

Grassroots Women at the World Urban Forum-III

June 19 - 23, 2006, Vancouver, Canada



The World Urban Forum, held every two years, was established by the United Nations to examine one of the most pressing issues facing the world today.

From June 19 - 23, 2006, the Huairou Commission and its

member networks organized 250 grassroots women and their professional and institutional partners from over 30 countries to participate in the World Urban Forum III in Vancouver, Canada. The World Urban Forum III, focusing on urban sustainability, was hosted by UN Habitat and the Government of Canada, and attracted 10,000 participants.

The presence of Grassroots women leaders at World Urban Forum made an impact among the delegates and organizers of the programme. Most of the dialogue forums and networking events were live with voice from grassroots women, whether it is on Governance, Local participation, mother care, disasters, Health, HIV/AIDS etc.

Building Back Better: Rebuilding Communities after Disaster and Conflict



Huairou Commission organized Networking Event on June 21st "Building Back Better: Rebuilding Communities after Disaster and Conflict". The event was chaired by Ian Davis, Visiting Professor, Cranefield University and Prema Gopalan, Director, Swayam Shikshan Prayog, India.

Grassroots leaders from India, Sri Lanka, Jamaica, Indonesia, Honduras and Peru presented their strategies, innovations practices and challenges. They spoke to a packed audience of NGOs, donors, academics and other partners at this event, which focused on recovery and reconstruction as opportunities for women to rebuild their lives and transform development. Women's stories highlighted their multiple public roles in recovery which enabled them to negotiate with local authorities and government.

Fitriah from Aceh Indonesia talked about the process by which women were empowered to participate in designing, building and supervising construction of their homes after the tsunami. While at first women were hesitant to participate in public meetings on reconstruction dominated by men, they gradually gained enough confidence to attend and speak at community meetings.



Roxana Aching, a community leader from Peru presented how the women in her community were organized and provided training to women to make building materials and construct seismic-safe housing.

A community leader from the marginalized Garifuna community in Honduras, Ana Lucy Bengochea presented ways in which her community organized after Hurricane Mitch in 16 Garifuna communities to rebuild houses, collectively cultivate traditional root crops to create food security and negotiated for land to rebuild in flood safe areas. In recognition of their work, Comite de Emergencia Garifuna has been invited to partner with COPECO, the national emergency organization of Honduras.

Prema Gamage, the Sri Lankan speaker, highlighted the benefits of putting relief resources and decision making in the hands of local women leaders and the importance of supporting women to re-start their livelihoods activities even while they were in relief camps.



A tsunami survivor Ezhilarasi from India recounted how women organized to set up solid waste management programmes and appointed health guides to connect women to government

officials and health service providers, in the government and private sectors to improve community access to health services.

Former combatant from El Salvador Mrs. Dehlia Osorio drew attention to the links between rebuilding after conflict and disaster spoke of the inequitable distribution of land after the conflict had left women with the worst land. While women came together to cultivate their lands and advocate for secure tenure, their struggle continues as they have no support from the government.

Safe spaces for women to organize and provide services for their communities were identified as another strategy that were used by women in rebuilding communities after both conflict and disaster.

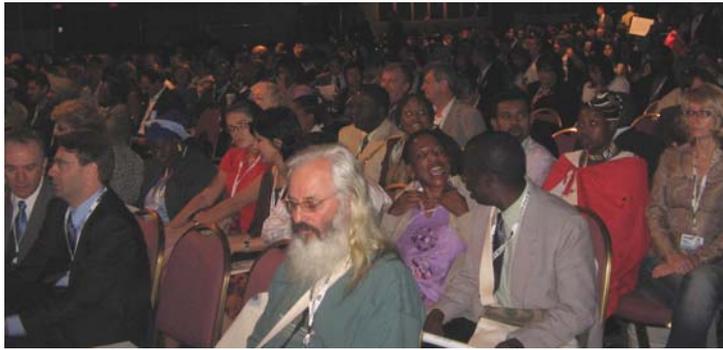
The audience was moved and inspired by the stories. Participants highlighted the need to recognize grassroots women as key partners and experts in disaster management. It was noted that grassroots women were not among the embedded experts in the Dialogue on urban safety.



A representative from the World Watch Institute asked how academics and professionals could support such grassroots efforts. A representative from GTZ lauded the efforts of the women in overcoming the social barriers to participation. The Mayor of Trincomalee, Sri Lanka

spoke of the local efforts to rebuild the city; a representative of the Worldwatch institute wanted to know how academics can support the efforts of grassroots women. American Jewish World Service spoke of the need to listen to communities and support them to scale up their efforts through peer exchanges. A UN Habitat representative from Indonesia requested that Huairou Commission support women in the recent earthquake affected Jogjakarta to rebuild their communities.

This event highlighted the innovative strategies used by women's collectives to rebuild their communities and simultaneously put in place systems and networks which sustain their ongoing efforts to address development priorities.



Prema Gopalan, SSP and Suranjana Gupta, GROOTS International were invited to speak to UNHABITAT organized event on Disaster Risk Management.

Apart from these highlights there were Networking Events, Dialogue Forums and Daily Women's Caucus organised by Huairou Commission at World Urban Forum. All these programmes were well attended by women leaders, policy makers, government representatives all around the world.

Disaster Watch, July 2006. www.disasterwatch.net