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NGO Comment
Habitat III Issues Papers
Submitted by the International Alliance of Women¹
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GENERAL COMMENT

The sustainable development goals can only succeed if women's human rights are at the center of the discussion. Equally important, women's leadership can help scale-up and speed-up progress toward innovative, inclusive, compact and resilient cities.

A. What's missing?

1. Habitat III offers a unique opportunity to ensure that a human rights framework that includes women's or integrates gender to guide the formulation and implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Habitat III must be a continuation of the Post-2015 Agenda and the SDGs, and build on the internationally agreements that address gender and other inequalities. Valuable insights can be found in the Beijing Platform for Action (191 countries) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (188 countries) as well as other international documents adopted at the Vienna Conference on Human Rights and International Conference on Population and Development. But as important these agreements have been in establishing policy norms and standards, none of these milestones on the path to social progress and women's empowerment are mentioned in the issues papers.
2. Missing also are mandates at the regional level that can help to support regional follow-up initiatives to Habitat III. The papers should explore the political potential of regional agreements such as the African Charter and European Union Gender Equality Law. More than just lip service to gender equality and women's empowerment, these mandates have practical value. For example, they can be used in designing regional-level pilot projects to showcase human rights based and gender-responsive framework that is in line with vision of the New Urban Agenda.
3. The current draft also ignores data and statistics on gender equality or women's human rights and empowerment as they relate to sustainable development and climate change.² Nor does it identify gaps and methodologies needed to be able to monitor and evaluate gender-based discrimination and violence at the city level.
4. As noted by several governments, the issues papers should include more examples of best practices. These should be relevant in developed as well as developing countries, correcting the current bias in the papers towards developing countries. In the case of women's empowerment,

¹ Submitted in consultation with Krishanti Dharmaraj, Executive Director, Center for Women's Global Leadership and Eleanor Blomstrom, Program Director, Women's Environment and Development Organization.

² For example, the IUCN, UNDP and WEDO in partnership with the GGCA have published a training guide on "Gender and Climate Change", NY.

there are a host of examples that could be cited in most of the issues papers to reflect conditions at grass roots as well as national and international levels.

B. A human rights framework must shape all issue papers

Gender equality in the papers is presented primarily as an “add on” to urban planning rather than a comprehensive framework guiding policy and programs. The wide diversity of women’s situation is not acknowledged and women are presented primarily as one of the many vulnerable groups rather than key decision-makers. Women’s unpaid care work is not acknowledged nor a recognition of how redistribution and provision of services can support sustainable cities. Furthermore, the public policy bias of the papers ignores the critical connection with the home and private sphere. The role of civil society, including the leadership of men and boys to achieve gender equality is critical to the success of the New Urban Agenda but is hardly mentioned. In brief, the issues papers need a comprehensive gender analysis. The following are some points that should be noted:

1. **Private and Public spheres are connected-** Public policies and services must always measure their success by whether or not they have improved the lives of citizens –not just in the workplace or the public sphere, but in the context of the home and family as well. There is no safe city when women’s human rights are violated due to domestic violence in the home. There is no end to poverty if women’s income must be meekly handed over to a male head of household. And there is no true democracy to strengthen civil and political rights if women and girls are not allowed to make decisions about their own bodies and exercise their sexual and reproductive health rights.
 2. **Women are not just victims or a vulnerable group**—Women are key decision-makers concerning economic and social rights related to food security, biodiversity, cultural heritage, migration, energy consumption and family size. They also play critical roles in the use of water, energy and natural resources and finding climate solutions. They have a specific role in the urban ecology as managers of household energy. Indeed, women are at the heart of the water-energy-food nexus. In many developing countries, rural and urban women are the human transporters of water, fuel and food and their capacity defines the speed and quality of the rural-urban flow of goods.
 3. **Urban women are diverse** - The gender analysis of the New Urban Agenda must avoid stereotyping and acknowledge the wide diversity of women’s situation by including the intersections of age, gender identity (including LGBTI) ethnicity, disability, religion, economic, social and political status, as well as cultural and ecological status. The human rights framework must be inclusive enough to apply to women heading corporations, working in city government, active in politics --as well as women living in poverty. In addition, since in many developed countries indigenous women must live and work within urban environments their concerns and specific challenges also need to be addressed.
 4. **End violence against women** – The New Urban Agenda must include a commitment to prevent—and ultimately end--violence against women and girls. Mental, sexual and physical abuse that take place within the home, in the community or by the State and the threat of violence inhibit women’s political participation and lead to unequal access to services. Men and boys must take stronger leadership roles to address cultural norms and behavioral changes needed to end violence against girls and women of all ages.
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C. Sample changes to the issues papers

The following are examples of how a human rights framework that addresses inclusion, equity and equality through non-discrimination would be applicable to the 22 issues papers. Note that this is not an exhaustive list. A more comprehensive set of examples should be included when revising the papers.

Issue Paper No 1 – Inclusive cities – Inclusive cities require women’s full and effective participation. However, this paper does not address the problems facing specific groups such as older women. Among the most excluded group in cities, older women often have little political or economic capability to cope with social exclusion or exposure to changing environments and housing situations.

Issue paper No. 2 – Migration and refugees in urban areas- Add risks inherent in migration. Although urbanization and changes in family structure have opened some opportunities for women’s empowerment, single and young women who migrate to cities also face increased risks in urban settings. The paper should address sexual harassment at work, sexual violence and the trafficking of children and girls in the context of migration.

Issue paper No. 3 – Safer cities – Address domestic violence and sexual harassment. In this paper, there is no analysis of how public policies can protect women in the home. Among other things, this paper should consider the many urban good examples of women’s organizations working together with city officials to combat sexual harassment in the streets and in public transport.

Issues paper No. 4 – Urban Culture and Heritage – Add women’s contributions to culture and the arts. Womens arts, music, crafts and historic representation should be seen as a rich resource for cities building community and social cohesion as well as inclusive identities through the arts and culture.

Issue paper No. 6 – Urban Governance – Include more examples of best practices. An excellent example of using a women’s human rights framework to apply to urban governance comes from San Francisco and its passage of CEDAW as a city ordinance in 1999. Using CEDAW women’s groups in cooperation with city officials made major changes in the Public Works department to hire more women and ensure that services were gender-sensitive. Gender budgeting was required for all city programs and this led to gender training for employees. Citing this extraordinary initiative, during Beijing + 20, the NGO Committee on the Status of Women/NY, a committee of the Conference of NGOs, launched a Cities for CEDAW campaign. Thus far, 240 US mayors have signed a resolution endorsing CEDAW, and nearly 50 American cities are on their way to applying CEDAW at the local level. (See: <http://sfgov.org/dosw/cities-cedaw>)

Issue paper No. 8 – Urban and spatial planning and design – Address the need to provide women leaders and voters with more public information about urban and spatial planning so as to correct the current gender bias of many plans. Most urban residents do not consider urban spatial planning and women often do not understand how this affects them. Much more effort must be made to inform and educate women about how they can fully participate in decisions about community plans on open and green spaces, public transport, and marketplaces.

Issue paper No. 9 – Urban Land –Add the need for women’s leadership and participation in urban land management and planning. A greater effort needs to be made to inform women about land use plans so they can assume leadership roles and mobilize constituencies and NGOs in favor of sound policies. Laws discriminating against women to own land must be changed.

Issue paper No. 10 – Urban/rural linkages – This paper should identify the gaps in knowledge and understanding about linkage between urban and rural as it relates to women. For example, little known about how rural women (non-farm as well as farm workers) and small town women running businesses interact commercially. Much more research is needed in specific ecological contexts, including the differences between urban women living in tourist coastal areas and remote provincial towns.

Issue paper No. 11 – Public Space –Design and planning of public spaces must be done in an inclusive manner and with a gender lens. More emphasis should be given to women’s well-being as criteria in decision-making about public spaces For women, the quality of urban public life includes measures to improve healthy life styles and enhance personal safety in public spaces.

Issue paper No. 15 – Urban resilience – Emphasize economic security for women. Ensuring women’s economic security is essential to increase urban resilience to natural disasters or conflict. If women do not control assets, or are unable to access credit, the quality of life of the family often deteriorates. If young women fall into poverty due to loss of employment or displacement due to natural disasters or conflict, they are more vulnerable to informal and precarious employment as well as sex trafficking.

Issue paper No. 16 – Urban ecosystems and resource management – Add examples of best practices. Urban forests and green spaces can be income-generating projects for girls while teaching them science and botany. For example, one project in New York City employs youth, including girls, to be “doctors” who care for trees planted in the reforestation program (“Million Trees” project).

Issue paper No. 17 – Cities and climate change and disaster risk management – Inclusive planning is critical to inform urban climate and disaster policies and improve the outcome of early warning systems. This paper should add a gender perspective on women as decision-makers and leaders. As major decision-makers about energy use in the home and in buildings, as well as many consumer products, women need to be informed about how their decisions may impact climate change. Women who are leaders in businesses and the private sector should be mobilized to support inclusive, sustainable policies and innovative solutions to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Issue Paper No. 18 – Urban Infrastructure and Basic Services, including Energy – Add example of Public Works. Public Works and service providers should be required to do a gender analysis and mechanisms need to be put in place within city government to make departments accountable for outcomes that do not violate women’s human rights. Gender budgeting should also be examined in the provision of services and measurement of their impact.

Issue Paper No. 19 – Transport and mobility – Add the need for more data and research. Much more information is needed on how to ensure women’s mobility in cities, taking into consideration patterns of travel and that in many cultures, women are prevented for accessing public transport due to restrictions on leaving the home.

Issue Paper No. 20 – Housing- This paper should emphasize that due to gender discrimination and restrictions on land rights for women, housing may not be accessible and equitable. Limited access to financing is a major obstacle as many women do not own assets or have access to credit. Security in a home for women includes the ability to make decisions concerning where to reside and whether to own or rent property. In some countries, laws do not allow women to independently decide their own residence after marriage.

Issue Paper No. 21 – Smart Cities – Add examples of how to make smart cities work for women. Women should be engaged in the development, financing and implementation of smart cities so that gender-specific needs and capabilities can be addressed. Mobile technology, for example, can directly improve women’s lives. One project provides women victims of domestic violence with free mobile phones so that they can call for help if needed. Another excellent use of mobile technology is registration of births and deaths and information about maternal health via mobile phones.

Issue Paper No. 22 – Informal Settlements – Add examples of best practices of women’s NGOs that have helped communities upgrade slums as well as organize those working in the informal economy (e.g. SEWA Bharat in India, <http://sewabharat.org>). The paper should also identify gaps in data and research related to the gender impact of national and city policies on informal settlements.
