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children's outstanding
participation in the Habitat III
Global Conference**



Save the Children

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© Latin American and Caribbean children's outstanding participation in the Habitat III Global Conference.

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LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN CHILDREN'S OUTSTANDING PARTICIPATION IN THE HABITAT III GLOBAL CONFERENCE

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Four months after the Global Conference, Save the Children asked some adolescents from the Latin America and the Caribbean region about their experience and what they had learned after participating in Habitat III.

Six adolescents, three girls and three boys, aged 15, 16, and 17 years old, gave us their testimonies about what, for some of them, was their best experience ever.

Representing their peers

Participants brought their peer's voices with them. They were all members of different types of children's organizations, some of which were multinational. This gives us an idea of the sense of community that children from Latin America and Caribbean maintain.

- **Hassel and Vladimir**, from El Salvador, represented RENAES, the El Salvador children's network and at the same time, REDNNYAS, the huge Latin American and Caribbean children's network.
- **Luis David**, from Colombia, represented the Center for Participation and Communication (PACO).
- **Henry** from Ecuador represented both the Ecuadorian Consulting Council and the social movement for the defense of the rights of the child.
- **Fransheska**, also from Ecuador, represented the Children's and Adolescents' Movement which she herself chairs.
- **Rosa Linda**, from Peru, represented Municipal Councils, a huge school-based children's organization.

A New Urban Agenda was promulgated to guide urban development. It is based on these three principles:

- ▣ **Leave no one behind.** We should all enjoy the same rights and opportunities always and live free from violence.
- ▣ **Promote sustainable and inclusive urban economies.** The economy should be focused on people, as the basis for development; should include the whole population; and should improve cities and urban surroundings.
- ▣ **Protect the environment.** Our ecosystems and biodiversity should be protected. Earth and water should be used properly. Cities must be prepared to face possible disasters and reduce risks.

What did participating in Habitat III mean to children?

- ❑ *Representing children from Latin America and the Caribbean, being their spokesperson, was a great experience. By participating in the Conference, I increased my knowledge of different realities and solutions to problems that affect my community.*
- ❑ *This kind of experience can change your point of view, the way you think. It helped me broaden my views on a range of aspects related to children's integral development.*
- ❑ *It was a wonderful opportunity to represent Colombia's childhood in the Conference. It helped me perceive the world and my country from a different perspective; that we aren't the only ones with problems and that things could get better every day.*
- ❑ *It was wonderful, my first travelling experience. Moreover Habitat was a very important Conference. I felt important.*

What children liked the most

Children were thrilled to get to know and share with young people of their age and adults from different countries and to learn from different cultures and points of view. They really enjoyed the diversity.

They liked:

- ❑ *"Sharing and obtaining knowledge from people from other countries and at the same time committing ourselves to building direct communication between nations to continue innovating and*



ensure the growth of our cities, with children's participation."(Henry)

- ❑ *"I liked meeting Martha Santos Pais, a great leader. Also, that children from my country's voices were heard and that our participation was considered important. But, what I really liked the most was that all of our ideas and concerns during the Conference were heard and answered."*(Fransheska)



- ▣ *“What I liked the most was that they considered us, they asked for our opinions, they heard us. I also liked sharing with people my age. We expressed our wishes. There was much confidence among us. We were leaders; it was beautiful to share with our peers. We had similar thoughts, we did not disagree. We all wanted the same, a world without drugs, happiness, and parks for children. The issues united us.” (Rosa)*

What children liked the least

Children identified a few situations that left them unsatisfied. Some of them mentioned disorder and confusion regarding the hours and days assigned for their registration, or that adults were given priority in terms of logistics, especially when entering the Conference.

The Ecuadorian adolescents wanted to participate in the children's assembly organized by World Vision, but were not accepted because they were over 16. They felt they were discriminated.

Rosa, and other children had difficulties understanding what was said in the Conference. They speak Spanish and most presentations were given in English. There were no earphones available for children. She felt that was an awkward situation:

▣ *“There was something that made me think **no, this cannot be true.** We children were all at the Conference and the people who were going to speak were sat at the main desk in the front. Two of them were children representing us. They spoke in Spanish, as did one additional person. The rest spoke in English. This was a very uncomfortable situation for those of us who did not know the English language. They were speaking and we did not understand. There were people who spoke in English during the Conference, they were adults and we did not understand. There were no earphones for us children. It is a pity that the organizers did not consider this situation. This is a very important issue; we were invited to participate and communicate and we were not able to do so because of the language.”(Rosa)*

How children prepared themselves to participate in Habitat III

The children were very well prepared to participate in the Global Conference. They worked personally and collectively to gather information, study the issues and discuss them with their peers. In some places, such as in El Salvador, they consulted other children about their perceptions regarding the quality of life in their cities and took the information with them. Their organizations participated in workshops carried out by Save the Children and partners. In Peru, Acción por los Niños carried out a simulation of the Global Conference, together with the School Council organization, in which they debated the issues included in the conference's proposed agenda. Adolescents felt they were prepared for participating in Habitat III, even though one of them said they felt they could have been better prepared.

▣ *“As well as reading about the issue, we had various workshops to produce ideas and organize information. This was very useful for strengthening my knowledge. We also recovered our own knowledge based on our day to day lives. We all live in urban contexts that are insecure and we all need to improve our environment, our education and other things.” (Vladimir)*





❑ *“I informed myself about the problems that my country has by asking people if they knew about the issue. I reviewed the projects that will be implemented for improving my Municipality and the United Nations’ objectives for the years to come. I did that kind of thing to prepare myself.” (Luis)*

❑ *“I had little knowledge about the issue. I wasn’t feeling totally prepared, but I looked for information on the Internet and read some articles in magazines and books. Our colleagues from the Social Movement trained us in some issues.” (Henry)*

❑ *“I was well prepared and I think I did a good job at the Conference. Before, I knew nothing about Habitat. Then we had two training sessions. The first one was a simulation of what was going to happen in the Conference. That was with Save the Children and Acción por los Niños. Then we had a personal*

meeting where we received additional information.” (Rosa)

Children’s opinions regarding the New Urban Agenda’s guiding principles

Children like the New Urban Agenda’s guiding principles. They consider that:

❑ *“They describe really friendly cities, adequate for everyone to live in. They have a rights approach.” (Hassel)*

❑ *“They are very important, because if we achieve these principles, we could be living in secure spaces, without fear, even when using public transport. With regards to education, we would be up to date and we would be more critical young people and researchers. These conditions would make it possible for us to achieve an integral development, with a focus on human rights.” (Vladimir)*





- ❑ *“They are perfect; they include everything, even the economy, which is very important. Without the economy, we can do nothing. The idea that no one should be left behind is important, because often children are not taken into account because they are children. Many people think that children’s opinions are not important, but children are aware of what happens in their surroundings and can contribute to whatever is needed.” (Rosa)*
- ❑ *“Cleaning up the cities, promoting basic services for all; taking measures for mitigating climate change, among others...” (Henry)*

What did children learn in Habitat III

- ❑ *“That with active participation and by listening to different opinions, we can produce projects for positive change for all; and that there is much hope that these changes could happen if we make the problems visible and demand coordinated actions.” (Hassel)*
- ❑ *“Working methodologies and ways of dealing with the issues, such as the Consultation groups, focal groups and group discussions.” (Vladimir)*
- ❑ *“That we shouldn’t always complain about the problems in our Municipality, our country or even the world. We should try to act to solve or combat the problems”. (Luis)*
- ❑ *“I learned how to plan a city correctly, with inclusive, participatory and just perspectives, guaranteeing respect for nature and green areas. And that in general, everyone is included in development.” (Henry)*
- ❑ *“I learned about Habitat, how is it useful, which benefits it brings to our country. I learned that every country must comply with the New Urban Agenda. I learned about the SDOs and that, regardless of whether I am a girl, a boy or an adolescent, my voice will always be heard and respected.” (Fransheska)*



- “First, I gained experience, much experience, and then I improved my performance. In the aircraft I felt alone, not knowing anyone. I hoped I would get along well with everyone and express myself well. Nerves can betray you. But when I got there it was beautiful to speak with confidence, knowing that I was heard and that I can share my opinions. The Conference helped me with my performance, with my self-esteem. It also helped me to share the experience with my peers when I came back to my country.” (Rosa)

Sharing the experience when returning to their countries

Children’s participation in Habitat III created much enthusiasm, not only among those going to Ecuador, but among their peers from their organizations, their schoolmates, their teachers and their parents. When they got back, many activities were organized so they could share their experiences and new knowledge. Children gave back their knowledge to their organizations, their schools and those who promoted their trip to Ecuador. Accountability is well installed in their procedures.

- “...communicate my experience, what I learned. Show people that we can be agents of social change; transmit the New Urban Agenda’s principles... Yes, I shared my experience with my peers in the organization. I let them know that all their ideas were given and heard.” (Hassel)
- “I circulated the information among my partners at school, in the community and with friends. I wanted them to know that we must change our attitudes and contribute to building a better environment for all. In my organization, I shared my experience twice; first in Santa Ana, in an Organized Children’s Network meeting and then in San Salvador, with the National Youth and Children Network (RENAES).” (Vladimir).
- “I’ve been able to share my experience in local debates and talks and also by training some other children on the issues and promoting the defense of the environment. In my organization I let my peers know that their contribution was essential for preparing my participation. They are also responsible for the achievements that will benefit us all.” (Luis)
- “I participated in several events organized by social organizations to discuss the issue of climate change and how it links to children, adolescents and young people’s situations. I repeated some of the things I learned with my friends in the Conference. In my organization, we’ve been analyzing the subjects covered by Habitat III, especially looking at ways in which we can put them into practice. Sustainable development in our cities is also a commitment for children to take on.” (Henry)
- “Transmit all of what I learned. We have the power to protest to the authorities when they are not fulfilling the commitments undertaken by the States under the New Urban Agenda in terms of public policies. This is particularly important when dealing with the issue of **secure cities for girls**. Immediately after my return, a few days after my arrival, we had a National Municipal Council meeting. I presented my report to everyone and talked about the wonderful experience I had in Habitat III. In my school, my teacher was very excited with the trip. She published some photos on our bulletin board, with information about the Global Conference. She also did a class on the subjects that were discussed in Habitat III. My Director placed a huge poster in the schoolyard. It was very touching. To be honest, I receive a lot of support from my school, they help me very much. I didn’t think they would do that much; my teacher made such a kind gesture and facilitated workshops with my peers for me to talk about what we did in Ecuador and to encourage them to participate and raise their voices so that they can also have a similar opportunity.” “When I arrived in Lima, Acción por los Niños (who sponsored my trip) organized a three-day retreat for Municipal Councils. I shared my experience with my peers in this event. Afterwards, I gave a presentation to some of the Municipal Council leaders to replicate the workshops we had in Ecuador.” (Rosa)

Friends forever, always in contact

Now these adolescents have formed a wonderful group of friends. They are constantly in contact, sharing what they do in their organizations and with their lives. They created a WhatsApp group and communicate every day. They also use other social networks, such as Facebook.

- *“The idea is to keep in contact, to share our achievements and our experiences.” (Luis)*
- *“We are all in touch through the social networks and we try to see each other constantly. We organize short activities for collective development.” (Henry)*
- *“We created a WhatsApp chat-group for all of us. We all have each other’s phone numbers, Facebook addresses and WhatsApp. We talk about how we are doing. I know that Luis is travelling this weekend to a different city in Colombia. I also get in touch with them when I see them connected on Facebook.” (Rosa)*

Children’s message to their Mayors and authorities

- *“I would ask the Mayor to create real mechanisms for participation and consultation, so that every measure they take is adequate for people’s realities. To invest more in people; if you invest in the community you can achieve sustainable development, because it has a high profile return on investment. Less crime, less violence and more cohesive families.” (Hassel)*

- *“To take children and adolescents into account when making their decisions, so we can contribute solutions to problems in an innovative and creative way.” (Vladimir)*
- *“To build the most secure neighborhoods for young people, girls and children who are the most vulnerable to violence, so that they do not continue to be victims.” (Luis)*
- *“To allow children’s participation when making decisions for planning our neighborhoods and cities. Children’s participation guarantees equity when solving problems.” (Henry)*
- *“Mr Mayor, I had the honor to be a speaker and participate in Habitat III. Now I understand that children from my country have a voice, a vote and the capacity to be informed on how you work, as our authority. With all my heart, I hope that your work is focused and consistent with the New Urban Agenda agreed on in Habitat III, which includes us, the members of this neighborhood, as participants, in an inclusive manner, regardless of our color, religion, gender or disability. Only when we are united can we build the city, the country, the size of our dreams. With love, Fransheska Cantó.” (Fransheska)*
- *“Young Guido (our Mayor is very young), is working very well on everything that has to do with infrastructure. I would ask him to promote culture and leadership and also to build more spaces for children to play, with a lot of light. Illumination is very important to protect children. I would also ask for more spaces for sports, not only football or volleyball, but tennis or other sports.” (Rosa)*



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