The World Assembly of Inhabitants 2011

Lessons and proposals to build the global federation of organizations and urban social movements

The inhabitants at the opening march WSF Dakar 2011

Executive Report[*]

Background

Faced with the structural crisis resulting from the implementation of urban policies leaded by transnational capital, adding to the weight of the challenge, inhabitants' organisations and urban social movements have decided to take a decisive step in order to go beyond the declarations and to define strategies and collective actions that entail having a programme, a form of organisation and reinforcing alliances that guarantee success. Consequently, sharing the principles enshrined in the Charter of the WSF, the Charter of San Salvador, by the World Assembly of Inhabitants (Mexico, October 2000) and by the World Assembly of Citizens for solidarity and a responsible world (Lille, October 2001), after the remarkable success of the Call for Creation a Common Global Space of Solidarity for the Urban Social Movements and of the Declaration of Madrid (2008), signed by over 600 signatories from 42 countries, they decided to launch the World Assembly of Inhabitants proposition to be organized during the WSF 2011 in Dakar.

The idea, developed through a basic process favoured by the IAI, aims to reinforce the status of inhabitants in the fight for the right to housing and to the city, without frontiers, because the global crisis that affects inhabitants in poor neighbourhoods down to their very brick or bones is without frontiers.

The WAI supports the emergence of a new kind of inhabitant, well anchored in the local social fabric and very aware of the global challenge, capable of getting involved in the fight to defend the collective rights and responsibilities to be the co-builders and co-governors of the cities and not simply users-customers of the territories.

In order to do this, given the failure of the neo-liberal model that accounts for over a billion homeless or badly housed people, to which must be added the suffering of around 70 million people who each year are threatened or evicted, a new Urban Social Pact is proving to be unavoidable and this time it will be based on human and environmental rights. In other words, for "another world is possible".

---

[*]   *Draft (March 18 2011)*

The WAI process has been fuelled by different dynamics and in particular by the debate on the Right to the City and the mobilisation of the 'voiceless', who have emerged through the Urban Convergences at the Belem WSF, supported by all the relevant international networks involved in these issues (including HIC, Swedish Cooperative Centre for Latin America, COHRE, LOCOA, Dignity International, SELVIP, PPEHRC, Habitat for Humanity – Latin America, ENDA Third World, FNRU and No-Vox), the Forum of Local Authorities and certain universities.

The initiative was formulated by the Declaration approved at the Urban Social Forum (Rio de Janeiro, 2010) where the WAI Steering Committee was established, starting the process of creating regional and local Steering Committees, particularly at the Social Forum events (the United States SF in Detroit, the ESF in Istanbul and the ASF in Asunción) and other events on all continents and in many countries including Bangalore for Asia, Bangladesh, Senegal and Cameroon.

The Steering Committees are mainly responsible for the contents and format of the WAI and also for managing the calendar running up to Dakar and beyond. This responsibility includes the possibility of creating partnerships in order to encourage greater participation and dealing with the follow-up of this.

The WAI Promoter Committees held a meeting at the International Days for the Right to Housing event in Bobigny, France, October 2010, and were composed of representatives from the different networks (IAI, HIC, LOCOA, No-Vox) that ratified the WAI's convocation in Dakar, Senegal, during the WSF 2011, and assumed the responsibility of defining the tasks and commitments aiming to promote the WAI. Agreements were made on the central ideas of the debate, on characterisation and objectives, format, dissemination and promotion, resources and partnerships.

Goal

The goal of this initiative is to establish adequate housing conditions for all as well as a safe place to live in peace and dignity by strengthening the worldwide networking of inhabitants organisations as these are the most important actors in shaping their living environment and claiming human rights-based duties of the state.

Objectives

Specific operative objectives are:

• A significant number of authentic and mandated representatives of urban grassroots organisations from all over the world shall participate in the World Assembly of Inhabitants in Dakar and shall be able to make binding decisions on the future structure of an international networking of urban grassroots organisations.
• The representatives of urban grassroots organisations attending the World Assembly shall make decisions towards making an efficient joint strategy against the forced evictions as experienced in many countries.
• The representatives of urban grassroots organisations attending shall deliberate on preparing a worldwide campaign to create solidarity funds for self-managed social housing projects and participatory human settlement improvement that will be funded by the debt relief funds, among other things.

Development of the World Assembly of Inhabitants

The approval of the Dakar Declaration at Village des habitants

The Assembly took place with a certain number of initiatives, some of which were self-managed by the various networks and inhabitants' organisations, some were in collaboration (workshops and themed meetings) with various networks that offered to bring their themes to the WAI process, and some involved everyone (opening march and Assembly of the whole):

a) Operational meeting of the WAI Steering Committee in order to take stock of the current state of affairs, hear all suggestions and to organise the WAI agenda in co-ordination with the relevant networks (5th February).

b) The implementation of exchange and solidarity initiatives in the popular neighbourhoods of Dakar.

c) Participation in initiatives under the WSF:
  • the caravan organised by No-Vox, CADTM, IAI and others, that arrived in Dakar from various African countries
  • the 'inhabitants bloc' in the opening march on the 6th February
  • different initiatives (15 workshops, discussions, cultural initiatives, meetings) on the Day of Africa and the Diaspora (7th February) and in the form of self-organised activities in the popular neighbourhoods and UCAD (8th and 9th February)

d) The WAI plenary session held in the 'Village of Inhabitants" tent at UCAD on the 10th February.

The debate on urban issues and housing focused on the following:
  • The city which we are opposed to (analysis of the urban and global crisis)
  • The city that we are building (exchanges of alternative and activist initiatives in support of the right to habitat)
  • The city that we are fighting for (creation of a g-local platform of action to build a new Urban Social Pact)

Some central ideas that emerged from the WAI process

  • The WAI functions in a radically different political context to that of the year 2000. 2011 is characterised by the global crisis of neoliberalism and the crisis of civilisation; the USA's loss of imperial hegemony and the emergence of China; the arrival of the left in the governments of many Latin American countries; the upheavals in the Arab world with the defeats of the Tunisian and Egyptian dictatorships; the rise of social disquiet in Algeria, Iran, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain. As a result, the WAI was filled with a feeling that revolutionary changes are a possibility in the 21st century.

- The various socio-political contexts in countries show the breaches of the right to habitat and the different obstacles that are ultimately borne out of the neoliberal system violating the territorial sovereignty. The various struggles of the inhabitants organisations however show the possibility of finding appropriate and sustainable solutions to the urban, global and housing crises to recover the territorial sovereignty and fairness.

- The Right of inhabitants to be considered holders of the territorial sovereignty, having rights and being responsible for the future as co-builders and co-governors of sustainable human settlements, locally as well as globally, and not just users-customers of the territories

- The WAI, run by inhabitants movements and not by NGOs, support groups or professionals, is a space where the actors fight from their neighbourhoods with their programmes and priorities, and is thus a political investment that brings hope.

- The development of the process initiated by the WAI connects the global, regional, national and local arenas in order to create a global federation of inhabitants organisations and urban social movements. It is about being a common space and not a bureaucratic superstructure where the networks of inhabitants, all while keeping their independence, share experiences, elaborate strategies and platforms, reinforce solidarity through g-local battles and use common tools.

- The agenda of this process is independent and based on the answer to the calls to solidarity at an opportune and appropriate moment, as well as on the amount of time inhabitants organisations and their networks need to mature on a global and local level. The calendar of the Social Forums at the various levels is an essential point of reference but there is a certain interest in evaluating the capacity to interact with certain institutional events around the world (World Habitat Day, Rio+20, World Urban Forum, etc.).

- The creation of the global federation requires the creation of a collective intelligence: the systemisation of the WAI process gathering the memories of the social movements by 'co-producing' knowledge constitutes a fundamental foundation. This instrument of knowledge attempts to dissolve the hierarchy of technical imposition, favouring speech that has the ability to develop the conscience and progress of inhabitants and their organisations.

- The social battle of inhabitants, and in particular the battle against forced evictions, is an essential theme in the creation of debate and in the inhabitants' proposals that have to be actioned at a g-local level in order to have influence.

- Claiming the Right to the City and the social Rights of the inhabitants and the environment are the foundations of alternative policies to those established by the current Urban Social Pact that is governed by market supremacy and exclusion.

- Recovering the social function of cities because "another city is possible" if the inhabitants organisations play a leading role at the g-local level directly and in partnership with the public sector, the NGOs and the professionals who recognise the principles of supremacy of solidarity and of human and environmental rights as being the foundations of a new Urban Social Pact.

- The Right to habitat is based on the ESCR that defend the territorial sovereignty, that is the structural place of inhabitants, families, urban and rural communities and of co-existence founded on the inclusion of all. The rights correspond to the obligations of the state with regards to housing, water and sanitation, education, health and participation; it is a legal base from which to gain respect for collective rights to land, natural resources, means of livelihood, energy, transport and leisure, to the Right to City, in particular, to food sovereignty and to climate justice.

- There are common foundations for possible alliances between those fighting for the right to habitat led by inhabitants organisations and those from other entities involved in the creation of "another world is possible" in the rural sector (Via Campesina), in production (trade unions) and in the protection of the environment.

- The inclusion of a diversity of gender, cultures, origins and different skills functioning as cross-cutting and transforming axes that focus the housing and urbanism policies, initiate by the independence of the inhabitants organisations and continue with dialogue with organisations, networks, NGOs and institutions that share this principle.

*From the popular neighborhoods of Dakar
to the World Assembly of Inhabitants*

These are the direct results:

- The important presence of quantity, quality and origin at the WAI resulting from the participation of inhabitants, activists and leaders, was a factor in the enlargement of the process on a global scale and in the countries of origin, particularly with regards to Africa and the host nation. A total of 352 participants (that registered) from 44 countries from all continents were involved in the WAI event in Dakar. Given the logistical difficulties, not everybody was accounted for in the WAI register so it is estimated that the number of participants was at least twice as many, especially given the local inhabitants organisations.

Reading the Dakar Declaration at Village des Habitants

- The activities, the meetings and the exchanges enlarge and consolidate the convergence of networks and movements, laying the foundations for the creation of the Via Urbana (Urban Way), a common space of solidarity federalising inhabitants organisations and urban social movements on a global scale in order to exchange experiences of struggles and alternative ideas, share strategies, and reinforce global solidarity with local battles for the right to housing and the city, without frontiers.

- The approval of the [Dakar Declaration of the World Assembly of Inhabitants. Convergence ofinhabitants for the right to habitat](#) is important not only for its content, but alsobecause, for the first time, all major international networks for the right to habitatconstituted a Liaison Committee, recognising also the WAI Steering Committees. Even if the different stories, political and socio-cultural roots and geographical origins were the cause of a certain amount of difficulty during the dialogue, they nonetheless provide a richness because they bring different approaches to tackling problems and finding adequate solutions on several levels. For these reasons it must be highlighted that the Liaison Committee is a a key achievement of the WAI, as it should be a durable tool favouring dialogue, co-ordination and the growing influence of the content, solidarity and alternative and activist initiatives in support of the right to habitat. First task: the drafting of a common plan of action and platform following on from the content of the WAI process, with a view to co-ordinating the October Days. The IAI and the WAI Steering Committees are involved in forming Steering Committees of a global federation of inhabitants organisations on a territorial level involving all the networks as well as the myriad of organisations outside the network. These Committees will therefore provide the foundations for the establishment of the Urban and Community Way which will be implemented on the occasion of the next World Assembly of Inhabitants which will take place at the next WSF, possibly in 2013.

- The activities, meetings and exchanges establish concrete agreements between the inhabitants organisations, local authorities and other stakeholders to face the evictions. Everyone acts according to their own competences but remains in co-ordination.The diverse initiatives have nurtured involvement into co-ordination not only between the various networks fighting for the right to habitat but also with other networks involved in several areas of activity.

Abdel Sadi, Municipality of Bobigny
present the FAL Declaration at the World Assembly of Inhabitants

To strengthen agreements with:

- **Amnesty International:** in order to co-ordinate the Zero Eviction Campaign with the Demand Dignity Campaign on all continents, starting with Africa. Thanks to this agreement, a mobilisation was organised, in co-ordination with a local one, in front of the Ghanaian Embassy in Dakar during the WAI, that succeeded in blocking the planned eviction of 25,000 people.

- **Witness:** to develop video advocacy globally in the fight against evictions, particularly those resulting from economic development.

- **Local Authorities Forum:** their 9th World Assembly approved a Declaration of support for the WAI, meaning that they asre engaged to guarantee the fundamental rights of everyone and, important, to lead actions alongside the inhabitants organisations with a view to declaring areas as "anti-eviction zones" and organising "chains of solidarity" so that this declaration does not reach a dead end.

- The activites, meetings and exchanges capable of producing contents that increases the durability of the WAI is seen as a process that reinforces inhabitants' reasoning in creating a new Urban Social Pact.

Demonstration against evictions in front of the Ghanaian Embassy
Dakar 8 February 2011

The following themes in particular were developed:

- **Popular Fund for land and housing**

This is a new tool of participative politicies that is financed by the cancellation of the external debt in order to recovery the territorial sovereignty and fairness on relations between states as well as between states and citizens, developing the public housing service through housing co-operatives as communities. The workshop defined the terms of reference of the programme proposal and of a mobilisation strategy that allow social movements to have an influence on the public policies of their countries. The proposed campaign will be tested in certain African and Latin American countries.

- **Housing co-operatives as a way of addressing the social housing crisis**

The workshop emphasised the various methods employed by the co-operatives of different countries that, by considering the housing as value of use, want to create social housing policies that are market alternatives. The participants agreed to develop, in particular, co-operatives that aim to build communities (community property, Community Land Trust, etc.). Of particular interest is the proposal of partnership between the multi-ethnic Coralli co-operative (Italy) and a recently founded co-operative in Dakar.

- **Popular strategies for facing evictions, including those resulting from "natural disasters"**

The workshops and the mobilisation that took place in front of the Ghanaian Embassy emphasised the importance of exchanging experiences in order to develop international solidarity, common strategies, alliances and partnerships with all the participants involved in the creation of a new Urban Social Pact based on human rights. The agreement on the co-ordination of the World Days of October 2011-2012, while concentrating on the fight against evictions in particular, is a measure to initiate the creation of common tools (a warning system, mobilisations, agreements with local authorities to issue anti-eviction orders, etc.).

- **Urban Reform in economic development, the Right to housing, energy, water and sanitation**

These closely linked issues help to define the Right to habitat. Exchange between the different networks (Right to Energy, CONAM, IAI, ENDA) reinforced the realisation that it is necessary to work together in order to ensure that development combines environmental sustainability with social and economic sustainability and climate justice. This has been taken into account in the preparations of initiatives for Rio+20 (May 2012).

- **Articulating the Right to the City and the Right to Land**

The workshops and exchanges between the inhabitants organisations and rural organisations emphasised the strategic importance of developing dialogue and an alliance between the two social sectors that are on increasingly more contiguous territories, both heavily affected by the privatisation of commonsn. The global scale of urbanisation shows an increasingly clear connection between agricultural production and urban agriculture and, in particular, thus shows the necessity of combined action against the land grabbing by the few and against the eviction of entire communities. It is mainly about starting to push for an international call to action for the recovery of territorial sovereignty and against the land grabbing.

- **Development and Handicap: equal opportunities in the cities**

The IAI also managed to establish convergences with networks that have not been part of the inhabitants' battles on a global scale up to now. An important such convergence was with Handicap International that proposed co-organising the inclusion of its workshop as a themed contribution to the WAI and to the right to the city in particular, considering handicaps as a base point of reference for policies concerning universal access to urban spaces, buildings and housing. There is consensus on elaboration of this cross-cutting theme not only on the platforms at a territorial level but also in the preparation of the International Conference on the Accessibility of Cities (Paris, January 2012).

- **Building the memory of inhabitants**

Over 50 video interviews with urban social leaders from all continents throughout the last year of the WAI process were the basis of the workshop organised in the popular neighborhood of Guédiawaye. The visualisation of the process that started at the World Assembly of Inhabitants (Mexico, 2000), has gathered results over time, and was an exercise of convergence that captured the identification of the participant in relation to the reading of events thanks to their conceptualisation and to knowledge without deception, secrecy or deduction. There is an agreement to develop this programme on all continents, implementing the methodology of knowledge co-production in the collective creation by organisations from different countries, cultures, languages and in partnership with universities.

The exercising of "responsibility" in the WAI process

Since its birth, the Charter of Founding Principles has always been the invisible yet powerful engine of the IAI. It is a new type of network under construction, a living collective that is developing as its members become increasingly aware of its strength as being g-local.

This innovative process, with inhabitants' organisations in the spotlight, and NGOs and professionals as support, has given rise to a "responsibility" over the years. This responsibility is based on strategies defined by the Co-ordinating Committee, exercised in a self-managed way by the Antennas, assisted by the global co-ordinator, and supported by the structure.

With this focus, agreements with partners and projects have been decided upon and implemented, budget included. To clarify, once the strategic goals have been determined and partners with whom the initiative is shared (not simply financial backers) have been found, the distribution of local resources at a central level takes place by agreement on the basis of the Annual Operation Plans (AOPs) introduced by the Antennas and the UPU, and validated by the IAI CC. This whole process is transparent because, in addition to the periodical meetings between the IAI CC and the Antennas, the internal e-mail list iai.coord@list.habitants.org is often used, as well as Skype to chat and make conference calls, in order to debate and make precise decisions. Strategic documents, the AOP of the Antennas, the UPU and the global one, descriptive and financial activity reports (global, Antennas, UPU), and all relevant decisions,

are published (in several languages) and made accessible to IAI CC members.

This practice is a real innovation as it highlights the sustainability of the network's construction and process at different levels. It also reverses the logic of NGO networks, often based on heaven-sent projects, which reproduce the relationship of dependency on financial backers. For these reasons, one of the preliminary conditions for approval of the AOPs is a definition of the management that aims to establish and implement partnerships with local authorities, foundations, universities and other supportive bodies.

For example, if the AOP of one of the Antennas is more ambitious regarding the resources available, yet coherent with the strategy, local-global co-ordination has all the elements at its disposal to obtain them, often successfully.

Thanks to this focus, we have been able to move the WAI forward, involving all of the network's strengths; a result which would have been impossible to conceive with a "project" focus, i.e. linked to the only financial resources available.

This democratic innovation, which requires both time and energy, revealed itself to be a winning factor during the WAI process as, in general, the IAI government's distribution motivated the Antennas to develop their "responsibility" beyond the initial conditions and in relation to the different subjects involved.

From there came the proposal to create united WAI Steering Committees, meeting spaces, the elaboration of proposals and management of the process, which include on one and the same level members of all networks for the right to housing and the countless organisations without references of this kind. These Committees, which were formed by adapting to the true conditions of each continent, with more bases where the IAI is better established, are the real innovation of the WAI process. In effect, they prefigure its development, i.e. the construction of a global federation of inhabitants' organisations and networks (Via Urbana y Comunitaria - Urban and Community Way).

Speaking of which, it is interesting to note the different reactions within the IAI and outside it, and to observe certain differences and similarities between a historic network governed by NGO (HIC) professionals and a recently formed network governed by more radical leaders, such as No-Vox. If at the start they were underestimating the WAI process (2005-2008), since the WSF 2009 and the USF 2010, they realised that the WAI was a major topic in the debate and that this process was preparing a structural convergence of urban social organisations and movements. During this final stage, a central commitment was made from the WAI, intervening with all its weight to try and change its direction.

Criticism of IAI management of the process, and the attempt to entrust management of Dakar's WAI solely to local NGOs (ENDA), without memory of or roots in the process, was based on a major fear, i.e. the weakening of its own network, considered to be "the" network to care for and develop. Explicit and hideous criticism of HIC and No-Vox regarding the Urban Way proposal is developing, and clearly makes this conservatism public.

Yet, at the same time that the leaders of these networks were rejecting this kind of development, the participation of their members in Steering Committees, as well as the rapprochement of others (LOCOA, RNHC, etc.), reveals the development of a unifying responsibility which extends further.

Regarding IAI Antennas, they have generally worked well, contributing to global co-ordination, becoming mutually enriched, and turning into important reference points at various levels and in relation to numerous social, political, and institutional subjects. The quantity and quality of the initiatives carried out, the number of WAI participants from all continents, the partnerships established and the resources found are as much indicators of the strategy's relevance and of the IAI's management as they are of the process and its sustainability.

The tensions and weight of a dynamic, behind which the IAI has been the main engine, have given rise to elements of criticism at the heart of the network. This has generally been due to the necessity to adapt the structure so as to make it more attractive, without suddenly having all of the necessary resources. It was, therefore, a growth crisis which, thanks to the visionary talent and unity of the leaders, to the rooting of the member inhabitants' organisations, and to the internal solidarity, was overcome and transformed into a success.

The only exception is the Antenna managed by CERPAC which, having accumulated notable delays from the moment at which it refused to sign the AOP because it considered the budget provided centrally by the IAI to be insufficient, no longer worked in conjunction with IAI CC. In reality, the IAI had managed to establish the partnership with Misereor, but support for the preparatory phase was lost because of CERPAC's refusal.

On the other hand, CERPAC decided to commit itself to WAI's organisation with No-Vox and HIC, but only in Guédiawaye. This was an important commitment which only partially took into account the decision taken by the IAI CC and Steering Committee to carry out the WAI in low-income neighbourhoods and in the university's WSF. But the interpretation of CERPAC, HIC and No-Vox, according to which the WAI took place, only in this neighbourhood and only with its members, is incorrect. In reality, the WAI was a

common space where everyone organised and participated in the initiatives, especially the IAI which organised and participated in workshops and meetings, both in Guédiawaye and in the university, fulfilling a real federal role with regard to the networks for the right to habitat and other networks.

Thanks to this focus, the final plenary Assembly was able to approve a Declaration which, when summarising the desire to further develop the federal dynamic beyond Dakar, introduced the Liaison Committee and common commitments with regard to a platform and the global mobilisation for the right to habitat, particularly to mark the World Days of October 2011-2012.

On the other hand, the publication of a unilateral text of the Declaration (without reference to the Liaison Committee, and cancellation of most of the signatures, etc.) by HIC, No-Vox and CERPAC, is the foundation of resistance manifest to the correct application of the plenary's decisions. The refusal to draft a common interpretation-analysis of the WAI process and the desire to limit co-ordination to a simple exchange of information, between only the heads of historic networks (excluding the WAI Promoting Committees), stemmed from here.

These aspects require subsequent reflection on the nature of those organisations, but especially on how to govern the development of a new phase created by the WAI in an inclusive way and on many levels, in order to avoid remaining entrenched in dead-end debates of which we are unable to make any sense.

With this aim, it is necessary to take into account not only the contents which appear, the proposals made, the relationships established, the decisions of the WAI which initiate so many workshops, but also the new 2011-2015 strategic line which raises the management of IAI "responsibility" to a higher level.

Construction of the Urban and Community Way requires support to be developed through the sharing of a thoughtful analysis, modesty, but also vision, yielding the greatest openness but also respect for the decisions made, with the aim of reaching this goal.

Links:

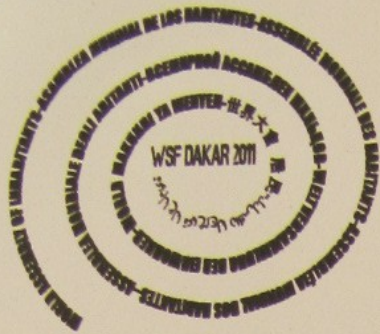World Assembly of Inhabitants (WSF Dakar, February 6 to 11 2011)
The Dakar Declaration of the World Assembly of Inhabitants. Convergence of inhabitants for the right to habitat
Image galleries
Video

Singing the Inhabitants Anthem (WAI, Dakar February 10 2011)

HYMNE DES HABITANTS

Nous sommes habitants

R

Nous sommes habitants
Habitants d'Afrique
Nous sommes habitants
Habitants de tout quartier

Nous sommes mobilisés
Pour défendre nos droits
Nous sommes tous engagés
Pour vivre dignement

R

Nous sommes habitantes
Habitantes d'Europe
Nous sommes habitantes
Habitantes du Monde entier

Nous sommes tous réunis
Pour défendre nos toits
Nous sommes mobilisés
Pour défendre nos lois

R

Nous sommes unis
Nous sommes divers
Et nous sommes plus riches

Nous sommes unis
Nous sommes divers

Et nous sommes plus forts

R

Nous sommes habitants
Habitants des Amériques
Nous sommes habitants
Habitants de tout quartier

Nous sommes habitantes
Habitantes d'Asie
Nous sommes des habitantes
Habitantes du Monde

R

Nous sommes unis
Nous sommes divers
Et nous sommes plus riches

Nous sommes unis
Nous sommes divers
Et nous sommes plus forts

R