Nearly 40 delegates from 11 countries represented Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) at the fourth World Urban Forum (WUF) in Nanjing, China, from November 3rd to 6th. SDI has attended and hosted events at each of the earlier WUFs, held in Nairobi, Barcelona and Vancouver biennially since 2002.

Each World Urban Forum serves three objectives for SDI:

- It allows local and national leaders of SDI affiliates to discover, explore and participate in global discourse on habitat.
- It provides a space for sharing views, reflections, challenges and projects.
- It helps SDI members identify potential linkages on city, national and international levels that can support the aspirations of the poor to drive development.

At this year’s event, we achieved broader participation than ever before, announced the Urban Poor Fund International (UPFI) [add link to main info on UPFI] and the Durban Declaration [link to Declaration], strengthened old partnerships, and achieved new commitments of support from governments and development agencies.
SDI’s delegation comprised federation members and NGO representatives from affiliates in Brazil, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Delegates from Sri Lanka, Uganda and Zambia did not make it to the Forum, as their visa invitation letter from WUF organizers did not arrive in time.

At the conference, we introduced the Durban Declaration, which was adopted on October 10, 2008, in South Africa and sets the next two years’ agenda for SDI and its partner governments. The Declaration articulates the commitment of participating slum dweller federations, NGOs and governments to work in real partnership to address human settlement needs and meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [link to Durban Declaration].

In a powerful session hosted by SDI, we officially launched the Urban Poor Fund-International (UPFI), a financing facility directly managed by federations of the urban poor,[link to brief on UPFI, info on UPFI, and video from the event] The launch was accompanied by testimony from SDI members from Malawi, Kenya, Zimbabwe and the Philippines [link to video] and songs of celebration [link to song/dance].

At the event, the government of Norway announced a $2 million contribution to UPFI, and ministers from Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa, as well as the Mayor of Harare, Zimbabwe, publicly pledged their support for SDI and committed to working with their local federations. Representatives from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), and Cities Alliance – which have been supporters of SDI and UPFI - also attended the launch.

Sixteen SDI delegates were official speakers in nine WUF events, sharing views and experiences on tenure security, housing finance, women’s roles in development, informal economies, slum upgrading and more [link to videos of speakers].

During the conference, SDI committed to joint initiatives with the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) and the International Institute for Environment and Development on slum upgrading and climate change.). SDI representatives also participated in during parallel meetings of UN-HABITAT’s Advisory Group on Forced Evictions (AGFE), Global Land Tools Network (GLTN) and Slum Upgrading Facility (SUF), as well as of the Community-Led Infrastructure Financing Facility (CLIFF).
“You build high houses with high expectations, talk loudly and do nothing. We are not waiting and watching. We will deliver. If you don’t participate, you will be left out.”

— Jockin Arputham, President, SDI and National Slum Dwellers Federation of India

Dialogue II: Promoting social equity and inclusiveness
“We talk a lot about slums, but we fly above them. We only see the problems and challenges. We need to mobilize the human resources in slums, where people have the skills, resources, and the need. We don’t need fly-dropped toilets not meeting the needs of those hit by them. The [Urban Poor] Fund is to expand already existing capacities [of the urban poor].”

— Minister from Norway – Mr Wasstol.

Networking Session: Urban Poor Fund International
“We do community savings, buy blocks with water, and put toilets where we can share. This is the first step in the incremental process. We borrow money to build houses and negotiate with builders and suppliers for an affordable price. We have community landownership to ensure people don’t lose it and help with regular repayments.”

— Edith Mbanga, Homeless People’s Federation, Namibia

Dialogue II: Promoting social equity and inclusiveness

“The federation started saving in 1998 to mobilize the community. We did enumeration, savings, and found space to negotiate with the new mayor. [Under CLIFF] we started a housing project, but we saw that the environment is not conducive to a community contractor. Our challenge is that the laws and bureaucratic process that apply to rich developers also apply to us.”

— Maria Sonia Vicenta Fadrigo, Homeless People’s Federation, Philippines

Networking Session: CLIFF — The Great Debate III