



Partnerships for
Forests

She Leads

**A needs-based
leadership
programme with and
for women in the
bioeconomy sector**

February 2024



Summary

She Leads is a capacity building programme designed in response to the challenges faced by women leaders in the Brazilian bioeconomy sector. The programme was initiated by Partnerships for Forests (P4F) as part of its Gender Equality and Social Inclusion approach in Latin America. Project partners [Teçá Impacto](#) and [Schneider Consulting](#) undertook extensive research and stakeholder engagement, including testing initial hypotheses with the target group and conducting a benchmark study, to design a needs-based programme.

The programme's effectiveness was then tested in a pilot workshop, after which the full programme design was finalised. The pilot participants reported increased confidence, motivation, and readiness for professional and personal development. The programme aims to support 50 female leaders annually, emphasising a holistic approach to leadership development.

Context

Bioeconomy is the production, processing and marketing of forest-derived products in ways that increase the value or restoration of standing forests, conserve biodiversity and add to the knowledge of indigenous and traditional peoples¹. It spotlights the importance of forest communities in promoting economic development that aligns with environmental preservation. When local communities can secure their livelihoods with products from the forest, they become fundamental participants in the preservation of the ecosystems, rather than potential deforestation drivers.

Women in particular play a key role in fostering sustainable practices in rural and Indigenous communities. The communities' dependence on natural resources and surrounding environments to provide food and medicine serves as a strong incentive to preserve and protect those resources². However, women in leadership roles in the bioeconomy sector face numerous challenges, such as: gender bias and discrimination; limited access to resources including funding, technology and specialised training; limited land rights; the need to balance multiple roles, and; a lack of networking opportunities.

As part of its Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) approach in Latin America, Partnerships for Forests (P4F) funded the launch of She Leads, which provides training to female leaders in the Brazilian bioeconomy sector.

This case study describes this target group's support requirements and shares details of the development and implementation of She Leads, a needs-based capacity building programme that aims to address key obstacles faced by women leaders in bioeconomy. It serves as an example of inclusive capacity building programme development that could be adapted and used in other contexts, and provides insights into the challenges and needs of female leaders in the bioeconomy sector in Brazil.

“I overcame the fear of facing challenges. Today, I feel confident; challenges are meant to be overcome and learned from.”

Elizeth Marques de Souza - Leader of AMA



Photo Fred Rahal

¹ ["New Economy for the Brazilian Amazon"](#) report, published by the World Resources Institute (WRI) in June 2023;

² ["Mainstreaming gender and empowering women for environmental sustainability"](#) report, published by OECD in 2020

An inclusive approach to the programme's development

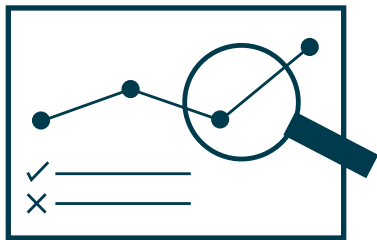
The first step was to better understand the root causes and effects of the challenges female leaders face and the support they require. To do this, implementation partners [Teçá Impacto](#) and [Schneider Consulting](#), supported by P4F, tested some initial hypotheses by reviewing 104 capacity building resources – including courses, materials and articles – and conducting 71 interviews with current and aspiring female leaders of the Brazilian bioeconomy. Based on the findings, the team revised the hypotheses about the actual support needs of women leaders and developed the She Leads capacity building programme as a direct response to those needs.

The programme methodology was designed to engage women leaders and provide tools that they could apply in their communities. After the initial structure was developed, a pilot workshop with 20 participants from all Brazilian biomes was run. During the workshop, the participants received training and had opportunities to connect with each other, identify challenges, and learn from each other's experiences. The pilot informed a [refined version of the programme](#) and a complete training cycle was created.

The methodology is presented in Infographic 1, with each step described in the following section.

Infographic 1. The Programme methodology

Hypotheses testing and validation



Benchmark study

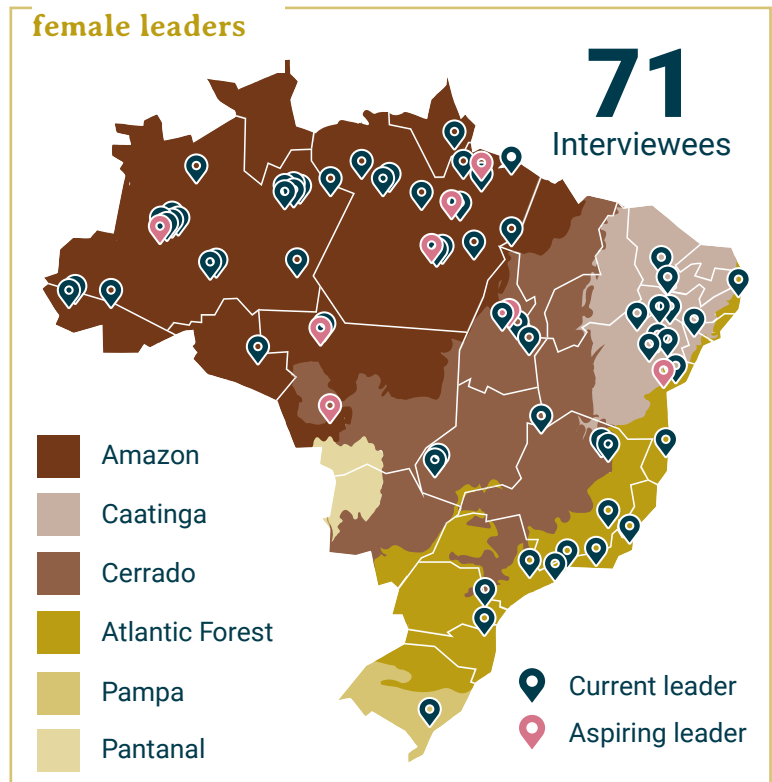
104
References



- 28 Programmes
- 22 Subjects
- 11 Courses
- 8 Platforms
- 6 Foruns
- 2 Publications



Interviews with female leaders



1. Hypotheses testing and validation

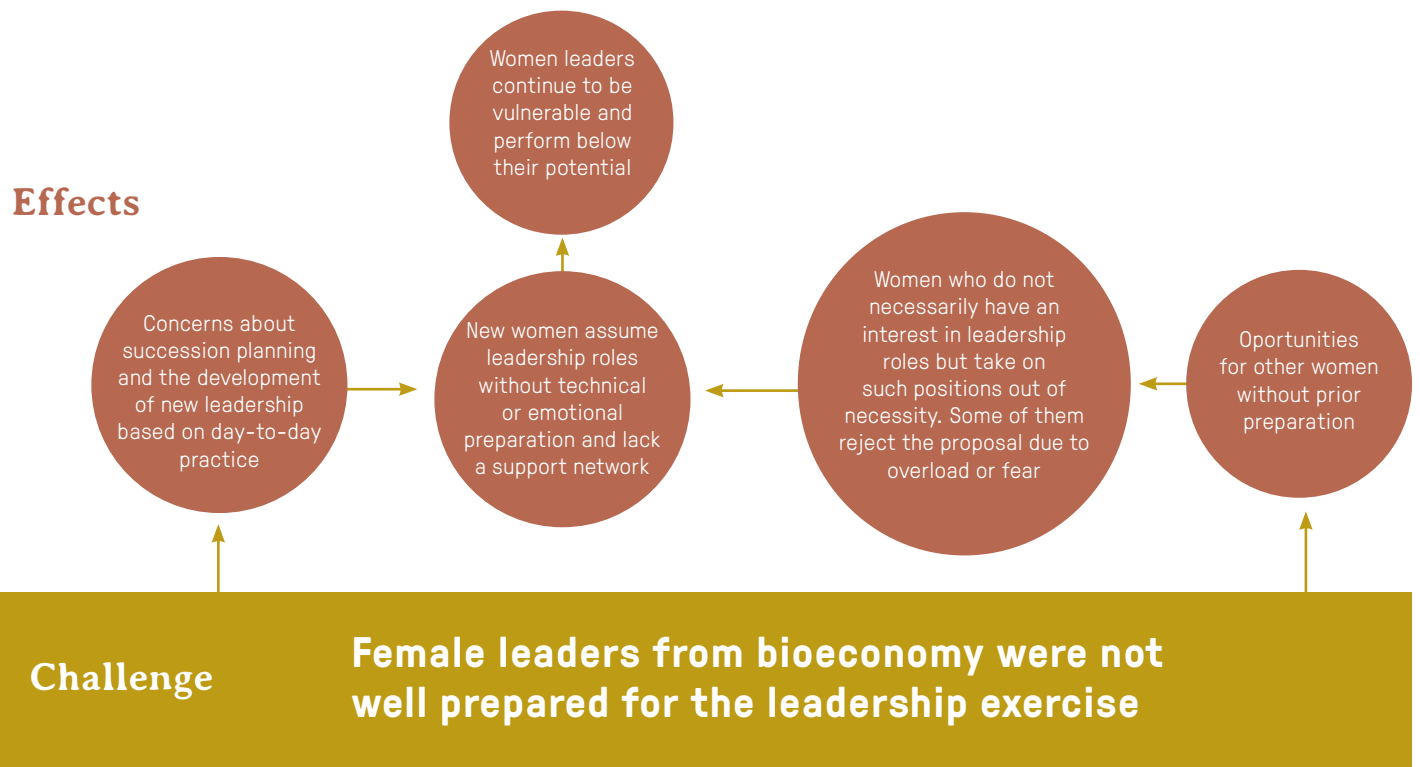
The initial hypothesis was that a root cause of the challenges facing female leaders is the lack of leadership training and preparation available to women. To test this, the partners conducted interviews alongside a benchmark study of relevant and currently available capacity building materials.

The Infographic 2 showcases the validated hypotheses, which formed the basis of the programme development.



Infographic 2.

The tested hypotheses on causes and effects of female leaders' challenges



Causes

Complex context:

- Limited access to land
- Limited access to educational resources
- Marginalization of local and indigenous communities
- Overload: multiple roles
- Sexist and racist society

Consequences of multiple structural factors:

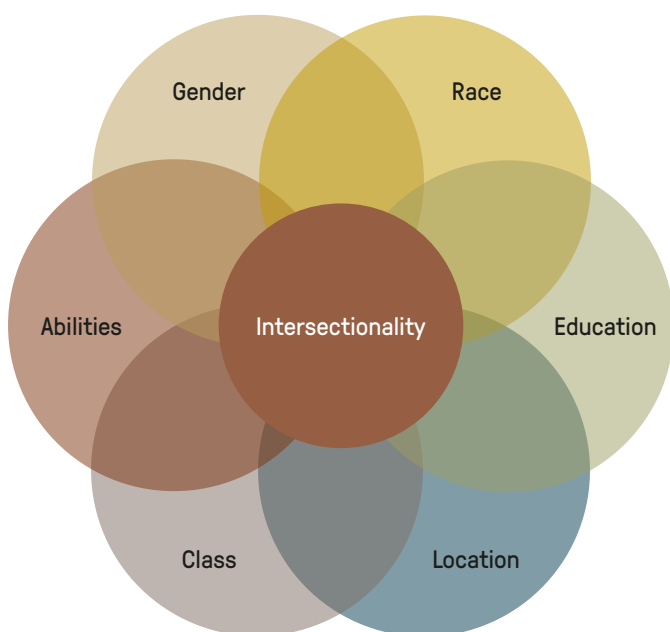
- Limited awareness of what they need to develop
- Limited or no exposure to business environments, especially outside their communities
- Few leadership role models
- Unsafety
- Limited exposure to discussion and decision making environments

Challenges faced by women in the bioeconomy sector in Brazil

When exploring the challenges facing women in the bioeconomy sector, it is crucial to understand intersectionality³. This concept highlights the complex nature of inequality when several types of discrimination and oppression – such as those based on race, gender, and social class – occur simultaneously.

Photo Fred Rahal

Infographic 3. Overlap of various aspects of a person's identity



Female leaders in the bioeconomy sector have to tackle at least two types of discrimination and bias: due to their gender and to their location. The reality faced by many women in rural areas is marked by a lack of recognition of their work⁴. Often, their contributions are perceived as assisting their husbands or families rather than of independent value. This social invisibility can be caused by a lack of territorial access, work, access to markets and resources as well as cultural beliefs regarding the role of women. All this can make women more vulnerable, dependent on men and undervalued, and can impact self-esteem. Women who are Black or indigenous may face additional prejudices that can result in social exclusion, limited opportunities, economic disparities, or mental ill health. The interviews showed that 77% of the leaders had experienced prejudice or discrimination, especially based on their gender, and 56% felt overwhelmed by the amount of tasks and responsibilities they had. Recognising the diverse and intersectional challenges that affect women is crucial for designing effective strategies to address these.

³ CRENSHAW, K. Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. 1989

⁴ "[Empowering Women in the Rural Economy](#)" report, published by International Labour Office in 2019.

Inclusion is in the details

Diversity and inclusion initiatives must go beyond merely prioritising diversity to achieve inclusion. When institutions bring underrepresented groups into their teams or projects, they need to consider how that person feels in those places. If those spaces or initiatives were not designed to serve those groups and take their unique circumstances into consideration, the result might be increased diversity but not inclusion. To counter this risk, the programme's pilot

workshop adapted the course material language to ensure it resonated with the participants, refraining from using foreign expressions and opting for a style that aligns with popular education principles.

Another inclusion effort involved removing barriers to the participation of a leader who uses a wheelchair, including the provision of appropriate infrastructure and trained professionals.

2. Benchmark study

For the benchmark study, the project partners reviewed 104 online leadership training resources, subjects, courses, platforms and more, prioritising the ones with a focus on women. The objective was to map the topics covered by each initiative and understand if the available options could address the needs of the target group.

The study showed that, while existing courses fail to wholly address the unique rural context and reality of female leaders in the bioeconomy sector, there were some valuable insights:



Programmes that promote networking saw an increase in the self-confidence of participants;



Training programmes should include both technical knowledge and leadership skills; and



Learning methodologies should be tailored to the different needs of participants.

Two publications were particularly aligned with the She Leads proposal – [Fostering Gender-Transformative Change in Sustainable Forest Management](#) by the International Institute for Environment and Development and [Rural women's leadership programme in grassroots organizations: a case study in Nepal](#) by the International Fund for Agricultural Development.



Photo Fred Rahal

3. Interviews with female leaders

In addition to the benchmark study, a semi-structured interview questionnaire for women leaders of bioeconomy associations, cooperatives and businesses was developed. Seventy-one interviews were conducted to test the hypotheses and inform the programme. These served as an opportunity for leaders to express their thoughts, be heard, and reflect on aspects of their career they had not explored before.

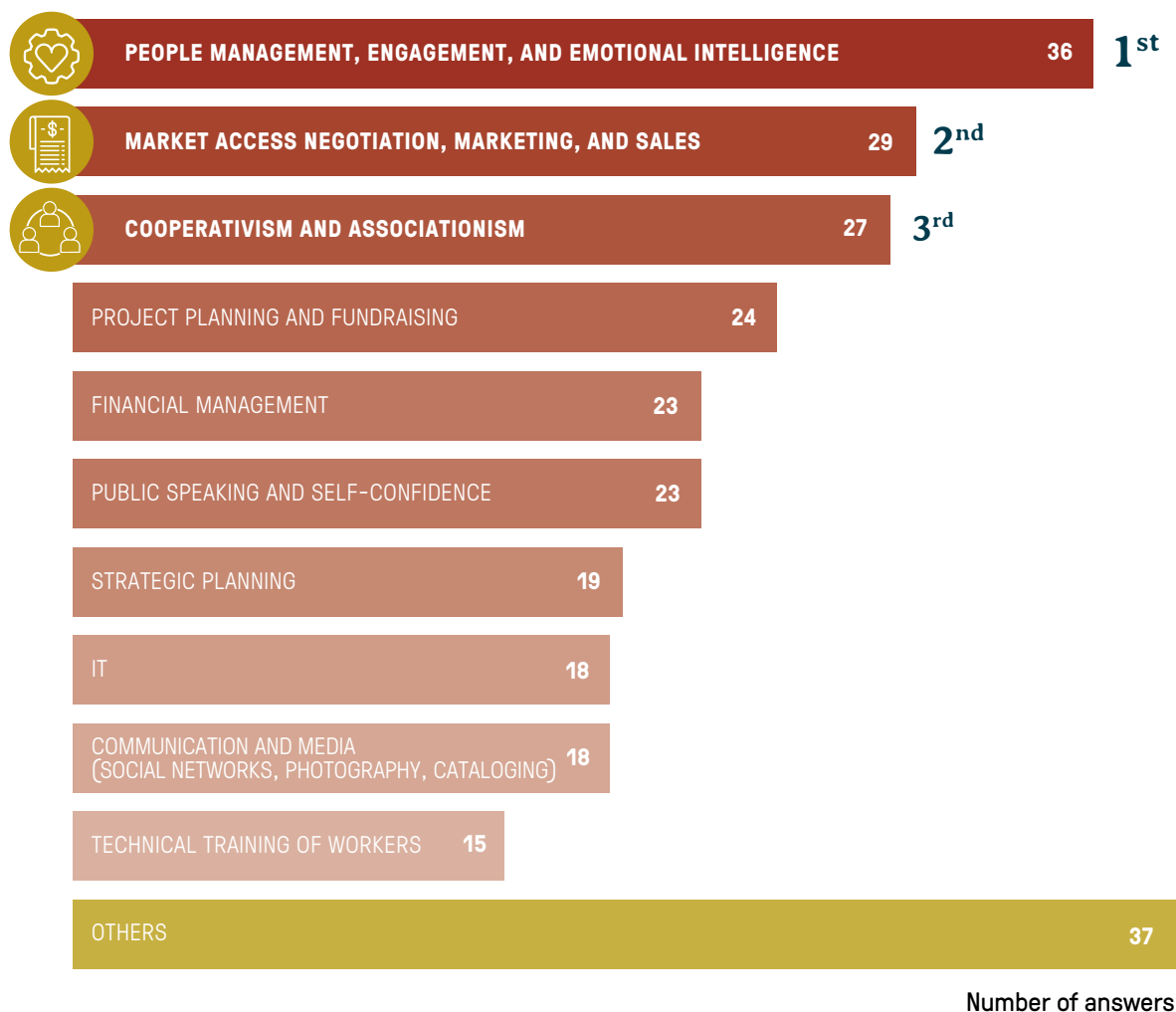
Interviewees represented a wide variety of contexts in terms of access to infrastructure, internet, education, etc. For example, several interviewees were invited to join the pilot workshop held in Brasília, the capital of Brazil. While some lived just one flight away, others faced considerable travel challenges, with a few having to embark on multi-day boat journeys just to reach the nearest airport.

The interviews revealed important needs: 60% of the leaders reported feeling overwhelmed, and 73% shared experiences of workplace discrimination. These findings had a direct influence on the programme design, where an objective was added to empower leaders with essential tools, including time management and effective delegation, nurturing their self-esteem through knowledge-sharing initiatives and specialised training in public speaking.

Interviewees selected their most needed topics from a list of 17 options for the leadership training, with the outcomes shown in Infographic 4. The answers were analysed by the implementation team and separated into technical and soft skills. The socio-emotional (“soft”) skills are considered the foundation on which technical knowledge can be build.

Infographic 4.

Main needs of the female leaders interviewed



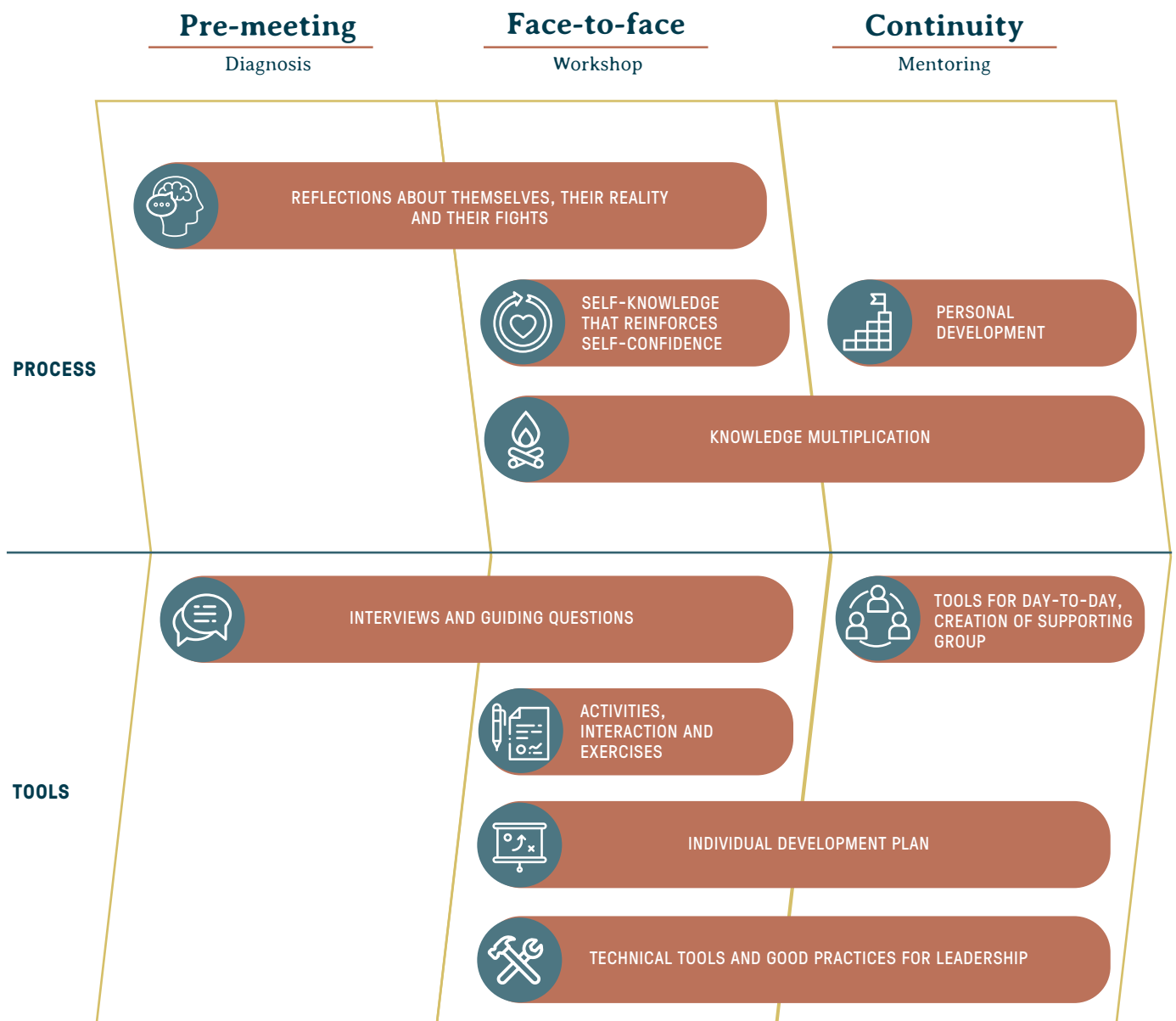
Number of answers

4. Programme design

Informed by the benchmark study and interviews, the programme was designed to be delivered in three phases: pre-meeting, face-to-face and continuity. As shown below, each phase involved several steps, each with supporting tools.

- During the pre-meeting phase, participants are engaged through interviews with guiding questions that increase their self-awareness and awareness of the key challenges they face.
- During the face-to-face phase, participants come together in a multi-day workshop and receive training, tools and the opportunity to network and exchange. They work on areas such as self-knowledge, self-confidence, leadership, knowledge dissemination and create a personal development plan.
- Finally, participants are encouraged to take what they have learned back to their communities to apply in their day-to-day and to share further. They are also invited to join an alumni network to continue to exchange with one another and receive mentoring both from other alumni as well as the project partners.

Infographic 5.
Phases of She Leads programme





5. Pilot workshop

The pilot was a three-day workshop held in Brasilia and was attended by 20 participants, selected from the interviewees. The selection was made to provide a diverse, representative group and to include leaders with the potential to disseminate knowledge to forest communities. The pilot's purpose was to test the face-to-face phase of the programme and make any necessary improvements before its wider rollout.

The face-to-face workshop aimed to deliver information, build on the experience and knowledge of the participants, and to empower them through discussions and collaborative problem-solving. To achieve this, there were presentations on topics and technical tools and a wide range of practical examples were shared, enabling participants to learn from each other's experience in a mutual exchange of insights and reassuring them of their existing knowledge and skills.

“A great surprise when I arrived at the workshop was discovering that I had already inspired someone's life. Reflecting on my professional life journey, I found that I have been doing this for a long time with my students, being a mirror for them. With a lot of care, listening, and attention, I managed to change the course of the river for many of them. I realised that with a bit of ancestral knowledge, we can change the life story of many.”

Ana Paula Souza dos Santos - Leader from Pataxó indigenous community

Infographic 6.
Workshop tools and content

TEAMWORK

BUILDING A NARRATIVE

Delegate
 Another key focus of the workshop was delegation. Participants received training on the concepts and learned about a tool that consists of a series of guiding questions that support participants to identify their strengths, and understand how these qualities inspire others, what activities they should delegate, who they should delegate to, and what the person will need to carry out the activities.

STRATEGIC VERSUS OPERATIONAL PLANNING

Systemic View

FEEDBACK AND NEGOTIATION

LEADERSHIP WHEEL

STORYTELLING

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

THE THREE STATES OF BEING

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

NETWORKING AND CONNECTING

Tips for Public Presentation

Multiplication Plan
 Participant selection prioritised individuals acting as knowledge disseminators, who would be able to share learning from the workshop in their communities. To do this, the programme used a tool called 'Multiplication Plan' which offers knowledge sharing guidance. The Multiplication Plan was developed by Teçá Impacto and Schneider Consulting to both build the capacity of the participants and, particularly, to multiply their knowledge by sharing it with difficult-to-reach communities.

Individual Development Plan

Types of Leadership

COLLECTIVE STRUGGLES AND PUBLIC POLICIES

INSPIRE AND MOTIVATE

VISION OF THE FUTURE

“Thanks to the workshop, it is the first time I peacefully travel for work knowing that everything is on track back in the cooperative.”
Luzirene Lustosa - Leader of Coopavam and former P4F grantee

Female leaders network

Networking forms an essential component of the programme's continuity and sustainability. During the pilot phase, the leaders recognised the importance of formalising this network, to provide a platform for continuing to share their experiences and perspectives through group discussions.

An online network was established to foster the connections formed during the workshops. Participants primarily used this platform to share their experience and highlight potential opportunities for others to engage in, including grant proposals, partnership prospects,

and upcoming events. Teçá Impacto and Schneider Consulting play an active role in supporting network members, especially by identifying opportunities and improving project proposals.

“I feel confident knowing I have the network's support and by being able to develop better my work as a leader in agroecology projects, after the She Leads training.”

Joelma Marcelino dos Santos - Leader of Mulheres do GAU

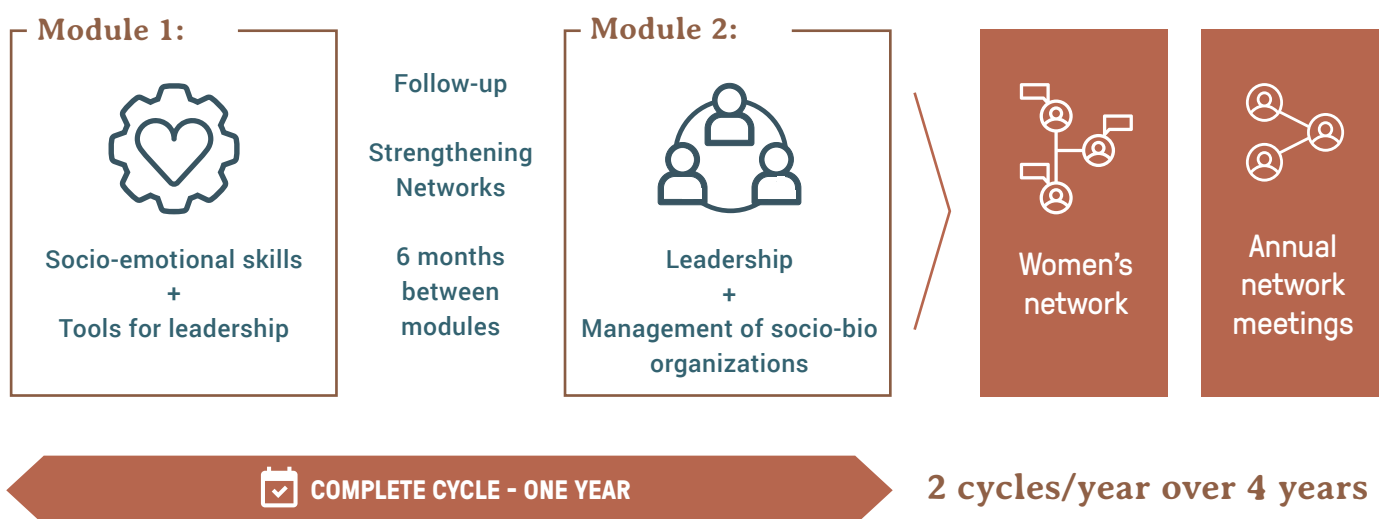
6. Proposal for the complete training cycle

The final step in the She Leads design was to finalise the programme structure. It comprises two modules: the first focuses on soft skills to form a socio-emotional foundation, while the second builds on this with technical skills. On completion of the full cycle, the participants are invited to join the network and attend its annual meetings. Teçá

Impacto and Schneider Consulting will run the programme for two years, after which it is expected that the female leaders will take it over. Teçá Impacto and Schneider Consulting are currently engaging with potential future funders of the activities. The envisioned impact is to support 50 female leaders per year.

Infographic 7.

Proposal for the complete training cycle



- 25 women per cycle > Group of 200 women at the end of the 4th year
- From year 3 on - training for autonomous networking management

Strengthening the capacity of female leaders

On arrival at the pilot workshop, participants completed a self-assessment with 11 quantitative evaluation questions. This included grading their abilities on specific leadership aspects. At the conclusion of the event, the women were asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire – with the same set of questions – to capture the shift in their perceptions of their abilities. They used a scale of 1 to 10 to rate themselves on the 11 criteria, with space for comments on each.

The graph below shows the average grade of the participants for each criteria evaluated before (yellow line) and after (red line) the event. While the grades were relatively high before the workshop, they increased on all points and evened out between the points, flattening the red line. This shows that participants felt their capacity had increased in each of the areas targeted by the workshop.

Graphic 1:

Average grade given by the participants per question before and after the workshop



The aspect with the largest improvement is **availability of tools needed for personal development**, with a 1.70-point increase compared to when participants arrived at the workshop. This aspect received the lowest score at the start of the workshop, indicating participants' initial lack of confidence in this area. The workshop offered frameworks to support personal development, such as the Individual Development Plan and the Leadership Wheel. The programme also created a network of powerful leaders who support each other, and which serves as a tool for personal development as they can ask for opinions and exchange knowledge.

The second largest increase was seen in **motivation for personal and professional development**, with a 1.15-point increase. This aspect became the participants' biggest strength, achieving

9.25 out of 10. Part of this may be explained by the frequently mentioned point that being recognised as an important leader for their business and communities and meeting other women like them made the female leaders feel powerful and eager to bring learning back to their communities.

The third largest increase was seen in **readiness for professional development** with a 1.05-point increase. The workshop involved looking at the past, present and future of both their personal and professional lives. It enabled them to reflect on what they have achieved so far, identify where they are now, and lay out a plan on how to get where they want to be in the future. That framework empowers the participants to be the owners of their stories and owners of their pathways.

Availability of tools needed for personal development



Photo Fred Rahal

“Now I started to know myself better.”

Sílvia Cecília Gouveia da Silva

Motivation for personal and professional development



Photo Fred Rahal

“Now, after this course, I am extremely motivated just by knowing that I have this valuable content. It's already an excellent experience.”

Maria Elena Araújo Bispo

Readiness for professional development



Photo Fred Rahal

“I am more prepared and confident now. I have a broader vision for expanding initiatives to foster the cooperative's growth with a more organized mission.”

Fernanda Pires de Araújo



Photo Fred Rahal

“Through studying with the group, I realized the potential for personal growth through self-analysis and recognition. Consequently, I can integrate coherent personal and territorial development themes into my projects. I aim to further my professional development through additional courses and training.”

Joelma Marcelino dos Santos



Photo Fred Rahal

“Lately, I was feeling a bit unmotivated, with little perspective, tired. But the meeting we had and the stories the other participants rekindled in me the desire to move forward. And, most importantly, I realized that I am more capable than I imagine.”

Tania Aldenaeide Brandão Shanenawa



Photo Fred Rahal

“I will organize myself better both professionally and personally.”

Maria Aparecida Ribeiro de Souza

Conclusion and next steps

The She Leads programme provides an innovative approach to the Brazilian bioeconomy by recognising the importance of female leaders in both forest businesses and communities. The programme provides them with support to overcome their main challenges, including a lack of formal preparation, high workload, experiences of prejudice, and low self-esteem.

The programme methodology was inclusive and responded directly to the participants needs by providing tools and enabling them to share their experience with each other during the programme and after it via the network. By building the capacity of female leaders who are central voices in their communities, the programme aims to multiply its impact, especially in hard-to-reach communities. The complete training cycle includes modules on both soft and technical skill development, emphasising a holistic approach to leadership. The network of support serves as a continuity of the program.

She Leads will be implemented for two further years by Teçá Impacto and Schneider Consulting, after which it is expected that the women leaders will take over the management.

Teçá Impacto and Schneider Consulting are currently looking for funders who will support the programme financially to ensure its continuity.



ELAS LIDERAM

Programa de Liderança Feminina
da Sociobiodiversidade

Support the She Leads programme

If your organisation aspires to spearhead positive change in the bioeconomy sector – at national or international level – and is interested in partnering to amplify the impacts achieved during the pilot workshop, you are encouraged to connect with Teçá Impacto.

marcela@tecaimpacto.com.br

Your involvement could play a crucial role in fostering a sustainable, empowered future.



This case study was developed by Partnerships for Forests in Latin America, in collaboration with the Monitoring and Evaluation global team

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Palladium
MAKE IT POSSIBLE

S Y S T E M I Q