

SDI meets Ministers on the sidelines of Shelter Afrique (5 June 09)



Edith Mbanga National Facilitator for SDFN presenting the CLIP report to the Namibia Minister with the Ugandan Minister looking on.

Consistent with its culture of making use of all international platforms where shelter issues are discussed, SDI addressed African Ministers at Shelter Afrique AGM meeting in Windhoek, Namibia. The meeting, which was held on the sidelines of the main session was attended by five housing ministers from Africa namely; Uganda, Togo, Central African Republic, The Gambia and from the host Namibia. Also in attendance were senior officials from Tanzania, Malawi and Morocco. The Namibian Minister invited the SDI in Nairobi at the UNHabitat Governing Council Meeting to enable the slum dwellers to make a presentation to African Minister of Local Government, Housing and Urban Development to make a presentation of our processes and the Urban Poor Fund International.

The Namibia Minister kick-started the discussions by highlighting the need for SDI to be part of the main agenda in future meetings. The sheer amount of work that SDI is doing in urban poor communities does not require policy makers and politicians to put low-income housing as a sideline issue. *'Traditionally, we have had the Banks and Developers at our meetings but these people are only solving the problems for the middle income people and not the poor!'* the Minister said. The Minister also added that future meetings should include site visits to the slums so that people discuss about what they have actually witnessed. The Ugandan Minister also supported this approach and added that his experiences with the SDI had helped him to appreciate the great potential that lied in informal settlements. *'Some of us have seen how the SDI is transforming slums with very bad conditions into decent communities. I also recall Jockin's presentation in Vancouver and*

I think it was the best because it gave a very practical feel to the housing challenges that the poor face on a daily basis,” the Minister said.



The Namibian Minister making a point at the SDI meeting flanked by Jockin and the Ugandan Minister

The seven SDI African affiliates that were present then shared with the Ministers what they were doing in their own countries. The Ministers heard how across Africa, Latin America and South East Asia savings were being used as a powerful weapon that brings poor communities together. Furthermore, SDI also explained how the concept of savings was being used as a bargaining tool in negotiations with central and local governments. In addition, the Zambians showed how SDI had expanded its focus to bring on board the 'soft issues' beyond just the bricks and mortar issues. In this regard, Veronica Katulushi from the Zambian Federation was spot-on with her presentation. *'Apart from saving for housing, we have also save for small businesses and health needs and I personally and on three occasions I have been assisted to buy medication through money that we have saved,'* she stated. Besides all this progress, most of the SDI chapters revealed that the main stumbling block that prevented even more progress was accessing land. Quite often, many governments are very skeptical and reluctant to offer land to the poor and in the few instances where this takes place this is normally through small pilots that make very little difference when compared to the huge numbers that make up the urban poor. It is against this background that Jockin was prompted to point out that, *'We are not coming to you as beggars but we want you to hear from the poor people themselves who have struggled for years in slums without water and toilets. We just need the land so we can build our own housing.'*

At the end, the meeting agreed that SDI would be part of the main discussions at the next meeting which will take place in Uganda. Such participation should help other Ministers to appreciate and embrace the SDI model.