



CONCEPT NOTE

Gender Equality Action Assembly
Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, 19 – 20 March, 2010
First Session

Theme: Bridging the Gender Divide in Cities

“Shelter is at the core of urban poverty: Much can be done to improve the lives of people through better policies in this area. Initiatives in this domain are particularly beneficial for poor women who are often burdened with the triple responsibilities of child rearing, management of the household and income earning...A roof and an address in a habitable neighbourhood is a starting point for poor urban people.”ⁱ

Background

The 22nd Session of the UN-HABITAT Governing Council in April 2009 approved the Gender Equality Action Plan 2008-2013 (GEAP), through Resolution 22/7, *Work programme and budget of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme for the biennium 2010–2011*. The GEAP was developed through a participatory process involving UN-HABITAT and its partners. It seeks to unite all UN-HABITAT’s programmes and partners to improve gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment in the areas of advocacy and monitoring; participatory urban planning, governance and management; land and housing; access to environmentally sound urban services; access to finance for housing and infrastructure; and gender mainstreaming in all UN-HABITAT programmes. In addition, it seeks to contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal 1, 3 and 7 related to poverty reduction, gender equality and empowerment of women, and environmental sustainability.

The Governing Council requested the Executive Director *to facilitate a gender equality action forum that will meet in conjunction with the sessions of the Governing Council and World Urban Forum to enable partners to assess progress made in the implementation of the gender equality action plan*. The Gender Equality Action Assembly therefore aims to do exactly this. It also provides an opportunity for partners to interface with key policy and decision-makers, especially women mayors, ministers of housing and urban development and parliamentarians and explore ways of strengthening gender mainstreaming in international, regional, and national land, housing and urban development policies and programmes. This is in response to a request for UN-HABITAT to consider establishment of a Forum for Women Ministers and key decision-makers similar to the UNEP Network of Women Ministers of Environment.

Gender Equality and Urbanization

The struggle for gender equality spans all areas of human development, and touches every aspect of rural and urban life. With half of the global population now living in cities, and millions more especially the youth from rural areas and across borders joining the ranks of urbanites on a daily

basis, understanding the gendered dimensions of urbanisation is critical for effective policy-making and programming, addressing the rapid urbanisation challenge, and ensuring that cities and regions provide a safe and healthy environment, productive economies, and social benefits for different groups of people.

Although numerous studies show that women are among the poorest of the poor, make up 60 to 80 per cent of the informal workforce in developing countriesⁱⁱ and constitute a large proportion of slum dwellers, women can and do contribute to development in cities and regions. Women feed cities and nurture the leaders of today and tomorrow through productive community management and reproductive work.

UN-HABITAT's *State of the World's Cities Report 2008-2009* confirms that in some countries, woman-headed households suffer disproportionately from inadequate housing in poor urban neighbourhoods, exemplified by overcrowding, tenure insecurity, and lack of access to clean water, sanitation, education, health and basic services. At the same time woman-headed households are becoming more common in urban areas, making up on average about 20 per cent of urban households in 160 countries surveyed.ⁱⁱⁱ

Women and girls have the same right to the city as men and boys. Women and girls should be able to move freely in cities, attend school and enjoy urban life without fear of crime and attacks in streets, highways and subways, in car parks, at bus stops, at work, and recreation facilities or any other public spaces. They should be actively involved in the planning, design, governance and management of cities and regions in times of peace, conflict and natural disasters. Efforts at all levels to bridge the urban divide therefore should examine the extent of gender equality in cities and regions. Addressing gender equality improves overall inclusiveness.

The Gender Equality Action Assembly will enable UN-HABITAT and partners to assess progress in implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plan, including challenges and good practices. It will provide an opportunity for making linkages between gender equality and urbanization bearing in mind the theme for the World Urban Forum - *Bridging the Urban Divide*. Participants will explore ways in which key policy and decision-makers, especially women mayors, parliamentarians and ministers of housing and urban development as well as local governments can contribute towards supporting implementation of the gender equality action plan, and strengthening gender mainstreaming in global, country, city and local level decisions on urbanization and development.

Objective of the Gender Equality Action Assembly

The objective of the Gender Equality Action Assembly is to facilitate partners to review and monitor the progress in the implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plan. It aims to promote policy dialogue on gender equality and urbanisation at the global and country levels.

Considering that women's role in human settlement remains largely unrecognized in both policy and practice as well as resource allocation, the Gender Equality Action Assembly will specifically seek to:

- Enhance learning and sharing on implementation of the GEAP by partners and key policy-makers and make recommendations for accelerating progress;

- Promote a deeper understanding and knowledge of gender and urbanization issues and identify opportunities for increasing action at the global, country and city level.
- Explore the possibility for establishing a network of women mayors, parliamentarians and ministers of housing and urban development, as well as local governments in support of incorporation of gender issues in policies and decisions on urbanization and regional development.

Outcomes

It is expected that the Gender Equality Action Assembly will lead to the following outcomes:

- Increased action and coordination among partners during implementation of the gender equality action plan;
- Understanding of challenges to implementation of the gender equality action plan and the possible strategies to overcome these challenges;
- Appreciation of the key gender issues in urbanization and strategic actions to promote gender equality, women's rights and empowerment of women;
- A decision on establishment of a network of women ministers, mayors and parliamentarians working in the areas of housing, urban development and local government.

Format of the Assembly

Day One

Participants will meet in both plenary and workshops on action areas of the gender equality action plan to discuss progress reports on implementation to-date, successes, challenges, gaps and strategies for action. Partners will share what is working and what is not working, any alliances formed in support of the gender equality action plan and make recommendations for the way forward.

Day Two

Women ministers, parliamentarians, and mayors will interface with practitioners including grassroots women from the field to deliberate on their possible contribution to the implementation of the gender equality action plan and to strengthening incorporation of gender issues in urbanization into global, regional, national and city level decisions. Presentations will include an overview of key issues in gender and urbanization, an introduction to the gender equality action plan and a summary of progress in its implementation. Participants through interactive panels, plenary and workshops will explore strategies for accelerating action given their specific and comparative strengths.

Participants

Invited participants include:

- Gender Equality Action Plan partners
- Women ministers and deputy ministers from relevant ministries
- Women mayors and deputy mayors
- Women parliamentarians
- Women's NGOs and grassroots organizations

- Academia
- Representatives of key government departments, development partners and UN agencies.

ⁱ UNFPA (2008) *State of the World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth*, p. 38.

ⁱⁱ World Employment Report 2004-2005: Employment, Productivity and Poverty Reduction, ILO 2004

iii. UN-HABITAT (2008) *State of the World's Cities 2008/2009: Harmonious Cities*, p 104.