World Green Building Week 2012: USGBC Focuses on Resilient Buildings as Key to Protecting our Future

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This past Monday, Sept. 17, a chorus of voices from around the world spoke out in support of "Green Buildings for Great Communities," the theme of this year's World Green Building Week, hosted by World Green Building Council. Green building councils from 90 nations organized hundreds of events to educate the public about the health, environmental and economic benefits of sustainable design and construction.

Global Communities (formerly CHF International) (Cooperative Housing Foundation), which serves millions of people in low- and moderate-income communities around the world, hosted a panel in partnership with USGBC called "Cities and Climate Change Adaptation: What We Can Learn About Resilience from Those Living on the Edge." The panel featured Judy Baker, lead economist in the Urban Practice at the World Bank Institute; Brian English, director of program innovation for Global Communities; Aram Khachadurian, an international development consultant; Helen Santiago Fink, urban climate change advisor for USAID; and Janice Perlman, an independent scholar, teacher and consultant, who discussed resiliency in the built environment and its role in addressing the plight of the urban poor.

As Baker explained, the urban poor are most severaly affected by low-intensity, high-frequency disasters, not just the 100-year storms that rattle the developed world. High-density informal settlements pose hazaradous conditions succeptible to disease and hyper-sensitive to natural weather events.

Cities play an important role in addressing these sub-standard conditions. Santiago Fink outlined the ingredients for a resilient and safe community—knowledge, organization, connected infrastructure, economic activity and natural resources. These assets enable the conditions needed to build local capacity and basic services. The panelists then used examples from India, Haiti and Honduras to illustrate communities in which resileint and sustainable building practices were employed to rebuild, both post-disaster and through settlement formalization.

USGBC's Project Haiti is an additional example of a replicable model for resilient, green buildings. The LEED Platinum orphanage that USGBC is working to build, in partnership with pro-bono design partner HOK, will have implications far beyond a needed physical structure; it supports community-building, employment and the local economy.

A resilient community is one that can both weather a storm and its economic effects. World Green Building Week is an important time to remember the lasting and deep force for positive change that green buildings can mean for our communities and planet.

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