



Two Reports on Health: World Social Forum Nairobi, Kenya, January 22-25

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Overcoming the nearly impossible

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The second World Social Forum that took place in Nairobi, Kenya, from the 20th to the 25th of January, 2007, will certainly be remembered as the Forum that overcame adversity. As I write, a few days later, it is now not difficult to understand what the “other world” might be about.

The event was organized without governmental support, in a country surrounded by violent struggles over borders between Somalia and Ethiopia; by traffic of weapons for opposing armed groups; used as a route by refugees and emigrant population; and of great social inequality.

Nairobi, the capital, has its own version of the shanty

towns that characterize the landscape of almost every city in the Third World. This parallel city is certainly much more poor and lacks sanitary services, in comparison with the properly urbanized sectors. However, little is known of the latter, a social elite dating back to the colonial period (made up of whites, indians and even blacks of different ethnic backgrounds) segregates itself within gardens and condominiums. In fact, it takes days to discover these privileged islands which seal themselves off from Kibera, the biggest “marginal parallel city” in the planet. It rolls down from the hills, made of collective stick houses, with a population of 700 thousand living under conditions impossible to visualize even in nightmares.

I went to Nairobi promoting the feminist agenda for the

area of sexual and reproductive health of women, with the commitment for the defense of Public and Universal Health Care Systems, founded on equity and respect for diversity. I was then part of the II World Social Health Forum, whose slogan was “Africa’s Health: Mirror of the World”. I had the additional task of helping out in denouncing gender violence against women and girls, as well as suggesting forms of mobilizing society around central questions regarding the health of women, such as: maternal mortality, AIDS, unsafe abortions and discrimination. Because of these commitments, I was completely immersed in a militancy without time or date. I left the continent through the very violent and also unequal South Africa, reassured in my sense of the need of overcoming adversity and to how much more needs to be done.

Overcoming is what I need to talk about, the challenge of organizing an event involving tens thousand people in a city



where the sewage system coverage does not reach 5%, where the transportation of 2 million 800 thousand people depends of "matatus". The "matatus" is the Nairobi way of commuting, small size collective transports, whose door remains open throughout the journey so the operator's assistant can hang outside from it, collecting fares, hitting the roof while yelling out the itinerary, as the operator horns and scrambles through in between thousands other "matatus" of many colors amongst crowds of pedestrians who barely manage across the chaotic English hand traffic.

Nairobi, although being the African city hosting most national events, having even a UN Convention Center, had to resort to Kenyan families to secure sufficient accommodations, an experience that by itself demands a paper. While my group and I found it to be a magic moment of exchange and sharing, it was seen by others as an expression of cultural constructs based on exploitation.

According to the International and African Organizing Committees, in spite of the difficulties, the official numbers of participation reached 60,000 participating in 1,200 events sponsored by organization and thousand of other self-organized activities that took place during five days, from

dawn until very late.

The venue where all this took place, the Kazarani Stadium, 40 minutes away from the city center is where the world class runners and marathoner train. Its seating areas divided up by white canvas into auditoriums. Around the stadium, hundreds of stands for thematic stores and those representing different social movements became hosts to a number of workshops, debates, panels, walks, demonstrations, cultural and artistic presentations. The smells, sounds and movements remitted us often to a magic scenery of moods, rhythms and responses.

In terms of participants by country, nearly 80% of them came from Kenya itself or neighboring regions, and 20% from other continents. Therefore a mostly black forum with a strong presence from popular groups organized by the churches. Foreign attendants include 400 Italians, 600 North Americans and nearly 400 Brazilians, according to data presented by Ibase.

Another breakthrough worthy of mention is diversity. The Forum in India possibly had a strong impact on its attendants for being so colorful. In Nairobi, the black faces of the African participants, with their distinct formats and their differences, showed a different type of diversity: tribes, ethnic

groups, religions and the presence of many women and young women. The latter played a decisive role in relation to the challenges deriving from the AIDS epidemic, that is devastating the continent. They dispute with the churches the way each group has to conduct itself. The veils hold a specific meaning to the Muslims and a different one for the Hindus, these two are in contact with a Jewish tradition and that of the Protestant chapters that promote literacy through the Bible. Unsurprisingly, these last ones contribute to the abandonment of ancestral cultural patterns for those based on a white, christian and western morality.

In this Africa, of so many traditions and cultures, women were present massively, from Wanagari Maathani, Peace Nobel Laureate, because of the millions of trees she promoted planting throughout the continent, to the anonymous members of small groups who fight for their right to water, land, food, health care for endemic disease.

During this event nearly 300 proposals, formulated by 21 "Forums for Alternatives, Struggles and Actions", were presented in accordance to the 22 lines of research that comprised the VII WSF. This proposals will become the foundation for the "Direct Action Campaign" to be carried out

worldwide in January 2008, parallel to the Economic Forum of Davos. The underlying idea is that civil society will make these proposals their own, therefore bonding a strategy to turn them a reality (Ibase).

Among these proposals, some are of special relevance to women, the world days against gender violence, fundamentalisms and wars that make them vulnerable targets for systematic rape and abandonment. It was agreed to organize an "International Conference on Universal Systems of Health Care" in Brazil, where the agenda of equality and sexual and reproductive rights would be an important focus. The AIDS epidemic, as expected, turned into a relevant argument to make evident the relationship between the predominant economic model and social inequality.

Speeches were not necessary. Walking along the streets of downtown Nairobi, mixed with remains from Colonial past (winding roads, mosques, itinerant merchants) and present (hundreds of LAN Houses that make use of otherwise deteriorated constructions), one literally stumbles across people. Women, ill with AIDS, without strength to even extend their arm; no need, their babies, also infected learn with their first steps the word "eat" and we are caught by their

beautiful and deep eyes. Do not look at them, do not listen to them, pretend you have nothing to do with them. Human consciousness one day will avenge them... my coins were all gone. That was one photo I did not take, Telia the journalist was shattered.

There we have, in fact, a good reflection of our world, not only because of the lack of sanitary systems and conditions but because of the social exclusion and the neglect. Cultural backgrounds apart, these HIV+ women that breastfed their babies did so as their maternal duty, forced by their mothers in-law in the name of their husbands. The lack of citizenship and health systems confirm the social injustice that prevails: 40% of the families in Africa lack a mother. Surely, the WSF of Nairobi did not create a new world, but it did expose the present one to all its contradictions. It also encouraged segments of the black continent to continue their struggle for a better world.

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Committee of the World Social Health Forum.

II Social Health World Forum Finishes Calling for an International Conference in Brazil for 2008.

Deborah Matte

A World Conference to discuss "Universal and Integral Systems of Health" was one of which produced the main number of proposals presented in the closing assembly for the II SHWF. Brazil was the country designated to host this conference, in July of 2008, on the 20th anniversary of their SUS.

Participants representing over 30 countries met in the last 3 days to discuss health conditions in the world and what can be done in order to guarantee access to health services.

Brazil and India are being pressed by the WTO (World Trade Organization) to stop production of generic drugs. India has already been prohibited to produce its own medicines. Such denounces heated up debate during the WHSF. It approved the following proposals:

- 1) A world wide campaign for the right of the people to health services.
- 2) A worldwide campaign so that developed nations stop

using toxic materials and products which jeopardize the health of people in the whole world and that deteriorate the environment.

3) International mobilization against the monopoly of drug patents in the hands of multinational companies as a struggle to bring about a redistribution of resources accumulated in the pharmaceutical industry.

The discussions that took place during the II WHSF paved the way for a better understanding of the reasons behind the African people suffering under such low sanitary conditions: most governments spend no more than 3% of their budgets in this sector. As a result, from 2001 to 2006, more than 8 million Africans died of curable disease such as tuberculosis, malnutrition and malaria.

One of the decisions of the Forum was the launching of a

continental campaign for the immediate channeling of 15% of the national budgets into the health care sector. The African Alliance for Health also proposed the independence of the Continent from the rule of governments and international agencies. Thus, conquering autonomy in the treatment for AIDS, and to implement those strategies relevant to Africa.

Women's health was also long debated during several workshops during the forum.

African women suffer the crudest part of the health crisis as they still live under conditions of violence and Brazilian malnutrition.

Telia Negrão, Feminist Network, stood for an alliance towards organizing an International Convention on sexual and reproductive rights. In the assessment of Valdevir Both,

coordinator of the II WHSF, this forum produced important results for the continuity of the struggle for equality universal health care.

Among these results, the strengthening of networks and movements that work in the area of health and the making of an international agenda to promote the universal right of health care, against the neoliberal logic of privatization and destruction of public security systems.

