FEMMES
ET VILLES

MUJERES
Y CIUDADES

WOMEN
IN CITIES

i n t e r n a t i o n a l

# SHARING OUR KNOWLEDGE

# FOR ACTION:

# AN ONLINE

# EXCHANGE FORUM

# ON GENDER

# EQUALITY

# IN CITIES

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# Introduction

The Third World Urban Forum, an initiative of the United Nations' Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT), took place in Vancouver in June 2006. International networks of women's groups were mobilized to attend the event to highlight questions related to gender equality at the city level and the importance of integrating gender in local policies and local governance.

Women and Cities International organized four networking activities and ensured the participation of women from five continents to enrich exchanges on policies and good practices aimed to foster gender equality in local governance.

We would like to acknowledge the support of these activities by the Canadian government, which gave the mandate to Women and Cities International to assist in encouraging representatives of women's groups to attend and participate in this large international event.

What follows is a synthesis of the online exchanges that took place in the months of May and June 2006. A special site was created to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences between participants at the World Urban Forum III and other representatives of women's groups who were unable to attend the networking events, but who nevertheless wished to contribute to the debate and discussion of key issues.

The synthesis also includes information on the evaluation of the objectives of the pilot project, and technical information for those who may be interested in a tool that can facilitate a process of online exchanges between stakeholders from different countries.

One of the first challenges encountered involved the development of the site in all three languages (French, English and Spanish).

The themes discussed during the four weeks of online exchanges were:
1. Developing a template: Partnership Models for Large Cities
2. Sustainable Community-Government Partnerships on gendered Violence Prevention
3. Gender Mainstreaming & Local Governance
4. Knowledge Networks for Women's Health and Safety

The present synthesis of contributions made by participants highlights a number of key elements that need to be in place to ensure gender mainstreaming of local governance.

These include the:

1. Importance of other levels of government (regional, national and international) to support the efforts of local authorities
2. Adoption of local policies on gender equality between women and men by city
3. Creation of offices of women or gender equality in the municipal structures (accompanied by human resources and appropriate budgets towards clear objectives)
4. Development of methods and tools to integrate a gender approach with the operations of local governance in general
5. Importance of partnerships between women's groups and municipalities
6. Support and recognition of the autonomy of women's groups
7. Key role of citizen participation, and in particular women's participation in the decision making process at the local level (public consultation, participatory budgets)
8. Significance of improvements in women's safety
9. Importance of developing exchanges and dissemination of information such as good practices at conferences, in seminars and publications, and in conjunction with research at the international level

We hope that this information will prove useful in the follow-up activities related to gender mainstreaming in municipalities and the development of future exchanges in this area. These matters are essential to improving the quality of life of citizens in the 21 century. We invite you to consult the online forum of exchanges which contains more detailed information on the contributions made by participants (www.femmesetvilles.org/networks) and visit our website for how to obtain more information on our activities and achievements to date (www.femmesetvilles.org).

# Objectives

The website www.womenandcities.org/networks was created to facilitate and encourage exchanges between various stakeholders of the four networking sessions. The website was organized around the theme "Towards Women Inclusive Cities. Safe and Healthy Cities for Women: Sustainable Partnerships for Local Action. Exchanges were based on concrete practices of partnerships for women's safety, and on integrating a gender approach in the management of cities.

The site also served to gather and disseminate information on: WUF III, including the programme of activities, the contributions of invited speakers in the four networking sessions, and the partners of Women and Cities International involved in the implementation of activities related to the participation of women in urban governance and equality between women and men.

Inspired by Habitat Jam, the online forum was aimed to facilitate exchanges between participants at the sessions in Vancouver and with other participants concerned with the highlighted themes, with the aim to consolidate international exchanges for future action.

Many forum participants became members of Women and Cities International following their participation in these exchanges.

# A Pilot Initiative

The site was developed with the programme 'free', and new and more convivial technologies such as TikiWiki, which allows authorised users to make direct modifications to published texts on-line.

In addition, the publication of reference documents in three languages (English, French and Spanish) had previously limited the plain use of this function, so it was very interesting to work with this programme and to be exposed to group texts in the same language. The content of the website was developed by Ms. Anne Michaud, Expert Advisor, with the technical assistance of Mr. Fabian Rodriguez, Consultant on Free Programmes, and the technical support of Ms. Josée Laplace, communications officer. Board members

of Women and Cities International also made contributions throughout the test phases, and served as moderators throughout the four weeks of exchanges.

The organisation CISCA (Argentina) kindly provided translation services for the texts on the Spanish website. In addition, they acted as moderators for Hispanophone exchanges throughout the duration of the forum in collaboration with partners from other participating countries in the programme 'safer cities for women = safer cities for everyone'.

It must be noted that from the start the the greatest participation in the oline discussion came from individuals from a number of countries in Latin America. This observation was also noted in the follow-up to Habitat Jam. Hispanophone participants also used the forum to exchange contacts for future collaborations.

# Problems Encountered and Solutions Sought

The main problems that required technical support were related to the functions 'how to register' and the passwords. In all cases, once reported to the consultant, this problem was resolved. Another problem occurred when the contributors directly entered long messages, which sometimes resulted in the user being disconnected from the site during certain periods, and sometimes resulted in the loss of certain information. This problem was also corrected following consultation. The suggestion to allow for attached files for long texts to be added to the site was adopted, and later followed up by certain participants.

The site of the forum exceeded its fixed objective for assembly and operation (from the start there were around 30 participants). The Technical Advisor recommended that the site www.womenandcities.org/networks be used as an example of a technical tool that could be harnessed by non-profit organisations and women's groups to easily facilitate exchange of knowledge and practices in the field, networking, and organizational development.

# The Themes of the Forum

Four introductory texts, presenting each theme of the networking workshops, were written, translated, and published on the website in all three languages (French, English Spanish) to ensure the greatest possible participation. To ensure feasibility, participants were invited to respond to questions in their own language. Moderators of the discussion forums were responsible for animating the exchanges in each of the languages.

The introductory texts to each of the online forums included the objectives of the Vancouver Session and the expected results, in addition to several questions for participants to respond to.

The website function also allowed participants to attach documents to each of their messages, and many documents were attached to this created section, for documentation that registered participants could consult with.

In April 2006, communications produced in three languages were sent to a diverse network of partners. The on-line exchanges began in May 2006 on the following themes:

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| May 8-12 | Develop a Model: Partnerships for Equality in Large Cities |
| May 15-19 | Sustainable Community- Government Partnerships on Gendered Violence |
| May 22 – 26 | Gender Mainstreaming and Local Governance |
| May 29 to June 2 | Knowledge Networks for Women' Health and Safety |

# Participation

Thanks to a wide diffusion of communications, **195** persons registered to participate in this forum. Women and Cities International was able to expand their network of individuals and organisations to follow up with for future activities. Registrations covered **22** countries spanning five continents, with strong participation from various countries

of Latin America. Website statistics reveal that participants made around 160 contributions to the site, and readers consulted the messages (with **2 765** visits) (Date: July 19, 2006). The nature of the forum contributions was both rich and diverse: this can be seen in the number of practices and real experiences highlighted with regard to issues such as: partnerships between women's groups and local decision makers, statistics and research results, description of mechanisms in place in certain cities, which Latin Americans refer to as 'architecture of gender.' The importance of exchanging knowledge and practices in this area was reaffirmed. 'Women' or equality between the sexes in the structure of the municipality, 'women' commissions composed of civil society, and citizen participation activities, (participatory budgets) were significant themes. Finally, many organisations and participants exchanged their contacts throughout the forum to communicate directly with each other following the on-line discussions.

Despite the specificity of each theme, the interventions were often linked to one another, confirming the direct links between questions related to women's safety and health and the structures and mechanisms that need to be in place in municipal administrations.

The synthesis of contributions is based on the four themes discussed during the four weeks in May 2006.

### WEEK 1
### DEVELOP A MODEL: PARTNERSHIPS FOR EQUALITY IN BIG CITIES

Twenty messages were posted on this theme during the first week of the forum, eliciting **492** consultations. From the start, the participants published general texts which documented their local experience. Participants were also invited to document their practices in relation to the model developed in 'A city for women = the role of municipalities in equality between women and men'. [1]

1. Publication of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2004 (Available in French, English and Spanish).

**WEEK 2**
**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY- GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS ON GENDERED VIOLENCE**
More than **80** messages were posted on this theme, which was the most popular, receiving **1 280** consultations.

**WEEK 3**
**GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE**
This theme elicited more than **20** messages and **602** consultations.

**WEEK 4**
**KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY**
**38** messages and **91** consultations were posted on this theme.

**KEY POINTS AND SUMMARY OF EXCHANGES**

The main objective is the validation of elements of the model proposed on the theme **partnerships for equality in large cities**. The participants made additional refinements and offered examples throughout each of the forums.

# 1. Role of supra local levels of governments

The World Declaration of *IULA* **on women and local government** was used by local authorities in many cities to support a policy orientation of gender equality. The support of UNIFEM Latin America towards projects on women and local governance was often highlighted in the discussions. National laws on equality or prohibiting violence against women (Spain) were regarded as useful when they were connected with adequate resources as well as an orientation in support of gender equality at the municipal level. It was also noted that the support of international cooperation agencies that fund training projects for managers on equality and a gender approach (Medellin, Colombia) are very much needed and extremely useful. In Chile, one suggestion was the creation of national fund to support local projects. Many participants highlighted the necessity to undertake comparative studies between cities that have implemented diverse mechanisms for equality,

and for international organisations (foundations, national and international associations of cities, international networks, UN agencies, etc.) to support these programmes.

A key problem highlighted in the discussions was the lack of coherence between different levels of government, which can affect the effectiveness of local action (Durban, South Africa). Also, it was noted that national programmes must respect and support local action.

# 2. Adopting local policies on equality between women and men

A key point highlighted in the on-line discussion was the significance of the support of local officials for the adoption of formal policies in the long term (across diverse administrations), such as policies on equality and plans of action. In Latin America, the existence of equality of opportunities plans facilitates the integration of a gender approach in the diverse sectors and activities of local government (eg. Bogotá, Colombia). Participants stressed that policies on equality must be developed in collaboration with women's groups. The creation of commissions such as 'Women and Cities' among others have worked towards this objective. (Levis, Quebec).

The issue of violence against women and security appears to be a priority in many cities. However these policies must also be applied at the neighbourhood level, as in the city of Bogotá which created units for women's rights and the transformation of gender relations in each of its 20 districts which integrate a gender approach with local development plans. The creation of a school to train managers, with the support of universities and specialized NGOs on women's rights and the integration of a gender approach, can follow from the adoption of equality policies. In many instances, that policies on equality often were not allocated the necessary resources for implementation, monitoring or evaluation and that this was a significant barrier.

3. Creating an office on 'Women' or 'Equality' within the structure of the municipality
4. Integrating a gender approach: methods and tools
5. Importance of partnership between women's groups and municipalities

# 3. Creating an office on 'Women' or 'Equality' within the structure of the municipality

The discussion confirmed the necessity and importance of implementing Offices of *«Women»* and a transversal integrative conception of gender in the municipal structure, for example 'Women's Spaces' in the cities of Quito, Buenos Aires, Mendoza and Rosario, 'Metro Mujer' in Medellin, and 'Women and Gender' in Bogotá- a city that has also created local units in 20 neighbourhoods. Offices or observatories on equality were created in France, and deputy mayors had responsibility for these issues (Paris, France). Participants once again highlighted the need for equality plans to be made in partnership with women's groups and civil society. Participants noted that the strength of these plans is often linked to sufficient resources being allocated to them, in addition to their positioning within the municipal structure so that they are seen as credible and likely to have a real impact, and not simply a symbolic one.

# 4. Integrating a gender approach: methods and tools

The term 'architecture of gender' appeared in the contributions from Peru. Political support is necessary to put in place new ways to integrate a gender approach in the municipal administration. One participant noted the importance of providing access to sex disaggregated statistics to provide a methodological base, and of cities voting on resolutions to include a sex variable in all of its databases and statistical documents so that a gender analysis would inform decision-making (Levis, Quebec).

A concern highlighted in the discussion was that transversal integration (gender mainstreaming) may actually translate into the dilution of questions addressing women. In particular, the following were noted: the tension between the maintenance of policies and programmes specific to women

and integrative action within a gender approach, and the appropriateness of the term 'gender' which is difficult to convey in Spanish and French. Many participants also stated the importance of choosing priority themes and demonstrable results to ensure the monitoring of the plan of action. They mentioned the need to establish international exchanges on training tools and processes on a gender approach and to reinforce capacities (empowerment), information and awareness, participatory budgets, the development of local policies, strategies on urban safety and the promotion of citizen participation. All of these were considered essential components of the method. The objective is to ensure the integration of gender in the orientations of the city, like the city of Quito (Ecuador) which approved a social and economic development plan that integrated gender.

# 5. Importance of partnership between women's groups and municipalities

The importance of partnerships between women's groups and municipalities was highlighted again and again in the online discussion. Local government was sometimes regarded as the only stable level of government (Ecuador). In addition, it seemed to provide an opening for opportunities to connect with powerful decision-makers that was not available elsewhere.
Main functions of the municipality identified were:
- Departments of health (including both social and psychological interventions). Education on rights and sexual and reproductive health is fundamental, especially in the context of HIV (Peru). Domestic violence also falls within this framework and can allow for links to be made between private violence and insecurity in public spaces, intervention among women, informing them of their rights so that they can claim these rights and exercise their citizenship (particularly displaced women and immigrant women)
- Departments of social and economic development
- Departments of education, culture and recreation
- Community safety plans in neighbourhoods, sometimes linked to police services
- Participatory budgets

5. Importance of partnership between women's groups and municipalities
6. The Support and Recognition of the Autonomy of Women's Groups
7. Citizen Participation

In many cases, women's groups have contracts or funding to intervene in these different areas, particularly around women, their children, and youth. One of the main challenges is changing the mentality of a masculinist culture. This change can be made through knowledge and through initiatives that promote women exercising their citizenship rights. Education and awareness through an 'empowerment' perspective are the avenues envisaged. It is also necessary to work with schools and communities, using a holistic approach to health (physical, mental, and psychic), to support access of women to health and safety.

ß One of the principal challenges of partnerships between municipalities and women's organizations is the lack of financial and human resources of women's groups but also the lack of resources for municipal activities. Partnerships are necessary but require time and resources, which can be especially challenging for small organizations (Victoria, Australia). The following are a list of some of the main conditions of partnerships noted in the online discussions: to have common goals, to establish trust, to agree on the values and principles which guide action, to make time to do the agreed upon work, to encourage the contribution of a maximum of participants,to establish and maintain good communication between members, and to develop tools to resolve conflicts.

# 6. The Support and Recognition of the Autonomy of Women's Groups

The need to support and recognize the autonomy of women's groups puts into question traditional ways of arriving at decisions. The examples of community solidarity (cohesiveness) initiated by women in deprived (underserved) neighbourhoods (Alto Hospicio) following the murders of young women illustrates the capacity at the local level. Action must bring together Mother's Centres

and women who have a more traditional vision of family and this action could be supported by contracts or other funding arrangements. Finally, having managers that are open to new practices is necessary. In five cities in Colombia, violence and health are the two priorities in the plans of action on equality of the sexes.

# 7. Citizen Participation

Participation is identified as one of the key elements of local democracy. One of the main challenges is to ensure the participation of women in activities such as public consultations and participatory budgets. Such participation is limited by the realities facing women, and in particular those women who are immigrants, who are displaced persons, who experience diverse forms of violence and abuse, who are infected with HIV, who are heads of single parent families, who are Indigenous, who are disabled, and so on. Vulnerability and social exclusion are central obstacles to women's participation in matters related to their safety and health. (For example, in Colombia, 70% of the displaced persons that are at risk of abuse and violence are women and their children). Exclusion can often hinder the trust and solidarity required for the viability of communities, and in order to reinforce the capacity of women, obstacles to participation must be reduced by tackling the systemic forms of discrimination that women often confront.

# 8. Women's Safety

Women's safety and access to public services such as public transit must take into account a horizontal approach and not marginalize questions related to the place of women in the daily life of cities. A suggestion was made to implement urban observatories on violence against women. Such a project has have been developed in the State of Victoria in Australia to develop policies and tools on prevention in four cities.

Another suggestion was to implement proven strategies from elsewhere), such as public awareness campaigns (Montreal, Quebec, and principles of safety management and design in public places, in city programmes to combat violence against women (Rosario, Argentina). New Delhi also has conducted a series of safety audits (adapted from METRAC, Toronto, Canada), and has developed local partnerships.

Groups of women collaborating with 'Women's Spaces' or with city programmes on citizen safety and activities noted that these are all achieved through the support and solidarity of the community committed to improving the situation. A recommendation was made to formalize informal partnerships where these exist (Rosario, Argentina). It was mentioned that the training of police on gender-based violence is essential. While the mobilization of the population is a challenge, it was agreed that partnerships are ways to press forward on common responsibilities.

Activities related to prevention, protection, and restitution were regarded by participants as necessary, especially in countries facing civil wars or wars against terrorism. Participants also expressed the need to develop tools to reinforce the capacities of women to exercise their citizenship, and to create networks and places of healing. In particular, arts-based and nature-based techniques, and alternative approaches to physical and mental health were highlighted as measures for healing and for reinforcing the capacities of women. National and international programmes to develop these practices are seen as having a vital role to play in providing support for local initiatives. Finally, participants discussed the important role of the media in creating awareness (eg. a major study in France on violence against women was broadly disseminated).

# 9. International Exchanges of Practices and Perspectives

The importance of exchanges on tools and methods of intervention on women's safety was highlighted as was the significance of the 1st International Seminar on Women's Safety (Montreal, 2002). Guides and tools developed in Quebec and in Canada were translated, adapted, and diffused within the framework of the programme safer cities for women, supported by UNIFEM in many countries of Latin America. One contributor noted the support of a programme on international cooperation (Germany) for training municipal personnel. Many propositions were made on the interest of supporting the development of local equality policies and the on the need for comparative initiatives between cities, such as the one piloted in Rosario (Argentina) and Bogotá (Colombia). We hope to share tools on empowerment, positive action, and to mobilize those women who are most excluded. We hope to share information on upcoming national and international conferences, new publications and the latest research.