

**WUF3:
World Urban Forum,
UN Habitat.
Vancouver
19-23 June 2006**



Summary

The World Urban Forum was informative, inspiring and encouraging. It affirmed to me that politics matters because getting your collective voice on an issue heard and responded to is essential for real change. UN Habitat has a global agenda for change, articulated through the Millennium Development Goals. It was apparent from the WUF that there has not been significant progress towards these goals in all countries. Where there has been progress it has been due to political will to match sound policy direction.

The challenge for us in Loddon Campaspe is to be able to identify our problems and also solutions for these problems, based on meaningful connections with grassroots organisations and groups. This must be followed by achieving the political support and will for action. Only then will we have the resources and sanctions for change to reduce sexual assault and violence against women and children. Participating in the WUF provided me with more insight into how to foster the political support and what some of the solutions we need might look like. My report on the WUF is structured around the answers to the following questions:

- What is the WUF?
- Why was I there?
- What did I do?
- What did I learn?
- What information was relevant to the Gender, Local Government and Violence Prevention project?
- What are some specific challenges for CASA ?

What is the WUF?

The World Urban Forum was organised and convened by the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT). It is a non-legislative technical forum in which experts can exchange views in the years when the governing

council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme does not meet. This gives it the capacity to act as an advisory body to the Executive Director of UN HABITAT.

The theme of the Forum was "Our Future: Sustainable Cities – Turning Ideas Into Action. This was explored through six dialogues on the sub themes of:

- * Social Inclusion and Cohesion
- * Partnership and Finance
- * Urban Growth and the Environment

There were approximately 10,000 participants at the WUF3 as well as many more who participated on line through Habitat Jam and a series of blogs and other online discussions prior to the Forum. Participants came from over 100 countries and included Ministers, mayors, academics, community based organisations, federations of non-government organisations, the private sector and interested individuals. In addition to the dialogues there were plenary sessions, over 160 networking events, caucus meetings, special sessions, 13 roundtables, training events and side events such as other conferences and satellite events.

For more information go to: www.unhabitat.org/ or www.wuf3-fum3.ca

UNITED
NATIONS

United Nations Human Settlements
Program (UN-HABITAT)

**WORLD URBAN FORUM 3:
Our Future: Sustainable Cities –Turning
Ideas Into Action**

**Sub theme 1: Social
Inclusion and
Cohesion**

- Achieving Millennium Development Goals: Slum upgrading and affordable housing
- Public Engagement – The Inclusive Approach

**Sub theme 2:
Partnership and
Finance**

- Municipal Finance: Innovation and Collaboration
- Urban Safety and Security: Taking Responsibility

**Sub theme 3: Urban
Growth and the
Environment**

- The Shape of Cities: urban Planning and Management
- Energy: Local Action, Global Impact

Diagram representing the organisational context of the WUF 3 and the themes of the Forum.

Why was I there?

I attended the forum in my capacity as Manager of the Centre Against Sexual Assault Loddon Campaspe Region (LC CASA), an agency that is participating in a three year research project entitled "Gender, Local Governance, and Violence Prevention: Making the Links". The project is funded by the Australian Research Council as a three year Linkage Project (2006-2008) between the University of Melbourne and the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). The following information is taken from the project overview written by Dr Carolyn Whitzman:

"This research project will develop Australian local government policy that can take an integrated approach to violence prevention in both public and private space, using a gender mainstreaming process and a community-government partnership model. We will analyse current local government community safety policies in the light of international good practice on violence prevention, and work with four local government/agency partnerships in Victoria to develop and evaluate integrated violence prevention programs. Lessons from these case studies will inform training materials and workshops for local government officials, community agencies, urban planners and health professionals in the final phase of the project.

This project is part of a set of international projects linked by an organization called Women in Cities International. The projects arise from the concern that research and public policy aiming to reduce violence in the public and private realms is presently disconnected as are understandings of public and domestic violence. The international projects, in Canada, Africa, Latin America/Caribbean, Europe, and Asia, also share a common analysis, whereby violence and fear of violence is seen as a major factor preventing the full participation of citizens, particularly women, in public life. The challenge is to create safer physical, social, and institutional environments, promote full participation in community life, pursue partnerships between community organizations and local governments, involve the full diversity of residents in local decision-making processes, and evaluate the impact of policies and programs. At the international level, we are also working with the Huairou Commission on Women, Homes and Communities, the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime and the UN-Habitat Safer Cities Program. "(Whitzman,2006)

There are four local governments participating in the project, each linked with a community organisation. In our case, the COGB has nominated the Safe City Forum to auspice the project. LC CASA is represented at this forum. The Shire of Loddon has since joined as the fourth local government, bringing a rural perspective. Project funding allowed for each community organisation representative to attend the World Urban Forum as an opportunity to meet with women from the Huairou Commission , Women in Cities International and participants from similar projects in Canada supported through the Office for Status of Women Canada.

What did I do?

The WUF program was huge. My session choice was determined by the program of activities organised by Women In Cities International (WICI) and partners during World Urban Forum 3. I managed to attend a few other events on the general WUF program as well.

Monday 19th

- Greeting and orientation by WICI
- Opening ceremony and plenary
- Women's Roundtable

Tuesday 20th

- Women's caucus
- Plenary session: Social Inclusion and Cohesion
- Meeting for SWC partnership projects
- Networking session: Sustainable Community Government Partnerships on Gendered Violence Prevention
- Networking session: Life in the urban landscape: a new urban governance: Local leadership and community involvement
- Women's reception

Wednesday 21st

- Meeting with SWC pilot site project managers and participants
- Networking event: Gender mainstreaming and local governance
- Networking event: Participatory budgeting: building participatory democracy and/or improving municipal finance
- Earth: world urban festival

Thursday 22nd

- Exposition of information
- Networking event: Knowledge networks for women's health and safety
- Women In Cities International AGM

Friday 23rd

- Closing session and ceremony

I also visited the Vancouver Rape Relief Centre on the Friday before the Forum commenced. I met several staff and volunteers and had a three hour conversation with one of the members who has been working in the sexual assault field in Canada since 1973. They provided me with a range of information and resources, as well as some challenges to the model of our service provision at LC CASA.

What did I learn?

This was my first experience in participating in a United Nations event. While I am accustomed to thinking upwards through the

layers of local, regional, state, national and international, this was the first time I was part of something with such a global perspective. In many ways the governance and communication issues the UN faces are similar to those in any partnership that includes civil society, government and the private sector. The structure seems to be very complex and there are real challenges for grassroots organisations to have a serious place in discussions. Many groups and sectors used the Forum to highlight their particular concerns with UN structures and responses. One of these was a push from the women's caucus to establish an autonomous women's agency at UN level, similar to UNICEF. Figures were presented to show the current lack of structured mechanisms for women's voices to be part of UN decision making. Some of these processes highlighted to me the need to be politically astute and well organised through mechanisms such as caucuses in order to get messages into the right arenas and forums.

The Grassroots Women's International Academy met for a week prior to the WUF 3 so that they were able to present a set of actionable ideas to the WUF3 which linked in with the themes for the Forum. They were seeking ways to scale up grassroots women's perspectives and leadership in a global agenda that strengthens our cities and poor neighbourhoods. They mentioned new concepts to me such as gender costing and participatory budgeting.

Another new term for me was the notion of gender mainstreaming. This does not mean losing women's voices and issues by having them absorbed into mainstream debates but rather ensuring that gender is a regular consideration and agenda item in any development, process or debate.

I was struck by many similarities between Canada and Australia

- Opportunities for women created through progressive governments eroded under more recent conservative administrations
- Impact of neo-liberal policies on community sector competing for scarce resources
- Challenges of distances to cover in providing and accessing services
- Similar tensions and opportunities for local governments to unite at regional and sub regional level within provincial (state) boundaries.
- Very affluent majority and noticeably poor minority
- Genuine attempts to ensure civic participation and sustainable development
- Struggles with including and responding to aboriginal communities

- Large CALD populations with distinct needs and identities in urban settings.

With representatives and speakers from Europe, North America, Asia, Africa and South America (limited Arab presence and also very limited Australian presence) the divide between north and south (developed and developing countries) was sometimes very apparent, particularly as we were in the setting of such a beautiful, clean and very affluent city. However we are all struggling with the same issues, just on different scales and with different combinations of political, cultural and economic constraints in place. There are opportunities to learn from city officials in a poor area of Ho Chi Minh City who have developed a child focussed way of consulting, planning and improving services. We can learn how South American women or African women have found ways to increase their participation in local governments, just as Canadian and Australian women use similar approaches.

The one presentation that stuck me as totally incongruous was by the Secretary of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Government of the United States of America. His government's policy is premised on the belief that home ownership is the key to financial security by providing a path out of dependency. They are aiming for an ownership society and therefore structure government interventions to increase access to home ownership by ensuring discrimination does not restrict people from purchasing homes. They also provide grants for start up costs and are working with Habitat for Humanity. The policy seemed to be separate from a reality that there is often more to homeless than a lack of money to buy a house. Issues like long term unemployment and social exclusion seemed to be overlooked.

Information relevant for the Gender, Local Government and Violence Prevention project in Bendigo and Loddon

The ideas mentioned by the Grassroots women are applicable in Loddon Campaspe in community development, community strengthening, neighbourhood renewal and health promotion activities that are either government driven or developed from a grassroots level.

E.g.

- Ensure opportunities for grassroots groups to own and operate public space to ensure sustainable participation in civic life
- Undertake ongoing community to community peer learning exchanges to reduce reliance on high paid officials

One of the main purposes for attending the WUF3 was to find out more about Women in Cities International (WICI) and in particular some WICI initiated projects in Canada supported by Status of Women Canada (SWC).

WICI was formed at a conference in Montreal in 2001 by a group of women interested in municipal governments and the role of local governments in safety. These women were aware of initiatives to develop more inclusive and safe cities for women and girls but these were often not linked into local government planning and activities.

WICI approached the SWC for funding to provide awards for projects promoting the safety of women and girls and noticed that not many of the programs that came to their attention had partnerships between local government and community based organisations. They have now identified six pilot sites that can demonstrate partnerships. The sites come together periodically to learn from each other and then apply and adapt ideas back in their environment. They are working to develop a guide for community based organisations to work with local government, highlighting the opportunities, challenges and the particularities and cultures of different organisations.

A brief summary of the six sites follows, based on my note-taking.

1. Williams Lake: Women's Contact Society

The goal was to develop safe havens for women. A successful strategy to get this onto the local government agenda was to reframe the issue of woman abuse in terms of current local government concern and pressures on police costs and car thefts. Once the woman abuse statistics were compared to these issues, city officials could see the magnitude of the problem and wanted to respond. There have been three phases in the response:

- Conduct a women's safety assessment. This involved engagement with organisations and data collection on crime stats etc. The Women's Contact Society was able to get public support for these assessments and surveys by accessing media support through the local government. The local government also supported this phase by covering photocopying costs for the surveys.
- Safety audits were conducted in four areas that had been identified through the safety assessment.
- Implementation phase: establishing the safe havens

2. Regina Aboriginal Women's Centre

The issue they are responding to is the high number of missing aboriginal women, many of whom have been found to have been violently abducted and assaulted. A taskforce was developed at the provincial level to build a specific homeless shelter for women (their vulnerability has been linked to the abductions). Another goal was to conduct another safety audit in ward six of the city taking into account the experiences of aboriginal women.

3. Peel Region

Peel region is a region in the province (state) of Ontario. It covers several local government areas. This project is more complex or sophisticated as it is about two well established networks working together with the provincial health department. The two networks, The Peel Committee Against Sexual Assault and the Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse have slightly overlapping memberships. They are similar to Primary Care Partnerships but with a more specific focus namely sexual assault and woman abuse. They have developed protocols for services in their region responding to sexual assault and woman abuse, they have developed media kits and a range of local projects. They are now focussing on working with the three mayors in their region. While all mayors are women and the majority of councillors are women, women's issues are still not on the agenda. They believe the local government planning for "Liveable Peel" with a 50 year outlook gives them a platform to work from.

4. Quebec

Women's services are focussing on:

- Employment opportunities for women
- Public education using funds from the province and a provincial committee with one woman representative from each of the 20 local governments in the province.
- Influencing the regional municipal strategic plan

5. Northern Quebec

An Inuit group of women now have funds to build an Inuit Women's wellness centre. They service 14 remote communities with main forms of transport between them either skidoo or jet. Local government has been one of the supporters in getting the centre established.

6. Prince Edward Island

The taskforce here has been led and initiated by the male mayor in response to the murder of a woman in Charlottetown in 2001.

The symbol for the campaign is a purple ribbon: there is a 5 foot high purple ribbon on the bell tower of the city. All city vehicles have the purple ribbon sticker. There are regular events and resources developed through the taskforce.

Discussions with these women highlighted a range of issues. In both Canada and Australia there are concerns with conservative politics that have buried women's issues under families and children departments. This can contribute towards the pathologising of women who have experienced abuse rather than realising it is a symptom of problems in our society which need to be addressed at a macro level.

There are real problems in keeping women's issues in the forefront of political agendas. How we frame the issue is critical, does the term feminist instantly alienate people? How do we manage the tension between selling out or simply being strategic? We need to get a message out without creating too many political enemies. Women's safety is a political issue, not just something to be addressed through public health or community services. It involves an inherent challenge to current power structures and values which of course will provoke resistance.

These problems and questions need to be considered in local (Bendigo and Loddon) context as well as Victorian and Commonwealth Government levels.

Specific challenges for CASA

My conversation with staff at the Vancouver Rape Relief Centre focussed on several questions and issues I have been thinking about at LC CASA:

- Have we become too domesticated and lost our political edge and independence?
- Why don't we seem to see events like Reclaim the Night as relevant anymore?
- Is our practice of providing individual therapy as the main focus of our work taking us away from other support and advocacy work we should be doing?
- Why can't we offer a more holistic response to women which includes a safe place they can stay in a supportive environment?
- Are we contributing to the pathologising of abuse by seeing it as something that requires treatment?
- How do we reverse the trend of professionalising our centres against sexual assault so that victim/survivors and other

volunteers can play a more significant part of the activities of the organisation?

- Are there distinct styles of management relevant for a feminist organisation?
- Can a collective structure function effectively in this complex service and political environment?
- To what extent are we professionals with boundaries around the distinction between our personal and professional lives?
- Is it possible to have a serious and credible profile at a political and policy level while overtly challenging so much of our dominant culture?
- Given that sexual assault is a gendered crime, should we move our focus back to being a service for women run by women, with capacity to refer men and boys to other services that we support?

One of my observations when starting at CASA was the shift that had occurred over time from a fiery initial beginning with a reliance on volunteers (Hewitt and Worth) to becoming a highly professional organisation institutionalised within the service delivery framework of the Department of Human Services. Real gains have been made so that a government response to sexual assault is now considered core business.

There are some feminist service providers (Miles,2005) who maintain that, "the daily lives of feminist service is feminist activism." Others (McDonald,2005 Willats et al) are not so sure as they see that feminist services have been depoliticised by government neo-liberal agendas and managerialist approaches that focus on an individual response at the expense of wider advocacy work. Others (McFadden, 2005) are more scathing and refer to the feminist movement as being co-opted by a "clique of right wing divas" who have sold out the feminist agenda to the government via processes such as gender mainstreaming.

We need to continue to allow for links between the internal and social transformation processes our service can provide (Profit 2005, Willats, McDonald, 2005) and ensure that what are essentially community and social justice issues are not lost in a health focus with the treatment focus being paramount.

The following quotes from John McDonald's article, "Neo-liberalism and the pathologising of public issues: The displacement of feminist service models in domestic violence support services" highlights the context we find ourselves in for sexual assault just as much for domestic violence:

Central to feminist philosophy has been the commitment to link the personal to the political with services using their knowledge from their own service provision to build social action and community education programs to fight for structural change

The provision of government-funded domestic violence residential support services in Australia suggests a pathologising approach, which individualises the problem and strives to meet clients' therapeutic needs through case management. This is evident in the standard outcome measures currently used by SAAP-funded services. The use of these measures is partly attributable to the inherent methodological and ethical issues in evaluating programs of this nature. However, it is primarily driven by a dominant managerialist ideology that has depoliticised and clinicalised domestic violence. When domestic violence is pathologised, it becomes redefined as an individual problem and deflects attention away from gendered power structures.

So what are we doing at CASA?

1. Move the focus away from being so individualistic

The main focus of service provision is individual counselling supported by individual clinical supervision for staff. There is now a shift to move us away from an individualistic focus as we are about to start a supervision model which allows for one peer supervision session per month for staff and one individual supervision session. Groups have been run in the past but here has been a long break. This break is now over through the efforts of one of the C/As who has developed a co-facilitated model of the Reconnect group for women. This same C/A is interested in developing further group work options for women who access CASA.

2. Develop more financial autonomy and harness community support

Once we have sufficient structures in place to ensure continuity in coordinating daily service delivery, I will be able to focus more attention on developing alternative funding sources so that we are less reliant on DHS funding and have resources for the support, community awareness and advocacy we want to provide. This should include making greater use of the volunteers, including service users that want to support CASA.

3. Get our vision back and base our service provision and structures on that

The planning day in April 2006 was a necessary organisational response to the recent service review as we needed to have agreement on how to prioritise recommendations. Our response to these priorities can now be developed into the next operational plan for CASA. What we haven't had a chance to do is ask some of the deeper questions about why we are all part of CASA so we can

determine the best response we should have to sexual assault in Loddon Campaspe. This includes rethinking who CASA is and how these parts (Committee of Management, funders, staff, service users, members of the Association) all work together. This may well affect the nature of our service provision, taking into account the current funding service agreement, and the structures we have.

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Websites:

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www.unhabitat.org/

www.wuf3-fum3.ca

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