

Case Study

Woman-headed households suffer disproportionately from inadequate housing

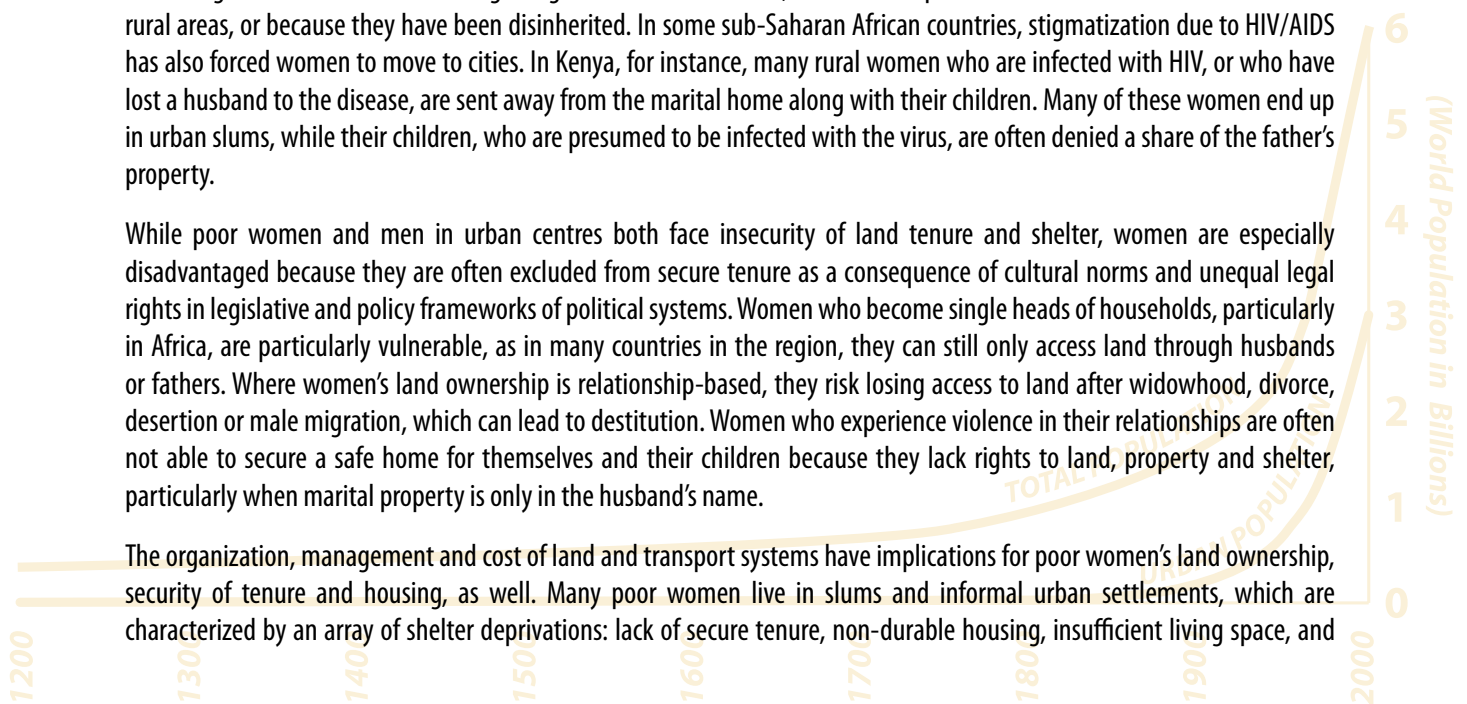


▲ Turkish women taking a lunch break in Ankara
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A recent report released by the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions notes that while previous studies found that women who migrate to cities do so to join family members – mostly husbands – in the city, this trend appears to be changing: an increasing number of women are migrating to cities on their own, often to escape domestic violence or discrimination in rural areas, or because they have been disinherited. In some sub-Saharan African countries, stigmatization due to HIV/AIDS has also forced women to move to cities. In Kenya, for instance, many rural women who are infected with HIV, or who have lost a husband to the disease, are sent away from the marital home along with their children. Many of these women end up in urban slums, while their children, who are presumed to be infected with the virus, are often denied a share of the father's property.

While poor women and men in urban centres both face insecurity of land tenure and shelter, women are especially disadvantaged because they are often excluded from secure tenure as a consequence of cultural norms and unequal legal rights in legislative and policy frameworks of political systems. Women who become single heads of households, particularly in Africa, are particularly vulnerable, as in many countries in the region, they can still only access land through husbands or fathers. Where women's land ownership is relationship-based, they risk losing access to land after widowhood, divorce, desertion or male migration, which can lead to destitution. Women who experience violence in their relationships are often not able to secure a safe home for themselves and their children because they lack rights to land, property and shelter, particularly when marital property is only in the husband's name.

The organization, management and cost of land and transport systems have implications for poor women's land ownership, security of tenure and housing, as well. Many poor women live in slums and informal urban settlements, which are characterized by an array of shelter deprivations: lack of secure tenure, non-durable housing, insufficient living space, and



lack of access to basic services such as clean water and improved toilets. Life in slums is difficult and precarious, fraught with ill-health and lack of employment and income-generating opportunities. According to the UN-HABITAT Urban Indicators database (2006 version), these high-density neighbourhoods with limited means of livelihoods are increasingly the homes of woman-headed households. Approximately 20 per cent of households in the 160 sample cities included in the Urban Indicators database are headed by women. In the cities of Central Asia, woman-headed households are almost the norm, rather than the exception. In the cities of Viet Nam, Ethiopia, South Africa, and Colombia, more than one in three households are headed by women.

The table below illustrates that between 15 and 57 per cent of the families living in houses with three combined shelter deprivations are headed by women in the urban areas of selected countries. Woman-headed households in the urban areas of Haiti, Ghana and Nicaragua are specially affected. In Kenya and Nicaragua, one-third of woman-headed households suffer from four shelter deprivations. While more research into the links between gender and urban poverty is needed, this preliminary data suggests that in some countries, woman-headed households disproportionately suffer from inadequate housing in poor urban neighbourhoods.

Sources: UN-HABITAT, 2006 ; Bazoglu & Mboup, 2007; Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), 2008.

PERCENTAGE OF URBAN HOUSEHOLDS HEADED BY WOMEN WITH DIFFERENT DEGREES OF SHELTER DEPRIVATION IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

Country	% one shelter deprivation	% two shelter deprivations	% three shelter deprivations	% four shelter deprivations
Ghana (2003)	38	34	51	-
Kenya (2003)	23	24	28	31
Madagascar(1997)	28	24	29	14
Senegal (1997)	27	23	25	14
Tanzania (1999)	28	28	15	
Nicaragua (2001)	40	37	39	33
Haiti (2000)	52	50	57	
Indonesia (2002)	13	14	17	
Nepal ((2001)	20	14	19	
Armenia	30	38	17	

Source: UN-HABITAT (2006) Urban Indicators Database, 2006. Additional analysis by Prabha Khosla.

Note: Shelter deprivations are defined as the absence of the following conditions: durable housing, sufficient living area, access to improved water, access to sanitation, or secure tenure.

NOTES

¹ Slum percentages and populations reflect revised estimates by UN-HABITAT in 2005 after a change in the definition of what constitutes adequate sanitation in urban areas. The decrease in figures from the 2001 estimates reflected in UN-HABITAT's State of the World's Cities Report 2006/7 is primarily a result of a change in the definition of adequate sanitation. In 2005, only a proportion of households using pit latrines were considered slum households, whereas in 1990 and 2001, all households using pit latrines were counted as slum households. The change affects estimates mostly in those areas where the use of pit latrines is more widespread, as in sub-Saharan Africa.

² Refer to the global scorecard on slums in the State of the World's Cities Report 2006/7, pages 38 to 45.

³ UN-HABITAT, 2006.

⁴ A similar situation has been also observed in Bolivia and Nicaragua. In Bolivia, 14 per cent of urban households lack only sufficient living area, 11 per cent lack only improved sanitation and 7 per cent lack both. In Nicaragua, with a slum concentration of 57 per cent, 13 per cent lack only sufficient living area, and 8 per cent lack either improved sanitation or durable housing.