

WORLD URBAN FORUM 4

Nanjing, China, November 3-6, 2008

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The World Urban Forum (WUF) 4 in Nanjing was worth waiting for – worth all of the machinations the Health Caucus endured in order to actually be there and participate. The Chinese outdid themselves to prepare and beautify the venue which consisted of 6 huge buildings and a very large site in general. There were 2 exhibition centres – one for WUF-related exhibits and another which showcased China. These 2 sites were very overwhelming to view. The Forum site itself was more difficult to navigate than the WUF 3 site in Vancouver, since it was spread over a large distance which kept people busy just navigating and at the same time separated people because it lacked small, comfortable gathering places. But this was superceded by the subject matter itself. The agenda was extremely full and made for difficult decisions with so many interesting subject areas to choose from.

The Health Caucus (HC) seminar, “A Culture of Sustainability: Multi-Stakeholder Process”, was very well received. People from 12 different countries were present with 27 participants in all taking part. I presented on the history of the development of the multi-stakeholder process within the Canadian Environmental Network (CEN), including the criteria we have developed and formalized for selection of our own representative at national consultations. The HC posters from WUF 3 were displayed on the front of the table from which we presented. I used the specific example of Healthy Communities in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to illustrate how local partnerships resulted in the formulation of new policies and legislation in the city of Halifax to protect environment and health.

Then, using this example, I explained how this local experience and expertise had impact all the way to the national level during Environment Canada and Health Canada consultations. Also, I gave

a detailed account of how the HC has developed a working relationship with Health Canada and how this has resulted in the creation of a new health network which is utilizing many of the communications and partnering processes already developed within the CEN.

Arciris then presented on the work we had done at WUF 3 and how that is evolving (see her report.) After this we had breakout groups where participants shared partnering success stories from their cities and towns. We asked people to identify commonalities in their successes so we can build on those. We also identified new ways to improve our processes. We felt that in such an international seminar time would be best spent emphasizing commonalities from which we could move forward, rather than devolving into a simple discussion of how we were different (which is so often the tendency when whole continents and regions are brought together.)

Jim took notes throughout and also facilitated one of the small group sessions.

I took personal notes as much as possible and here are the points I captured under the discussion of commonalities:

Commonalities:

- Working to actually get people to the table is key;
- It is important that facilitation be done by a third party (someone external);
- The facilitator should be trained and neutral to the discussion;
- A list of facilitators in each region should be developed even if that is costly;
- People in low income areas do not trust the government;
- Government participants should be open-minded, clear, committed people;
- Community leaders should be brought on board;
- It's helpful to have a good system of assessment and user-friendly information sharing;
- Everyone has to see the benefits of participation;
- Benefits must be emphasized for the various players;
- Have to make the process fun;
- Must make sure people know they are being heard;
- Identify the objectives of each group;
- Find a central point;;
- Analyze stake-holders in terms of strengths and weaknesses and clearly identify their agenda;
- Caretaking of people is important to create trust.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS:

This working seminar was of interest to NGO's, youth, city planners, academics, municipal leaders, and even the World Bank. It is obvious that people are wanting to learn how to build and strengthen their multi-stakeholder processes. They realize that diverse interest areas have to be addressed and accommodated to solve problems and arrive at lasting solutions within the context of harmonious urbanization.

This session built upon the Roundtable session that the HC presented at WUF 3 in 2006. We now have an even stronger base to continue to offer our expertise and to facilitate broader learning at WUF 5. The work of the HC and the CEN is recognized and acknowledged within the WUF. This fact positions us to reach out to our own government to seek potential partnering for WUF 5. The Canadian delegation chose to emphasize partnering as their main theme, so we are already synchronized in this interest area. CMHC, FCM, and EC are potential partners. Also, we may want to seek involvement from Health Canada's Safe Environments Program.

Environment and Health Component

We brought this component into the seminar through reference to our posters from WUF 3 which were on display, with specific reference to the Halifax experience. Two young Canadian men attended with specific interest in environment and health. Two participants were

AIDS activists and have made the link between environment/health and immunity.

The subject of the total load of chemical exposure in cities is not being addressed as such within WUF and that clearly needs to change. Health issues are currently seen more in the context of climate change, sanitation, nutrition, vehicular emissions, etc. Whenever I raised the subject of environment and health or Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS) in sessions I attended or in private conversations, there was distinct interest expressed in learning more. Looking toward WUF 5, it is important to propose that the HC do a separate seminar on this subject. With the rapidity of urbanization, the numbers of people developing MCS and related diseases will be concentrated in urban areas. This will put a tremendous strain on health and community services. Children affected by MCS have difficulty developing into strong healthy self-sufficient adults and men and women lose their ability to work to support themselves and their families. Basic human rights dictate citizens' access to healthy air, food and water. Examining and reducing the chemical load is essential to achieving this basic goal.

NUGGETS OF INFORMATION FROM SOME OF THE MOST COMPELLING SESSIONS I ATTENDED.

The choice of sessions to attend was rich and varied making it difficult to choose among all the excellent and vital topics. Here are a few nuggets from some of the sessions I attended, by way of sharing the larger WUF 4 experience. The HC may want to explore some of these points as we debrief further on the details of the Forum.

Opening Ceremonies:

- China emphasized its focus on human beings and the beginning of urban improvement and development. Their first concentration is on employment to achieve social reform and equity. Next is to develop science and technology and then to ensure disaster preparedness and mitigation.
- It was noted that Nanjing has been the capital for 6 dynasties. Nanjing is rich in cultural and political history and has preserved and reclaimed many natural environments in the midst of urban expansion. Cleanup and restoration of major water arteries has been undertaken at great expense but with remarkable success. The city is expanding upward to control urban sprawl.
- Nairobi has 3 million inhabitants. People are moving to the cities because they cannot tolerate conditions in the rural areas. The urban problems they face are: shelter, clean water, sanitation, non-secure housing, and indefinite tenure.

State of the World's Cities:

This was a flagship report of UN Habitat.

- In 2008 50% of the world's population lives in cities. This will increase to 2/3 by 2030.
- People are referring to this as the City Century.
- Income inequalities in cities worldwide are becoming more marked led by Africa and Latin America.
- South African cities are the most unequal.
- In order to have harmony you need balance.

- We need peace and prosperity which is the purview of the UN.
- Water and sanitation are two of the major challenges for slum dwellers.
- Large cities in the US are more unequal than small cities.
- Social unrest and economic inefficiency can result from inadequate income and inadequate access to shelter.
- CO2 emissions are more related to consumption than to urbanization.
- Cities making a difference are protecting intangible aspects like culture and soul of the city.
- Women's participation in the work force contributes to more compact cities as they like to be close to schools, shops and other services.
- We need to plan way ahead for land and housing needs of the urban poor and the urban use of space.
- Scale and scope of inequality is increasing.
- This report is based on equity and sustainability.
- Cities traditionally have been engines of growth.
- In Africa, colonial history has left its mark in terms of two faces of the city: one, the administration area with services, and two, slum dwellers. This has set the stage for slum development.

Back to the Future:

- Tokyo's population is going up to 35 million.
- Poverty rates are increasing more in urban areas than rural.
- Income generation trumps physical improvement in terms of empowering the urban poor; for example, 66% of slum dwellers in Rio de Janeiro wanted a good job and good pay more than anything else.
- Future policy should start with job creation, income generation and skills upgrading.
- Morocco experience: Morocco changed its thinking from demolishing slums to putting emphasis on the idea of cities without slums. Slum dwellers were given plot ownership and funding for building structures which were designed for them, sometimes with shops below. Sometimes they would rent part of their space. Water, sanitation and electric services were provided with considerable success all in all.
- Jockin Arputham of India spoke of his experience. He was instrumental in forming the National Slum Dwellers Federation and also Slum Shack Dwellers International. In the late 1960's, his slum of 70,000 was going to be demolished to make swimming pools. He started organizing immediately. Soon he established a school, becoming headmaster, then principal. He emphasizes people-centred development.
- In Bombay, more than 6 million people live in slums.

My conclusion, after listening to this session, is that income equity must be addressed in order to abolish slums. We must have:

Limits to growth;
 Limits to corporate expansion;
 Limits to corporate profits; and
 Limits to personal wealth.

All of the "fixing" of slum situations amounts to band-aid efforts. We must insist on redistribution of wealth. Full stop.

Bahrain: A Universal Urban Society:

Bahrain is the only jurisdiction in the world to not just meet, but to surpass the Millennium Development Goals. The Prime Minister was present to accept a UN award for this achievement.

- Bahrain was the first Arabian country to discover oil.
- In 1925 it was still a British protectorate. It gained independence in 1971, becoming a Kingdom in 2002. The population is just over 1 million.
- It has 12 hospitals, and 8 universities and colleges and over 410 financial institutions. Two-thirds of the population is below the age of 30.
- The goal is to provide homes, jobs and no poverty for all Bahrainians.
- Economic vitality, social wellbeing and environmental quality are seen as 3 pillars to harmonious urbanization.
- Environment and health is seen as one of the challenges needing attention.
- Ten state guarantees free health care as a right for all citizens (health has one of the biggest budgets.)
- Goal to provide social housing for those in need is also a high budget ministry.
- Education also has a high budget allocation.
- Bahrain built its social system on women's empowerment as stated in its constitution; to date it has one woman in Parliament.
- Girls are outperforming boys in academic performance. They are considered the "horses" in the new race.
- One-quarter of the land mass is a wildlife park with indigenous animals, such as the oryx (a form of gazelle.)

Cities and the post-Kyoto agenda:

- The size of economies in Asian cities is enormous – much larger than that of some countries. Asian cities are especially vulnerable
- to climate change because more are located on the coast or on the banks of large rivers.
- Flood protection, storm surge, food supply and food security are major challenges.
- In Asia pollution legislation is in place but largely unenforced.
- In Asia there is an enormous shift toward a consumption society, for example, the increase in air conditioners can be 20% per year. So figuring out how to retrofit buildings can be quite critical on the demand side.
- Cities are growing at an average rate of 2.4%. The footprint in terms of spread is really increasing.
- Most GHG's come from cities. Demand for extra electricity to power computers is a staggering factor here.
- High-rise buildings use more energy in their construction and extra energy for security systems, elevators, etc.
- Grasslands are very significant capturers of carbon so the hinterlands are capturing carbon from the cities. Transport contributes 25% of global CO₂ with Asian cities being the largest emitters. 52% of transport growth will be in Asian cities.
- Decrease in household size has an impact on energy demand.

Urban Ecological Footprint::

Pelle Persson of Sweden made an impressive presentation. He represents SIDA, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sweden includes a "non-

toxic” environment as a goal written directly into their Swedish Social Contract. His excellent presentation can be found at: www.adb.org/urbandev.

My intervention in this session was to pose the question: “Why are we not tackling the problem of consumption/growth head on?”

Are Cities more important than Countries?

- Cities and countries grow and wane in their prominence; for example the 1700’s was the Golden Age for the Netherlands,
- Over the centuries cities gained economic power and with it political power.
- Cities are knowledge-based societies and those with a big knowledge base grow faster.
- National governments are losing power....giving way to regional blocs.
- One billion (30% of the world’s population) live in slums – mostly in the developing world.

The Soul of the City:

Just before the Closing Ceremonies there was a plenary discussion on the “Soul of the City”. Subjects such as the history of the city, historical buildings, and art and culture were some of the areas discussed. The session was unexpectedly cut short to accommodate the Closing Ceremonies before I had an opportunity to voice my view on another aspect of the soul of the city so I will express it here. That has to do with natural history, the environment itself. Preservation of forested areas, bogs, natural grasslands are all part of the history of the city which hold the spirit of nature for the enrichment of all. These areas have thousands of years of natural history contained in the soil, the rock formations, the insects, flora and fauna, which cannot be replaced by simply planting new trees and flowers. This latter provides pleasant beautification but lacks the vitality of living systems which have held their place and have naturally evolved over centuries. Special emphasis and resources must be given to protect these areas of natural history.

After this session I spoke with the Mayor of Nanjing to compliment him on the way in which natural areas have been maintained in Nanjing. I could actually feel the soul of Nanjing upon arrival. Even though it was late in the evening, there was an unmistakable feeling of enchantment owing to the boulevards of large very old trees and the well maintained walls of the ancient city. Two local television crews picked up on this conversation which provided an opportunity to express my appreciation for their hospitality and their beautiful and very vital city.