

Side event/parallel session GC 24

Urbanisation- Catalyst or Impediment for Women's empowerment –

Concept note for a side event at the 24th Governing Council of UN-HABITAT Nairobi Kenya

The Theme of this year's Governing Council is ***Sustainable Urban Development: The Role of Cities in Creating Improved Economic Opportunities for All, With Special Reference to Youth and Gender.***

In this context is fitting, that an event to discuss the linkages between Urbanization and Gender, more specifically how women are positively impacting upon the urban landscape and how the urban landscape in turn facilitates or impedes women's and communities empowerment being organised.

Urbanization is a ubiquitous part of current human society. According to UN-HABITAT the majority of the world's population is currently urban and this population continues to grow at an exponential rate. Women form at least half of the urban population and for this reason their interactions with urban spaces are crucial in the quest to achieve a better urban future.

The plight of women in urban areas has been well documented; they face numerous challenges such as poor sanitation, lower wages, sexual violence and many other social ills. Yet, women continue to migrate to the city in droves driven by the pull of the chance for a better life in the city, for paid employment, access to better health facilities, credit facilities and the other trappings of city life.

Rather than looking at the reasons women migrate, or the challenges that they face, this report also seeks to address the ways in which women themselves have demonstrated resilience, the ways in which women are taking advantage of the city despite all of its challenges, the ways in which women are finding solutions to their own problems. ***By embracing these solutions and strengthening them policy transforms itself from being prescriptive and reactive to the problems women face to embracing proven, women led resolutions to these problems.***

This event will present a literature review that assesses the status of current knowledge and information in order to identify gaps and guide the definition and scope of future studies and research. The main purpose of this side event is to deliberate and understand how women worldwide are turning *oppression into Opportunity and the role urbanisation plays in this context*

To bring a synchronized approach to the literature review, the above mentioned review paper is based on the following *hypotheses*:

- Urban areas provide more opportunities and space to women in the social political, and economic spheres
- Urban services and institutions cater to the specific demands and requirements of women significantly more and far better than rural areas
- Women exhibit better resilience in times of crisis than men do, and are therefore able to take greater advantage of the limited resources the urban areas offer them

This brief panel discussion follow the presentation will attempt to bring together expertise in this field to consider the learning we can gather from women- led organisations around the world. These grassroots, women led organisations are uniquely positioned to comprehend the challenges posed by urbanization in their particular localities. It is our hope that this discussion will spur policy and research into this under-examined niche: that is how women are positively responding to the threats posed by urbanization and make use of the opportunities at the same time.

There is a Chinese proverb that says, “Women hold Half the Sky” And in this century of urbanisation, we need to understand how the *urban women can hold down their place on the urban landscape*.

Proposed Panel layout

Brief Introduction of the Research by the Authors

Introduction of the Panellists

Saskia Sassen (tbc) Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology, University of Columbia, lessons from migration and urban women’s struggles

Ms. Lene Conradi Mayor of the Municipality of Asker- Urban Space, Government and Safety (tbc)

Mr Frederik Arthur, Gender equality Ambassador - Norwegian Government (tbc)

Huariou Commission's Representative - Grass roots Women's empowerment (tbc)

Slum Dwellers International Representative - On Poverty and Employment (tbc)

Deputy Executive Director - UNHABITAT - Relate this discussion to the theme of the GC - UN and Woman's Empowerment (tbc)

State secretary Eli Blakstad Norwegian Ministry of Local government and Regional Development: One hundred years of women's enfranchisement: Women's struggles and achievements, linkages between the town and country side

Floor opens for discussions amongst panellists and audience.

Summing up and the way forward, Erik Berg