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Partnerships between government and slum/shack dwellers' federations

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I. BACKGROUND

The text below is the keynote address by Lindiwe Sisulu, the South African Minister of Housing, to a conference organized by Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) and the government of South Africa's Department of Housing in Cape Town, 19–21 May 2006. This conference was organized to highlight the achievements of partnerships between governments and slum/shack dwellers' federations. The text is taken from the official text released by the Department of Housing, however at the conference, Ms Sisulu's speech went further, and she committed the equivalent of US\$ 40 million from national and provincial governments to support the house construction and upgrading work of this South African Federation of the Urban Poor in the coming years. Ms Sisulu also committed herself to promoting comparable partnerships between government and slum/shack dwellers federations throughout Africa through the Special Ministerial Conference of the African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development (AMCHUD). After the text of the keynote address, we include a paragraph from a subsequent speech by Ms Sisulu, which gives more details of the support her government will provide to the South African Federation of the Urban Poor.

The conference was attended by representatives from slum/shack/urban poor federations from 11 nations and the local NGOs that work with them.⁽¹⁾ It comprised many joint presentations by federation members and government staff of the work they were undertaking together, including:

- The Malawi Homeless People's Federation described the 220 homes they built when the government provided them with land, while the presentations by the Lilongwe city planner and a city councillor from Blantyre described how impressed they were with this achievement and how their attitude towards the federation had changed. The presentation by the Malawi Minister of Housing talked of his ministry's partnership with the Malawi federation, and he promised that 11,000 land plots would be made available to the federation, in Lilongwe and Blantyre, to support its housing programme.
- The Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation and the support NGO, Dialogue on Shelter, described their productive partnerships with some local governments in Zimbabwe, despite the national policy

1. Argentina, Brazil, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

that has favoured massive evictions. This partnership was also described and endorsed by the city planner of Zimbabwe's second largest city, Bulawayo.

- The Namibian Shack Dwellers Federation described the support they have received both from national government and from local governments, including those of Windhoek (the capital and largest city) and Gobabis.
- The Ghanaian federation and the local support NGO, People's Dialogue, described the emerging partnership with city and national government, especially in Tema, a city of around 200,000 people that is close to Accra; this partnership was also described and endorsed by the government of Ghana.
- The Brazilian federation and the local support NGO, Interação, described how they were working with 11,000 families in six cities, with government and the private sector; this partnership was also described and warmly endorsed by the Brazilian government's Director of Housing from the Federal Ministry of Cities.
- A community leader from Mahila Milan (a federation of savings groups formed by women slum and pavement dwellers) and SPARC (the NGO that supports them) described the hundreds of community-designed and managed toilets built with support from city and national government; also the partnerships that had developed between community organizations and the police in Pune and Mumbai on policing in the slums.
- A representative of the Kenyan federation, Muungano wa Wanvijiji, and from Pamoja Trust (the NGO that works with the federation) talked of their partnerships with city and central governments with regard to regularizing land already occupied (this process is underway in 34 sites) and getting new land for those who have to be resettled (for instance, those living alongside railway tracks).
- The South African Federation of the Urban Poor's partnership with Durban city council was described both by federation members and staff from Durban government, including work on community toilets and household enumerations in informal settlements.

II. TEXT OF KEYNOTE ADDRESS

"I accepted the honour of opening this conference with a great deal of humility. Humility because I, who represent those who are seen to have plenty, have to stand here in front of you, who represent the poorest of the poor, and pretend that I have some words of wisdom to impart to you. But I stand here with pride because you have chosen my government as a partner in a cause that goes right to the heart of what we are and what we fought for, for all those years. For me, this can only mean an endorsement of your confidence in us, that with us, through us, your ideals can be achieved. I welcome your confidence, for we in turn will use it to spur ourselves on to ensure that our common goals are realized. It is an honour for us to be counted on as one of the champions of the poorest of the poor.

The great revolutions of modern times have, apart from the influences of technological advances and progress, been the result often of the kind of progressive action that found its source in the

grassroots. Such has been the influence and the power of the grassroots in the present time that none who held political power could on their own define and occupy the political space that is critical to issues of sustainable development. We are all one human force, inexorably drawn to the ideal that until all are free, free from the shackles of poverty, none of us is free. Because, by some strange reason, we are bound to this universe together. There is some logic in this contradiction. If we are to move forward – progress – our collective pace will be determined by the slowest, in this case the lowest. The great irony of our time! The future of our civilization rests on how we determine our way forward. We shall not be identified as the civilization of great poverty; that cannot define us, we who are proud inventors of everything that has culminated in our launching into space, to seek answers about what lies beyond. Perhaps, this is a justifiable deflection, as we remain unable to solve problems that lie at our feet.

Intellectually one of the best periods of recorded history, but morally very wanting. The consciousness of the rich closed to the poverty that surrounds them. In convening this conference, Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and the (South African) Federation of the Urban Poor give us reason to have greater confidence that the common struggle we share against homelessness will indeed achieve its greater results during our own lifetime. No moment in the history of human society has lent itself to this possibility other than ours. I have just returned from a trip to India – a most valuable learning experience. I did not get to see the Taj Mahal, but what I experienced was more valuable than the Taj. I went to see to see the pavement dwellers of Mumbai, living in the most shocking conditions on the edge of society – having lived that way all their lives. But a people with hope. An entrepreneurial people taught me about the value of saving and the spirit that drives them to ensure that they do provide a house for their families. A people determined that they will do their bit to restore their dignity. I yearn for that spirit here. A spirit that says this is our government – how can we help it in this huge challenge to provide housing? What can I – sitting in a shack house – do to help to ensure that I too have a house? We need to infuse this in our people. We were once a proud people who moved heaven and earth and did the impossible. The present challenge is within our power to resolve. In India, I also had a tour of projects that had been undertaken by slum dwellers, projects that demonstrated resourcefulness, originality and innovation. They vindicated the belief I had always had that if government were to accelerate the delivery of housing then the complete involvement of the poor needed to receive full support.

I then began to reflect on the 2005 World Summit outcome that committed governments to specific actions in relation to slum prevention and slum upgrading. Key among the resolutions was the commitment to increase resources for housing and the related infrastructure. Gandhi believed that there was an innate goodness in human nature, which at all times is able to perceive the truth as though by instinct. We are a people with a very proud history, proud of what we can do for ourselves. My worry right now is that this proud heritage is dissipating, now that we have our own government, the government of the poorest of the poor, the disadvantaged. And

we have, ourselves, to believe that the government will provide. I have been very attracted by the founding ethos of Shack Dwellers International: that no matter how disadvantaged, we can still do it ourselves, that in fact it is nobler if we do it ourselves. Help me plant this into the heart of every disadvantaged South African. Help me inspire them to stand up. At the Special Ministerial Conference of the African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development (AMCHUD) that we held in Nairobi a month ago, resolutions were passed to affect the outcomes of the World Summit by focusing governments on the resourcefulness of the poor. Having ourselves placed the issue of slum prevention and slum upgrading at the top of the international agenda, we resolved not only to prevent new slum formations but also to look into the existing policies, legal, institutional and regulatory frameworks that hinder our ability to deal with slum formation, in ways that affirm and strengthen our relationship with the poor. We therefore resolved to review the frameworks that exist, to enable an environment where the full capacities of community organizations and non-governmental organizations are utilized. In practice, among other things, this will mean the promotion of community-led development processes in slum prevention and slum upgrading, and the identification of ways to assist initiatives relating to savings.

I am gratified that the relation we have cultivated with you has already enabled us to implement some of these resolutions. The (South African) Homeless People's Federation, that we had interactions with in 2004, enabled us to make this start. The conference cements the relationship, enabling us to act together at the international level. It is my hope that such collaboration will help encourage a fundamental rethinking of issues connected with sustainable development and the achievement, specifically, of the Millennium Development Goals. It is a great contradiction of our times, in my view, that while on the one hand we correctly extol the virtues of economic progress and political stability, on the other hand, we remain unable to expend and invest sufficient resources to achieve those outcomes.

I have had occasion to look back and assess the damage done to all of us in this country by the policies of inequality. It has cost us dearly. If 80 years ago we had all progressed along the same path, I leave you to imagine where this country would be today. We held back on the development of a segment of our society and we live with those consequences. The steps that we have taken to support and assist initiatives from the Slum Dwellers International and (South African) Federation of the Urban Poor recognize this singular truth. As government, we recognize that apart from the market mechanism, other initiatives and ways that have their origins in the people who make up our cities and towns exist. This is the experience that yet again, I was exposed to when again I visited Thailand last year. I was exposed to a unique programme that forms partnerships between communities, government and other stakeholders in identifying and developing suitable land for housing. This was a partnership to ensure that communities were located in the most opportune locations, where their actual needs could be addressed in a sustainable manner.⁽²⁾ We are thus committed to learn through practical

2. Minister Sisulu visited the Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) and its Baan Mankong (secure tenure) programme. For more details of this programme, see Boonyabantha, Somsook (2005), "Baan Mankong: going to scale with 'slum' and squatter upgrading in Thailand", *Environment & Urbanization* Vol 17, No 1, April, pages 21-46.

3. This was an acknowledgement of the work of Jockin Arputham, President of Slum/Shack Dwellers International, who has visited South Africa some 50 times to support and work with the South African Federation of the Urban Poor.

4. For the full text, see <http://www.housing.gov.za/>; also see <http://www.sdinet.org/bulletins/b16.htm>.

experience and to enhance our programmes to ensure that community needs are achieved. And I thus welcome the proposed structured cooperation arrangement that will be established during the conference for the implementation of projects linked to policy and strategy enhancement. The conference is a unique opportunity for all of us to learn how partnerships with civil society are formed and should operate. I would like to congratulate all of you for the achievements that both individually and collectively you have made in advancing the cause of slum dwellers. Finally, Jockin, I do not know what to say to you.⁽³⁾ You remind me so much of my own father. You are beautiful in every single way! I thank you most sincerely.”

A speech by Minister Sisulu on the occasion of the Budget Vote 2006/2007 at the National Assembly in Cape Town on 24 May 2006 included the following:

“It was with a sense of real achievement and pride that we co-hosted the very successful Slum Dwellers conference, which ended at the weekend here in Cape Town, where we were able to forge a formal relationship with those communities whose daily lives are plagued by the elements, by insecurity and poverty. Together, we forged a new way of doing things and we have formed a partnership built on an understanding that we, each of us, have a responsibility toward changing the fortunes of the poor. It was a high point of our time in housing. The message is out – we are in this together. We have pledged a sum of R185 million, which represents 5,000 subsidies to the South African Federation, because in them we have found an ally that will help mobilize our beneficiary communities to understand that they have a responsibility, that they can take up arms against poverty and join government in this crusade, that it is in fact in their interests that they do this. Together, we can do it so much faster. At bottom, we need to create and emphasize a culture of joint responsibility and, equally importantly, inculcate a culture of saving.”⁽⁴⁾

REFERENCES

- Boonyabanacha, Somsook (2005), “Baan Mankong; going to scale with ‘slum’ and squatter upgrading in Thailand”, *Environment & Urbanization* Vol 17, No 1, April, pages 21–46. <http://www.housing.gov.za/>
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