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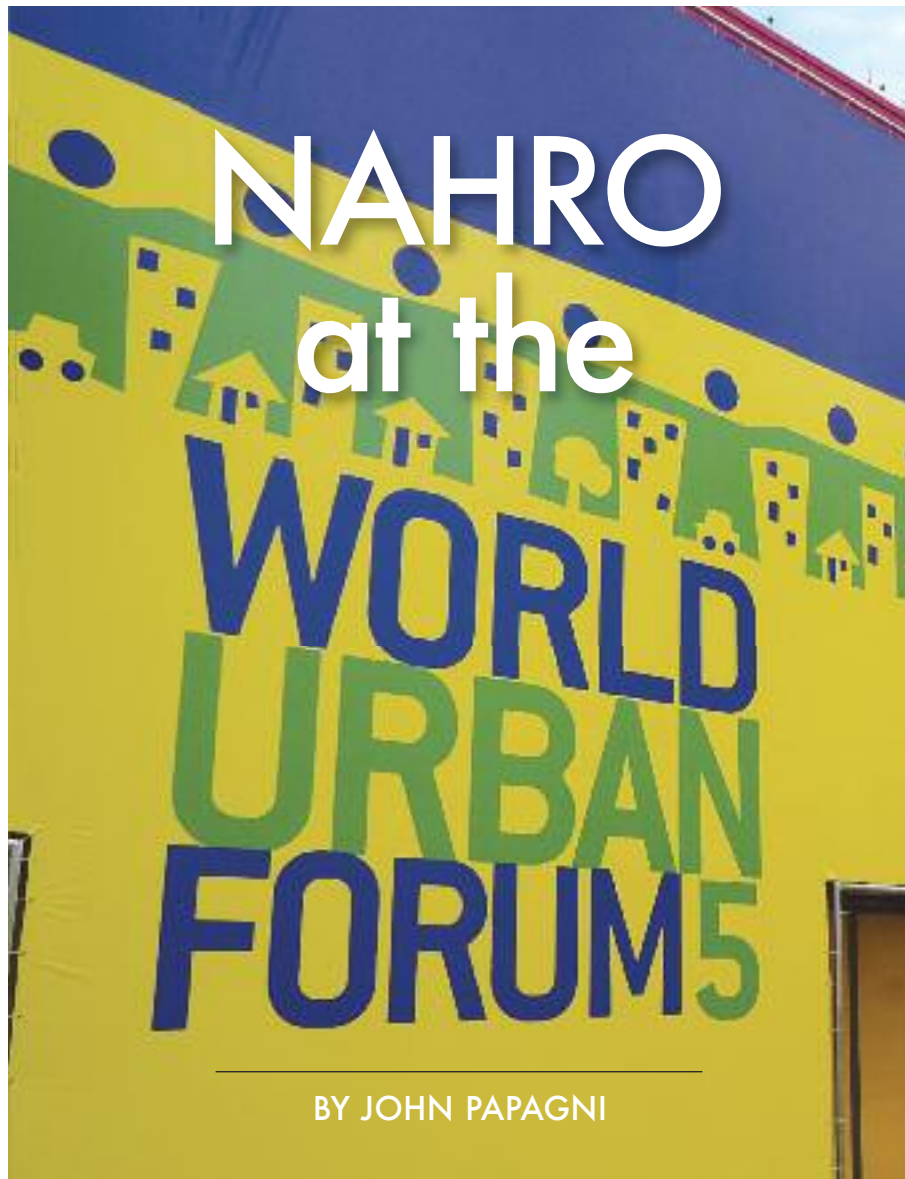
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NAHRO at the

WORLD URBAN FORUM 5

BY JOHN PAPAGNI

THIS YEAR, the fifth World Urban Forum, titled “The Right to the City: Bridging the Urban Divide,” was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from March 22-26. The biennial conference is sponsored by UN-HABITAT, the United Nations Agency for Human Settlements. With nearly 14,000 participants from 150 countries¹, this was the

largest World Urban Forum to date. The author attended as part of a delegation of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) that included Chief Executive Officer Saul Ramirez and International Committee Chair Elizabeth Morris. (NAHRO is registered as a non-governmental organization with the United Nations.)

¹ Source: www.unhabitat.org “Curtain Falls on Fifth World Urban Forum”, March 26, 2010.



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Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

FORUM IN A MEGACITY

An international tourist destination, Rio de Janeiro is famous for its breathtaking natural beauty. Located on the Atlantic coast of Brazil, its status as a global city was recently affirmed when it was selected as the host city for the 2014 World Cup soccer tournament and the 2016 Olympics. With a metropolitan population of 10.8 million residents², Rio meets the United Nations definition of a megacity—a metropolitan area with more than 10 million residents. As the setting for the World Urban Forum, Rio is also a graphic representation of the “urban divide” in the conference title, and serves as a living example of the challenges and opportunities facing cities in the 21st

century. When approaching the city from the airport, the first views are of the “favelas”—informal settlements built on hillsides surrounding the city. Housing in the favelas is comprised mostly of brick and cinder block structures topped with tin roofs. Plagued with violence and drug trafficking³, the favelas have been a focus of recent government efforts to improve housing conditions and alleviate poverty.

The favelas are a sharp contrast to high-rise oceanfront hotels and restaurants on Avenida Atlantica, where Copacabana’s tourist facilities seem worlds apart from the slums that stand less than a mile away. Even on the broad plazas between the hotels and the street, there is a visible homeless population. As the city prepares for the Olympics, there is an active local debate about the

² “World Urbanization Prospects: The 2003 Revision”, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York.

³ Brazil A Country Study, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, April 1997, page 150.

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future of the favelas and concern among advocates about potential displacement of low-income residents. In an interview with *The Independent*, Raquel Rolnik, a city planning professor at University of Sao Paulo, Brazil stated that large events can be an opportunity to mobilize investment in low-income communities, but acknowledged, “The dominant approach we have seen with mega-events is that they are part of the machinery of territorial exclusion of the poor.”⁴ The plight of the favelas was tragically highlighted in April of this year, when 200 people died in flash floods in Rio’s neighboring city, Niteroi.⁵

Brazil’s President, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, opened the conference with impassioned support for measures to improve governance and quality of life, such as efforts to create greater transparency and accountability in budgeting and expenditures as well as programs to upgrade slums and

infrastructure—including expansion of the mass transit system. “We are proud of the redevelopment that is occurring in Rio de Janeiro,” he stated, “and the city can be seen as the image of the new Brazil. We are proving that it is possible to build a new country. I encourage everyone to not only visit our tourist attractions, but also to visit the favelas and witness what is going on and the positive changes that are occurring.”⁶

Despite challenges, Brazil has made advances in both urban policy and practice. In 1988, it became the first country to include a specific chapter on urban policy in its constitution.⁷ The federal government has increased funding for housing, as well as urban infrastructure in the favelas through “Programa de Acelaracao do Crescimento” (Growth



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Acceleration Program). Investments in housing and infrastructure have been associated with investments in education, cash transfers and job creation for the poor.⁸ Brazil, and Rio in particular served as a model for global urban challenges and opportunities in sessions throughout the Forum.

⁸ Ibid, page 159

⁴ Kristofer Rios, “Brazilian Crackdown”, *The Independent*, March 31, 2010.

⁵ Daniel Hernandez, “Mud Slide Wipes Away Rio Slum, Killing 200”, *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 2010.

⁶ “Rio leads Brazil to a new era of development”, *World Urban Forum Daily News*, Tuesday, March 23, 2010, Rio de Janeiro.

⁷ “State of the World’s Cities 2010/2011 Bridging the Urban Divide”, page 124, United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT).



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THE WORLD URBAN FORUM

The United Nations established the World Urban Forum to focus on urbanization and its impact on communities, cities, climate change and policies. Since the first forum in Nairobi, Kenya in 2002, the confer-

Clockwise from far left: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva speaks at opening ceremony of World Urban Forum; UN-HABITAT Executive Director, Anna Tibaijuka, and Brazil's Minister for Cities, Marcio Fortes, join dancers at the closing ceremony of the World Urban Forum; UN-HABITAT Executive Director, Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, and private sector partners; HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan addresses opening ceremony of World Urban Forum; Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive addresses the special session on Haiti.

ence has grown in size and standing; subsequent conferences were held in Barcelona in 2004, Vancouver in 2006 and Nanjing in 2008.⁹ While the conference attracts high-level elected officials, diplomats and housing officials, attendees also include representatives from every sector, including nongovernmental organizations, ministers and slum dwellers. The conference is intentionally inclusive: there is no registration fee,

⁹ Source: www.unhabitat.org "World Urban Forum 5: The Right to the City Bridging the Urban Divide".

and participants can register online to obtain UN credentials.

The conference itself is based on a simple premise—that as the world's population becomes increasingly urban, solutions to global challenges will need to focus on urban centers. Cities consume seventy percent of total energy and generate eighty percent of the world's waste and 60 percent of the greenhouse gases.¹⁰ Today, more than half of the world's population lives in urban centers. By 2050, it is projected 2/3 of the world's inhabitants will call urban centers their home. In developed countries the trend is more dramatic. Eighty-six

¹⁰ Source: UN-HABITAT .World Urban Campaign presentation, Nairobi, Kenya, February 8, 2010.

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Display of model housing units in exhibition hall at the World Urban Forum

percent of the population of developed countries will be urban dwellers in 2050.¹¹ The trend is already well underway in the United States, where the nation's 100 largest metropolitan areas are home to 66 percent of Americans.¹²

Urban centers are also key to the wealth of nations and economic opportunity for citizens. For example, Seoul, South Korea and Brussels, Belgium each contribute nearly half of their respective country's gross domestic product (GDP). Tokyo, Japan accounts for nearly two percent of the world's GDP.¹³ Economic opportunity and potential of urban

centers is compromised by low-density sprawl development that increases disparities in wealth and quality of life. In developed countries, this may take the form of low-density suburban development for high- and middle-income residents. In developing countries, sprawl is associated with illegal patterns of land use, lack of infrastructure, public facilities and basic services.¹⁴

The conference venue showcased redevelopment of Rio's port. Signs in Portuguese leading to the port read *revitalização do porto, uma nova cidade nascendo*—"revitalization of the port—a new city rising." Obsolete shipping facilities were repurposed to house a large conference center and cruise ship terminal. To accommodate sessions in Rio's steamy summer air, long warehouses were renovated with air-conditioned breakout rooms, an auditorium and exhibit hall.

The 2010 conference attracted the largest U.S. presence of any World Urban Forum—more than 500 U.S. citizens attended.¹⁵ The official U.S. delegation, led by HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, reflected the new urban and social agenda of the Obama administration. In remarks at the opening ceremony, Secretary Donovan pointed to examples of that agenda, including the new Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities at HUD to "nurture sustainable development at the metropolitan level" and an "interagency sustainability partnership" to link federal housing, transportation and land use policy.¹⁶

¹¹ "State of the World's Cities 2010/2011 Bridging the Urban Divide", page 5, op cit.

¹² "Metros As Key's To Our Future: But Will Cities, Suburbs Collaborate?" Neal Pierce, Washington Post Writer's Group, May 21, 2010.

¹³ "State of the World's Cities 2010/2011 Bridging the Urban Divide", pp. 19-20, op cit.

¹⁴ Ibid, page 11.

¹⁵ Remarks of HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan at World Urban Forum Opening Ceremonies, March 22, 2010.

¹⁶ For the full text of Secretary Donovan's remarks, go to: http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/ HUD/world_urban_forum

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A SAMPLER FROM THE WORLD URBAN FORUM

BY ELIZABETH MORRIS

The World Urban Forum offered perspectives and information on a remarkable range of topics. Choosing among sessions was the conference's biggest dilemma. A sampling of thought-provoking sessions included:

IS SHELTER AN INTERNATIONAL PRIORITY? A session with donors and NGOs discussed the traditional focus of donors on rural and agricultural issues. With the shift to urban areas, housing is not getting the support that it needs. Why? The hypothesis was that, similar to budget discussions in the U.S. Congress, housing is complex, expensive and long term (requiring more than a one-year funding cycle), making it difficult to obtain the required resources and commitment.

INCREMENTAL BUILDING: How to structure both the development process and financial mechanisms to support the reality of incremental building practices? Is there a way to help potential homeowners to finance components of development—first the land acquisition and later, when they have resources, site preparation, rudimentary construction, and finally upgrades and expansion? Or can programs that finance incremental acquisition of a completed home (such as a shared equity model in which buyers' share of ownership grows over time) fill that need?

RESILIENT CITIES: What development patterns and building codes are needed to protect against environmental threats (typhoons, monsoons, earthquakes, etc.)? Resilient cities are also those with effective plans for post-disaster redevelopment—a relevant concept to many U.S. communities. Groups like Shack/Slum Dwellers International are intent on counting residents in informal communities, which are typically sited in vulnerable locations, so that there is some record of how many lives are lost in a disaster and to assist in rescue and recovery.

GENDER ISSUES: A day-and-a-half pre-program focused on the Gender Equality Action Plan and its implementation. Among the plan's components is the importance of enabling (legally, culturally and financially) women to hold title to land, solely and in conjunction with their husbands, in order to provide them with economic security and security of tenure.

UPGRADING SLUMS: Around the world, communities are working toward better living standards in low-income

communities. In many places, "regularizing" informal communities and establishing land ownership are first steps. Issues like inclusion of residents in decision making, funding for infrastructure, appropriate housing, economic development opportunities, reliable and nutritious food supplies and crime prevention mirror current discussions in American cities.

WATER: Accessible, potable water is a health issue and much more. Carrying water from distant sources is the work of women and children. If installing a local tap can save them hours each day, then their energies can go toward schooling and economic development.

URBAN LABS: There is a network of research-based evaluations of best practices in dealing with urbanization in varying circumstances and many parts of the world. Through UN-HABITAT, these findings are published and shared. Also, international researchers are creating indicators to measure performance of urban areas. The UN publication, *The State of the World's Cities 2010-2011*, was released during the World Urban Forum. It contains a wealth of data and comparative information relating to social, economic, political and cultural dynamics of urban environments.

MEGACITIES: While less than 5% of the world's population lives in megacities, they are growing so fast that planning and development cannot keep pace. Lagos, Nigeria, was cited as one example. In 1950, there were 290,000 inhabitants, in 2004 there were 13 million, and by 2015 a projected 23 million will call Lagos home!

ENGAGING YOUTH: Arts, including hip-hop music, are tools being used to engage youth in improving life in cities. Participation via social media is a worldwide trend. The World Urban Forum included roundtables and side programs especially for younger participants.

WHY ORGANIZE? A compelling case was made by a high-ranking spokesperson for a donor nation in support of organizing disenfranchised low-income residents. As a nation, he explained, they donate directly to other nations. An organized citizenry provides some assurance that the needs expressed by national leaders reflect priorities of residents, and that there is a civil society mechanism to hold governments accountable to deliver results.



“In the next 20 years, Homo sapiens, ‘the wise human’, will become ‘Homo sapiens urbanis’ in virtually all regions of the planet”¹⁷

THE FORUM’S SCOPE

Displays and booths at the exhibit hall reflected the conference’s scope. Instead of local or regional vendor displays, exhibits were sponsored by member nations and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Attendees who stopped by Afghanistan’s booth could peruse the Kabul General Plan, which focused on familiar issues such as managing growth, delivering infrastructure and historic preservation. Germany offered information on sustainable building practices and energy efficiency. The World Bank described its involvement in many financing programs, from national financial systems to micro lending programs. UN-HABITAT had several booths, including a library of research materials and programs addressing urban-

¹⁷ “State of the World’s Cities 2010/2011 Bridging the Urban Divide”, page VIII, United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT).



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UN-HABITAT’s exhibition stand at the World Urban Forum

ization around the world. NGOs were well represented, including Habitat for Humanity International and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). Even Boise State University had a presence, addressing incremental building systems and water conservation.

With hundreds of briefing sessions and networking events, participants had to make tough decisions regarding how to invest their time. Climate change and sustainable development were the focus of numerous sessions, including leading practices from Sweden, Korea and elsewhere. Another common theme was how to finance both infrastructure and social housing. Urban governance and inclusion in decision making are also common concerns.

A special session was added to the program to address what was described as the single most severe humanitarian crisis in the world: the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti.¹⁸ Haiti’s government has estimated

¹⁸ “Haiti Earthquake of 2010 Overview”, *New York Times*, February 19, 2010.

that 230,000 people died in the earthquake—the same toll as the 2004 Asian tsunami.¹⁹ The tragic loss of life is compounded by damage to buildings and infrastructure. The United Nations estimates that the earthquake destroyed 105,000 homes and damaged 208,000 others, mostly in Port-au-Prince.²⁰ Titled “Build Back Better,” the session included Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive and UN-HABITAT’s Executive Director, Anna Tibajuka, who read a special message from former President Bill Clinton (the UN Special Envoy to Haiti). “Every time I visit Haiti,” the message reads, “I see potential for stable growth. I see it in the Haitian government’s committed leadership, in the huge number of nonprofits on the ground and in the world’s unprecedented attention.”²¹

¹⁹ “Haiti Earthquake Death Toll Raised to 230,000,” *The Huffington Post*, February 9, 2010.

²⁰ “Rubble of Broken City Strains Haitians’ Patience,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2010.

²¹ “Haiti Prime Minister Promises Rebirth of His Nation”, *World Urban Forum Daily News*, Wednesday, March 24, 2010, Rio de Janeiro.



Uganda booth in exhibition hall at the World Urban Forum

The session also addressed the practical challenges of reconstruction in Haiti. Participants learned that soon after emergency assistance began arriving, attention quickly turned to effective rubble disposal. Much of the rubble was initially pushed aside, often landing in creeks and drainage areas, which would compound flooding during the rainy season. The discussion focused on a different strategy for redevelopment, one that encouraged a shift of economic and physical development outside of the capital city. Representatives of donor foundations and nations are making long term commitments to assist the government, which had just begun to institute necessary improvements prior to the earthquake, to rebuild governance, infrastructure, housing, education and a stronger economic base.

Sessions provided excellent speakers who addressed familiar issues regarding urbanization, such as planning, infrastructure, finance, environ-

mental impacts and the like. Others dealt with less common topics, such as two sessions that focused on organizing and empowering low-income residents of slums and informal settlements.

IMPROVING THE LIVES OF IMPOVERISHED URBAN DWELLERS

Shack / Slum Dwellers International (SDI) has had a presence at every World Urban Forum, with 67 members attending the Forum in Rio.²² With affiliates in 35 countries, SDI is focused on the challenge of massive “informal settlements” or slums in developing countries. On the edges of cities like Cape Town, South Africa, Mumbai, India and Nairobi, Kenya, these rapidly expanding

²² “SDI makes a splash at WUUF”, Louise Cobbett, March 2010, www.sdi.net.org.

slums, with 500,000 or more residents, are the equivalent of medium-sized cities.²³ Many of these informal settlements are built on sites not appropriate for housing, including dumps, near power and gas lines, or on roadside right-of-way.²⁴ Their compelling session had a deceptively technical title: “Protocols for Upgrading Large Urban Settlements.” In contrast to other, more formal plenary sessions featuring speakers with prepared remarks, this event began and ended with singing. With panelists wearing green shirts that read “Making Cities Inclusive,” it felt like a mixture between a revival meeting and an organizing event.

Market forces frequently drive housing policy in cities. When land

²³ “Slum Upgrading: Making Cities Inclusive” Slum/Shack Dwellers International, 2010.

²⁴ Source: Panel discussion at “Protocols for Upgrading Large Settlements”, UN-HABITAT World Urban Forum, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, March 22, 2010.

around cities becomes valuable, slum dwellers are at risk of forced relocation. The demands of SDI members are simple: to have a voice in the future of their communities.

Mzwanele Zulu, an SDI delegate from Joe Slovo, stated, "The government is always planning things without including people. They need to include people." Though the settlements are often called informal ones, their residents view them as "formal." "I have been a resident of Joe Slovo for 10 years," Mr. Zulu said. "My community is no longer informal."

Enumeration—that is, completing a local census—is a key organizing issue for SDI. Slums are generally not included in local population counts, making it difficult to document needs or advocate for services. The most significant attribute of an enumeration is that it allows the community members to become participants in development, rather than simply recipients. With their expert knowledge of the settlement, the community is then able to channel the resources to where it is most needed. SDI provides technical support to these self-organizing communities. Like the enumerators for the U.S. Decennial Census, their surveys form the basis to advocate for new resources, improved services and representation.

In a conversation after the session, Father Norberto Carcellar, an SDI delegate from the Philippines, characterized SDI's presence in Rio as "an opportunity to advocate to leadership," since high-level delegations at the forum provide slum dwellers with access to a level of government ministries that they may not have in their own country. Louise Cobbett, an SDI staff member who traveled to Rio with the delegation, characterized SDI as "a bridge between informal settlements and formal governments."

SDI is attracting international attention and resources, including support from the Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. A recent example of SDI's expanding international relationships is assistance the organization provided to victims of the earthquake in Haiti. SDI members sent money for tents to victims through Peer Global in Rockville, Md. This represents a reversal of the traditional model of international aid by developed countries. In this case, a federation of urban poor in developing nations provided assistance to disaster victims, who themselves numbered among the urban poor.²⁵

THE INTERNET AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

A session sponsored by the U.S. State Department focused on the Internet as a new tool for building and exercising citizens' rights. One example of an emerging movement for digital inclusion is Viva Favela. A Portuguese-language website created in 2001, Viva Favela is dedicated to sharing information about life in Rio's slums. The slum dwellers take on the duties of correspondents—they create news items with print, photos and digital film, which are then posted to the website. At its core, Viva Favela is an example of the use of technology to reduce the isolation of very low-income communities. The website seeks to empower residents on two levels: first as a vehicle for networking and information sharing, and second, as a means of advocacy.

Rodrigo Nogueira, Viva Favela's Content Editor, stated that one of the website's goals is to demonstrate that there is "more to the favelas than vio-

²⁵ Louise Cobbett, Slum/Shack Dwellers International, Personal Communication, May 18, 2010.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about UN-HABITAT and the World Urban Forum go to: <http://www.unhabitat.org/>

For information about Slum/Shack Dwellers International go to: <http://www.sdinet.org/>

To learn more about Viva Favela, visit their web site at: <http://www.vivafavela.com.br/>

To learn more about the Center for Digital Inclusion, visit: <http://cdiglobal.org>

To learn more about PEER Global, visit: <http://www.peercpc.com/>

To learn more about the World Urban Campaign, visit: <http://www.unhabitat.org/wuc>

lence and poverty"; in order to be evenhanded, it publishes both positive and negative stories. Viva Favela has also created a forum for information sharing with similar communities in other parts of the world. According to Mr. Nogueira, the website has become a key source of content for information about the favelas, improving perceptions and creating economic development potential.

Another speaker, Rodrigo Braggio, is the founder of the Center for Digital Inclusion. An Internet entrepreneur with experience at IBM, Mr. Braggio speaks in terms that blend social equity, vision and entrepreneurial skill, discussing "social e-business as a new sector of the economy" and "mobilizing for access to Internet technology as a right." Launched in 1993 in Rio's Santa Maria favela, CDI has grown a network of 753 schools in eight Latin American countries seeking to expand local access to

Internet technology. CDI provides free computers and software, trains instructors and monitors the schools.²⁶

NAHRO AND THE WORLD URBAN FORUM

The World Urban Forum offered NAHRO an opportunity to open discussions with numerous potential partners. For example, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) is interested in including NAHRO expertise in their international work, which is funded by U.S. Agency for International Development (US AID) and other donors. Habitat for Humanity International sees the value of NAHRO assistance when Haitian relief turns to rebuilding plans. Opportunities to work with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the American Planning Association will also be pursued.

Participation in the World Urban Forum also offered NAHRO an opportunity to impress on HUD leadership our capacity and commitment to partner with them at home and abroad.

THE WORLD URBAN CAMPAIGN

The sixth World Urban Forum will take place in 2012. To continue and build upon the work of the previous forum, UN-HABITAT launched the World Urban Campaign at the 2010 Forum held in Rio de Janeiro. The campaign seeks to engage public, private and civil society partners to share practical tools and promote policies for sustainable urbanization; it also seeks to position sustainable

²⁶ Source: Center for Digital Inclusion web site: <http://cdiglobal.org>



Delegates of Shack/Slum Dwellers International at World Urban Forum

PHOTO COURTESY SHACK/SLUM DWELLERS INTERNATIONAL

urbanization as a priority issue.

The campaign can be expected to make extensive use of the Internet to build a network of partners and serve as a global platform for collaboration on urban issues. The launch video for the World Urban Campaign was recently posted on YouTube, and a page on the UN-HABITAT website provides general information about the Campaign and background documents. The campaign's "e-forum" will provide an online platform for local partners to share information on new projects and ideas, knowl-

NAHRO'S INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

NAHRO's International Committee collects and disseminates information on housing and community development in foreign countries. The committee identifies innovative programs, development techniques, and management systems that may be usable in the United States. The committee also shares information on American programs with its foreign counterparts. For more information regarding the International Committee, resources and international partners, visit: www.nahro.org/international.cfm

edge and experience.

The first common effort of the World Urban Campaign is the 100 Cities Initiative, which will highlight and celebrate innovations or "living practices" that make cities more sustainable by sharing local stories and outcomes. While currently in a pilot phase, the initiative will culminate in a planned 100 Cities summit in 2011.²⁷

CONCLUSION

Participation in the forum was both humbling and hopeful. Participants felt the clear sense of being part of a movement for the improvement of urban centers that extends beyond national boundaries. For professionals struggling with daily challenges to improve conditions in their own communities, this was an opportunity to connect with people and organizations in countries around the world and share their commitment.

Audax Nshala, a private sector representative from Tanzania, commented, "I think this conference is really about us [African Nations], because our cities are growing rapidly and lack the infrastructure to support growth." In a world with an increasingly urban, interconnected population, the message that emerged from the conference is that this is really about all of us.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Morris serves as Chair of NAHRO's International Committee. She is Principal of E. M. Advisors and formerly served as CEO of the San Diego Housing Commission.

John Papagni serves as a Program Officer in the Division of Neighborhood Revitalization at the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development.

²⁷ For more information regarding the World Urban Campaign and the 100 Cities Initiative, visit: <http://www.unhabitat.org/wuc>