

## **IFUWA International Conference: March 1 &2, 2024, Pune**

IFUWA organized an international conference on the theme 'Working Together for a Sustainable Future on March 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup>, at Pune. The conference saw several presentations, panel discussions and conversations on the theme. We have heard voices of eminent women coming from the domains of environment activists, lawyers and from industry too, all of who are both nationally and internationally working on different aspects of sustainability and creating connectors ,spread knowledge and encourage activism in meeting the SDG goals.

The inaugural session of the conference opened invoking Almighty's blessings followed by the traditional lamp lighting ceremony. This was followed by welcome address of Dr Ujjwala Shinde, President of UWA Pune who was the host of the conference. Dr Shinde assured the President of IFUWA and all the delegates of her full support in the success of the conference as part of the organizing team. Dr Ranjana Banerjee, President IFUWA in her welcome speech set the tone of the conference by laying emphasis on the transforming power of Education which would help in finding innovative solutions in improving the welfare, status, dignity and sustainability of women in all walks of life and across the world. She further explained the directions set by the parent body which aims to provide lifelong education for women's socio economic sustainability. She mentioned that 60 countries as GWI affiliates are working for improving the lives of girls and women.

Dr Meera Bondre , GWI Vice President Membership threw light on the important milestones of her long work of more than a decade to revive the Asian Region. First it started in 2013 when she was the CIR . Then during her first tenure as a part of the GWI Membership Committee the revival and re-affiliation of Pakistan Federation of University Women was done and during her second tenure as the Convener of GWI Membership Committee the Thai Association was brought back to GWI. This was with full support of the then VP Eileen Fock- Bakker. In 2020 August, Ranjana Banerjee became the IFUWA President ,and wholeheartedly joined in these efforts . Meera informed that from January 2021 India became the chair for the GWI's Asian Region. After the revival of UWAsia on July 5, 2021, Ranjana and Meera started work to reestablish SAARCFUW. This was officially launched on 25 may 2023, as SAARCGWI with the support of the current GWI Board and Stacy, the Executive Director. Now IFUWA's work is in progress to have Associations from Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and the Philippines back into our GWI family.

GWI President, Patrice Wellesley Cole communicated her best wishes on behalf of the GWI Board and Stacy, over a video presentation. This year in July GWI is planning its 105<sup>th</sup> anniversary. She mentioned that IFUWA has played a pivotal role with two of its International Presidents of then IFUW, Dr Bina Roy and Prof Chitra Ghosh, and also congratulated the current Indian team on shouldering the responsibility of organizing this timely Regional Conference in Pune.

Dr Kalyani Bondre introduced the Chief Guest Dr Ujjwala Chakradeo, Vice Chancellor of SNTD Women's University in Mumbai. She is a qualified architect holding many awards, accolades and publications to her credit. Her keynote address emphasized the importance of Education in the empowerment of women and girls. She shared the story of Maharishi Karve the founder of

the University in Pune, who was committed to educate women and encouraging remarriages for widows during the early days of the twentieth century. She said though girls enrollment has increased, however there is still insufficient enrolment in the Higher education sector and in leadership roles in corporate and organized sectors. She explained the tagline of SNTD's Logo - Sanskrita Stree Parashakti which means 'women are the enlightened strengths of any society'

Dr Vandana Shiva, a researcher, and environmental activist emphasized the need for safeguarding planet Earth. The concept of Vasudaiva kutumbakam has not yet steeped into our conscience and we are unmindfully utilizing our resources. Nature and women are interlinked and the currency of life is not money, they are the panchabhutas, air, water, earth etc. She explained the concept that soil, gut and the body are interlinked hence being connected and preserving Nature is of paramount importance. She introduced new vocabulary like ecological apartheid. Her session brought to light the misuse of fertilizers and pesticides on soil and crops that was dangerous for human health and earth.

Ms Meher Pudumjee an industrial leader heading Thermax Ltd a leading Energy and Environmental Engineering Company, shared her views that the Government has introduced and taken various initiatives to achieve green energy objectives to tackle climate change. Mrs Meher emphasised on the collective action of the stakeholders like employees, customers, vendors, authorities etc. Businesses could play a key and crucial role in achieving sustainable development through its mindful practices. Industries are consciously moving towards adopting Green technology however they will move towards Sustainability if it is commercially viable and beneficial to them. She further presented various case studies of the work being done in her company towards the goal of Sustainable development.

Dr Akram Khatoon from Pakistan was not present for the session but her views were shared by reading out her paper. She began with emphasis on SDG 1- No poverty. She stated 50 million people in the world were recorded as poor. She shared various ways that poverty could be eradicated and overcome.

The last speaker for the inaugural panel was Ms Nimalka Fernando of Srilanka a Human Rights activist. She placed before the delegates an important issue of peace as a sustainable goal for the future. She emphasized that despite our diversity we humans are one species and need to live in peace. Women are the harbingers of peace and more women representation is needed in governance. Women being the backbone of families and communities who should be given justice, equality of status and reprimand injustices to them, and all these must be addressed for action towards sustainable peace.

The afternoon session was the SAARC panel which was moderated by journalist Swati Bhattacharya. She stated that women in SE Asia are keen to change gender inequalities prevalent in their countries and they are coming together to combat this inequality collectively. This session was a hybrid of online and offline presentations. The panelists were from SAARC countries of Pakistan, Bhutan, Maldives, Srilanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and India who shared their experiences on the theme of sustainability as representatives of their countries. The first speaker, Dr Mallika Farah - HOD Law College IBBAT University Islamabad in her digital presentation explained the Impact of Teachers Education towards Sustainable

development. According to her teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the younger generation with the help of modern and new curriculum. Ms Neyma from Bhutan who is a Social Media Influencer spoke about the use of media as a tool for discussion amongst the youth of Bhutanese. In Bhutan women are not represented in politics hence policies and governance was still unequal. Ms Maimuna Siddiqui of Bangladesh in her digital presentation shared her observations in the prevalence of early marriages in her country. She shared that her country was ranked 5th in the world for early marriages which impacts girls and they drop out of completing their education. Ms Tabassum from Maldives a young journalist shared that in Maldives, women feel comfortable as caretakers of families and not seen in leadership roles. This gap has to be addressed for changing the mindset of society. The voices of women need to be heard and efforts are slowly being made in this direction. Ms Dilrukshi from Sri Lanka stressed the need for the media to highlight women's role in different aspects and to ensure that social or print media refrains from depicting women in deplorable roles. Government must have supervision of media but not total control. Ms Farida a journalist from Afghanistan insisted that education for women was the most important issue in Afghanistan. Taliban had caused an upheaval in the lives of the people but the impact was faced by the women. She no longer lives in Afghanistan but supports the cause of empowering women through education. She put forth some thoughts like online education, using the media to communicate thoughts so that the unheard voices would be heard. Last on this panel was Ms Subarna Maharjan from Nepal, an Early Childhood educator who felt education should be started in early childhood so that children learn with confidence to participate in the activities of the country. Nepal government is taking great pains in educating the girl child and it was encouraging to note that girls enrollment in formal education has remarkably increased. Thus we had representatives from all the 8 SAARC countries. Although four of them (Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka) do not have NFAs, significantly they would collaborate in all our projects.

The next session was the much awaited Life time Achievement award instituted by Dr Purnima Kashyap in memory of her mother, Ms Sushil Bharadwaj'. It was an emotional moment when Purnima showcased the life and works of her mother and explained that she was desirous to give this award to a member of IFUWA, who has done exemplary service to society. Details of selection were worked out amongst IFUWA President Dr Ranjana Banerjee, IFUWA Scholarship Convenor Dr Sheela Kulkarni and Dr Purnima Kashyap. Out of the 3 names received from 3 different UWAs, Dr Panna Akhani's past president IFUWA was selected as the candidate for the award. She was felicitated with a plaque, a shawl and a cheque of Rs 1 lakh. The event closed for tea with a book launch of Dr Gayatri Vatsalya from UWA Nagpur. The title of the book was Diet Sustainability with Millets. The book was put out for sale and the amount collected would be used by her NGO that works with adult intellectually deprived persons.

The evening ended with a cultural program of Milind Tulankar a renowned exponent of Jal Tarang and a Kathak group dance by the disciples of Guru Shama Bhate.

Ms Malati Kalmadi started the second day session with introduction of Dr Muckta Karmarkar, the moderator of the session who is an academician and educator, In charge Principal Kaveri Arts, Science and Commerce. Dr Muckta started the session with an introduction of the importance of gender equality and sustainable development goals.

Dr Chizuko Suzuki -Deputy CIR Japan, Dr Supinda Lertlit -CIR Thailand, Bina Maharjan- Board member and Project Co-ordinator- Nepal, Teiko Nakamichi-Japan were present for the session. We had 3 presentations that were recorded and sent for the event, and in all 7 UWAsia countries were represented.

The first speaker was Ms Candice from Hong Kong who made it clear that women play a crucial role in the economy of the country but this is not given proper attention. For women to be contributors to the country's economy they need policies and laws to motivate and help them. Dr Ambreen Ashar, Associate Prof-chemistry, Pakistan's presentation focused on preservation of water and proper usage of the same and the role women play in water sustainability and their challenges of water availability under the effect climate change. Ecological sustainability is of paramount importance.

Dr Chizuko Suzuki and Dr Tiko Nakamichi from Japan presented the importance of working with youth in creating awareness about sustainability issues. They had planned courses to take this message to the youth who are the future of a nation. They receive immense support from institutions both public and private and are giving immense importance to hands on training to the youth of their country through technological, innovative and improved methodologies.

Dr Supinda Lertlit from Thailand spoke on inclusive and quality education and focused on activity based approach and new knowledge skills.

Their new dimension of empowerment of single mothers and disadvantaged women was marvelous and are generously giving scholarships to the needy girl and boy child to continue education. They also offered some interesting short term courses that would benefit the girl child with skills and knowledge for personal growth.

Dr Suwithida Charungkattikul (TAUW) spoke on the future of Teaching and Learning where she explained that the learning has to be towards providing opportunities for Life Long learning, aiming towards self development and academic qualifications. She further emphasized the use of using technology and adapt to innovations and change.

Dr Saira Banoo PFUW emphasized on Peace and Justice for sustainable living. Peace away from conflicts will be away from harm where importance will be given to see that there is justice for all for a just society. Institutions to deliver in practice and in theory value based education for stability and progress and endeavor to establish collaborations amongst institutions to ensure sustainability.

Ms Bina Maharjani Nepal has been in Non Formal education since 2002 with emphasis on skill enhancement training and connecting it to entrepreneurship thereby empowering women to be self sufficient. With education, girls are now represented in parliament too. Focus is still on to help women especially in the grassroots level to speak up and learn to share their ideas and opinions.

Ms Maimuna Siddiqui from Bangladesh focused on educating women to handle Cyber atrocities and online abuse of women in Social Media. She also insisted that in the present times, capacity building and training of women in the use of Technology has become imperative. She felt the need of training women to protect them from becoming victims of cyber crime and knowledge of legalities to take the required actions for the same. She emphasized the need in creating awareness about safe guarding one's mental health as cyber harassment leads to pathetic mental stress and depression.

The afternoon session was presentations of affiliates of IFUWA on sustainability activities.

UWA Pune was represented by Neelam Jagdale who presented members individual and collective roles in sustaining the environment like hills and rivers, lakes and forests. UWA Vadodara was represented by Ms Swati Bedekar who made a presentation of her work on health and hygiene of girls and women through her Sanitary napkin project called Sakhi. This endeavour has enabled the underprivileged girl child to not drop out or miss school during her menstrual days. Her work has reached beyond India, to Syria and Jordan. UWA Delhi was represented by Dr Suman Jain who shared her work on the campaign of creating awareness in communities over the use of plastic and its impact on the environment. Suman is currently spearheading a joint project with the Canadian Federation on the theme of No Plastic, a venture of GWI's Membership Marketplace NFA To NFA programme.

There were 3 presentations , 2 of which were through videos.

1. Dr Eileen Focke Bakker, past VP of GWI's Membership who presented reaserch paper on two aspects of Sustainability. One purely scientific energy transformation and the other on socio-psychological support measures for children with hearing impairment.
2. Ms Shaila Rao Mistry VP, of Advocacy, GWI who shared the importance of advocacy, partnerships and collective work towards people working on the Sustainable Goals.
3. Arthi Parigi , an Architect ,made a presentation titled Reimagining Consrtustion Worker Settelements. Her co -author being Aishwarya Nalingaswamy. Arthi told us about theabout WiREnet at as a groupwhich intends to bring about sustainable change in the construction industry.

The session ended with summing up of the two -day long programme, by Malati S Kalmadi, Project Convenor IFUWA, followed with a formal vote of thanks by Mrs Phola Kaul, Trustee of UWAPune. .

To take back home the richness of knowledge that each of us have received from our eminent panelists in matters concerning human and environment sustainability is to make the world a better place for all of us to live in peace devoid of injustice and humiliation, ensuring equality of status and rightful submission of our needs and to help us contribute largely for our mother EARTH and her people , we recollect in all humility the words of the Nobel Peace Prize awardee - Wangari Maathai- 'Education if it means anything should not take people away from the land, but instill in them even more respect for it, because educated people are in a position to understand what is being lost. The future of the planet concerns all of us, and all of us should do what we can to protect it. As I told the foresters and the women you don't need a diploma to plant a tree'

