



World YWCA

women leading change

**EMPOWERING WOMEN AND ENHANCING GENDER
EQUALITY AS A STRATEGY IN ACHIEVING
HARMONIOUS URBANISATION**

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It is a greater pleasure for me to address the Fourth World Forum, on behalf of women who comprise more than half of the world's population today. We appreciate your recognition of gender equality and the empowerment of women as central to social, economic and political aspects of harmonious urbanisation. China as a country has a deep association with the global effort to promote the empowerment and rights of women. The 1995 Beijing Conference on Women with its focus on Equality, Peace and Development continues to be the cornerstone for development interventions.

The Beijing Platform for Action, together with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the United Security Council Resolution 1325 together form robust global legal and policy tools that should guide our discussions during this Fourth World Urban. Indeed these have to be complimented by regional and national specific instruments adopted to promote the empowerment, rights and security of women and men, boys and girls in their diversity, such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on Women's Rights in Africa as well as the Africa Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality.

It is an accepted position and general knowledge that women's empowerment and gender equality is key to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the Habitat agenda. Harmonious urbanisation, the theme of this Fourth World Urban Forum must be explored in full recognition of the current threats to life, dignity and human rights for the many women, men and their families that experience extreme levels of poverty and homelessness, conflicts and wars and the burden epidemics including HIV and AIDS. Many continue to experience domestic violence, rape and abuse. Cultures and traditions, while positively evolving in some areas, continue to place women in positions of subordination and exclusion.

If we are to achieve harmonious urbanisation, informed by a human rights based approaches that empower women and promotes gender equality, five key strategies must be adopted. These include:

1. Participatory, inclusive and gender responsive urban governance
2. Economic empowerment, through decent work and entrepreneurship development especially for women and young people

3. Quality of social services and proper prioritisation of women and men's needs and rights
4. Safety and security for all, and especially addressing violence against women
5. Mainstreaming gender in disaster response and post crisis recovery and reconstruction

First, participatory, inclusive and gender responsive urban governance. Governance lies at the heart of political, social and economic organising, management and service delivery for our cities and urban communities. The question of power and accountability is key to the quality of dialogue between the authorities, citizens and tax payers. Women, just like men have a right and a responsibility to positively contribute to urbanisation and the governance of their cities. Participation of women in decision making is an acceptable global indicator to measure empowerment of women, and progress towards achieving gender equality. Harmonious urbanisation as a process must therefore invest in increasing the numbers for women as mayors, town planners, local councillors, members of parliaments, researchers and knowledge providers. The noticeable recent achievements in Africa are encouraging, notably Rwanda's new parliament which is the first in the world to have more elected women than men. But, we have to go beyond the numbers! Its important to consider the quality of decision made and how they affect women and men, boys and girls.

Participatory and inclusive governance means reaching out for quality engagement and dialogue with other non-state actors. To what extent are civil society organisations, people's movements, business and academic sectors, the homeless, the youth and persons with disabilities networks involved in decision making, in service provision and in strategic directions of our communities? To what extent are the networks of women's organisations, community and faith based organisations like the YWCA that provide services involved and consulted on matters that affected the communities they serve. Inclusive governance demands a healthy political discourse, that allows multiple and diverse perspective to flourish, and prevent our cities, towns and local governments from becoming captives of the ruling political elites thus compromising the space for people's engagement for quality delivery of services.

Secondly, harmonious urbanisation must be about *economic empowerment, creation of wealth and decent jobs* for women and men, and especially young people. Urbanisation

presents gross contradictions and at times shows the worst faces of inequality. It is in big cities like Los Angeles, Nairobi and Mumbai where you find some of the extreme wealth of individuals and corporations juxtaposed with homelessness, slums and the worst forms of poverty. In this enclave of contradictions women, single mothers, widows, child-headed households and unemployed youth search for livelihoods and employment. Empowering women and promoting gender equality among the urban poor therefore demands some strategic economic empowerment actions that can provide decent work that respects and encourages entrepreneurship such as adequate maternity provisions for women.

Again, we still find that women are overrepresented in the informal trade and business sector in most of the urban areas. They are least protected by law, they often do not have a decent place to trade and do their business, there is no adequate sanitation and childcare services are non-existent in the main places of trade such as markets. The small businesses owners are often subject to harassment, evictions and targeting by the municipal authorities. Yet, it is the income from such business that sent many of us to school, put food on the table and paid rent for those rooms that did not even have security of tenure. Women and young people, who find themselves with no options for employment and income, often become innovative and opt for small business. This World Urban Forum must therefore continue to explore ways and mean of promoting adequately supporting and facilitating innovation and entrepreneurship for women and youth.

As our cities and towns grow and as rural-urban migration continues, the quest for improved infrastructure, roads, houses, and utilities means offers opportunities for employment. Affirmative action must be employed to ensure that women and young people are can gain access to non-traditional sectors such as constructions, city planning and in the public transport industry.

Thirdly, harmonious urbanisation must take *a gender mainstreaming approach to the provision of basic services*. Women are the primary first-line consumers of basic social services. But, women also provide care for the sick, ensure there is a meal and water for the family's daily consumption and struggle to care for children as they got to schools. The socialised role of men is mostly as providers. The burden of care on women must be alleviated and gender equality promoted in service industry, including informal service provision.

Access to quality, affordable housing for the poor in our cities remains perennial problems especially in the sprawling slums and informal settlements. The 2008/2009 State of the World Cities Report from UN-Habitat shows that women in poor urban areas 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. For the majority of single headed households, child-headed households, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV secure housing is hard to come by. In addition to providing accommodation and shelter for women and girls around the world, the YWCAs in a number of countries like Canada, Australia and the USA are advocating for policy reform that prioritises housing for these communities.

The UN-Habitat support local-to-local dialogues and the grassroots women's academies undertaken in partnership with the Houiroui Commission have over the years emphasised the gendered nature of access to services. In informal settlements, slum dwellers rely on women and girls as community care-givers where there is an absence of services. In the advent of HIV and AIDS, women's organisation have risen to provide much needed services: organisations like the YWCA of Rwanda that provides home-based care, the Kenya Network of Women and AIDS that provides much needed community care support in the Kenya slums of Kibera, and Rozaria Memorial Trust that reaches small groups in Murewa Zimbabwe. It is such poorly resourced and highly committed women's groups that become the social and moral pillar for individuals struggling to access care and support. Yet, communities have observed, that where a new housing project is initiated, bars and public clubs are up and running before day-care centres for children and safe spaces for markets for women are made available!

Fourthly, harmonious urbanisation must mean safety and security for all, and especially women and children. While women, just like men, are taxpayers, citizens and voters with equal entitlement to the cities, they often find the right to freedom of movement restricted due to violence and crime. In most cities and towns there are no-go areas for women. Sexual abuse, violence, intimidation and harassment are the norm in some of the neighbourhoods. Violence against women and children is a gross violation and abuse of the human rights declaration. The UN-Habitat Safer Cities programme and especially its implementation in the Latin America region, implemented in partnership with women's organisations and other UN agencies such as UNIFEM has a cutting edge approach that must be sustained, financially and technical supported. Ensuring safety and security in the

cities requires an investment in proper infrastructure, proper road networks, proper lighting services, proper playgrounds and well-maintained public spaces.

Harmonious urbanisation must contribute to crime and violence prevention. Training of the police and law enforcement on human rights, on handling cases of violence against women, and social services to support. The innovative initiatives in urban communities with programmes to provide counselling and legal aid services to survivors of violence, by such organisations as Women Lawyers Associations, YWCAs and WiLDAFs, Legal Resource Foundations, must continue to be integrated into programmes for addressing violence and security. Town and Urban Planning programmes and approaches must integrate approaches for violence prevention as they have a long-term perspective of the relationships between populations, infrastructure, economy and the environment.

Lastly, *harmonious urbanisation must always remain conscious of disasters and conflicts, and their impacts on women, children and families.* When disaster strikes, and there is a mass movement of people, displaced, looking for livelihoods and for security; migration into cities and towns and or cross-border migration is one of the common outcomes. Disasters, and especially conflict, fracture communities, services and political stability. Families are separated and women assume extra responsibilities. The existing security and rights in property, housing, land and other assets is either undermined or destroyed. Therefore, it is crucial to have relevant and appropriate tools for empowerment of women and promotion of gender equality especially in post crisis situations. Such approaches must positively mobilise the innovative roles of women and men as well as young people in recovery and reconstruction and ensure that programmes for immediate relief such as for shelter and livelihoods are accessible to the extremely excluded such as persons with disabilities, orphans and single headed families. For instance, the current situations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Zimbabwe and in Darfur, Sudan demands a collective effort for bringing sustainable peace and political settlement.

In conclusion, promoting gender equality, rights and empowerment of women in the agenda of this World Urban Forum is an issue of accountability, of commitment and knowledge. It remains true that bringing together harmonious urbanisation demands collective action by various stakeholders and partners, in a way that places the rights and well being of women, men and children as the primary goal for the development actions. It demands adequate legislation, policies and regulations for our countries, cities and towns

that protect and respect the rights of citizens. Indeed gender responsive and socially responsible budgeting and resource allocation and management that ensure that the priorities of women, men and children are balanced for services today and sustainability for tomorrow must accompany it. The women of this world continue to do their best to bring harmony in their families and communities. What action are you taking in your individual and collective role to ensure the promotion of women empowerment and gender equality?

I thank you all.

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