



# WORLD URBAN FORUM 6

## GENDER EQUALITY ACTION ASSEMBLY

### *“Fostering Economic Empowerment in Cities”*

Naples, Sunday, 02 September 2012, 08:00 -17:30

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### **A. Background**

Urbanisation is one of the most powerful irreversible forces in the world. We live in a new urban era with most of humanity now living in towns and cities.<sup>i</sup> By the middle of this century it is expected that seven out of every ten persons on the planet will be urban dwellers<sup>ii</sup>. Cities are said to be the engines of national economic development and of economic wealth creation, inherently configured to generate prosperity and to provide opportunity, increasing access for all to the benefits accruing in urban life. Unfortunately progress has not been evenly spread and prosperity has not come to everyone; economic prosperity in cities does not automatically imply fairer shares of resources between women and men. ‘Prosperous cities’ require equitable access to the necessities for building human capabilities and well-being such as basic services, employment and housing.

In developing countries, rapid urbanisation has put enormous pressure on the provision of basic services, housing, and other public amenities; the cities are confronted with the task of ensuring that urbanization generates sufficient economic growth to create decent and productive jobs for their rapidly growing populations; but too often economic development has led to gains only for a few. Gender inequality and barriers to women empowerment remain widespread in urban environment, compromising the future of cities. “Common sense alone should tell us that even from a developmental perspective the privileging of males, who constitute the lesser half of the global population, does not make any economic sense. The blatant denial of space and agency to women in resolving a crisis that directly affects them is the worst possible abuse of human rights”<sup>iii</sup>. Nation cannot impoverish the higher percentage of its citizens and hope to prosper.<sup>iv</sup> “Gender equality is smart economics”<sup>v</sup> and can make cities ‘smarter’ still<sup>vi</sup>.

‘Women are the Third World’s powerhouse’<sup>vii</sup> and the drivers of global economic growth. An *Economist* article on women and the world economy argues that “the future of the world economy lies increasingly in female hands”<sup>viii</sup>. Women are vital economic players; globally, millions of women are involved in economic activities, undertaking critical roles in industry,



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agriculture, manufacturing, services, and as entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs play a big role in business development in the Pacific region. In Japan, 5 out of 6 new businesses are created by women, and they have at least five employees<sup>ix</sup>.

In developing countries, women are incredible forces for change in their families, villages, cities and countries. According to the International Center for Research on Women, *'Income in the hands of women has had a dramatic impact on the well-being of their families. Women spend a significantly higher proportion of their income on children's food, health, and education, ensuring that the next generation will have a better future'*. When economic crises fell on the country, Indonesian women became the backbone of the family, particularly where their husbands experienced job termination. They proved to possess high resilience in survival. Many men-led enterprises went bankrupt during the crisis, but the number was relatively small in the case of women<sup>x</sup>.

**B. Gender and Economic Empowerment in Cities**

Women are a city's greatest asset, and contribute heavily to sustainable urban development. They provide labor (both paid and unpaid), housing, care, community organizing, transport, and vital services. That women participate in economic productive activities in rural and urban areas, both within and outside the house, is now an established fact. A growing body of research and literature affirms women's contributions to urbanization, and the importance of women's political participation, social empowerment, asset ownership and control for economic development and social security for cities as a whole. However, women's vital contributions have largely been neglected by city officials, economic planners and development practitioners, who have tended to concentrate on the industrialization of food production, commoditization of services such as transport, and privatization of health care and education<sup>xi</sup>. This has led to increased burdens on women's time and resources, decreasing their ability to increase their contributions let alone focus on their own empowerment or economic wellbeing.

Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families and communities. Giving space for women's participation is critical but only the first step. Effective participation of women will require empowerment of women in various areas to facilitate a productive engagement in the subject. The United Nations Population Fund defines women's empowerment through five major components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.



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Women's economic wellbeing and the larger concept of gender equality are intricately tied to other development concerns. *"Women who are economically empowered are an incredibly powerful source of development"*<sup>xii</sup>. Figures and facts before our very eyes speak loud and clear in affirmation of the indispensability of women, especially in times of human and natural calamities or crises<sup>xiii</sup>. One out of seven people in the world is suffering from hunger and more than 60% of the hungry are women and children<sup>xiv</sup>. Women bear a disproportionate burden of the world's poverty and being poor can also mean that they have no role in decision making, have little protection from violence, and are vulnerable to diseases/viruses such as HIV and AIDS. The feminization of poverty is not just an abuse of women's basic human rights but a threat to family security in general<sup>xv</sup>.

### Employment

Perhaps women's most important contribution to the sustainability and overall functioning of cities has been their unpaid, care -focused contributions. As Manuel Castells, the famous sociologist has stated:

'In the end if the system still 'works' it is because women guarantee unpaid transportation, because they repair their homes, because they make meals when there are no canteens, because they spend more time shopping around, because they look after others' children when there are no nurseries, and because they offer 'free entertainment' to the producers when there is a social vacuum and the absence of cultural creativity. If these women who 'do nothing' ever stopped to do 'only that', the whole urban structure as we know it would become completely incapable of maintaining its function'<sup>xvi</sup>.

According to some estimates, women represent 70 percent of the world's poor<sup>xvii</sup>. Women perform sixty-six (66) percent of the world's work, but earn only ten (10) percent of the income<sup>xviii</sup>. Women are often paid less than men for their work, with the average wage gap in 2008 being 17 percent<sup>xix</sup>. It is estimated that if women's paid employment rates were raised to the same level as men's, America's GDP would be 9 percent higher; the euro-zone's would be 13 percent higher, and Japan's would be boosted by 16 percent<sup>xx</sup>. Furthermore, women's informal work is neither visible in national labor statistics nor included in social protection schemes. Facts demonstrate that as human resources, women are not just being wasted but are greatly undermined. While being denied their rightful place as agents of 'her story', their energy is being sapped as they negotiate their existence through draining conditions, which are not of their own making<sup>xxi</sup>.

### Access to Land

Women are responsible for between 60 and 80 percent of food production in developing countries<sup>xxii</sup>, yet they seldom own the land they labour on, have security of tenure, right or control over the land. Legislation in many countries prevents women from owning and inheriting land, and this increases their vulnerability to poverty and exposes them to further discrimination. In cases where law ensures women equal rights, implementing mechanisms are missing or traditions and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities are still in place.



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Ownership of land and property empowers women and provides them with security and income as land can serve as a base for food production and income generation, it can also serve as collateral for credit and as a means of holding savings for the future. In some communities, land is a social asset that is important for cultural identity, political power and participation in decision making.

Access to Housing

Although access to adequate, safe and secure home to live in peace and dignity is the right of every woman, man, boy and girl; excessive levels of urbanization in relation to the economic growth have resulted in high levels of urban poverty and rapid expansion of unplanned urban settlements and slums, which are characterized by a lack of basic infrastructure and services, overcrowding and substandard housing conditions<sup>xxiii</sup>. In spite of women being the primary users of the house in performing domestic/unpaid and paid labour, women have little control or right over houses. Providing affordable housing with tenure for poor families will make them less vulnerable and more secure. Legal housing made available to women independently or jointly with men will help empower them and improve their status.

Transportation

As cities are engines of growth in many countries, transportation systems are what make the engines work<sup>xxiv</sup>. Functioning transportation networks are a key element for cities and towns across the globe and are a precondition for economic activity and social participation. In addition to its importance as an urban service in terms of moving people and goods, the transport infrastructure and service sector itself is a significant generator of wealth and employment. In developing countries, rapid urbanization and insufficient investment in infrastructure often made worse by urban poverty and social exclusion have led to transportation problems. The gender dimensions of infrastructure and road building programmes are often ignored, assuming an alleged neutral position of benefits to all, and consequently increasing women's time burdens and reducing their ability to participate in economic activity.

Given the gender roles in many households, women's travel patterns are potentially different from men and sometimes affected by a usual greater share of household and family responsibilities. Women traditionally showed a different pattern of space interaction in urban settlement; their daily mobility routines in many cases are different from that of men; women tend to 'trip chain' in response to family demand and responsibilities, a routine may include: take children to school, go to work, go for grocery/shopping, carry children to playground, go to pharmacy etc. These multi-tasks place a high need for their mobility and requirement for flexibility in their travel option/choice. Findings from a Turkmenistan transport-user survey conducted by the Ashgabat Urban Transport Project indicate that 28 percent of women walk to work compared to 14% of men; 7 percent of women commute by car as compared to 20 percent of men and women's waiting times are longer than men's and their average total journey time is 10 to 15 percent greater<sup>xxv</sup>.





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Inadequate transportation also poses security risks to women. Women are usually concerned with the safety and personal security aspect of transportation. Overcrowding of public transport is sometimes a security issue for women as it facilitates groping and inappropriate behaviour from male counterparts; mobility at night also poses similar risk including possible risk of violence. Although this also affects men, they have less aversion to overcrowding. “Poverty complicates mobility and lack of transport options complicates poverty”<sup>xxvi</sup>. Changes in economic structure, such as infrastructural supports (e.g. transportation and sanitation) and social services make it easier for women to combine their productive and reproductive roles<sup>xxvii</sup>.

Water and Sanitation

Investing in upgrading of slums and urban poor settlements and providing them with basic services will help build sustainable and prosperous cities. People living in slums or slum conditions live in less than dignified state; amongst many deprivations, poor access to water and sanitation in slums poses great inconveniences and health risk for the whole communities, but often with the greatest burden on women and girls. Women, especially in developing states, play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water; thus their right and access to reliable safe water resources is essential. Women and girls are most often responsible for collecting water for the whole family, and they also usually manage household and human waste. In many local cultures in the Lake Victoria region of Kenya, women and girls bear the primary responsibility for water, sanitation and hygiene at the household level; for them, sanitation means more than just latrines: it incorporates safety and dignity<sup>xxviii</sup>. Adequate and safe water and sanitation brings quality of life to women and their communities. The benefits include greater convenience, less loss of energy from the labour of carrying water, better health and hygiene, more privacy and dignity, more time to engage in work and thus more opportunity to earn money for the family. Less time spent fetching water can also mean more time to study in school (particularly for girls), which further improves prospects for better employment and poverty alleviation<sup>xxix</sup>.

Access to Finance

The majority of Africa’s urban poor have no access to any formal financial instruments due to lack of collateral resulting from the quality and/or legal status of their assets (e.g. land/housing), limited incomes or uncertain employment status. Due to lack of regular or predictable incomes for most of city dwellers, and an absence of financial instruments that could adjust accordingly, only 15 per cent or so of Africa’s urban population may be eligible for formal housing loans, effectively excluding the remaining 85 per cent<sup>xxx</sup>. Women’s control over economic resources, including financial resources, is key for women’s economic empowerment. It not only enhances women’s economic status in society, but also creates a multiplier effect for economic growth. It provides women with opportunities to set up and/or expand enterprises, including in the micro-enterprise sector. To graduate women’s income-generating activities from survival level into strong and viable businesses, women need access to the full range of credit, banking and financial services and facilities, essential to fully develop their productive assets, their land and their businesses. Unfortunately, banks in developing countries often have conservative lending practices.



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Expanding women's economic opportunities means: more and better jobs for women across a wider range of sectors; equitable financial rewards; a business climate that supports women in starting and growing businesses, and building their management and entrepreneurial skills; a financial sector in which commercial banks and microfinance institutions provide women with effective access to a range of financial services and products tailored to their needs, especially credit and savings instruments; and, in times of high food and fuel prices, greater livelihood security for women<sup>xxxix</sup>. Ultimately, a country's success in empowering women will depend on a multi-faceted and responsive approach to its public policy management and implementation, including its macro-economic, financial and trade policies<sup>xxxix</sup>.

**C. World Urban Forum 6 – The Urban Future**

The World Urban Forum is a biennial event that is organized and convened by the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) pursuant to paragraph 10 of resolution 18/5 of the Commission on Human Settlements, in which the Commission requested the Executive Director "to promote a merger of the Urban Environment Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty into a new urban forum, with a view to strengthening the coordination of international support to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda".

The theme for the upcoming sixth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF 6) is: *The Urban Future*. The World Urban Forum facilitates the exchange of experiences and the advancement of collective knowledge among cities. The WUF 6 will provide an opportunity to tackle the challenges of fostering prosperity and connecting it with the challenge of broadening the improvements in the quality of urban life. The Forum will also examine the old and newly emerging factors creating prosperity, which actors trigger positive change, what kinds of strategies they use, what prevents cities from becoming more prosperous and how they can engage in interdisciplinary analysis to develop policies and plans to meet their goals for urban-based social and economic development that is environmentally safe, equitable and sustainable.

**D. Gender Equality Action Assembly (GEAA)**

During the upcoming WUF 6, UN-Habitat will host the Gender Equality Action Assembly (GEAA). This is the second GEAA, the first was held at the last WUF 5 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The GEAA holds during WUF pursuant to Resolution 22/7 on UN-Habitat's Work Programme and Budget for 2010-2011; the resolution requested UN-Habitat's Executive Director to facilitate a partners' forum to meet, in conjunction with the sessions of the Governing Council and the World Urban Forum, to assess progress of the implementation of the UN-Habitat's Gender Equality Action Plan (2008 – 2013).

The GEAA is a dynamic and multi-stakeholder event, bringing together UN-Habitat's partners, including, ministers, local authorities, civil societies, academia, non-governmental



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organizations, private sector, and other Habitat Agenda partners. The theme for the WUF 6 Gender Equality Action Assembly is: Fostering Economic Empowerment in Cities. The GEAA will seek to answer various questions, including:

- a) What are the issues of economic empowerment in cities?
- b) What are the prevalent pathways to providing economic empowerment in cities and the impact on men, women, boys and girls? Who is/are the marginalised and vulnerable group and to what extent? Evidence based cases
- c) What policy instruments and actions have successfully increased opportunities for all, promoting equity in the cities?
- d) What are the strategies to mainstream gender equality in related policies, regulations and implementation in the identified pathways?
- e) Who are the key players and their respective responsibilities?
- f) Is there a role for the private sector? How can they engage?
- g) What benefits are there for public and private institutions in supporting women's economic activities?
- h) How can public and private sector work collaboratively in cities with key stakeholders to yield the greatest mutual value for women economic empowerment?
- i) How can women in urban areas access land and housing in their own right?
- j) How have cities and central governments succeeded in enabling access to affordable housing for all?
- k) What support can women receive from public and private sector to achieve economic empowerment through land and housing?
- l) What role can international development agencies play to catalyse women's economic empowerment, particularly in relation to land and housing?
- m) What are the policy requirements? Policy advice and recommendation
- n) What are the delivery methodologies and channels?

**Objectives of the Gender Equality Action Assembly (GEAA)**

The objectives of the GEAA are:

- (1) To discuss the achievements and challenges in the implementation of the GEAP; and
- (2) To discuss the theme of the GEAA - assessing the trends and implications of economic empowerment in cities on men, women, boys and girls looking at various pathways to economic empowerment, with the view to identify the vulnerable groups, the marginalised, and inequities; highlighting the issue(s) based on current trend and examples of practices and challenges, key players, policy requirements and recommendations to various relevant development actors.



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In their analysis/discussion of the subject, the GEAA speakers, panelists and participants may adopt amongst other frameworks, the UNDP's three core dimensions of women's economic empowerment, namely: **economic opportunity** (e.g., expanding employment and entrepreneurship, promoting decent and productive work, improving access to finance); **legal status and rights** (e.g., improving women's property, inheritance and land rights); and **voice, inclusion and participation** in economic decision-making (e.g., developing mechanisms to enhance women's involvement in decision-making<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The GEAA will inform the discussions at the Gender and Women's Roundtable (GWR) and will contribute to discussions in the other WUF 6 dialogues and overall it is expected to inform relevant stakeholders on innovative and sustainable approaches to delivering equitable economic empowerment in cities to facilitate sustainable prosperity of cities.

**Peer organisations**

The lead partner for the GEAA is Huairou Commission which is a global membership and partnership coalition that empowers grassroots women's organizations to enhance their community development practice and to exercise collective political power at the global level.

Other key partners and participants are:

- i) Government of Italy
- ii) UN Women
- iii) Government of Norway
- iv) URBANIMA LUPT Research Centre of the Federico II University of Naples
- v) Fondazione Mediterraneo
- vi) Anna Lindh Foundation
- vii) NGO's e.g. WIEGO, GROOTS International, Plan International, Women in Cities International, Yemeni Women Union, Habitat for Humanity
- viii) Other international bodies (e.g. Asia Development Bank)
- ix) Subject experts from academia in renowned universities and professional bodies

**Speakers and Panelists will comprise representation from:**

1. Government
2. Grassroots
3. Financial Institutions
4. Human Rights
5. Women's Economic Empowerment expert
6. Land and Housing experts (with gender perspective)
7. Youth
8. Academia
9. Private Sector





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**Language**

English

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<sup>i</sup> Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director, UN-Habitat (2011)

<sup>ii</sup> UN-DESA (2010) World Urbanization Prospects: The 2009 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/index.htm>.

<sup>iii</sup> Micere Githae Mugo, Women and empowerment in Southern Africa, SADC Regional Human Development Report, Challenges and opportunities for regional integration (2000).

<sup>iv</sup> *ibid*

<sup>v</sup> World Bank (2006). Gender Equality as Smart Economics: A World Bank Action Plan – 2007 - 2010

<sup>vi</sup> UN-Habitat (2010). Gender Equality for Smarter Cities: Challenges and Progress.

<http://www.unhabitat.org/pmss/listitemDetails.aspx?publicationID=2887>

<sup>vii</sup> a research reported by an Australian NGO, Community Aid Abroad, Cited in Motik, S. (2000), Significant Roles of Women Entrepreneurs in Economic Development

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.economist.com/node/6802551>

<sup>ix</sup> Motik, S. (2000), Significant Roles of Women Entrepreneurs in Economic Development

<sup>x</sup> *ibid*

<sup>xi</sup> *ibid*

<sup>xii</sup> Peter Sands, Group Chief Executive, Standard Chartered Bank

<sup>xiii</sup> Micere Githae Mugo, Women and empowerment in Southern Africa, SADC Regional Human Development Report, Challenges and opportunities for regional integration (2000).

<sup>xiv</sup> 'HER MILE'. Women's rights and access to land. The last stretch of road to eradicate hunger ActionAid (2010)

[http://www.actionaid.it/filemanager/cms\\_actionaid/images/DOWNLOAD/Rapporti\\_DONNE\\_pdf/HerMile\\_AAItaly.pdf](http://www.actionaid.it/filemanager/cms_actionaid/images/DOWNLOAD/Rapporti_DONNE_pdf/HerMile_AAItaly.pdf)

<sup>xv</sup> Micere Githae Mugo, Women and empowerment in Southern Africa, SADC Regional Human Development Report, Challenges and opportunities for regional integration (2000).

<sup>xvi</sup> Alice Hovorka, Henk de Zeeuw and Mary Njenga, eds, *Women Feeding Cities: Mainstreaming gender in urban agriculture and food security*, 2009 Practical Action Publishing, Rugby, UK.

<sup>xvii</sup> [http://www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/women\\_poverty\\_economics/](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/)

<sup>xviii</sup> [www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/fast](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/fast)

<sup>xix</sup> [http://www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/women\\_poverty\\_economics/](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/)

<sup>xx</sup> Annual Report of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), 2007

<sup>xxi</sup> Micere Githae Mugo, Women and empowerment in Southern Africa, SADC Regional Human Development Report, Challenges and opportunities for regional integration (2000).

<sup>xxii</sup> ActionAid (2010) 'HER MILE'. Women's rights and access to land. The last stretch of road to eradicate hunger [http://www.actionaid.it/filemanager/cms\\_actionaid/images/DOWNLOAD/Rapporti\\_DONNE\\_pdf/HerMile\\_AAItaly.pdf](http://www.actionaid.it/filemanager/cms_actionaid/images/DOWNLOAD/Rapporti_DONNE_pdf/HerMile_AAItaly.pdf)

<sup>xxiii</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/HousingIndex.aspx>

<sup>xxiv</sup> Gender and Urban Transport: Smart and Affordable. Sustainable Transport: A Resource Book for policy-makers in Developing Countries. Module 7a (2007) <http://www.sutp.org>

<sup>xxv</sup> *ibid*



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<sup>xxvi</sup> Innovative Approaches to promoting women's economic empowerment. Paper for the partnership event. UNDP, 2008.

<sup>xxvii</sup> DAW (2008); UNRISD (2010). Cited in the States of the Cities Report UN-Habitat 2010

<sup>xxviii</sup> UN-Habitat. PROMOTING GENDER PARITY.

<http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?typeid=19&catid=462&cid=5918>

<sup>xxix</sup> <http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?typeid=19&catid=303&cid=6847>

<sup>xxx</sup> UN-Habitat (2010). The State of African Cities 2010: Governance, Inequality and Urban Land Markets

<sup>xxxi</sup> UNDP. Innovative Approaches to promoting women's economic empowerment. Paper for the partnership event in 2008.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Women's Economic Empowerment. OECD and DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET) Issue paper, 2011.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> UNDP. Innovative Approaches to promoting women's economic empowerment. Paper for the partnership event in 2008.