

World Urban Forum 3

The World Urban Forum (WUF) was established by the United Nations to examine one of the most pressing issues facing the world today: rapid urbanisation and its impact on communities, cities, economies and policies. It is estimated that in the next fifty years, two-thirds of humanity will be living in towns and cities.

Between the 19th and 23rd of June, the streets of Vancouver were buzzing with over 10 000 participants who came from 100 countries around the world to take part in the Third World Urban Forum (WUF3), UN-Habitat's biennial conference on urban issues. The WUF3 Secretariat (Human Resources and Social Development Canada) and Environment Canada sponsored the participation of 18 RCEN ENGOs in WUF3. In addition to fully participating in the many activities and events scheduled during the week, these delegates from the Health Caucus and International Program organized several RCEN events such as a Roundtable on the Environment, a reception and daily ENGO meetings.

General Outcomes

Many of the participants at WUF3 expressed the sense of being overwhelmed by the size of the conference and the security checks. Nonetheless, they embraced the inspiration fostered by the multiplicity of ideas and opportunities presented at the networking, dialogue and roundtable sessions, among others. Many of the participants commented on the ironies involved in discussing issues affecting slum dwellers that are often poorly represented at these events. This complemented one of the main themes coming out of WUF3 expounding the need for genuine community-driven development. Far too often, there is a disconnect between the programs that governments and international agencies (such as the World Bank and the IMF) want to deliver and the exigencies of the communities they seek to help.

The Roundtable on the Environment

The RCEN held a roundtable at WUF3 on Wednesday, June 21 from 2h30 to 5h30pm entitled, “Strategic Eco-Innovation: Integrating Health and Environment into Sustainable Urban Practices”. During the Roundtable, participants identified common problems and developed project ideas for partnerships to achieve sustainable cities. This event attracted over 30 organisations including NGOs from Africa and Latin America. The small group discussions took place in five different working groups focusing on issues including: community capacity-building, energy and resource management, food, safe environments, and youth and education. The alliances explored during the event included Canadian and international NGOs, health professionals, labour unions, indigenous and youth groups, academics, the private sector and governments. The Roundtable was a great success and was seen as a unique and original forum for cultivating the development of potential strategic partnerships with common visions in the environment sector. As Arciris Garay, Canadian co-chair, concluded, the RCEN Roundtable demonstrated that the “key elements in successful partnerships lie in good communication and enabling dialogue, cooperation and partnerships with communities, real commitment among partners on specific measurable outcomes as well as shared vision and sharing of resources.”

NGO Participants and other events

The RCEN also hosted an ENGO News and Views reception at the Fairmont Waterfront Hotel, on Monday June 19th from 6:30 to 8:30 pm. This was an opportunity to meet and network with over 100 ENGOS, youth, academics, government and private sector representatives in an informal and relaxed context. WUF participants and local RCEN members were delighted to meet new as well as old friends during this successful event. Finally, ENGOS met every morning to update each other on the previous day’s events as well as prepare for the day’s WUF program ahead. Overall, the RCEN-led participation of ENGOS in the WUF was a great success. It was a very good capacity-building exercise

to organize an official WUF event such as the Roundtable and coordinate ENGO involvement in WUF3. The Health Caucus Steering Committee and International Program delegates networked throughout the week and the Canadian government and UN-HABITAT gave positive feedback regarding the RCEN's involvement.

Next Steps

The RCEN will continue to provide limited support to the Roundtable participants to pursue the partnership action plan that was developed during the small group activity. Participants are encouraged to maintain contact with each other and continue to build on the relationships they established during the small group discussion period. The ultimate goal of the Roundtable session is to realize one or two partnership projects and present the results at the fourth session of the World Urban Forum in Nanjing, China in 2008.