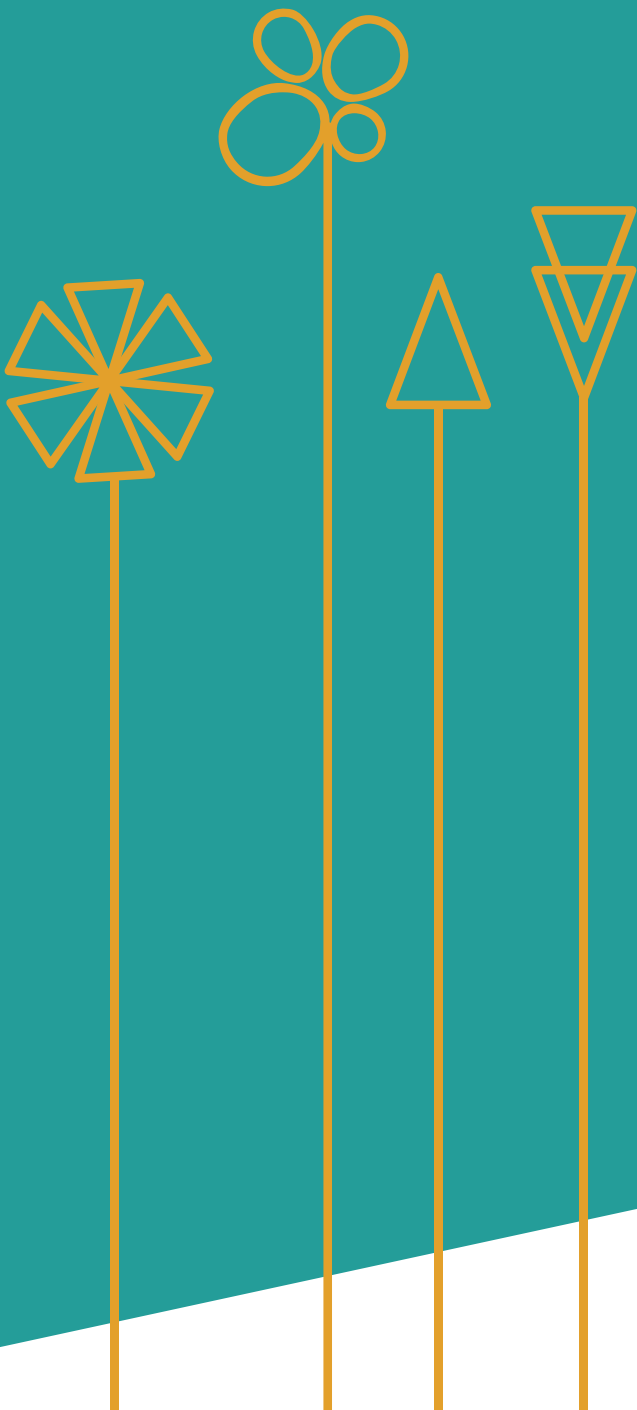


The world came to my home: Tidinha's story



Tales from the
AWID Forums

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Tidinha is an environmental activist, a feminist, and an anti-racist activist. She is part of the traditional Afro-Indigenous communities in Massarandupió, a wonderful beach in Bahia, Brazil, very close to Costa do Sauipe where the AWID Forum was held in 2016. Tidinha is a teacher, a farmer, and a member of a cooperative. She is passionate about her territory and about justice.

The 2016 AWID Forum was the first international event of this magnitude that Tidinha attended. She says:

“I came to the Forum with questions about why they had chosen a location that for us stands for environmental violations, and also other kinds of exploitation, like the sexual exploitation of girls. Costa de Sauipe, the place where the Forum was held here in Brazil, has most of its luxury hotels built on the dunes, that has destroyed our environment, and as an environmental-protection activist if I have to go to one of those places, I will question a lot. I did not feel restrained: I challenged (the organisers) a lot and I realized they listened and respected what I said. They explained to me that they needed a large enough space for that number of people and then I understood why Costa de Sauipe had been chosen”.

Due to its size, but also because it includes a wide array of feminist presences, the AWID Forums require a space that is not only big but also safe and fully accessible for bodies of all kinds. Unfortunately such spaces are often not the alternative ones where we feminists feel most at home, but belong to the corporate world – luxury hotels and conference centers – and through the years this has always led to serious challenges within AWID and also by brave Forum participants like Tidinha.¹

AWID’s capacity to acknowledge and explain these contradictions and limitations, to listen to dissent and respect it, has allowed those expressing it to stay in the space and explore its other elements, as happened with Tidinha.

Shareen Gokal, who worked at AWID for many years, says that “The Forum is an alchemy that just happens”. How was that alchemical transformation for Tidinha? To see the diversity of participants, to be in a safe space, to be able to express herself without fear, to be respected and heard were the ingredients that made the Forum stay in her memory, stimulating her presence and shaping her future:

1 For instance: during the 2005 Forum in Bangkok, some of the trade unionist participants also joined a protest that took place in front of the hotel that was the venue of the Forum. They were part of organising the protest against the precarious working conditions for the hotel staff.

“I realized I am not alone. That there are many women fighting across the world and that our struggle is worth it. Before (the Forum) I was shy and now I feel more free, with more energy, with more courage. Inhibition is off! I also felt safe there, because in some spaces where we participate, we are afraid to say some things because we know we will be harassed afterwards. At the Forum I felt safe and respected, even after I had voiced my criticisms. Lots of people came to ask me questions after that. I felt supported.”

To see the diversity also means to understand the struggles of others. Tidência says she was moved by the presentations made by sex workers: “with a lot of autonomy and proud of being who they are. I found their attitude, their autonomy, marvellous”.

When what seemed far away becomes close, our perspective changes. We can no longer see our reality in the same way, because now we are wearing a different pair of lenses. And for that, no language is needed – it is closeness that takes care of everything. Tidência says:

“I met this very nice activist from India and what I experienced with her will stay with me all my life. I invited her to see my community and she came! She spent a whole day with us here, we shared many experiences. We communicated through gestures and words in English and Portuguese, and we managed to understand each other”.

Our new lenses also have an influence on how we feel. When we look at our own reality in a different way, it may be that – as it happened to Tidência – we start giving a different value to what we do and have:

“(The Indian woman) was delighted to see all the communal land and she said that in India there is a scarcity of land, that only the very rich have land. She said that all her plants are in pots and she could not believe the plantations we had. That was very important for me. I did not know that about India and I started to value what we have much more – it may be modest but it is valuable”.

One has to learn how to take care of the earth – both the planet and the concrete one in our plantations or pots. Tidência, who is also a farmer, took the Indian activist to the local rural farmers’ association. There her guest saw that no pesticides were being used and she was very happy about it. She had lunch with the local farmers and then visited the organization that the women farmers have created to take care of their own issues. During the visit, the Indian guest bought a piece of Indigenous (Tupinambá) art to take home.

To feel important, to be part of an event as big as the AWID Forum had a deep impact on Tidência. She has many reasons to be proud of being who she is, of her roots, and the importance of the Indigenous people's arts on the legacy that her mother, Joana, is passing on to her.

Tidência came to tell us about her experience at the AWID Forum accompanied by her mother, who showed us the art she creates and talked about her daily life that includes bathing in the sea, taking care of animals and the plantation. Joana was also moved by the visit of the Indian activist, and she says that the joy that brought her still lives inside of her. Tidência gave space to her mother in her conversation with us as a way to reinforce that she is not alone, and she was not alone when attending the Forum, that she went there carrying with her other presences, those that preceded her existence and those who could not attend but had asked her to represent them in the space. And she shared her thoughts for the future:

“I know the Forum cannot welcome everybody from the community. I thought a lot about my sisters in the struggle who could not attend. This is why I imagine, that in the future, the Forum can spread itself around its venue. Just like that Indian activist came to see our reality, it would be great if other activists attending the Forum would go to the communities and talk to local people”.

That is Tidência: whenever she sees a challenge, she comes up with an alternative to solve it. Full of emotion and ancestral wisdom, she is committed to mobilise resources together with other women to attend the next Forums! ✨

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