



## *International Advocacy Reports and Statements*

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### **UNDP: 7th Forum of the World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty (WACAP) Confronting the Crisis Collectively: Working Together to End Poverty**

24-26 February 2010, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

*Written by Marion Minnis, Member of IFUW Status of Women Committee*

Representatives of local governmental organizations from all over the world, especially mayors and their staff members, civil servants, and international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended this three-day meeting to discuss what they are doing or have done to fight poverty within their local communities by creating international/regional, public/private sponsored partnerships to solve aspects of the problem. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) promotes these public/private partnerships on the local governmental level and is sometimes involved.

#### **The Themes for the first Plenary Sessions were:**

- Employment and social inclusion
- How to improve partnerships amongst cities and regions in the fight against poverty?
- To develop social corporation responsibility in partnerships between governments, private sector and NGOs
- The role of European cities in the fight against poverty, with reference of current crises
- Urban development and migration
- How to provide all of humanity with access to basic services and basic provisions, with focus on food, water management and water supplies. One of the speakers on this panel was the Secretary General of the Dutch Council of Women as representative of Women for Water partnerships (WfWp), an international partnership established by the Dutch Council of Women some years ago to promote all aspects regarding water & water management that are important to the position of women.

#### **Day 2, Plenary Session:**

##### **'Presentation of the new multilateralism through the territorial approach for development'**

New refers to the acknowledgement of local governments as real and active actors with lots of knowledge and resources. During this session examples were presented from the ART GOLD project of UNDP, a project involving local communities in development.

ART GOLD started 5 years ago and is now in 18 countries (in Africa, Asia, Middle East, Latin America). For example, local governments, NGOs (international, regional, national and grass roots), and the private sector worked together in an Art Gold project in Sri Lanka following the tsunami in 2004. The Regional Waterboard Krimpenerwaard (NL) was one of the parties involved and helped them reconstructing sanitation, developing water management, training and instructing people.

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## **Energy for all**

*Panel members: Kirghiz Republic, Netherlands, Mexico, Morocco.*

The session was excellently introduced by Nicolas Svenningsen (the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Division of Technology, Industry and Economics): energy efficiency is especially the concern of local governments. They can provide policy incentives to encourage the building construction sector to build energy reducing buildings. It's a long term goal, as most parties tend to focus on short term revenues. Full political backing is needed to be successful on this issue. Green Energy Cities Networks - a recent WACAP initiative - will follow some cities for a period of 5 - 10 years to see how it works and what results are achieved.

Mexico: the mayor from a combination of 8 small cities in Chiapas region, in the south east of Mexico, which suffered from an earthquake some years ago, showed a video of a successful project with they had done in co-operation with, amongst others UNDP ART GOLD. This region counts many very small villages (sometimes consisting of less than 100 people) which makes it very costly to provide them with electricity, sanitation, and so on. The earthquake was used as an opportunity to relocate many of these people / farmers to a newly constructed (small) city where approx. 14.000 people now are living and have decent brick houses, access to drinking water, sanitation, schools, health care centre, work (growing vegetables, etc. in a modern way) and distribution of the surplus to markets. Solar cells are used for energy; bio fuels (from a local poisonous herb) power buses, and forests have been replanted. All in all, a good example of a successful public / private partnership.

Kirghiz Republic: Professor Erkin Boronbaev of the University of Kirghizstan, spoke on experiments in building houses using local construction materials, e.g. a house in a rural area built with straw blocks - cheap and warm, in combination with windows consisting of three layers of glass (good isolation) and some protection to keep the sun out in summertime (no air conditioning is needed in that case). Likewise in a city you should use materials easily available in an urban area. Some of these experiments have been supported by the UN. His students develop these energy friendly houses. If you use simple materials, local people can understand them, and then it's easier for them to maintain the houses; therefore training people is also important.

Netherlands: The representative from the International Council for Research and Innovation in Building and Construction (CIB), stated that governments have to set the example if they want other people/organisations to follow. If governments don't ask for buildings that are energy friendly, how can they expect the private sector to invest in it? Currently he is drafting a manual /handbook for UNEP on this subject. Innovations in the construction sector include, for example, sustainable constructions, life cycle friendly homes (suitable for people in all stages of life), low energy consumption housing, and houses that have less impact on soil and water.

He stated that in rural /small areas you need small solutions on a big scale, and in urban areas you need big solutions on a small scale.

Sustainability is about a mindset; e.g. in developing, poor countries people /governments want western buildings. He says: 'don't use western glass, concrete, air conditioning, and so on.

Instead, use materials that are found locally. It's not only cheaper, but fits the culture; people can understand it - because they know it - and maintain it.'

**Vulnerable groups and poverty (\*) :**

No definition of 'poverty' was given, nor definitions of 'vulnerable groups'. So all speakers informed the audience on their city / project / experiences and showed how they see poverty (what is poverty and how to fight it?) and who are the victims (how do they solve it?).

Panel members: *mayors from cities in Turkey, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Russian Republic and Netherlands.*

Belgium: According to the mayor and vice-mayor of Huy, a small city in French speaking Belgium, all women are to be regarded as 'vulnerable people'!

Netherlands: The vice mayor of Rotterdam corrected the Belgians on this point and she concluded, at the end of this session, as host of the conference - that next time more women should be invited as speakers of the WACAP panels.

In the Netherlands a problem is the relatively high perinatal mortality - especially amongst traditional migrant women living in poor urban areas. Domestic violence (approx. 20.000 people in Rotterdam each year are confronted with domestic violence) is also an issue. On these issues a lot has already been done on the local governmental level, for example campaigns to raise awareness amongst citizens, instructions to & training of the police force on how to deal with this subject, and judicial measurements.

Dominican Republic – A former sugarcane exporting country, the Dominican Republic nowadays includes many poor regions in which people have no access to: electric energy, drinking water, sanitation or health care. Also 34% of the people have to cook with charcoal, which has negative effects on the environment /agriculture. This was the only speaker who mentioned the enormous costs of the military industrial sector in his country and indicated what could be done for the poor if this money was used otherwise!

Turkey (very brief presentation): has suffered two economic crises, also faces a major issue in the difference between people of the very traditional regions versus the more developed (western oriented) regions.

Ivory Coast: the national government has worked especially with MDG 6 (HIV/AIDS). Sick people now have access to health care. International organisations do a lot, but the total amount of financial assistance is less than halve of what is needed in order to be really effective.

Russia: The representative of the Ministry for Health and Social Development presented many statistics. There have been projects in cooperation with, among others, the International Labour Organization, the World Bank and the European Union. The financial crisis in the 1990's was difficult, even for someone in his position. Economic crisis and fighting it are still very important

### **Day 3: Plenary Session:**

Four mayors from Haiti were flown in to ask for financial support from the international community.

Conclusions from all the working sessions will be drafted and distributed later on.

The next WACAP meeting will be in 2012; the site has not yet been decided.

### **What's in it for IFUW?**

- IFUW themes such as the current one on creating sustainable futures remain useful, as indicated by the presentations of Prof. Wubbo Ockels and Prof. Michael Braungart.;

- Some of the ideas presented might be appealing to women students and researchers from technical universities. One example presented by Wubbo Ockels was a project in Australia involving youth in a sports race for cars that drive on solar energy. These cars are designed & developed by students of universities. Another looked at the feasibility of creating new sources of energy e.g. solar energy, wind energy, kite energy or water management and carbon management.

- Michael Braungart suggested that we should replace 'CO<sub>2</sub> reduction /green house gasses' by a more positive phrase like 'carbon management'. As 'reduction' suggests when there are not enough resources, people will fight to get their share. That's why they become greedy and aggressive. He compared people with ants: the rain forest in Brazil can only exist thanks to the many types of ants, 80% of these are non vegetarian. They are highly organised and very efficient as they don't create waste. According to Mr Braungart, we are not too many, just too stupid as we think we are bad (CO<sub>2</sub> reduction is about exporting the western guilt culture). Nature doesn't know waste, he claims. Everything nature produces can be 'digested' although it takes time, especially in certain climate zones. When people have positive ideas on the future, they feel good and will behave decently. So the question is: what do you want the future to look like? And what is needed to get there? *To me this analogy is also useful for IFUW. Instead of focusing on reduction, we should think about what we want IFUW's future to look like and decide what we need to do to achieve it.*

- In order to fight poverty it is necessary to combine urban and rural policies. *This might be an interesting 'theme' when e.g. selecting themes for seminars & workshops IFUW conferences;*

- UNDP has been involved in projects building public / private partnerships on the local level. Some of them have been worked out in a simple way in order to encourage people / individuals to copy them. The contact person is willing to send us this information. *It might be interesting for the upcoming Mexico conference, as a source for inspiration to IFUW NFAs; what to do and how to do it?*

- *Advocacy teams at the UN when dealing with UNDP should stress the need to have more women speakers involved during the next WACAP in 2012!!!*