



WECF | Women in Europe for a Common Future

“Georgians are feeling the impact of the climate change”

Interview with Nino Gamisonia of Rural Communities Development Agency

Nino Gamisonia (36) is from Tbilisi, Georgia and works for the organisation Rural Communities Development Agency (RCDA). 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 WECF, interviewed her on climate change in Georgia and her involvement with RCDA.

How did you become involved with the RCDA?

“I graduated from the University in Applied Math and Computer Sciences and then I realised that I did not want to be a programmer or mathematician. So I never actually worked in the field that I studied for.

My father is the founder and director of RCDA that focuses on agriculture and economy. It was founded in 1997, but back then I did not work there. I was a student at the time and after graduating I worked in different places. But one day I just decided; why not join RCDA and work there? In 2006 I started to work there. I went to Sweden to take a training course on ecological alternatives related to sanitation. There is a huge problem in Georgia as there are no sewage systems in our rural areas. This creates big environmental and health issues. People mostly use pit latrines and the water is contaminated.

There are 8 people in the main office of RCDA, including engineers and technicians. There is a Resource Centre of water and renewable energy in a western Georgian village called Khamiskuri and five or six people work there. Our money comes from partner organisations like WECF and donor agencies. RCDA started working with WECF in 2008 and in 2008-2009 we were coordinator of the ELA project. WECF has helped with the construction of solar water collectors, with adding insulation and with solar heating.

With our WECF joint project in Western Georgia we work with 2 villages on an ecological disaster reduction project.

I also have a direct aid project with the United Nations Development Programme. This project will be assisting 2 villages in Georgia with funds for the construction of solar water heaters and urine-diverting dry toilettes. I love to meet the local women who live in the communities. I especially like to talk with them to get information from them so they can share their experience.”

What do the Georgian people know about climate change?

“The Georgian people do not know much about climate change. However, they are feeling the impacts: droughts, landslides from deforestation, very harsh winters that are very cold and freezing. And then this past summer it was so cold! Also, the farming of different crops has changed. The seasons of production have changed and diseases they did not have before are showing up.

We do have many natural energy resources. Hydropower is the main source of energy in Georgia and the government has decided to build another dam called Hudoni. I am protesting against, but individually, as an individual citizen, not from our organisation. The government says it is an important investment from a foreign investor, but journalists say the company is registered offshore.

The awareness about climate change is not that big in Georgia. We need to help raise the awareness and get more people engaged in the solutions. We do try to introduce new technologies. We explain how we are all connected to climate change. We are working to explain how renewable energy can be used for the environment. We have a lot of people using our Centre to demonstrate new technologies. Schoolchildren, local residents, teenagers, they all come to our Centre in Misaktsieli, at least 400 or 500 persons a year come, perhaps even more. We also have a Facebook page and we have a web page. Every week I get at least one call asking about the urine-diverting toilet, about building one at a house in the village. It is really important how local people are trying to find solutions for themselves in the rural villages and we work to support them.”

How is it to be present at the UNFCCC meeting here in Warsaw?

“This was my first time doing something like this and I was just getting familiar with the process. I hope that the next time I will be able to make more of a contribution and give more input. It was exciting for me to see so many women from all over the world fighting for a change, especially in the Women’s and Gender Constituency at the COP. It is always interesting to meet different people. There are so many women with different backgrounds, different experiences, and different habits, yet here they are united for one goal. We all have been sharing our experiences of how we do our work in our communities and things we can do back home. One cannot know everything in the world; we are learning something new all the time. For me it was a huge experience to see how the process of women’s caucus and women and gender constituency works and to see and participate in the UNFCCC negotiation process.

I met with the official Georgian government delegation. Sabine Bock of WECF arranged a meeting for me. We are going to start a NAMAS project in Georgia together with the Greens movement there and it was good to be able to meet with our government here. We were able to meet with the representative of our Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. The meeting was useful for him as we explained the projects that we do. We also explained the importance of a gender balance in sustainable development projects. The representative said that he “did not know that such an organisation exists”. He was very excited to find out what projects we do. He asked me to send him any information that we have on solar hot water heaters which I have already sent to him by email. He was very excited about that and we will be staying in touch with him. It was a great opportunity to meet with him here in Poland. We should bring our input to the governments.

I do not think that meeting here at the UNFCCC was a waste of time. All of these resolutions that we have worked on here are very good. The interventions we have worked on are very good, but it is important that they should start from the bottom, the grassroots, and then go to the top.”

Can you tell me more about your participation in the WECF Training Programme here in Poland?

“The first day of our time here was a training day. The sessions were very important for me as I am going to implement this project back home. To complete my commitment to this project, I will be organising it for a year at the national level in Georgia and during the training I got all the information I need on how to do this. Our primary goal is the empowerment of women at an international level. Each participant in the WECF leadership training will be training another four grassroots women leaders back home. We will be supporting them, encouraging them, helping them build their capacities and their abilities to be leaders at the local and national level.

I am planning to choose all four women from one community, so that they can work together locally. I am thinking to involve young women as they have more stake and hope in the future. Our goal is clear, we want to encourage them and show them support so that they can see that “if you want to change something, you can actually do this or you can do that”.”