

# Women in Sustainable Chemistry at the ISC3 Stakeholder Forum



“We work with women and men in their diversity, and try increasingly to use intersectional language, to ensure inclusion of women, men, and non-binary persons and from all backgrounds, black, migrant, young, indigenous, etc”. (Sascha Gabizon, WECF)

The [ISC3](#) – International Sustainable Chemistry Collaborative Centre - Second Stakeholder Forum took place online on 23rd and 24th of November 2020.

As one of the Advisory Board members of ISC3, we ([WECF](#)), participated in several of the sessions including in the workshop on “gender and sustainable chemistry, how women benefit from sustainable chemistry and vice versa”, in which our director Sascha Gabizon was one of the speakers.

During the first day of the Stakeholder Forum we took part in the discussion on principles of sustainable chemistry, and it was positive to understand that all participants understood that we are looking not at replacing one chemical by another, but at changing entire processes and value chains, aiming at making them non-toxic for people and planet.

On the second day, the ISC3 moderator posed a few questions to foster a productive discussion on gender and chemistry:

- ✓ What are the opportunities that might arise from sustainable chemistry for gender equality and women’s rights?
- ✓ What are key challenges that should be addressed in the discussion on sustainable chemistry and gender equality?
- ✓ How could cross-sectoral dialogue and networking help to promote gender equality in different sectors?

In her presentation given by Sascha Gabizon she demonstrated how a broader based network like WECF with over 1000 women civil society organizations working together can promote gender equality across key sustainability areas, such as climate, agriculture, energy, and also in chemicals, etc.

Yet, regarding the more technical sectors, such as the chemicals' industry, still have fewer female employees, especially at higher levels. This is partly because more women might decide not to work in a sector that they consider as male dominated as well as polluting.

It also means that fewer women are involved in decision-making on chemical related policies. Sascha Gabizon highlighted the importance of an intersectional approach to all policymaking. She described how chemicals affect directly and indirectly women's everyday lives, and that we are exposed to many harmful chemicals in cleaning, cooking and beauty products daily. There is plentiful evidence of chronic diseases linked to chemical exposure, including irreversible diseases and disabilities.

In this sense, it is essential to address the health impacts of exposure to harmful chemicals, and that the best way is to phase out harmful chemicals and shift to sustainable products that are not toxic for people and the environment. Chemicals should not be persistent, accumulative, reprotoxic, carcinogenic nor endocrine disrupters.

Solution can be provided by sharing knowledge to those women affected through exposure on chemicals, like women that are working in terrible conditions as waste scavengers, in so called 'plastic recycling' plants, or women that are working in the small scale artisanal gold sector – destroying their and their families health with exposure to mercury.

At WECF we also organize trainings for interested consumers and producers and retailers, we have started with children products, as the developing child is even more sensitive to chemicals and can suffer lifelong health effects including serious one's like cancer.

It is important to stress that, legislation is always running behind, products get onto the market, and it takes decades to get them off the market, - for example with the 'forever

chemicals' in non-sticky pans and water resistant materials – and even if they get banned in the EU, our waste might well end up in Kenya or Ghana and then the health hazards are even worse, as in mixed waste it is even more difficult to safely manage harmful chemicals.

So, how do we support women entrepreneurs, not just those who are chemists, but those that produce daily products and would like not to contaminate their clients and the environment? The easiest for them would be if all harmful chemicals would no longer be available for them on the market, - that they would automatically only be able to source healthy and sustainable chemical products.

But as long as that is not the case, we need to encourage female entrepreneurs that want to be completely sustainable and support their access to data about safer sustainable chemical alternatives.