

UN Habitat World Urban Forum 4
Nanjing, China
Report from Arciris Garay Arevalo

Introduction

Participation at the UN Habitat World Urban Forum 4 in Nanjing, China was probably the busiest WUF yet. The sessions were all very interesting and attempted to engage the public and decision-makers present - if not always through participatory methodology then through panel discussion and questions of topics presented. I believe the WUF is one of the best international systems we have in place today to engage in intellectual and real discussion of best steps forward and we would be remiss to not engage others and ourselves within it in one way or another. We may also learn from the type of structure and varying seminar styles.

I attempted to attend as many sessions in the interests of the Health Caucus/Canadian Environmental Network to either increase A) recognition of the RCEN/Health Caucus reputation and breadth of knowledge on the issue of sustainable urban development and B) our contacts. I ensured that we had our name and efforts recognized within the Canadian delegation. I do believe that we have made in-roads for a few potential and exciting partners within Canada to continue working on the issue progressively.

It is important to note that the stated in her departing comments, Executive Director of UN Habitat, Anna Tibaijuka, made special mention of the Habitat Seminars, saying how they received overwhelming support and highly recommended for the next WUF session as they added a lot of dynamism and value to the event.

Habitat Seminar: A Culture of Sustainability - A Multi-stakeholder Process

Jim Elliott, Sheila Cole and myself spent most of the morning of Day 3 preparing the photocopies for our Habitat Seminar and arranging the room in a friendlier circular fashion for better discussion (with the tremendous help of the Chinese volunteers always on hand to help us cut out our evaluation exercise, have the agenda waiting on participants seats, and posting up signs etc.)

We had to begin a bit late as arrivals were late but in the end we had approximately 25 participants.

Sheila Cole and I gave our presentations on the work of the Health Caucus in relation to the WUF and the RCEN multi-stakeholder consultation process (see attachment). We invited the participants to have small group discussion of key successes and resources, present back and have a larger group discussion of potential areas of collaboration. Key successes and resources were identified as involving:

Social assessment of the problem

Worker involvement and facilitation

External resources and matching funds

Time

Information-sharing and friendly-ness to community

Training of councilors so partnership developed from inception

Integrated sustainability of the project into the planning

A mechanism for society to access funds themselves

A focus on relationships

Consistency and continuity

Acknowledgement of public heritage

When discussion was moved to identifying an existing tipping point that we may all be able to work with for collective change, the participants continued examining the key successes and resources identified. They stated that to accomplish the above facilitators were key but that choosing the facilitators posed a dilemma. Participation in facilitation by government would be a risk for them but that we could work in identifying leaders of government and community, not just as facilitators. A part of good facilitation would be establishing a mechanism with clear timelines where benefits of projects are clearly identified to all. Any mechanism or process would sustain culture and recognize culture. Identifying objectives of each sector at inception of project and establishing trust around a central point from all parties involved would ensure an essential spirit of cooperation.

Completing stakeholder analysis was agreed to be necessary in contributing to the success of any joint work. It was finally discussed that the process should be formal but vivid.

Evaluations were completed by the participants, collected by Jim Elliott.

Sessions Attended (notes/comments available if anybody is interested in a particular session)

Day 1 Monday, November 3rd, 2008

8:00-8:30 Canadian Delegation Daily Coordination Meeting

8:30-11:30 Opening Ceremonies

14:00-16:00 Habitat Seminar: Cities promoting climate protection – research partnerships

16:30-18:30 Habitat Seminar: Global city Indicators – measuring and monitoring performance.

18:30-20:00 Host Reception

Day 2 Tuesday, November 4th, 2008

8:00-8:30 Canadian Delegation Daily Coordination Meeting

9:00-11:00 Field Trip: The Model Urban Construction Projects

12:30-14:00 Side Event: The Habitat Exchange – Tools for an urban world

14:00- 16:00 Networking Event: Learning Cities – Interactive research and capacity building platforms

16:30-18:30 Networking Event: Strategies and Practices for inclusive and welcoming communities.

18:30-20:00 Side Event Reception: Opportunities Fund for Urban Youth Led Development

Day 3, Wednesday, November 5th, 2008

8:00-8:30 Canadian Delegation Daily Coordination Meeting

11:00-13:00 Habitat Seminar: A Culture of Sustainability: Multi-stakeholder Process

14:00-16:00 Networking Event: Comprehensive Planning in China and Canada

16:00-18:30 Preventing and mitigating HIV in an urban development context

Day 4, Thursday, November 6th, 2008

8:00-8:30 Canadian Delegation Daily Coordination Meeting

9:00-11:00 How to Develop a Collaborative Dialogue Process with communities, local authorities and other stakeholders using the Local to Local Dialogue Methodology
11:00-13:00 Closing Plenary and Closing Ceremonies

Next Steps

There were several areas that the Health Caucus may want to move into on the sustainable urban development front.

Several people expressed interest in our experience with sustainable urban development (within an environment and health context) so we may want to develop our portfolio more professionally or look into documenting this more (eg. Our best practices gathered at WUF3-4). A comprehensive process would involve liaising with our Canadian member groups and contacts and exploring more where the Health Caucus can liaise with international contacts.

The Health Caucus and RCEN could strengthen our network with the work of the FCM and municipalities formally. I recommend learning more about their programmes, events, and becoming involved with their projects where we can. We had a couple of good connections made at WUF4 but they were new to the FCM and hadn't even heard of the RCEN! They were keen to continue the connection made. This could be part of a larger strategy to become more involved with municipalities, either through initiating contact around consultative process or projects relating to WUF issues.

Developing our capacity to evaluate and provide a perspective on developments around Canada and the world would be an interesting project to undertake (related to aforementioned next steps). If we can do that, working with others internationally to develop stakeholder analysis and facilitation mechanisms would serve as appropriate follow-up to the recommendations made in our Habitat Seminar.

There were several connections made with Canadian contacts around the issues of youth, culture, AIDS information, on-line resource development (the Habitat Exchange, Cities Indicators, see sessions attended). We could pursue the individual contacts if we wanted to go in these directions but they would appreciate obviously any support for their research or programmes, as we would appreciate their support.

Lessons Learned

The sessions were all informative and attending any one of them would have been useful but as we couldn't I wish there had been more planning involved to send resources collected, sometimes only available on the spot, back to the Health Caucus. Sharing the content of the WUF with the RCEN and Health Caucus could also be increased with more than one mode of communication but this requires us prioritizing this and ensuring resources/efforts are allocated towards it. Our Habitat Seminar was very well organized and I think we did the best we could with the resources we had at hand, which were exceptional from UN Habitat.

There was an issue of national office support being necessary while we were away as some basics (hotel accommodations) had not been confirmed as needed by the hotels and we must be vigilant about setting up emergency systems of communication etc. in future organizing as it caused significant stress.

Conclusion

I believe we have made a very good impression internationally and within the Canadian Delegation, which would be exciting to continue. I would recommend starting with our contacts made to see where funding is possible for potential projects, and researching what next steps to WUF in Brazil will be from international and Canadian organizations.