

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

8th Forum of the World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty

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‘Building Smart, Safe, Sustainable Cities

Contribution by Mary Robinson, President, MRFCJ

I would like to thank the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Naoise O Muiri for inviting me to speak at the 8th Forum of the World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty. It is a pleasure to share this platform with Michelle Bachelet of UN Women, Aisa Kirabo Kacyira of UN Habitat, and Tom Arnold of Concern. I was particularly pleased to hear that Dublin intends to be the first city in the developed world to become a member of UN Women’s *Safe Cities for Women Programme*. Girls’ and women’s empowerment remains one of the most obvious, achievable and transformative strategies we can take to tackle poverty and enable development. Ensuring that girls and women are safe in our cities is an important step in enabling them to be active participants in all aspects of city life; social, economic and political.

Many of us at this Forum can empathise with what UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said in April 2012: ‘Our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in cities.’

With up to 80% of the global population expected to reside in cities by 2050, according to figures from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), it is not surprising that cities have become the focus of international sustainability efforts and will be central to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Cities contribute to climate change with urban areas accounting for 50 per cent of all waste, generating 60-80 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions and consuming 75 per cent of natural resources. Developing world cities, which are growing much faster than their developed world counterparts, are particularly vulnerable to lack of resources, poverty, inequality and vulnerability to climate change. The impacts of climate change may negatively affect the infrastructure, worsen the access to basic urban services and unfavourably affect the quality of life in cities.

The city is possibly the most complex system we interact with, composed of political, social, and cultural systems. This complexity has distanced us from knowing our city, our place, from that essential part of the environment we live in. If we discuss the use of technology and sustainability in cities, one of the key aspects must be how to involve all citizens – using democratic

principles of accountability. A lot of innovation starts with the need to change something close to us. By re-thinking our urban environment we are also re-thinking our society, our economy, and our culture.

Professor Mark Dyer of TrinityHaus in Trinity College puts it well: “To understand their needs, citizens need to be engaged in a dialogue about their cities. Rather than perceiving inhabitants as the unquantifiable, ‘messy’ element that interferes with a clear planning process or public policies, their participation needs to be integrated in the design and implementation processes. Creating ownership means: (a) asking for / listening to people’s wants & needs; (b) educating them concerning options and innovation; (c) communicating developments effectively and seeking citizen input and feedback; and (c) finding methods of incorporating this understanding into solutions.”

Some groundbreaking work has been done in Belfast by the organisation, Participation and Practice of Rights, which has been commended recently by the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as representing best practice in making practical use locally of the international human rights system. Specifically it pointed to the work of the Belfast based Seven Towers Residents Group as an international best practice

example of using international human rights standards to make local change. I have visited groups in Belfast taking part in projects of Participation and Practice of Rights, and I can vouch for how it re-enforces human dignity, and the sense of being connected and respected in decision-making.

Across the island of Ireland, indeed across the globe, people are increasingly demanding ‘healthy’ democratic participation within the state. This is not some abstract political concept; it is about ensuring public decisions are taken on the basis of transparency, accountability and participation. It applies to 'big' questions like national taxation policies as much as it does, for example, to 'narrow' issues faced in the daily lives of residents from the Seven Towers in Belfast asserting their right to adequate housing. This type of ‘healthy’ relationship with the state is the basis for a sustainable democratic and economic fabric tomorrow. Its absence today is the promise that yesterday’s failures may be repeated tomorrow.

The outcome document, *The Future we Want*, of the United Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro last June acknowledged that, ‘if well planned and developed, including through integrated planning and management approaches, cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies’. At Rio+20, governments

committed to promoting ‘an integrated approach to planning and building sustainable cities and urban settlements, including through supporting local authorities, increasing public awareness and enhancing participation of urban residents, including the poor, in decision-making’. Governments also committed to promote sustainable development policies that support inclusive housing and social services; a safe and healthy living environment for all, particularly children, youth, women, elderly and disabled; affordable and sustainable transport and energy; promotion, protection and restoration of safe and green urban spaces; safe and clean drinking water and sanitation; healthy air quality; generation of decent jobs; and improved urban planning and slum upgrading. We have a long way to go before we reach many of these commitments.

While Rio+ 20 may have been weak in its outcomes, it did reaffirm the relevance and need for rights-based, inclusive and equitable sustainable development: development which encompasses in equal measure the social, economic and environment dimensions of human well-being. We did not manage to achieve this through the MDG or CSD processes so far, and we now have a window of opportunity to reframe development. Post 2015, I would like development to be people-centred, to protect human rights and to be inclusive and equitable. Those of you who have gathered here for this forum

are empowered not only to shape this new vision of development, but to deliver it – to make sure that the world our children and grandchildren inhabit is safe, bountiful and filled with opportunity. Development, from now on, also means building climate resilience of the poorest and reducing the planetary risks by moving to ecological patterns of production, consumption and re-use.

The sustainable development goals would frame development differently to the MDGs, they are for all countries, not just developing nations. By being inclusive, of all states and all people within states, the post 2015 development agenda can bring citizens, business and governments together in solidarity to address a shared set of goals. Giving voice, enabling active participation and ensuring measurement and accountability are all part of making this inclusiveness a reality. The SDGs are also different because they undertake from the outset to address all three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. Cities have been, and will continue to be, the engines of economic growth but we must ensure that economic considerations do not over-ride environmental and social concerns as they have in the past.

It is clear that we will need one global, integrated set of goals going forward. When I visit families and communities living with

the daily reality of poverty they see no divisions between the environment (access to water and soil to grow food), economics (ability to earn a living and access to credit) and social development (access to education, healthcare, information and decision making): all of these issues are linked, closely-related, part of the reason why they are poor, powerless, in ill-health or hungry. Our challenge is to understand these linkages in the same way that those experiencing them do, and to design responses that solve the closely related problems.

I call on the World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty to make sure that development post 2015 is rights-based development. This is something my colleagues and I strive for through climate justice; an approach which links human rights, climate change and development to achieve a people-centred response. Climate justice requires a multidisciplinary approach – thereby enabling linkages and avoiding siloes - and mirrors the three dimensions of sustainable development.

As you know, the impacts of climate change are contributing to the injustices vulnerable people and communities experience, particularly in relation to hunger and under nutrition. Climate change is a driver of food and nutrition insecurity, poverty, disease, conflict, insecurity and migration – as such it must be

addressed, with ambition, urgency and equity, as a precondition for sustainable development.

My friend, Sheela Patel, Chair of the Board of Shack/ Slum Dwellers International (SDI) describes well the particular problems of the informal sector in cities: ‘the global economy is producing more informal settlements, leading to increased inequity and lack of access to basic services. Lack of documentation exacerbates social injustice at times of disaster, as people who don’t have property title can’t access benefits. Evictions often happen in the name of safety, and again there is no redress for those who are invisible in the informal sector.’

Even though the percentage of urban populations that are living in slums declined between 1990 and 2010, as the developing world has rapidly urbanised, the proliferation of slums and informal settlements has reached gigantic proportions. According to the United Nations, by 2003, a billion people were living in slums, a figure that is likely to have increased significantly since the global economic collapse of 2008. More than 60% of all urban citizens in sub-Saharan Africa live in slums. Although the actual numbers of slum dwellers are higher in Asia than in sub-Saharan Africa the percentages are lower; ranging between 24-43%, while in Latin America and the Caribbean 27% of the urban population live in slums. Africa has the highest rates of city

population growth (3.3%), and urban populations are projected to increase from 373 million to 1.2 billion by 2050. Slum populations may increase by an additional 800 million inhabitants. The socio-economic divide is pervasive throughout cities of the developing world in particular but it is also a critical factor affecting cities in the developed world. Achieving scale in urban development policy and practice begins at the individual settlement level. When local authorities engage with informal settlement communities, residents become active partners in upgrading their built environment. When communities and authorities learn together and produce developmental outcomes together, they are able to reach many more communities than the top-down initiatives that some countries attempt. Further, when communities own the process of upgrading, they are able to ensure that it is sustainable and continues to grow over time.

A 2011 Report by UN Habitat indicates that the urban poor in developing countries will be hardest hit by the impacts of climate change. The impacts of climate change are exacerbating existing inequalities in access to resources and contributing to injustice. Those who have done least to cause the climate change problem are already suffering its impacts, but are learning to become climate resilient.

Let me cite two examples:

Residents of Uganda's slums are not strangers to severe flooding and landslides, which disrupt and destroy business, make roads impassable, decimate homes, overwhelm sanitation systems and spur outbreaks of cholera, malaria, dysentery, and diarrhea. Throughout the slums, homes and businesses are severely damaged during rainy periods, necessitating partial re-building multiple times per year. Yet the work of the Ugandan Slum Dwellers Federation clearly illustrates that when the urban poor are organised and informed about climate change, they can play a central role in mitigating its impact upon their environment. The Federation is a network of 343 community groups that save daily, work in partnership with local authorities, and mobilise their members to improve living conditions in slums. A Health and Hygiene Committee in each community is mobilising members and the wider community to dispose of waste thoughtfully and work with local authorities on municipal-wide initiatives. These initiatives make a visible difference in some of the largest slums, and greatly mitigate the risk of flooding by clearing drainages and encouraging residents to keep them litter-free. Community projects make briquettes from organic waste, recycle plastic waste, and reuse discarded materials to make crafts. In Jinja, the Federation is using innovative soil compressed interlocking brick technology to construct quality and weather resistant houses for members.

The Federation shares information gathered during citywide enumerations about waste management practices and sanitation services in each of its cities of operation with local authorities ensuring that targeted and effective strategies for climate change adaptation are jointly implemented.

Another good example of local participation is the Dampa Federation in the Philippines, a federation of 217 grassroots organisations with a membership of almost 80000 urban poor families representing almost half a million people. The Federation aims to provide solutions to basic urban poverty issues including appropriate and affordable housing; demolition and relocation; income generation and livelihood development and resilience building programmes.

Large areas of Manila, and neighbouring cities Queznon and Navotas, are reclaimed land and have seen significant development of high rise buildings in recent years. During the rainy season rainfall levels have become unpredictable with long sustained periods of heavy rain causing severe flooding in the cities' streets. Poor communities living along the banks of the cities' rivers and creeks are particularly vulnerable. This situation becomes more precarious as many families in Manila

are living in over-crowded conditions with three or four families frequently living in one house.

People living within the Parola compound of Manila have organised and held dialogues with the relevant government agencies. Together they are working to improve their resilience and adapt to climate change by building flood resistant housing and developing an early warning system for flooding, a system that is based on the local knowledge of older members of the community on flood prediction. Quick Response Teams trained to raise the alarm and get people to move to evacuation centres during times of extreme weather and disaster have been established. Alternative sources of income have been developed including the production of food in urban gardens.

As Mayors and senior officials of cities you have emphasised the importance of the focus on technology at this Forum, which I hope will illustrate ‘bottom up’ approaches to sustainability. Over fifty Global Stories of Hope will demonstrate how technology can make a difference, and I welcome the commitment of the cities represented in this Forum to work with each other to develop solutions to their urban challenges. My core message is that technology and urban planning need to be grounded in human rights and gender sensitive values. In this way they can actively enable transparency, accountability and participation by

the urban poor in promoting solutions which enhance human dignity.

Finally, I warmly congratulate Dublin City Council on having secured this 8th Forum for Dublin, and I wish it every success