

Why the world needs more (Female) Climate Entrepreneurs

Did you know that girls often outperform boys in digital literacy in school, but only half as many women as men are graduating in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields in the EU? It might sound a bit bonkers, but it's true. The question is: Why?

Temps de lecture : minute

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What is it that dims young women's bright minds when it comes to science and technology, somewhere between the secondary school classroom and choosing their career? The answer lies somewhere within our *deeply entrenched* social perceptions and attitudes i.e. what young women (and their communities) believe they are capable of, or 'should' pursue for work. The idea of becoming a female scientist, engineer or researcher does evidently not seem either attainable, or attractive (in many senses of the word).

This is a real shame on many fronts, from *women's missed career opportunities*, to the impact they could have had on science and tech fields in general. I would argue, though, that there is one huge missed opportunity staring us right in the face - the field of *climate entrepreneurship*. The plight to save our planet before it's too late has never needed new minds and ideas more than now. After all, the window to meet climate goals is, as the UN warned us all last year, "*rapidly closing*" - if there ever was a time to bring in new recruits to the charge, it would be today (or yesterday, in fact).

It's not all doom and gloom, though. There are ways to bring women into

the climate entrepreneurship space, and indeed women have a unique role to play in the sphere. Given that women are adversely affected by climate change more than men (as a statistically poor and under-resourced group), female climate entrepreneurs have a unique opportunity - to help other women across the globe.

In this article we look at the challenges, the opportunities, and hear directly from the inspiring young women who took part in *The Earth Prize* (the world's largest environmental sustainability competition for young people aged 13-19 years).

The 3 greatest challenges

The main challenges faced by women in STEM fields and entrepreneurship in general include:

1. Gender bias and stereotypes: By associating traditionally masculine qualities to STEM and business careers, young women are held back by inaccurate perceptions of what they can and cannot do, and may even self-select themselves out of the race.
2. Lack of mentorship and role models: Relatable role modeling is well-cited in current research as an effective tool to inspire, motivate, support and inform young people, and even adults. Typically referred to in academic research as '*exemplars*' who inspire 'emulation', role modeling is cited as a central method by which we learn as humans to develop, find purpose, move forward, and flourish.
3. Funding disparities: Around *3% of total capital* went to all-women teams in Europe in 2023 (and no, that's not reflective of how many female-led teams there are!).

Diving into these common roadblocks a bit further, we spoke to some of The Earth Prize's all-female teams about their experiences. In fact, the Winning teams of 2022 and 2023 were both all-female teams: *Adorbsies*

(Vietnam) and *Delavo* (Türkiye). While team Adorbsies created biodegradable sanitary pads made out of dragon fruit peels, team Delavo invented a device to treat and reuse 90% of laundry machine wastewater.

Dorothy Tran, from team Adorbsies, (Winner of The Earth Prize 2022), explained the challenges she faces: *“As a female teen or young woman aspiring to become an entrepreneur, one of the biggest challenges I perceive is navigating and overcoming gender stereotypes in the business world. These stereotypes often create barriers to accessing funding, finding mentorship, and being taken seriously in entrepreneurial circles. Additionally, balancing entrepreneurial ambitions with societal expectations around traditional gender roles and responsibilities can be particularly daunting.”*

Irmak Zelal Cengiz, from team Delavo (Winner of The Earth Prize 2023), expanded: *“While entrepreneurship is notably a challenging occupation due to the intense competition and limited opportunities, becoming an accomplished female entrepreneur from scratch is unfortunately harder. Young female entrepreneurs' greatest challenges may be summarised as unsupportive investors and collaborators, insufficient financial and logistical resources, and undue criticism.”*



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The huge opportunity: Women helping women

Did you know that women are more likely to be affected by climate change compared to men? According to *UN Environment*, 80% of the people displaced by climate change are women and girls, who are facing heightened risks of poverty, violence or unintended pregnancies, as they migrate to safer locations.

In general, *women represent the majority of the world's poor*; not only are they proportionally more dependent on threatened natural resources, but their roles in societal structures mean that they have less access to important tools that could help them manage the effects of climate change (e.g. land, credit, agricultural inputs, decision-making structures, technology, training and extension services).

In this way, female climate entrepreneurs have the unique potential to not only make an impact on the sector as a whole, but also take a lead on positively affecting the lives of other women affected by climate events.

Tips and advice for budding female Climate Entrepreneurs

While campaigning to change both gender bias and funding trends are important actions to take, one thing we can do is speak to female climate entrepreneurs and share their stories. In doing so, we can hope to contribute to relatable role modelling for future generations, share tips and advice that they've found helpful, and even spur on mentoring opportunities.

Team Delavo spoke to us about their experience of The Earth Prize, and explained that what they found most useful as female climate entrepreneurs was to join a programme like this competition, to receive

structured support such as feedback from mentors. Irmak from team Delavo explained: *“Along our journey through initiating Delavo, we acquired significantly valuable experience: we witnessed the high potential of inclusive teamwork, the substantiality of expert feedback, and the power of durable determination for implementing our intentions. On the other hand, attending The Earth Prize competition played a crucial role in the success of Delavo by providing influential mentorship support, and enabling Delavo to be heard by possible partner companies. Therefore, we highly recommend young entrepreneurs apply to The Earth Prize and resembling programs to receive support for their attempts.”*

On the other hand, Dorothy Tran from team Adorbsies explained that one piece of advice she would give is to remain tenacious and resilient as you pivot your concept: *“Becoming an entrepreneur often means stepping outside your comfort zone. Of course, at the beginning of the journey, everything will seem unstable, and many will feel stuck in one place, us included, but it doesn’t mean you’re failing. It takes a lot of refining to create something that reflects both your values and the market needs.”*

The future: Efficient Climate Entrepreneurship

In any case, both Irmak and Dorothy hope that more young women will step into climate entrepreneurship, if only as a matter of efficiency. *“We hope that female climate entrepreneurs can possess an equitable working environment in the future, and reveal innovative solutions for the climate without encountering challenges - so that we can find the most efficient alternatives to overcome climate-related problems”,* explained Irmak Zelal Cengiz, from team Delavo. *“Indeed, we are amplifying more voices and ideas for the bettering of the environment”,* concluded Dorothy Tran from team Adorbsies.

If you know a young person aged 13-19 years and think this career path could be for them, encourage them to apply for [The Earth Prize 2025!](#)

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