

# 10 Wonder Women – Rosemary Vishwanath- Chief functionary, Equations

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Equations was founded in 1985, to understand the impacts of development, particularly in the context of liberalised trade regimes, the opening up of the national economy, new economic policies and structural adjustments. While the industry, the middle class and the upper class of the society were lauding these changes, the question remained on what these changes held for the common person (the indigenous people, dalits, women, coastal communities and the poor). I have been associated with Equations for 15 years and we've seen that while tourism is becoming extremely important, the impact on the local community was not being considered. While the economic benefits were many, there was a realisation that the benefits to the local community were not enough, and hence we are constantly looking at how local tourism is. Our work examines ways in which women can have greater access, control and ownership over livelihoods and natural resources as well as access to the benefits in the context of tourism. We endeavour to influence policy makers for evolving greater gender-sensitive models and policies for tourism. We have strong networks in the south Indian states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu and are increasingly active with groups in other parts of the country like central India, eastern India, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, north-east states, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. We are particularly concerned about areas where tourism is coming up as a new force.

There are outright exploitative aspects of tourism, as well, which call for attention, for instance, child sexual abuse. It is a reality in this country. It has been a 19-year old battle to prove that it is an Indian phenomenon, thanks to loose legislation and poor law enforcement. We have also been concerned about what's happening with the environment. We work on international, national and local level policies and processes to build an understanding of the environmental impacts of tourism. We critique current models of tourism; all which have a bearing on ecological sustainability, biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods

## **The challenges**

We have always been worried about how some policies are made with no backing from the ground. We are concerned that tourism isn't being approached sensitively and we cannot rely on it merely as being an economic phenomenon. This is one of the biggest challenges. We are a tiny group who try and change policies and I think what we need is more sensitive tourists.

## **Women's Day message**

Tourism is a people oriented industry and we need to be more humane. This is a strong need for a more ethical tourism industry and more sensitive tourists.

*Rosemary Vishwanath has studied all over the country; her father was in the Air Force. She completed her graduation from St Stephen's College in New Delhi and her post graduation from IIM Bengaluru. She worked in HR development for five years and then decided to work in the non profit development sector. She believes that she belongs here and looks back at the last 20 years as being both challenging and satisfying.*