



**WECEF | Women in Europe for a Common Future**

**“We want to work on the environment so that we can leave a legacy for our children”**

**Interview with Kalyani Raj of All India Women’s Conference**

**Kalyani Raj is from Delhi, India and works as a volunteer for the organisation All India Women’s Conference. She attended the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference Of the Parties (COP) 19 in Warsaw. Claire Greensfelder, senior Advisor on Climate and Energy for WECEF, interviewed her on her work and her motivations.**

**How did you become involved with the All India Women’s Conference (AIWC)?**

“I was a bank officer, but I stopped working when my daughters were small and I needed something that would keep me busy. I was looking for an institution where I could be useful, that was AIWC. The first project I took up was with a leprosy colony. Because of social taboos they were not allowed to go out in the social economy to work; they were all surviving on government grants. So we started a primary school. I thought we could do a lot for the women in the colony. We trained them in making candles as a way to generate an income. This was 14 years ago. After that, we started another project with weaving. We started with a loom and trained the women to make small napkins for sale.

AIWC is an 84-year-old organization and we have more than 500 branches all across India. Our organisation exists entirely out of volunteers and we have now more than 100,000 volunteers.

We are just now getting involved in climate change specifically, but we have been working in energy and environmental issues for 20 years. The AIWC has been promoting solar and renewable energy. Earlier, we sold solar lanterns and solar cookers. Last year we started training women to do the repairs on these solar appliances. We did it with the cooperation and help of the manufacturers. So far, we have trained 100 women in solar repair skills. As of now, we have three projects for solar repairs with women in Delhi.

We also have a solar project in a women's prison. The women get an extra income to do the solar repair work. The manufacturer sent the goods to the women in the prison for initial assembly and now for repairs. We have 35 women in prison who are part of this programme. We are also training women in the solar drying of food products. They make solar dried mangos and masala powder and curry powder. After it is dried, they pack it and sell it. Most of the women we work with live in semi-urban areas. These are women who are sitting at home with nothing to do and with no extra income. They get to keep the income they make with us. We also do economic empowerment work with them. We help them get bank accounts and help organise self-help groups. Our main objective is to create social and economic empowerment for women."

**What motivates you to do this work?**

"I feel there is an urgency that something needs to be done about climate change. Why it is not being done I really do not know. I sometimes feel that the politicians take a slow pace on their own. Because of my work at the grassroots level I know that more work can be done there. We do not need to wait for the policy makers to come and tell us what to do and we can update our knowledge about mitigation and can update our knowledge about adaptation. What we want to do is to work on the environment and the energy so that we can leave a legacy for our children. As for the policy makers, they should work it out with each other. They should remove all their defences and come to some solutions."

**Is this your first time at the UNFCCC?**

"Last year I was in Doha and that was my first experience with the UNFCCC. I saw the process that was taking place at the negotiations and I thought I could do some work at the national level in India on climate change. So this year we were a little more prepared for this COP. We were involved with the submission on Gender at the COP. India only made a submission on Article 2 so we worked with our environmental minister on this. We spent a year on this at home and got the government of India to make a submission on Gender this time. To get them to do it is not easy, but AIWC has a good history of working on environmental issues.

The first COP was only the beginning of my learning. Now, at this COP, I am a little wiser and more importantly, I am able to understand what is going on and I am able to "speak the language" and participate more effectively. For example, the first time I did not even understand what they were talking about when they would discuss money and financing. Now it is clearer for me.

We have a very democratic organisation and every three years we have elections. We are going to have elections soon and then we will bring in a team that will concentrate on climate change as a serious project for AIWC. This will happen between now and the next COP. There is a lot we can do."

**Has it been useful for your work at home to be here at the UNFCCC COP?**

"It is important for me to have access to the international processes. It is very important for me to be able to influence my national government. If I am here and they are taking a stand that we do not agree with we can speak to them about it. In fact, I did meet with the

Indian delegation. It is not very difficult to meet with your government here and it shows how serious you are.

Another good thing is that I am able to connect with other south Asian NGOs from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. As a result, we have started a meeting to consider becoming a South Asian NGO women's group. That's what I love about the COPs; every second you are learning and doing something new.

I hope I will be back here at the UNFCCC. It is also great working with WECF. They are very supportive. They do not dictate what you should do. Sabine Bock is always very inclusive in all her decisions. I find it very good, the way that they work as a team."

**What is your experience with the WECF Leadership training?**

"The WECF Leadership Training was good. We are already all leaders in our own way. We are all facilitating a whole lot of things. The best part of the training is the part where I can include more women on my team back home. I am thinking to work with four women; two who are already slightly empowered and two who are absolutely not. We will be asking them to attend conferences related to environmental and climate issues at the national level.

Women who are working in agriculture know that something is going on. They can see that a change is happening in the climate, but they do not know why it is happening. I want to empower them to be capable of bringing their own point of view to policy makers. I am trying to work with the women at the AIWC to make them aware of the decision level of work at the national policy level. In our own way, we are doing work with adaptation and mitigation, but many do not know that it is part of the bigger world of climate policy. They also are not familiar with how the policies need to be more gender sensitive.

The best part of the training was that all the members of the leadership training programme come from different cultures and different nationalities and we became a part of a team. We have all become good friends and we all think along the same lines. It is a good team. Sascha Gabizon is a great leader. She makes sure that everyone's voice is heard and Sabine is following the same principles."