

“COP 19 helped me to build a stronger bond with women who care about the planet”

Interview with Isis Alvarez of the Global Forest Coalition

Isis Alvarez of the Global Forest Coalition (GFC) is from Colombia. She attended the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference Of the Parties (COP) 19 in Warsaw last year. Claire Greensfelder, senior Advisor on Climate and Energy for WECF, interviewed her on GFC and the importance of being present at COP 19.

What is the main focus of the work that you are doing locally in your own community and country and also in the world?

“ The scope of my work involves many different aspects. For the past few years I have focused on international work, but without leaving behind the realities of my own country. I try to bring examples and case studies from Colombia to the international arena whenever I have the opportunity to do so.

I work closely with CENSAT Aqua Viva (Friends of the Earth - Colombia), the local member of GFC, which allows me to participate in different workshops, forums and meetings with people from the grassroots, including campesinos, indigenous and rural women, environmental leaders, and impacted communities, among others.

For example, after participating in different events that relate to activism, I have actively advocated against agro fuels and other green economy strategies. I have informed policy-makers, and all others who engage in these processes, about the wave of poverty, contamination and violence that the agro fuels and green economy strategies leave behind. For the past two years I have focused on gender work and currently, I am starting a cooperation with a local project regarding unsustainable livestock production. We will be looking at the different dynamics of this industry in Colombia and be considering the impacts on women particularly. I am also looking forward to starting with the EWA project which will allow me to get involved with indigenous women from the Amazon and the different challenges they face while confronting extractive industries.

The gender focus of my work started after the gender program of GFC was not moving forward due to a lack of capacity. As gender was a theme that interested me and there was an opportunity to actively 'revive it' within GFC I took the opportunity and ever since, I have been actively involved with the Women's Major Group of the United Nations NGO community.”

Is it important for your organization to have access to international processes like the UNFCCC and the SDG / Post 2015?

“It is indeed. By participating in these arenas we bring together the voices of the people that make up our coalition. We bring different views on and criticisms of proposed

policies and warn policy-makers of (potential) adverse effects.

At home it gives us the motivation to keep working and being able to disseminate the work we do at the local level including our different research findings and information about the situations that many marginalized communities have to confront.

We also have a fantastic opportunity to relate about our work with people from other networks, as well as those from our own networks, and meet other like-minded people that struggle for the same cause.”

What has your experience been in terms of collaborating with WECF at various international meetings?

“It was a very enriching experience for me and I really regretted not having being able to participate in all of the sessions at the UNFCCC COP 19 in Warsaw due to my other commitments with GFC. It was very inspiring for me to meet these incredible women in the WECF delegation who are change makers in their countries and to learn from their valuable experience. It gives me further motivation as it helps me build a stronger bond with other women who care about people and the planet.

The experience could be further improved in terms of the UNFCCC negotiations and our specific role in the negotiations as well as in teamwork. It would be interesting to get to lobby together and do more of this work in this arena as a team.”