are adopting ESG principles because they strongly believe in the financial advantages derived from integrating sustainability into their corporate and investment strategies. ESG leadership and ESG leadership skills have become imperative in the current global perspective due to the profound challenges and transformations shaping the business landscape. Organizations now require more credible and more senior leaders who combine ESG domain expertise with business/ Profit and Loss (P&L) backgrounds, and diversity of thought and experience.

Russell Reynolds Associates conducted an analysis of 46 senior ESG leaders appointed by large, global organizations over a period of 18 months.³⁵ The findings indicate that these leaders are primarily female, often recruited externally rather than promoted from within the organization, and bring diverse cross-functional business expertise to their roles. The "ESG 2.0" leader is tasked with four key responsibilities: (1) Establishing a top-tier enterprise-wide ESG policy and framework; (2) Ensuring the integration of ESG policy throughout the organization, maintaining consistent messaging and execution across individual business lines and investment strategies; (3) Acting as the internal and external representative, communicating to investors how ESG is ingrained at all levels of the organization and incorporated into each business line and investment strategy; and (4) Collaborating with external partners, including portfolio companies, operating partners and the supply chain, to assist them in developing more sustainable business strategies for their organizations.³⁶

As per the analysis, slightly more than one-third of the recently appointed leaders were trailblazers in this role within their respective companies, and nearly all were selected externally, indicating an increasing demand for specialized expertise. Many ESG 2.0 leaders possessed diverse experience in various business functions, bringing a breadth of perspectives. Notably, the ESG function has overcome cultural and structural barriers that have hindered the ascent of female executives in other roles – and 70% of recently appointed senior ESG leaders are women. This could be attributed to the recent establishment of the

³³ Niu S. et. Al. (2022).

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance (2021).

³⁶ Ibidem.

role, allowing for diverse and multifaceted paths to ESG leadership, and enabling companies to broaden their search for top talent.³⁷

In conclusion, the rise of ESG leadership is not just a response to societal expectations, but is a strategic imperative for organizations navigating the complex and dynamic global landscape. The integration of ESG principles into corporate strategies, coupled with the emergence of leadership expectations, not only ensures sustainability and ethical practices but also positions companies for long-term success in an evolving business environment. As we move forward, the need for credible and diverse ESG leaders, serving as catalysts for positive change and sustainable business practices, is becoming increasingly apparent.

³⁷ Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance (2021).

CHAPTER 2: EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

Leaders across many nations emphasize that investing in women's education is not so much an expense as an investment in a brighter, fairer future. Despite recent progress in girls' education, the global learning crisis is affecting all children, irrespective of gender, and presents multifaceted challenges that transcend borders. Disparities in education access and quality persist, disproportionately impacting girls and marginalized groups. Overcrowded classrooms, outdated curricula, technological disparities and language barriers exacerbate the crisis, hindering students' preparedness for the evolving world. To tackle this crisis, concerted efforts are required, including targeted investments in education infrastructure, teacher training, curriculum reform, and initiatives to bridge technological and socio-economic gaps. Cultivating a culture that prioritizes and values education is crucial for sustainable progress in addressing the global learning crisis.³⁸

In light of this, educational institutions must go beyond the fundamental task of imparting knowledge and skills. They must take a holistic approach to education, ensuring that girls feel safe within the school environment. Their safety includes protection from physical and sexual violence, as well as a zero-tolerance policy for gender-based bullying. For this, issues such as harassment stemming from gender, including the stigmatization and mistreatment related to menstruation, must be addressed. Only when girls can attend school without fear or obstacles can they wholeheartedly focus on their studies, thereby realizing their full potential.³⁹

Recent years have seen a growing awareness of the importance of not only cultivating girls' soft skills but also encouraging them to actively engage in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). The 2017 UNESCO report underscored the significance of promoting girls' involvement in these fields. It is a crucial step towards narrowing the gender gap in traditionally male-dominated professions, ensuring that girls have the same opportunities to explore and excel in these fields as their male counterparts.⁴⁰

In addition to more established skills and competencies, education for sustainable development and female leadership could benefit from increased attention to the ways in which images, ideas and stories about the future feature in public discourse and private thinking about where we are headed and what kinds of transformation are possible today. The UNESCO-developed concept of Futures Literacy (FL) provides a comprehensive frame within which to explore and develop future-oriented skills. FL is understood as a competency in analogy to traditional reading and writing literacy, and more modern forms of literacy such as digital literacy. Where traditional literacy concerns our use of language, and digital literacy our use of information and communications technology, Futures Literacy concerns the various ways in which we "use the future" in the present: for example, when planning a course of

³⁸ Tabreek Somani (2017).

³⁹ Center for Global Development (2022).

⁴⁰ UNESCO (2017).

action for our own education or imagining the kind of sustainable future we would like to bring into being.⁴¹

Whenever we do something today with the aim of producing some result later on, we are in effect using our imagination to anticipate what that future will be like, and act accordingly. Hence, the way we imagine the future already plays a major role in how we understand and orient ourselves in the present. In an increasingly complex, uncertain and changing world, old images of the future may no longer be relevant or useful to understanding what we should be doing today to help create a society that meets the needs of present generations without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Poverty of imagination and “business as usual” go together, and in order to move society and business towards sustainable development, we need to enhance and expand our powers of imagination.⁴²

Increased attention to our use of the future in general, and in particular how and what we imagine the future will be like, can help us be more creative in seeing opportunities to effect change, more resilient in the face of the unexpected, and better able to understand new developments that emerge as we move forward through time.

In the context of SDG and ESG leadership, FL equips (future) leaders with a key competence not only to comprehend the evolving landscape but also to help shape it. Future leaders need to respond to technological advancements, global shifts and societal changes, cultivating the agility to pivot in response to unforeseen challenges. They must also train their creative imagination to envision and implement innovative solutions for sustainable development.

Leaders who are future-literate are better equipped to navigate uncertainty, make informed decisions, and inspire their teams to embrace – and create – change. By fostering FL, we empower emerging leaders to proactively drive progress towards sustainable development goals. In essence, FL is a key enabler for individuals aspiring to lead in an ever-evolving world, providing them with essential skills to shape a better and more resilient future.⁴³

In a wider perspective, it is crucial to empower women across diverse spheres, placing a particular emphasis on young girls. The Nordic Women’s University (Kvinneuniversitetet i Norden or KUN) stands as an example, actively engaging in the promotion of gender equality and women’s education. This organization provides various courses and programmes tailored to different age groups, including initiatives specifically designed for young girls.⁴⁴

Effectively teaching leadership requires a collective desire and commitment to prioritize the development of women leaders. The Nordic countries - Denmark, Norway, Finland, Iceland and Sweden stand as exemplary cases in female leadership education⁴⁵ and have consistently been pioneers in addressing gender equality issues. In the upcoming sections, we delve further

⁴¹ UNESCO (2018)

⁴² UNESCO (2018)

⁴³ Magnus Astrid C. (2021)

⁴⁴ Kvinneuniversitetet i Norden – Nordic Women’s University (2023).

⁴⁵ Malone Post (2022).

into the topic of good practices for women’s leadership education in the Nordic Region, focusing on educational issues of sustainable development.

GOOD PRACTICES OF WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP EDUCATION IN THE NORDIC REGION

This section of the report presents “A Review of Good Practices of Women’s Leadership Education in the Nordic Region”. The descriptions of these practices follow a structured framework that comprehensively analyses each initiative. The outlined structure encompasses the type of initiative, its objectives, the rationale for implementation, a detailed description of activities, the challenges encountered, the impact achieved, and an exploration of possible scalability. This latter feature is particularly distinctive; including the exploration of possible scalability serves as a means to contemplate and evaluate the potential extension of similar practices or projects to other countries. This emphasis on scalability is integral to our and the report’s broader objective of disseminating successful initiatives beyond their original contexts. The selection of these practices is deliberate and strategic, considering factors such as geographical diversity, scale, and effectiveness. The chosen initiatives reflect a nuanced understanding of the varied contexts within the Nordic region, providing a rich tapestry of approaches to women’s leadership education. The diverse geographic representation ensures a comprehensive overview, enabling insights into practices that resonate across different national landscapes. This intentional selection process contributes to the richness of the report, offering valuable lessons and inspirations for fostering women's leadership education.

WHEN GIRLS MEET TECH – DIGIPIPI CLUB, DENMARK

THE COOLEST GIRLS’ CLUB IN DENMARK – DIGIPIPI	
Launched in 2015 with a clear mission to engage young girls in the world of technology, DigiPippi aims to address the gender disparity in computer science education, specifically in Denmark, where only 27% of students in the field are female. ⁴⁶	
Type of initiative	Engages girls in the world of technology through workshops, five-week programmes at school, mother and daughter brunches, educational events for teacher and parents and tech self-esteem.
Objectives (including description of target group)	The primary objective of DigiPippi is to instil a profound awareness of technology’s potential in girls aged 7 to 13. It aspires to cultivate specific skills, elevate self-esteem, and serve as a catalyst for transformative change in the gender makeup of the ICT industry.
Rationale for implementation	The rationale behind implementing DigiPippi stems from the alarming gender gap in computer science studies. By empowering young girls with technological skills and knowledge, the initiative

⁴⁶ Minister for Ligestilling (2017).

	seeks to challenge stereotypes and contribute to a lasting transformation in the tech industry's gender dynamics.
Description of activities	DigiPippi offers extensive courses and a five-week programme for schools, actively engaging in educational events for teachers and parents. The project not only imparts technical knowledge but also serves as a beacon, encouraging effective role modelling in the field of technology for girls.
Challenges	While addressing gender disparities, DigiPippi faces challenges related to societal stereotypes and preconceptions regarding technology as a predominantly male domain. Overcoming these ingrained perceptions is a crucial aspect of the initiative's success.
Impact and possible scalability	Beyond technology and education, DigiPippi strives to be a transformative force by redefining the discourse surrounding girls in the technology and IT industry. The project aims to contribute significantly to changing the gender makeup of the ICT sector by fostering a comprehensive understanding of technology's potential and boosting girls' self-worth in this domain. DigiPippi's success and impact suggest that similar initiatives should focus on empowerment, challenging stereotypes, and fostering inclusivity. The project serves as an exemplar for the global necessity to empower girls and women in technology, emphasizing the need to break down gender barriers and provide equal opportunities from the early stages of education. ⁴⁷ Implementing practices similar to DigiPippi in Poland or other countries requires key resources: experts and instructors in technology, partnerships with safe venues like libraries and schools, diverse educational programmes for different age groups, support for parents and teachers, and an accessible online platform. Collaboration with businesses for financial and resource support, effective promotion strategies, and a monitoring system to track results are also essential. Adapting these resources to specific cultural contexts will facilitate successful initiatives, fostering technological competencies and confidence among girls and young women. In summary, "DigiPippi – the coolest girls' club in Denmark" stands as a transformative initiative with the potential to inspire societal change, enrich individual lives, and contribute to a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable future

Source: CASE own elaboration based on desk research.

⁴⁷ EIGE (n.d.).

NORDIC CO-OPERATION ON GENDER EQUALITY: DEVELOPING TEACHER EDUCATION DIALOGUE, PRACTICE, AND POLICY

NORDIC COOPERATION ON GENDER EQUALITY: DEVELOPING TEACHER EDUCATION DIALOGUE, PRACTICE AND POLICY

The "Nordic Co-operation on Gender Equality: Developing Teacher Education Dialogue, Practice, and Policy" project is a noteworthy initiative spanning from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2022. Implemented collaboratively, the programme aims to leverage the competencies and experiences of both women and men, girls and boys, emphasizing empowerment. The focus is on confronting challenges in priority areas such as the future of work, economic growth, wellbeing, health, quality of life, power and influence, and gender equality, with a specific focus on men and masculinity.⁴⁸

Type of initiative	The cooperation programme was adopted on 1 November 2018, and applies for the period 1 January 2019 – 31 December 2022 in the Nordic countries: the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.
Objectives (including description of target group)	The overarching goal is effective and targeted efforts in gender equality, emphasizing men's inclusion to avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes. The project aims to address issues related to gender norms and responsibilities, focusing on the living conditions of boys and men. The target group includes women and men, girls and boys, with a particular focus on achieving gender equality in areas where women are underrepresented, such as IT, technology, and entrepreneurship.
Rationale for implementation	The rationale for this project lies in the necessity of comprehensive efforts to achieve gender equality, considering both genders and avoiding perpetuating traditional roles. Issues related to employment rates, parental leaves, part-time work, and responsibilities in childcare and home duties need attention. The project aims to rectify these imbalances and mature towards gender equality.
Description of activities	Activities include ensuring access to counselling and career guidance free from traditional gender stereotypes, with a focus on professions and sectors shaping the future of work. Collaboration with various stakeholders, including parents, caregivers, NGOs, municipalities, regional authorities, and the private sector, is crucial. The project emphasizes challenging stereotypical roles for girls, particularly in technical endeavours.
Challenges	Challenges include addressing imbalances in employment, parental leaves, and part-time work, as well as overcoming traditional gender stereotypes in career choices. The urban-rural perspective in health and gender equality matters adds complexity, requiring tailored approaches to ensure equal opportunities.
Impact and possible scalability	The project seeks to impact gender equality by addressing disparities in various sectors, empowering both genders, and challenging stereotypical roles. Success will be measured by

⁴⁸ Nordic Council of Ministers (2019).

	<p>increased awareness, changed perceptions, and more inclusive practices in the education, employment, and health sectors. To transfer the success of this project, collaboration and dialogue between sectors and stakeholders are essential. The gender equality sector plays a key role in supporting practices and prioritizing areas such as supporting vulnerable children, collaborating with civil society, and disseminating knowledge. The programme period sets the stage for continued progress in gender equality by ensuring that each sector within Nordic cooperation takes responsibility for formulating and achieving gender equality goals based on sector-specific issues.</p> <p>In summary, the collaborative project represents a comprehensive approach to gender equality, focusing on diverse sectors and involving various stakeholders. It addresses challenges, promotes inclusivity, and sets the groundwork for sustained progress beyond the programme period.</p>
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Source: CASE own elaboration based on desk research.

ROLE MODELS FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP – AMBASSADORS FOR WOMEN’S ENTREPRENEURSHIP, SWEDEN

ROLE MODELS FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP – AMBASSADORS FOR WOMEN’S ENTREPRENEURSHIP, SWEDEN	
<p>This case study sheds light on impactful strategies implemented in Sweden to empower young women and cultivate their interest in business creation and self-employment. It explores the project’s goals, inception rationale, and operational intricacies, backed by insightful data showcasing its effectiveness. The initiative aimed to challenge stereotypes and alter perceptions regarding entrepreneurship as a male-dominated field. Implemented nationally, the project involved various stakeholders and was coordinated by the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth.⁴⁹</p>	
Type of initiative	The ambassadors’ project aims to promote female entrepreneurship in Sweden.
Objectives (including description of target group)	The Women Ambassadors scheme, initiated in 2008 and extended until December 2014, seeks to increase the visibility of female entrepreneurship, inspire and promote female entrepreneurship through personal stories and role models, and facilitate women’s identification with entrepreneurial figures. The primary target groups include female high school students, university students, vocational training students, career advisors, and women with an immigrant background.
Rationale for implementation	The project addresses the prevailing image of entrepreneurship as a male-dominated field, aiming to influence occupational choices. A national survey revealing low recognition of female business owners prompted the creation of the ambassador scheme, with the goal of enhancing the desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship among women.

⁴⁹ OECD (2016).

<p>Description of activities</p>	<p>Launched and coordinated nationally by the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, the project involves 880 women entrepreneurs selected through a comprehensive application process to act as ambassadors. These ambassadors share their entrepreneurial journeys, challenges and rewards through speaking engagements, networking events, and a dedicated website. Activities include mentorship and advice to aspiring female entrepreneurs, complemented by a podcast featuring ambassador interviews.</p>
<p>Challenges</p>	<p>Challenges faced include volunteer engagement, particularly in rural areas with substantial travel demands. The self-selection process for ambassadors raised concerns about their effectiveness as role models. Questions were also raised regarding cost-effectiveness and the project's ability to influence behavioural norms related to entrepreneurship.</p>
<p>Impact and possible scalability</p>	<p>From May 2008 to December 2014, the project's ambassadors reached over 170,000 people through approximately 11,000 activities. Positive survey responses indicated a 70% satisfaction rate with content and execution. About 50% of participants expressed increased interest in entrepreneurship after meeting an ambassador, and ambassadors reported tangible benefits in terms of personal brand, social networks, and competencies. The success of the Women Ambassadors scheme has inspired similar initiatives in 21 other European Union countries. Key success factors include building a dedicated ambassador pool, ensuring diversity, extensive promotion, delivering positive messages, and conducting thorough impact assessments. By spotlighting Sweden's Women Ambassadors initiative, this case study serves as a valuable good practice model for empowering young women and fostering entrepreneurship globally.</p>

Source: CASE own elaboration based on desk research.

CHAPTER 3: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BEGINS WITH EDUCATION FOR ALL

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the fourth sustainable development goal – Quality Education – is intended to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The fourth SDG has seven outcome targets and three means of implementation, one of which (4.7) is focused on education for sustainable development (ESD). According to UNESCO, **ESD is education aimed at achieving human development in an inclusive, equitable and secure manner.**⁵⁰ The aim of education for sustainable development is to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development.⁵¹

Education for Sustainable Development: Towards achieving the SDGs (ESD for 2030)⁵² is the global framework for implementation of ESD from 2020–2030, building upon the lessons learned from the Global Action Programme on ESD⁵³ (GAP, 2015–2019), in response to the increased importance placed on ESD to promote the contribution of learning content to the survival and prosperity of humanity.

ESD is far more than teaching knowledge and principles related to sustainability. In its broadest sense, **ESD is education for social transformation with the goal of creating more sustainable societies**, and touches every aspect of education including planning, policy development, programme implementation, finance, curricula, teaching, learning, assessment, and administration. ESD aims to provide coherent interaction between education, public awareness, and training with a view to creating a more sustainable future.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ UNESCO (2014).

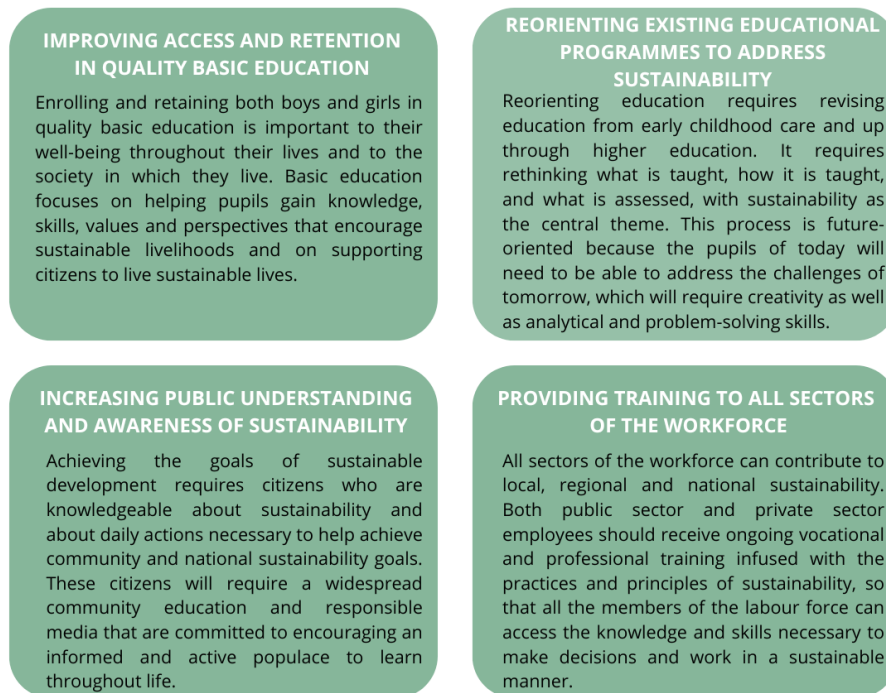
⁵¹ UNESCO (2016).

⁵² UNESCO (2017)

⁵³ UNESCO (2016).

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

Figure 3: Four Areas of Education for Sustainable Development



Source: UNESCO (2012). *Education for Sustainable Development Sourcebook*.

In contrast to more traditional ways of teaching according to strict subject boundaries, ESD means adopting a holistic approach to education, with the overarching aim of “*creating a better world for this generation and future generations of all living things on planet Earth*”.⁵⁵

Lifelong learning (LLL) has been identified as crucial to the achievement of sustainable development and quality education. SDG4 defines learning as a lifelong process that begins in early childhood, with primary care and pre-primary education. These early years are an important opportunity to give every child a chance to learn, regardless of their social and economic background.⁵⁶ In later stages, LLL, especially connected to vocational education, ensures that individuals stay relevant in dynamic job markets. The evolving nature of professions and expectations from the labour force demands a commitment to ongoing education in order to acquire new skills, adapt to emerging technologies, and navigate shifts in industry requirements.

In the pursuit of creating sustainable societies, relying solely on technological solutions, regulatory frameworks, and financial instruments is insufficient. It is imperative that individuals acquire the necessary skills, values, and attitudes to live sustainably and actively contribute to the establishment of sustainable communities. This involves developing the ability to reflect on personal actions, and take into account the implications for social, cultural,

⁵⁵ WWF (2022).

⁵⁶ OECD (2022).

economic, and environmental aspects both now and in the future. People need to be adept at engaging in sustainable practices in complex situations, and should be actively involved in sociopolitical processes that propel their communities towards sustainability.⁵⁷

GOOD PRACTICES IN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORDIC REGION

This section of the report presents good practice examples in education for sustainable development (ESD) within the Nordic Region. The selection of case studies focuses on initiatives or policy approaches taken on the regional or national level that exemplify successful strategies in promoting sustainable development through education. These practices aim to inspire and inform, shedding light on effective models that contribute to lifelong learning, competence development, and active citizenship within the context of the Nordic countries. By examining these noteworthy examples, we aim to distil key insights and lessons that can be shared and potentially scaled to foster broader advancements in ESD across Europe.

NORDIC COOPERATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING AND COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

THE NORDIC NETWORK FOR ADULT LEARNING (NVL)	
<p>The Nordic network for adult learning (NVL) was established in 2005 by the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), financed by NCM, and administrated by Skills Norway 2009–2017, VIA University College 2018–2022. NVL supports Nordic cooperation in policy development and implementation regarding lifelong learning and competence development. NVL contributes to the development of the Nordic education systems by raising awareness of the UN Sustainable Development Goals among adult education providers. The network contributes to the implementation of the Nordic strategy for sustainable development by developing and delivering adult education opportunities, which help individuals become active and integrated citizens, while also furthering the development of local communities in the Nordic countries.⁵⁸</p>	
Type of initiative	Cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary networks across the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden).
Objectives (including description of target group)	<p>The goals of NVL are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● enhance the development of relevant competence in various areas of adult learning in the Nordic countries; ● contribute to the development of adult learning systems in the Nordic countries through enhanced dialogue with the Nordic Council of Ministers and the rotating presidencies of the NCM; ● contribute to personal development and democratic participation through various forms of adult learning;

⁵⁷ Vieira D. (2019).

⁵⁸ Nordic Network for Adult Learning (2019).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● contribute to cross-sectoral and cross-national cooperation; ● enhance cooperation with civil society and the workforce, especially with liberal adult education; ● propagate the experiences and results of Nordic cooperation in adult learning. <p>The network has for several years been working actively on finding good methods of education on sustainable development for adults.⁵⁹</p>
<p>Rationale for implementation</p>	<p>The Nordic Region faces the challenge of exploring innovative approaches to facilitate learning and skill development for individuals, employees, businesses and organizations. This is crucial for addressing the growing diversity in society, the rapid transformations, and the demand for novel solutions. NVL actively encourages cooperation among various professional sectors within adult education organizations, between different organizations and companies, and between research and practical application. The goal is to foster sustainable solutions in addressing complex challenges.⁶⁰</p>
<p>Description of activities</p>	<p>NVL serves as a platform where Nordic countries engage in mutual learning about practical approaches and policies through networking, meetings, analyses, comparative studies and information activities. It facilitates the sharing of successful models and methods that have proven effective in real-world applications.⁶¹</p> <p>Additionally, NVL explores topics such as innovation in adult learning, workplace learning, guidance, validation, and flexibility in study programmes. In collaboration with NVL and the Nordic Council of Ministers, a Nordic project group had the opportunity to initiate two courses promoting sustainable development. The first course served as a pilot project in 2014/15, and its experiences were incorporated into a subsequent course in 2016.⁶²</p> <p>NVL's learning circle, titled "Inclusion and leadership", plays a role in advancing continuing education options for Nordic managers whose responsibilities prominently involve the concept of inclusion. The objective of these learning circles is to establish a collaborative learning environment, providing participants with a structured framework to enhance their understanding and explore new avenues for addressing specific and contemporary challenges and topics.⁶³</p> <p>The NVL also organized a webinar series on the topic of adult learning and sustainable development.⁶⁴</p>

⁵⁹ Nordic Network for Adult Learning (2019).

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ Nordic Network for Adult Learning (2019).

⁶⁴ Nordic Network for Adult Learning (2022).

Challenges	One of the main challenges faced by NVL in promoting adult learning for sustainable development is the need to effectively engage various stakeholders across the Nordic countries. Coordinating efforts and maintaining collaboration among diverse sectors, including adult education organizations, civic society, working life, and liberal adult education, can be complex.
Impact and possible scalability	The impact of NVL's initiatives is evident in its contribution to enhancing competence development in adult learning across the Nordic countries. By actively engaging with policymakers through the Nordic Council of Ministers and promoting dialogue, NVL has influenced the development of adult learning systems. The focus on personal development and democratic participation aligns with the broader goals of creating active and integrated citizens.

Source: CASE own elaboration based on desk research.

URBAN GARDENING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ESPOO'S URBAN GARDENING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE)	
Espoo's "Urban Gardening in Early Childhood Education" initiative began in 2017 through a strategic pilot led by the city's co-designer at the Green Area Maintenance Unit. To kickstart this initiative, a survey was conducted to identify interested Early Childhood Education centres, and educators were provided with courses and relevant educational materials. The Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre played a supportive role in building the capacity of educators, leading to the enrolment of approximately 33 units in the first year. This positive momentum was sustained through an agreement between the city's Public Works department and its Education and Cultural Services. ⁶⁵	
Type of initiative	Integration Action Plan/ Initiative contributing to a "sustainable learning city".
Objectives (including description of target group)	The aim of incorporating urban gardening into early childhood education in Espoo is to enhance stakeholders' comprehension of the connection between humans and nature, emphasizing its significance in the natural ecosystem. These endeavours foster collaborative learning between children and teachers, leading to the acquisition of knowledge and skills that enhance environmental awareness and encourage active citizenship. The impact of gardening activities is particularly notable among young children, as their evolving relationship with nature is positively influenced, and hands-on engagement in the gardens cultivates environmental sensitivity and life skills. Espoo's urban garden initiative in early childhood education makes creative use of spaces to further the city's goals in environmental and sustainable development. ⁶⁶
Rationale for implementation	Espoo is the second largest city in Finland, and consists of five city centres. It is a continuously growing city which makes it necessary

⁶⁵ UNESCO (2021).

⁶⁶Ibidem.

	<p>for the city to organise more and more services. This has pushed the city to rethink how to organise its operations, and to take action in many new and innovative ways.⁶⁷ Espoo is guiding citizens towards Education for Sustainable Development in order to integrate their values, knowledge, and skills with the principles of sustainable development. Programmes at schools have managed to reduce energy consumption and food waste. However, when growing up in an urban environment, children may believe that food automatically appears on shop shelves. They could also be confused about which foods grow in the soil and which grow on trees if they have never seen them with their own eyes. To increase awareness, Espoo daycare centres and schools are able to order planter boxes for their yards. Urban gardening in Early Childhood Education centres in Espoo exemplifies how humans are all part of, and dependent on, the broader ecosystem.⁶⁸</p>
<p>Description of activities</p>	<p>The collaboration in urban gardening facilitated the Green Area Maintenance Unit in delivering soil and plant boxes to enrolled Early Childhood Education units during regular maintenance sessions. Once these resources were provided, both children and adults could engage in planting, caring for, and harvesting vegetables. The key contributors to the project, besides the children, their parents and teachers, include Espoo’s Green Area Maintenance Unit and the Early Childhood Education and Care Unit. The Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre played a crucial role in supporting capacity-building by offering educational materials for educators. They conducted a complimentary web course on urban capacity-building, offering ideas and practical tips for ECE units. More recently, a distinct course titled “Sustainable Daily Life in ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care)” was launched. This course presents a comprehensive perspective on how ECE centres can implement positive changes.⁶⁹⁷⁰</p>
<p>Challenges</p>	<p>The initiative’s first summer posed the most significant challenge for the centres as they had to devise a plan for watering plants during the holidays. However, this hurdle was swiftly overcome when the pilot units discovered that placing the boxes directly on the ground in a strategically chosen garden area yielded the best results for nurturing the plants.⁷¹</p>
<p>Impact and possible scalability</p>	<p>A particularly positive result of the initiative is the collaborative development of educational activities by teachers and centre staff, involving the children in the process. Through these activities, children not only gain knowledge about gardening but also acquire insights into insects, vegetables, teamwork, making healthy meal choices, and the rewarding outcomes of hard work in producing</p>

⁶⁷ Erkkilä K (2020).

⁶⁸ UNESCO (2021).

⁶⁹ UNESCO (2021).

⁷⁰ Espoo City (2022).

⁷¹ UNESCO (2021).

	<p>good food. The advantages of this learning experience are expected to have a lasting impact throughout their lives.⁷²</p> <p>The participation data has shown positive trends, with the number of enrolled units growing from 55 in 2018 to 77 by the end of 2019. Consequently, the pilot initiative was expanded early on to include select service houses for older people and various specialized units. In 2020, the series of actions over the three-year pilot period resulted in the incorporation of the operational model into Espoo's standard operations within the early childhood education sector. Furthermore, the initiative has been extended to encompass schools and several care centres for the elderly.⁷³</p>
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Source: CASE own elaboration based on desk research.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN CREATIVE INDUSTRIES (DESIGN FOR ALL) – NORWEGIAN DESIGN COUNCIL

DESIGN FOR ALL – ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN CREATIVE INDUSTRIES	
<p>Since 2005, what is now called Design and Architecture Norway (DOGA), a state-controlled foundation,⁷⁴ has been unwavering in its commitment to advancing the “Design for All” initiative throughout Norway. DOGA encouraged good design of Norwegian products as a key driver for improved innovation and enhanced international reputation and sales. Also known as universal and inclusive design, this approach aims to create products and environments that cater to a diverse audience, irrespective of age, ability, or social background.⁷⁵ The inclusive design approach looks for solutions that might be needed by some, but that are good for everybody – which means avoiding the stigma associated with the “special solutions for special needs” that typify accessible design.</p>	
Type of initiative	Interdisciplinary, inclusive entrepreneurship education programmes.
Objectives (including description of target group)	The primary objectives of DOGA, as a state-controlled foundation, include boosting innovation in Norwegian enterprises through the Design-driven Innovation Programme, providing financial support to projects generating new knowledge in design-driven innovation. The initiative’s target group embraces businesses, designers, and the general public interested in creating inclusive and innovative designs. ⁷⁶
Rationale for implementation	One of the obstacles confronting the international business community involves adopting a broader outlook when approaching design. It is not merely about addressing aesthetic, functional, or emotional requirements; the emphasis must rather be placed on recognizing the potential of design in advancing sustainability,

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ Norwegian Centre for Design and Architecture (2014).

⁷⁵ DiVA Portal (2014).

⁷⁶ Design and Architecture Norway (2019).

	<p>upholding human rights, and fostering social inclusion. Presently, within the Norwegian Government, the Universal Design concept holds significant prominence, being officially acknowledged as a top-priority goal. Various initiatives have been formulated to achieve the ambition of creating a universally designed society.⁷⁷</p>
<p>Description of activities</p>	<p>To accomplish its objectives, DOGA has undertaken several key initiatives. The Design-driven Innovation Programme (DIP) was launched to provide financial support to projects fostering design-driven innovation. Additionally, DOGA developed a comprehensive online resource on Design for All, offering valuable methods, practical tools, resources, videos, and key takeaways. Seminars, exhibitions, cross-company education programmes, and prestigious awards such as the Award for Design Excellence contribute to the promotion of innovative design practices.</p>
<p>Challenges</p>	<p>While promoting inclusive design, NTC has faced challenges in ensuring widespread adoption and understanding of universal design principles. Overcoming pre-existing notions and fostering a collective understanding of the importance of inclusivity in design remains an ongoing challenge.</p>
<p>Impact and possible scalability</p>	<p>DOGA's initiatives have had a profound impact on the landscape of design in Norway. The "Design-driven Innovation Programme" has spurred innovation in enterprises, and the comprehensive online resource has empowered businesses and designers with valuable tools and knowledge. Awards and recognition highlight groundbreaking solutions, motivating the design community to strive for excellence.</p> <p>For the project to succeed, collaboration and dialogue between sectors and stakeholders are essential. The gender equality sector plays a key role in supporting practices and prioritizing areas such as supporting vulnerable children, collaborating with civil society, and disseminating knowledge. The programme period sets the stage for continued progress in gender equality by ensuring that each sector within Nordic cooperation takes responsibility for formulating and achieving gender equality goals based on sector-specific issues.</p> <p>The success of DOGA's initiatives provides a solid foundation for transferability. Key conditions for replication include promoting collaboration, offering financial support for innovative projects, and recognizing excellence through awards. The comprehensive online resource can serve as a model for other institutions, providing a repository of knowledge and tools to inspire inclusive design practices on a broader scale.</p>

Source: CASE own elaboration based on desk research.

⁷⁷ Norwegian Arts (n.d.).

CHAPTER 4: IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLES IN COMPANIES

The activities and modes of operation of organizations and businesses have a major impact on the wellbeing of individuals globally. This extends beyond the goods and services they provide, or the employment and opportunities they generate. It also encompasses aspects such as working conditions, human rights, health, environmental considerations, innovation, as well as education and training. For this reason, companies should understand their positive and negative impacts on society and the environment – preventing, managing and mitigating any negative impact that they may cause. Living up to this duty is commonly known as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), or Responsible Business Conduct (RBC).⁷⁸

CSR concerns actions by companies beyond their legal obligations towards society and the environment. Certain regulatory measures create an environment more conducive to enterprises voluntarily meeting their social responsibility.⁷⁹ ESG has in many ways become a contemporary or updated version of corporate social responsibility. Differentiating between ESG and CSR can be challenging due to the subjective nature of defining ESG and the close association between the two concepts. ESG encompasses a broader range of concerns by explicitly addressing governance issues alongside the company's social and environmental responsibilities.⁸⁰ The growing interest among businesses, capital market participants, professional organizations, and regulators worldwide in incorporating ESG factors into investment strategies has led to an increase in proposals that rating agencies measure companies' ESG performance. This trend is particularly notable among agencies increasingly prioritizing sustainable investment considerations.⁸¹

Some sustainability and ESG ratings also address performance measurement of countries around the world, with the Nordic countries usually ranked the highest. The latest Robeco Country Sustainability Ranking (2023) placed all Nordic countries in the top 6 (ESG Score is rated on a scale of 1-10). This ranking collects and analyses relevant ESG data via a comprehensive framework to calculate overall country score using a model that consists of three pillars – Environment (30%), Social (30%) and Governance (40%) – comprising 51 indicators related to 15 criteria.⁸² Finland and Sweden scored the highest (both 9.07), and Norway came third with a score of 8.92, followed by Denmark with an overall score of 8.86. Iceland was 6th – with an overall score of 8.49.

While CSR and ESG are frequently associated with large corporations, numerous small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) actively incorporate sustainability principles into their core

⁷⁸ EC (2022).

⁷⁹ EC (2011).

⁸⁰ Gillan S. L. et. al. (2021).

⁸¹ EC (2023).

⁸² Robeco (2023).

competencies. These SMEs often align their business models with sustainability commitments, creating solutions that are innovative for society while simultaneously constituting the engines of economic growth, promoting equitable development and creating more opportunities for sustainable solutions.⁸³ These green businesses (or social enterprises) involve the creation of new types of jobs and lower environmental impacts, and are very promising platforms for innovation.

Nordic countries have established a global standard by demonstrating that economic prosperity does not have to compromise societal and environmental wellbeing. Numerous companies in the region serve as exemplary models for CSR and ESG practices. Notably, SMEs in the Nordic region are recognized for their innovative approaches and strong dedication to sustainable principles, setting a valuable example that other nations can adopt.

GOOD PRACTICES FROM COMPANIES COMMITTED TO SUSTAINABILITY

This section explores the successful implementation of sustainability practices in Nordic organizations. The practices have been chosen to illustrate the diversity of approaches, strategies, and models adopted by organizations across different sectors, varying in their organizational model and size. With this review, we aim to capture the essence of sustainability as a multifaceted concept, acknowledging the varied challenges faced by organizations and the innovative solutions they employ.

SOCIAL PLATFORM THAT EMBRACES ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS PRACTICES

FAUNA — THE APP THAT REWARDS YOU FOR BEING SUSTAINABLE	
Fauna, established in Norway in 2019, serves as a social platform that incentivizes users to embrace environmentally conscious and sustainable practices. The platform allows users to accrue points through a variety of sustainable and local brands, which can later be redeemed for rewards and treats. Both minor and major eco-friendly decisions are acknowledged, such as taking public transportation or switching to a sustainable energy provider. Operating as a community, Fauna not only encourages users to explore new sustainable products but also provides opportunities for challenges through quizzes, and facilitates connections with friends who share a commitment to a more sustainable lifestyle. Prior to featuring any brand on the app, Fauna’s sustainability council meticulously evaluates them, considering publicly available data on aspects like business models and certifications pertaining to their sustainability efforts. ⁸⁴	
Profile of the organization	Social platform – available as an app for Apple and Android users.
Objectives	The mission of the company is to inspire people to reduce their footprint on the planet. The app, with many gamification principles,

⁸³ Baporikar N.(2018).

⁸⁴ Fauna (n.d.).

	motivates users and makes it as convenient as possible to switch to a more sustainable lifestyle.
Rationale	Each instance of monetary expenditure exerts an influence on market demand. Businesses adjust their strategies in response to shifts in consumer preferences. This principle extends to political spheres as well. Therefore, if a significant number of individuals are motivated to alter their purchasing behaviours, a consequential transformation in societal practices is likely to ensue. ⁸⁵
Overview of activities and integration of sustainability principles into operations	<p>Fauna is building a social network that acts as a consumer loyalty scheme, helping users track their purchasing habits of green products. The app does the tracking by connecting with the banks and using a system based on points that can be exchanged for goods or discounts, or can be gifted to other users.⁸⁶</p> <p>Companies in the network express their gratitude to Fauna users by providing commissions based on sales, which are then converted into “points”. Accumulating these points, earned through various sustainable actions such as dining at a vegetarian restaurant, transitioning to smart electricity, or using public transport, empowers users to select their preferred rewards. These rewards may range from eco-friendly cruises and surfing classes to meals, offering users a diverse array of choices.⁸⁷</p> <p>The accrual of Fauna points extends to all brands designated as environmentally friendly, with a particularly high point yield from those affiliated with Fauna as partners. Which brands attain green status is determined by Fauna’s sustainability council, which carefully examines all publicly accessible data concerning each brand, assessing their adherence to specific criteria. A brand’s score is based on this council’s investigation. Their review is based on two sets of criteria: the main criteria are those with the greatest impact on the environment, a good example being the circular business model; additional criteria are also relevant, but their impact is minimal in comparison. Certifications are typical examples of additional criteria. Those brands that meet one or more of the main criteria are highly recommended, and receive green status. Those that only meet one or more additional criteria are rated red or yellow. Within the red and yellow batches, brands are sorted by their sustainability efforts.⁸⁸</p>
Stakeholder engagement	Over 100 companies have joined the network.
Challenges and future outlook	Considering the success in Norway, exploring opportunities for global expansion could be part of the long-term vision. Adapting to different markets and cultures while maintaining the core sustainability focus will be crucial. However, scaling the network and forming partnerships with additional companies while ensuring their commitment to sustainability could be a complex task.

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

⁸⁶ *Crunchbase (2022)*.

⁸⁷ Fauna (n.d.).

⁸⁸ Ibidem.

Community Impact	After a little over a year of design and development, the Fauna app was published on App Store and Google Play. After one year (the end of 2021), 1600 people had signed up to Fauna with an additional 3000 on the waiting list. ⁸⁹ The success of Fauna relies on users making informed and sustainable choices. Addressing the challenge of educating and motivating users to understand the environmental impact of their decisions is vital.
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Source: CASE own elaboration based on desk research.

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE INDIGENOUS TOURISM

VISIT NATIVES	
Visit Natives promotes sustainable indigenous tourism with respect for local culture and the environment in Norway and Tanzania. The company is a social enterprise that allows tourism to positively impact local communities with well-thought planning, management and respect towards the indigenous people and the environment. Travellers booking the tours experience the daily lives of Sami, Maasai, Hadzabe and Datoga people and explore nature.	
Profile of the organization	Social tourism company.
Objectives	Visit Natives connects travellers with the world's indigenous peoples and provides them with unique and authentic experiences that directly benefit the indigenous people. The company's main mission is to minimize travel's environmental impacts and maximize the benefits for local communities. ⁹⁰
Rationale	<p>In general, most tourism fails to benefit indigenous people, while this company's economic focus is on supporting local indigenous families and communities. Sustainable and equitable tourism enables them to experience greater economic advantages, preventing the need to migrate to urban areas in search of better financial opportunities.⁹¹</p> <p>Preserving indigenous cultures is crucial, as these communities face numerous threats to maintaining their traditional lifestyles. The company actively supports and embraces indigenous languages, cultures, beliefs, and knowledge systems. In the face of climate change, indigenous peoples, who depend on nature, encounter new challenges. Their ethical relationship with nature, characterized by a profound respect for the environment that also holds a spiritual dimension, offers valuable lessons for everyone. The company aims to reconnect travellers with nature.⁹²</p> <p>As the lands inhabited by indigenous peoples boast 80 percent of the earth's biodiversity, the majority of the company's tours are</p>

⁸⁹ EU-Startups (2022).

⁹⁰ Visit Natives (n.d.).

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² Ibidem.

	conducted in locations that have been recognized on UNESCO's World Heritage List. ⁹³
Overview of activities and integration of sustainability principles into operations	The company's tours and expeditions are conceived and led by the indigenous people themselves. The company's indigenous hosts warmly embrace travellers as guests rather than mere tourists. This hospitality extends to all, including family members, neighbours, friends, and unfamiliar visitors. The indigenous commitment to hospitality adds authenticity, memorability, and uniqueness to one's stay. Travellers are invited to observe and partake in everyday life, including feasts, rituals, and ceremonies. Guests on all tours reside with indigenous hosts in their homes, villages, and homesteads. Accommodations range from tents to cabins, and meals consist of locally sourced food prepared by the indigenous hosts using regional ingredients. ⁹⁴ The experiences unfold in remote locations devoid of electricity, roads and Wi-Fi connection, allowing visitors to genuinely unwind and appreciate the natural surroundings with minimal environmental impact. The company collaborates closely with WINTA (World Indigenous Tourism Alliance), and all endeavours adhere to Framework, ensuring the protection of the rights of Indigenous peoples through tourism. ⁹⁵
Stakeholder engagement	This model of social enterprise engages local indigenous peoples with employment opportunities in remote areas.
Challenges and future outlook	Finding the right target audience and key customers who are interested in and supportive of sustainable indigenous tourism is a time-consuming process. ⁹⁶ Both the burgeoning mass tourism and extractive industries have the potential to adversely affect the environment and disrupt the traditional lifestyle of local communities. Recognizing sustainability as the pivotal solution, the company aims to utilize sustainable indigenous tourism as a means to raise awareness about global warming and other detrimental impacts – especially in the case of the Arctic environment, which holds vital significance for the Sami people. ⁹⁷
Community Impact	The tours not only engage but also provide direct economic advantages to local indigenous individuals who organize and host them. For each tour, local indigenous hosts receive compensation, contributing to supplementary income. A notable 70% of the company's profits are channelled directly to the indigenous host family and the broader community. ⁹⁸ Indigenous families inhabit remote regions where access to quality health services, electricity and education is often limited. In response, the company has taken initiatives such as procuring health insurance, distributing sanitary pads, covering school fees,

⁹³ Ibidem.

⁹⁴ Northflash (2022).

⁹⁵ Visit Natives (n.d.).

⁹⁶ Northflash (2022).

⁹⁷ Ibidem.

⁹⁸ Visit Natives (n.d.).

	<p>and supplying solar panels and water tanks. These efforts are made possible through the support of travellers, who play a crucial role in facilitating these improvements.⁹⁹</p> <p>Both the Sami and Maasai cultures confront numerous challenges to sustaining their traditional ways of life. Sustainable tourism serves as a vital means for them to safeguard their cultural heritage, customs, and traditional livelihoods, ensuring the preservation of their knowledge for future generations.¹⁰⁰</p>
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Source: CASE own elaboration based on desk research.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE, EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN NETLIGHT

ADDRESSING WOMEN'S UNDERREPRESENTATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET: EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN NETLIGHT	
<p>The company has made equality a cornerstone of its mission, manifested in strategic objectives and a commitment that permeates every facet of its operations. In this context, Netlight has undertaken a series of initiatives to address the underrepresentation of women in the labour market in the male-dominated Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector.</p>	
Profile of the organization	<p>A medium-sized IT company that operates in seven countries. In Finland, Netlight employs around 40 people and provides services focusing on software development and IT strategy consultation.</p>
Objectives	<p>Netlight considers equality to be its cornerstone, and it has been a strategic objective since 2012. All Netlight partners sign the company's Declaration of Equality, and those in Helsinki have signed an agreement on promoting equality. An equality clause is also included in all job contracts and client agreements.</p>
Rationale	<p>In Finland, there is a notable degree of segregation in the labour market, with women dedicating considerably more time to household chores and childcare than their male counterparts. This segregation begins early in life, as girls often choose health and welfare professions over technical ones in the education system. This trend persists into adulthood, resulting in a scarcity of women leaders and gender-based salary disparities leading to reduced pensions for women. The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector in Finland is particularly male-dominated, and this underrepresentation of women starts at the educational level.¹⁰¹</p> <p>Within Netlight, the proportion of women in the company ranges from 25 to 30%. The company views equality as a fundamental principle, considering it a valued competence that permeates all its activities.¹⁰²</p>

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁰¹ EIGE (n.d.)

¹⁰² Ibidem.

<p>Overview of activities and integration of sustainability principles into operations</p>	<p>At Netlight, the commitment to fostering equality is actively demonstrated through a range of initiatives and activities. The company strives to create an inclusive environment for everyone, irrespective of gender, religion, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.¹⁰³</p> <p>One notable initiative is the transparent wage policy, where information about salaries at all levels is openly shared, promoting equality in compensation.</p> <p>“Edge Equality” serves as a dynamic platform for all Netlight personnel to actively engage in building and enhancing their competence in promoting equality. Through various activities such as meet-ups, seminars, and other events, employees develop skills that not only add value to their professional roles but also contribute to fostering equality as proud “Netlighters”. The dedicated equality group within Netlight functions as a forum where all equality-related missions are spotlighted, aiming to inspire mutual support, assist in internal marketing efforts, and facilitate discussions on additional initiatives to further embed equality.¹⁰⁴</p> <p>The company prioritizes providing a working environment free from harassment, defining harassment as any unwelcome conduct at work that infringes upon an employee’s integrity based on gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, disability, or age. The strategic initiative “Vostok” launched in 2013 is a significant step towards recruiting more female employees and attracting women into the IT industry. Named in honour of Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, Vostok extends its impact beyond the company, addressing industry-wide challenges. Vostok encompasses practices such as the TechEQ network of companies, focused on promoting women’s participation in IT, and the Code Pub for coding, networking, and knowledge sharing. The inception of Code Pub as part of Vostok provides a practical avenue for women interested in learning more about IT. This meet-up event is open to both beginners and professional developers, offering an accessible platform for women to engage.¹⁰⁵</p>
<p>Stakeholder engagement</p>	<p>The stakeholders involved in the initiatives include Netlight partners, employees, clients, and the broader community. Netlight’s approach involves a comprehensive strategy that incorporates various stakeholders at different levels, and their engagement is formalized through the Declaration of Equality, signed by all partners, and an equality clause embedded in job contracts and client agreements. Additionally, initiatives like Edge Equality and the equality group provide internal forums for Netlight</p>

¹⁰³ Netlight (2022).

¹⁰⁴ Netlight (n.d.).

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem.

	<p>personnel to actively participate, discuss, and contribute to the promotion of equality within the organization.¹⁰⁶</p>
<p>Challenges and future outlook</p>	<p>Challenges in addressing women’s underrepresentation in the IT sector are rooted in societal norms, education trends and industry biases, and might be difficult to overcome in the short term. However, the future outlook is optimistic, with ongoing initiatives aimed at recruitment, skill development, and fostering an inclusive working environment. By consistently promoting equality as a core competence, Netlight may contribute to a positive shift in gender dynamics within the company and the broader industry.¹⁰⁷</p>
<p>Community Impact</p>	<p>The initiatives not only benefit Netlight but also have broader implications for the industry by addressing the underrepresentation of women in technology. By providing opportunities for skill development, networking, and knowledge sharing, Netlight actively contributes to building a more inclusive and diverse community within the IT sector. The Code Pub, in particular, serves as an open platform for women to enter the IT field, creating a ripple effect on the community by empowering women and fostering diversity in the industry.¹⁰⁸</p>

Source: CASE own elaboration based on desk research.

¹⁰⁶ Netlight (2022).

¹⁰⁷ EIGE (n.d.).

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem.

SUMMARY – WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE NORDIC REGION?

This report has dived into the multifaceted realm of ESG leadership and sustainable practices, focusing on the Nordic region. Organized into four main chapters, each addressing key aspects of leadership, education, and sustainable development, the review has shown many cases of successful initiatives that can constitute a starting point for individuals, especially young females seeking a means for embracing sustainability principles in their professional and personal future. The lessons learned span three dimensions: (1) Empowering women through leadership education; (2) Education for sustainable development; (3) Implementing sustainability principles in companies.

Empowering women through leadership education

- 1) **Addressing Gender Disparities:** Nordic initiatives emphasize the need to address gender disparities from the early stages of education. Global efforts should prioritize initiatives that instil awareness, cultivate skills, and elevate self-esteem among young girls, fostering transformative change in gender dynamics.
- 2) **Overcoming Stereotypes and Perceptions:** Initiatives like DigiPippi focus on challenging societal stereotypes and preconceptions regarding specific fields. Targeted educational campaigns should be implemented globally to shift perceptions and foster a collective understanding of the importance of inclusivity in various sectors, particularly those traditionally dominated by one gender.
- 3) **Collaborative Approaches to Gender Equality:** Nordic cooperation projects emphasize collaborative efforts involving various stakeholders, confronting challenges in priority areas. Initiatives with similar objectives should adopt a comprehensive approach, collaborating with diverse stakeholders to address gender equality issues, challenge stereotypes, and empower both genders.
- 4) **Inclusive Teacher Education and Career Guidance:** The Nordic cooperation project focused on ensuring access to counselling and career guidance free from traditional gender stereotypes. It has proved that implementing inclusive practices in education and career guidance can help challenge stereotypical roles and foster equal opportunities for both genders.
- 5) **Role Models for Entrepreneurship:** Sweden's Women Ambassadors scheme successfully inspires and promotes female entrepreneurship through personal stories and role models. Establishing similar initiatives building dedicated ambassador pools, ensuring diversity, and conducting thorough impact assessments can empower women in entrepreneurship.
- 6) **Emphasizing Diversity in Leadership:** Successful initiatives emphasize the necessity of efforts in gender equality, with a specific focus on areas where women are underrepresented. Encouragement of diversity in leadership roles by addressing

imbalances and challenges in various sectors can foster inclusivity and promote equal opportunities.

- 7) Sustained Progress through Collaboration: Nordic collaboration projects (tend to) lay the foundations for sustained progress beyond the programme periods. Encouraging continued collaboration and dialogue between sectors and stakeholders, with each sector taking responsibility for formulating and achieving gender equality goals based on sector-specific issues, contributes to successful outcomes.

Education for sustainable development

- 1) Comprehensive Online Resources for Knowledge Dissemination: The development of comprehensive online resources, as seen in DOGA's initiative, plays a crucial role in knowledge dissemination, empowering businesses and practitioners. Developing and maintaining accessible online platforms that compile best practices, tools and resources, thereby supporting the widespread dissemination of knowledge in ESD, is recommended.
- 2) Overcoming Challenges in Inclusivity Promotion: DOGA's experience in promoting universal design principles underscores the need to overcome pre-existing notions. The recommendation is to implement targeted educational campaigns, shifting perceptions and fostering a collective understanding of the importance of inclusivity in design and education.
- 3) Promoting Inclusivity and Lifelong Learning: Espoo's Urban Gardening in Early Childhood Education highlights the significance of inclusivity and lifelong learning from an early age. The recommendation is to integrate inclusive and lifelong learning principles into educational policies, emphasizing the interconnectedness between humans and nature. In summary, these lessons and recommendations offer valuable guidance for organizations and regions aspiring to enhance their sustainable education initiatives, leveraging the Nordic Region's rich experiences and innovative approaches in ESD.

Implementing sustainability principles in companies

- 1) Sustainable Behaviours Through Technology: The Fauna Social Platform presents a compelling model for incentivizing environmentally conscious actions. Organizations are encouraged to explore technology-driven solutions, employing gamification principles to motivate users towards sustainable practices. Such platforms can serve as effective tools for fostering a community committed to reducing environmental footprints.
- 2) Incorporating Transparent Sustainability Evaluation: Fauna's Sustainability Council meticulously evaluates brands based on comprehensive criteria. Organizations aspiring to embrace sustainability should adopt transparent evaluation processes. Publicly accessible data, certifications, and adherence to specific criteria can be

essential parameters for assessing and endorsing brands committed to sustainable practices.

- 3) **Building Social Networks for Sustainable Consumption:** Fauna's approach of building a social network as a consumer loyalty scheme offers a blueprint for organizations looking to promote sustainable consumption. Creating platforms that enable users to track and reward green purchases can significantly contribute to widespread adoption of eco-friendly products.
- 4) **Global challenges as a Sustainable Business Model:** Visit Natives exemplifies sustainable indigenous tourism, emphasizing respect for local culture and environmental conservation. Organizations involved in tourism can learn from this model by prioritizing community engagement, local empowerment, and environmental preservation in their activities.
- 5) **Stakeholder Engagement for Social Impact:** Engaging stakeholders, as demonstrated by Fauna and Visit Natives, is crucial for the success of sustainability initiatives. Organizations should actively seek partnerships with companies, communities, and users to create a network that amplifies the impact of sustainable practices.
- 6) **Equality as a Core Competence:** Netlight's commitment to equality as a fundamental principle provides a noteworthy recommendation. Organizations should integrate equality into their core competencies, fostering an inclusive environment. Transparent wage policies, dedicated equality groups, and initiatives for skill development contribute to building a workplace that values diversity.
- 7) **Targeted Initiatives to Address Underrepresentation:** Netlight's initiatives to address women's underrepresentation in the IT sector offer insights for industries facing similar challenges. Companies should develop targeted programmes, such as mentorship opportunities, skill development initiatives, and networking events, to encourage greater diversity and gender equality in male-dominated sectors.
- 8) **Sustainable Practices Beyond Business Operations:** Visit Natives showcases the integration of sustainability principles into daily operations, providing direct economic benefits to indigenous communities. Organizations are encouraged to extend their impact beyond business operations by contributing to the wellbeing of local communities and addressing broader environmental challenges.

The lessons drawn from empowering women through leadership education, promoting education for sustainable development and implementing sustainability principles in companies offer a roadmap for individuals and organizations alike. Emphasizing the Nordic region's successes, this report has underlined the importance of collaborative efforts, diversity in leadership, and sustained progress. As the global community navigates the challenges of sustainability, these lessons provide valuable insights and inspiration for fostering positive change and advancing towards a future where economic growth, social wellbeing, and environmental protection are harmoniously integrated.

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