

## “Grassroots Women at the Heart of Harmonious Cities”

### Huairou Commission at the World Urban Forum IV



The World Urban Forum IV, under the theme Harmonious Cities, convened from 3-6 November in Nanjing, China. The Huairou Commission with its delegation of over 25 women from around the world highlighted the fact that grassroots women are at the heart of harmonious cities and sustainable urbanization!

Huairou Commission members featured in a dozen events, from Roundtables to Dialogues to Networking events. Its primary Networking Event, held on 5 November, highlighted grassroots women leaders and organizers in a panel discussion. Huairou Commission members from the organization LUMANTI in Nepal, DAMPA, in the Philippines, CEPROMUR of Peru and GROOTS Kenya of Kenya, shared a variety of strategies and innovations arising from grassroots women, focused on improving urban settlements.

Huairou Commission member Lorna Chavez, President of Legazpi Slumdweller's Federation/Chair of Bicol Urban Poor Coordinating Committee in the Philippines, spoke eloquently at the Women's Roundtable, sharing the importance of women in sustainable urbanization. She focused on disaster risk reduction, sharing the outcomes of the Huairou Commission Grassroots Women's Asian Academy held in Cebu City, the Philippines, the week prior to WUF.

The Cebu City Academy held prior to the WUF was focused on building disaster resilient communities, and its outcomes were featured prominently throughout the World Urban Forum's deliberations, in particular during a Networking Event hosted by GROOTS International, Huairou Commission's anchoring member. During its Networking Event, GROOTS shared outcomes of the Cebu Academy as well as past Grassroots Academies, showing the importance of this strategy in furthering and disseminating grassroots women's knowledge and practices.

Huairou Commission featured prominently in its role as a key partner to UNHABITAT's initiative, the Global Land Tool Network. The GLTN is an innovative partnership venture of the UNHABITAT, focused on the development of large scale land tools that are gender sensitive and pro poor. The Huairou Commission, together with the GLTN, organized two side events, on the issue of scaling up land tools, and how this can be done from a grassroots woman's perspective, as well as developing further the gender criteria and determining pilot projects to test them. Both events were very successful and provided much substance to the further development of gender sensitive land tools. Huairou Commission also shared their work as a part of the GLTN Roundtable, where strategic intervention on the gender mechanism and the grassroots mechanism were shared.

Innovative solutions to make cities safer for women were shared during Women in Cities International (member network of the Huairou Commission) event on gender, local governance and violence prevention. Further security issues were presented by Tessie Fernandez of Lihok Philippina (Huairou Commission member) and others during a UNHABITAT Seminar Series on Urban Innovations on urban safety and the poor in Asia.

Marilu Sanchez of Estrategia, a large scale grassroots organization based in Lima, Peru and long time Huairou Commission member, shared anti- eviction strategies during a training event jointly

organized with Institute of Housing Studies (Netherlands) and others. Ms Sanchez spoke eloquently on the importance of dialogue and interaction with affected communities- a strategy which featured prominently during the responses to the trainers challenge to develop guidelines against evictions. Another training event focused on the Huairou Commission member developed and promoted strategy of Local to Local Dialogues. Local to Local Dialogues are enabling strategies which create space for local communities to join with local authorities in together developing solutions to urban problems. The strategy has been successful in a number of countries, including Philippines, Kenya and Uganda. Trainers at the event were all grassroots organization leaders. Though held on the last day of the World Urban Forum, attendance was high and feedback positive over this innovative, grassroots women developed strategy for use in creating sustainable and harmonious cities!

The World Urban Forum IV, despite challenges of its own, proved a successful forum for sharing and learning innovative and unique strategies towards sustainable urbanization. Grassroots women and organizational leaders were able to raise their voices and highlight their innovations, to underscore that grassroots women should not be treated as beneficiaries but as key actors in urban development. Huairou Commission's participation at the World Urban Forum once again underscored that at the heart of harmonious urbanization are poor community based women, and their contributions must not only be acknowledged, they must be made a part of all decision making and development of urban policies and projects.

Huairou Commission is currently drafting a full report of all relevant activities at the World Urban Forum IV, which will be soon posted on the Huairou Web - keep an eye out for these important further details!