

The following is an extract from the UN-HABITAT publication "Gender Equality in the Habitat Agenda." The Habitat Agenda is one of the key documents outlining UN-HABITAT'S mandate. The extract below gives a brief overview of how the Habitat Agenda is relevant to gender equality and the advancement of women.

*To read the Habitat Agenda in full, please visit UN-HABITAT'S website:
<http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?ID=1176&catid=10&typeid=24&subMenuId=0>*

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE HABITAT AGENDA

"Making the Habitat Agenda Work for You: Women, Men, Girls, Boys"

In June 1996, the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II, popularly known as the City Summit) was held in Istanbul, Turkey. Thousands of people, representing national governments, local authorities, non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) participated. Among the NGOs and CBOs, women's organizations were some of the strongest. It is therefore no accident that the Habitat Agenda, the document that was endorsed in Istanbul, makes reference to women and girls and gender equality.

Did you know that the Habitat Agenda contains 30 references to "gender", and no less than 110 to "women/girls?" Throughout the Habitat Agenda, you will find such phrases as: gender equality, gender needs, gender perspective, gender specificity, gender sensitivity, gender-disaggregated data and many more. What do all these gender words mean to you, your household, your community or your city? The 110 references refer to areas that need to be addressed in order to empower women. They include recognition of the human rights of women, greater participation of women in public and political life at all levels, capacity building for women, women's right to land, housing and property etc. There are also calls to take into account the special needs of women, such as a safe place to leave their children while they work, and to value women's knowledge and contribution in planning and managing our towns and cities.

Putting gender in the Agenda: from Beijing to Istanbul

Ensuring that the Habitat Agenda equally addressed the needs and roles of women and men required the concerted effort of many women's organizations, supportive governments, as well as supportive individual women and men in government delegations in the Habitat II preparatory process and in Istanbul. It involved many months of strategizing by many women and women's organizations, coalitions and alliances. In particular, the Super Coalition on Women Homes and Community, organized to get habitat issues on to the agenda of the Beijing conference in 1995. After Beijing, the Huairou Commission, which succeeded the Super Coalition, worked hard to ensure that what was won in Beijing was carried forward and improved upon in the Habitat Agenda.

The Habitat Agenda: a Document of Commitments

In Istanbul, governments said, "we commit ourselves"... It is important to remember that the Habitat Agenda was adopted by consensus. It is equally important to remember that it was subsequently adopted by the UN General Assembly. This means that all Member States of the General Assembly have endorsed it. The Habitat Agenda is a call to action by national governments, in partnership with local authorities and civil society, to make our cities, towns and villages places where women and men, girls and boys can live in peace and dignity and where they can grow and develop, not merely survive.

Let us take a quick look at some of the underlying principles

Central to the Habitat Agenda are some principles that have a direct or indirect bearing on gender equality and women's empowerment. These are the basic ideas of fairness, decency and even common sense that guide the calls for action made in the Habitat Agenda. Many of these could be assumed to be universally acceptable. However, judging by the enormous amount of debate and negotiation that went on before they were accepted, it cannot be assumed that they are obvious or acceptable to all nations and all segments of society. That was one reason why members of women's organizations were quite certain that the work would not end at Istanbul.

Equality

First and foremost, the principles of equality, solidarity, partnership, human dignity, respect and co-operation are recognized as being essential for sustainable human settlements. In addition, commitment is made to: the equality of women in the family, women's equal participation in public life, women's equal access to resources, including land and property, women's equal access to information, education and training as well as decision-making. Special mention is made to the situation of the girl-child, as the starting place for discrimination against women, and therefore also a starting place for addressing the question of women's human rights. For example: do girls have the same right as boys to inherit their parent's land? This question is as important as the related question: do women have the right to inherit the family property upon the death of a husband?

(See paragraphs 25, 27, 46, 119, 182)

Sustainability

Genuine and lasting development must be people-centered, meaning it must be for the benefit of and driven by people who are most affected by that development. It cannot exclude any group/s, and should not endanger future generations by mismanaging natural resources, and the environment. The Habitat Agenda therefore calls for measures to ensure wise use of the environment, taking into account the need to maintain community solidarity (sustainable communities). It also calls for the creation of sustainable livelihoods. This means taking measures to ensure that individuals and communities can make a living and look after themselves in an effective and predictable manner, and without degrading the environment. The participation of women in the management of neighborhoods and communities is called for as one way to ensure sustainable communities and environments. Women's expertise and knowledge must be recognized, utilized and rewarded at all levels, and women should benefit equally from all development programmes and activities. In addition, special effort must be made to assist but also to involve women during and after natural or human-made disasters such as wars, earthquakes and floods.

(See paragraphs 25, 27, 28, 35, 36, 39, 44, 45, 57, 100,)

Gender equality

Gender equality was one of the biggest and hottest debates in Istanbul and before. During the preparatory process, there were those who argued that gender equality is taken care of under equality and equity. "What is all this fuss about gender?" they asked. However, as many women are aware, this assumption has in the past often led to women being left out either by ignorance or by design. Therefore, it had to be spelled out as a separate issue, and women's organizations, supported by many governments, fought hard to have it specified. Finally it was accepted as a separate principle. The commitment is to:

- *Integrating gender perspectives in human settlement related legislation, policies, programmes and projects through the application of gender sensitive analysis;*
- *Developing conceptual and practical methodologies for incorporating gender in human settlements planning, development and evaluation, including the development of indicators;*
- *Collecting, analyzing and disseminating gender-disaggregated data and information on human settlements issues including statistical means which recognize the unremunerated work of women for use in policy and programme planning and implementation;*
- *Integrating a gender perspective in the design and implementation of environmentally sound and sustainable resource management mechanisms, production techniques and infrastructure development in rural and urban areas;*
- *The formulation and strengthening of policies and practices to promote the full and equal participation of women in human settlement planning and decision making.*
(See paragraph 46)

In everyday language, this means

- ensuring that the needs, perspectives, roles and priorities of women and men must be equally addressed in laws, policies, programmes and projects;
- that our cities and towns must be designed and developed to take into account the roles of women, men, boys and girls;
- that all information and data collected must clearly show how women and men are affected by, and how they benefit from, any activities and developments;
- that management of resources and production processes, as well as provision of services must take into account the views, needs, roles and needs of women and men;
- that special attention must be placed on promoting policies and actions that improve women's participation in public and political life.

The right to security of tenure

Women's equal rights to own, manage, control and use land and property was an important concern of women during the processes of both the Beijing and Istanbul conferences. In Istanbul, it was recognized as an element of the right to adequate housing (another hot topic) and the right to equal access to resources. The Habitat Agenda provides for:

- *provision of legal security of tenure and equal access to land to all people, including women ... legislative and administrative reforms to give women full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technologies.*
(see paragraph 40)

This means that if your country has laws that do not allow women and girls the equal right to own and use land and housing, you should lobby for their revision. Similarly if

good laws exist but are not being implemented, you should lobby for implementation but also organize women to make them aware of their rights. This paragraph also asks that all persons and groups be treated as equal with regard to access to shelter and basic services. Including: housing, water, sanitation, health facilities, schools etc. and for legal measures to remove all discrimination in these areas.

Recognition of different forms of the family

The definition of what constitutes "a family" was also an issue of contention at Istanbul. The language that was finally adopted in the Habitat Agenda recognizes the diversity of family types within different cultures. It recognizes that families headed by women are often among the poorest and often need special focus in development activities. Gender equality within the family, that means equality between women and men in the family, was recognized. This of course connects to other things such as equal access to information and resources. In other words, equal access to resources applies within the household. Very important also is the need to protect and preserve the family and to make sure that our towns and cities are managed and designed to help in protecting the family. For example: are our streets safe for boys and girls? Do women have safe child care facilities so that they can work outside the home? Does the public transport system assure safe passage for women and girls or are our cities so insecure that some members of the family are under constant threat and fear?

(See paragraph 31)

The right to be involved in governing your city

Habitat II was known as "the partners" conference and the Habitat Agenda recognizes the importance of involving a diverse group of organizations in urban management. The Agenda calls for the involvement of local authorities, NGOs, CBOs and all interest groups at the local and city level. Women's groups are highlighted as a very important part of this group. These groups must be involved and consulted in the management of the environment, in spending public money, in designing public services, and in any other neighbourhood and city issues. Does your municipality or city have citizens' forums, neighbourhood associations, gender-budgeting initiatives? These are all useful means of getting involved in decisions that affect your every day life.

(See paragraph 179, 181, 182, 183)

Capacity Building: training to enable participation

Even though all citizens have a right to participate in the running of their towns and cities, not everybody is equipped with the necessary knowledge, expertise or awareness to take advantage of this right and opportunity. Governments and local authorities are therefore asked to provide the necessary and appropriate capacity-building programmes to enable citizens to participate. Women's organizations are highlighted as one of the groups within the civil society that particularly need capacity-building in many areas such as planning, construction, municipal financing and management of basic services.

But women are also recognized as having crucial knowledge and expertise arising out of their day-to-day work in managing households and neighborhoods, and conserving resources. This expertise must be recognized and used by policy-makers and planners. Hence, women's organizations must dialogue with city managers.

Monitoring: keeping track of progress

Governments are given the main responsibility for implementing the Habitat Agenda, but they are required to work in partnership with all relevant actors and interest groups, including women's organizations. They are required to develop ways of measuring progress, based on consultation with women and men, and using engendered information (information that shows the situation for both women and men respectively). Of course, it is much easier for women to be involved in monitoring and evaluating progress if they are also involved in the actual business of implementation. (See paragraph 213, 46).