

## **CENTER STAGING GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN SECURING SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE URBANIZATION**

### **THE HUAIROU COMMISSION NETWORK:**

#### **TWO DECADES OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO POLICY-MAKING AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES TO FOSTER CITIES AND SETTLEMENTS THAT EMPOWER AND SUPPORT GRASSROOTS WOMEN**

The Huairou Commission is a global coalition of women's networks, NGOs and grassroots women's organisations in 49 countries cooperating to empower grassroots women's organisations to enhance their community development work and exercise collective political power to achieve public recognition and support for it (locally to globally). Our organization formally emerged in 1995 at the 4<sup>th</sup> World Women's conference in Beijing when a multi-regional group of leaders, alarmed that grassroots women's key issues—housing, access to essential basic services, tenure, food and livelihood security and local governances--were missing in the women's agenda, prepared a political platform and successfully lobbied women's groups and member states to incorporate it in the Platform for Action. Witnessing this creative organizing, the then Executive Director of UN-Habitat (charged with organizing the upcoming UN Global Conference on related issues), dubbed the group of activists 'my Huairou Commission' and requested they organize and drive women's participation at Habitat II and engender the policy outcomes.

At the UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul in 1997, Huairou Commission members succeeded in placing women's contributions, priorities and policy recommendations at the forefront of civil society's accomplishments and the finalization of the Habitat Agenda. Subsequently, we have been at the forefront of successive policy reviews, and established strong partnership platforms, advocacy tools, and institutional linkages to engage key decision makers. In 2015, as a result, grassroots women's constituencies now are recognized as an essential civil society partner in the *New Urban Agenda*, Habitat III planning and within the World Urban Campaign. We have been the women's voice in the human settlements movement and the human settlements and community voice in the women's movement for over 20 years, and view the Habitat III process, as well as other global policy processes, as critical opportunities for shifting policy-making paradigms that recognize the role of grassroots women as critical designers, implementers, and monitors of sustainable urban development.

Huairou Commission plans to make sustained contributions to the development of the *New Urban Agenda* in the coming months and sees its core strengths as:

- **Bringing a unique and vital constituency to thematic debates, agenda setting, and policy-making;**
- **Approaching urbanization and its challenges, opportunities and solutions from multiple thematic entry points, recognizing the intersection of a multiplicity of identities: gender, race, class, ethnicity all contribute to and challenge models of participatory urban development and decision-making.**
- **Contributing to sustainable urban transformation by modeling and scaling up tools and processes that increase the accountability, gender-responsiveness, and participatory nature of decision-making and planning.**

As a global network of organized grassroots women living in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, we have documented and scaled up the specific local knowledge, tools, and strategies that organized groups are using to address community priorities and respond to hazards and risks. These groups are often doing the work of service delivery, community mapping, and awareness raising. To adequately overcome challenges presented by urbanization and rise to meet growing opportunities investment modalities and policy-making should reflect the lived realities and experiences of these constituencies. Transforming urban policy-making and achieving meaningful participation of grassroots women and slum dwellers will require empowering them to be decision-makers, facilitating their institutionalized roles in governance and planning structures, and using community-led data collection findings to drive policy choices.

## **A WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT APPROACH TO EQUITABLE, SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT: EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

### **Context**

Urbanization is a ubiquitous trend in current 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. Due to a lack of investment in rural areas, as well as minimal opportunities for accessing land, jobs, markets, and basic services, women in particular are often forced to migrate to cities and live in informal settlements. Conversely, urban-based women are being displaced from city centres as a result of speculation, land grabs, and evictions; they too find themselves moving to informal settlements lacking in planning, infrastructure, and fertile productive land.

Grassroots women living and working in poor and marginal communities—regardless of locality—are commonly the primary caregivers for their families and are the community members most frequently pressing for more secure housing and basic services like water, health, and sanitation. In fact, grassroots women often constitute the majority of organized groups working to fill in gaps left by an absence of public and/or private services, pooling their labour to improve the quality of life for their families and neighbourhoods. Across the developing world, in higher-income and low-income countries, grassroots women leaders representing community-based/self-help organizations “volunteer” their time to participate in municipal planning, settlement upgrading, and budget allocation bodies to ensure that development investments not only reach them, but also reflect their priorities.

As the group that stands to benefit—or lose—the most from the *New Urban Agenda*, organized grassroots women's groups must be formally positioned to serve as vital drivers of its implementation. Our global leaders and member organizations have built movements of women working to secure decent housing, basic services, land tenure, and safe and secure living conditions in the face of constantly changing political regimes and policy frameworks for over 20 years. Decentralized decision-making spaces and service provision analysis have been key entry-points for the involvement of community-based groups in designing, implementing, and monitoring governance processes and basic service delivery.

Grassroots women's strategies for good governance address both the practical and the strategic needs of women. On the practical side, they address the material conditions of women, their families, and their communities by improving living conditions and opportunities for income generation. On the strategic side, they seek to ensure that women are seen as leaders and agents of change, by their communities as well as by local and national governments. Repositioning grassroots women within development and governance processes not only raises their political and social status, but this in turn has a sustained impact on their ability to access services and acquire and retain control over housing, land, and other assets.

These assets are fundamentally important to women's ability to sustain household incomes, increase their skill sets, and reduce poverty and income inequality. For example, after gaining secure access to land, grassroots leaders in Jamaica, Peru, and the Philippines have been able to initiate construction training and establish sustainable and low-cost building practices, thereby building the skills of women, as well as, allowing them to protect and improve their own built environment.<sup>i</sup> Even so, the practice of gaining secure access to land in rapidly urbanizing areas is becoming increasingly more difficult: namely, insufficient legal frameworks exist to enforce women's rights over land, housing, and other productive assets. The intensifying commodification of land in growing urban areas, increasing violence and conflict related to evictions and displacement, and increasing vulnerability to climate change and disasters all converge to present numerous challenges to women living in marginalized areas in regards to securing tenure and making their land economically viable.<sup>ii</sup>

Many of Huairou Commission's network members have been displaced from fertile, central land in cities, leading to an increase in the number of communities living in peri-urban areas, often in informally planned settlements lacking infrastructure and access to basic services. Poorly-developed infrastructure and public spaces have caused numerous hazards for these communities, including urban flooding and water-borne diseases due to poor drainage, as well as insecure mobility for women

in poorly-lit and poorly-planned public alleyways and streets. Grassroots women have responded by developing strategies to deal with drought, erosion, irregular delivery of electricity and clean water supplies; furthermore, they hold local authorities accountable to spending by monitoring their infrastructure budgets. Additional innovations include upgrading infrastructure such as water supply, sanitation delivery, and waste management; exploring options for alternative safe and clean energy; experimenting with drip irrigation and innovative water management systems to protect against drought, flooding, and soil erosion; and working toward the reforestation of hills and riverbanks through stone/cement and vegetative barriers.<sup>iii</sup>

Grassroots women's organizations have also developed innovative practices around collective farming, seed banks (control and distribution of local seeds), alternative income generation, and market access. By organizing themselves into groups, women have combined their collective determination and organizational skills with practical knowledge of local natural resources and traditional agricultural methods. Together, these women have succeeded in improving the availability of nutritious food, boosting small-scale agriculture, and generating alternative incomes.

Such achievements importantly contribute to the recognition of women as agents of inclusive and equitable urbanization (not vulnerable groups waiting to be helped). They have worked hard to organize in communities; systems and structures should be responsive to their rights, and public amenities and public space should be made accessible to them. Through tools such as safety audits, risk audits, and planning and political strategies, women have become visible as generators of knowledge and owners of an expertise that should be utilized at the centre of public service design and public space design. We have developed an extensive experience of initiatives that enable women to claim spaces and provide them safety from violence (thus redefining who controls public spaces) as well as creating models for collaboration with local authorities. For example, our network's expertise on urban mobility is anchored by initiatives for safe access to and use of public spaces for women. Central to this work has been the collaboration with local authorities on the use of safety audits as well as the mobilization strategies to change behaviour and perceptions. We also work to address the challenges and opportunities that cities and human settlements present for grassroots women's mobility: public spaces and facilities, markets, and parks connected by safe and accessible walkways, streets, paths, and public transport provide women freedom and efficiency of movement.

Huairou Commission's network member approach to sustainable and inclusive development, spanning the course of nearly two decades, has generated key recommendations for ensuring that decentralized resources and decision-making capabilities are participatory, gender responsive, and result in concrete changes in the well-being and daily lives of communities living and working in marginalized areas.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARDS ACHIEVING RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE & SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS**

**Decentralize power and fiscal resources to empower local governments to take appropriate actions and enhance the financial and technical capacities of local stakeholders to partner in the implementation of gender-responsive, community development.**<sup>iv</sup>

- **Establish financing mechanisms that directly benefit citizen constituencies** such as women, slum dwellers, and informal economy workers so as to enhance their negotiating positions.
- **Allocate a percentage of enterprise funds, business loans, and technical support to diversifying and strengthening grassroots women's livelihoods and income generating opportunities** in both the informal and formal urban economy.
- **Promote and publicly finance community centres**, operated and accessed by organized grassroots women's groups, as spaces to enhance women's empowerment and to formalize their leadership in urban planning.<sup>v</sup>

**Institutionalize the roles of grassroots women in decision-making and budget allocation, and provide support for ongoing partnerships between elected women leaders and community women.**<sup>vi</sup>

- **Ensure grassroots women's organizations and slum-dwellers have formal roles** in planning, implementing, and monitoring delivery of public services and are knowledgeable of and can use mechanisms to access public services, funds, and budgets.
- **Integrate grassroots knowledge** as well as professional knowledge into poverty eradication and gender equality policies.

**Establish and monitor legal frameworks and other institutional arrangements that guarantee the participation of organized constituencies in city planning, budgeting, implementation, and monitoring.**

- **Institutionalize community-driven, gender-just urban policies** that measurably increase women's secure rights to land, property and other assets.
- **Increase formal inclusion**, legitimization, and support of **community-led data collection** as documented evidence of tenure, and **collect disaggregated data** (by gender, age, locality etc.) on the nature and scale of gender inequality, poverty, and informality in communities, taking into account different groups of local communities (rural, peri-urban, and urban).
- **Consult and employ women's groups** in engendering the design and operation of urban development programs including housing, transportation, and basic services by accounting for women's diverse household and public roles, responsibilities, and needs.

**Develop coordination mechanisms and policy incentives that promote collaborative problem-solving with organized groups of women and men living in poor communities.**

- **Formalize engagement and partnerships with grassroots women's groups** to sustain collaborative planning, implementation, financing, and monitoring of housing and urban development initiatives, and to **recognize and support organized networks of slum dwellers, poor people, and grassroots women** who build intentional movements towards influencing and enhancing their own development.
- **Establish urban observatories** to develop a baseline and monitor and measure progress to inform decision makers on the state of access and use of land and property, reduction of risks and hazards, gender equality, transparency of government processes, public services, urban mobility and safety.
- **Provide sustained financial and technical support to proven exchange and learning tools**, such as the Local-to-Local Dialogue Methodology, to ensure their continued effectiveness and contribution to building networks, both horizontally and vertically.

## **THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NEW URBAN AGENDA**

### **LAND AND HOUSING**

**Prioritize the establishment of a coherent legal framework that guarantees equal tenure rights to women.**

- **Advocate for frameworks that capture both rural and urban realities for women's land rights**, take into account the gendered nature of challenges in legal frameworks, and frame struggles for land tenure within a more holistic development process.<sup>vii</sup>
- **Consider land tenure simultaneously with other laws** that affect women and their ability to own, control, and access land, including civil rights, marriage and inheritance laws, and labour regulations.
- Guarantee **security of tenure from one generation of women to another** by developing and incorporating mechanisms that ensure inheritance protections.
- Guarantee land tenure security that **includes protection against climate change and other environmental threats** to ensure the vitality of land and access to it for future generations of women.

**Build grassroots women's capacity to organize, document and advocate for their own priorities, mobilize their communities, and partner with local authorities and service providers.**

- Consolidate and scale up **mapping and analytical tools**, applicable in diverse social and political contexts, allowing women to quantify access, land ownership, and power dynamics (legal and customary practices) of all actors in their communities.
- Recognize **community-driven data collection** as key and legitimate evidence of tenure that should form the basis of planning and property reform, and prioritize the collection and dissemination of disaggregated security of tenure data.
- **Mitigate risks of land grabbing and displacement** in formal, informal and customary systems in order for women to continue agricultural production and sustain their livelihoods.
- Promote the connection between women's security of tenure and their economic and political empowerment, which is **central to alleviating poverty, enhancing productive capacity and reducing income inequalities.**<sup>viii</sup>

**Institutionalize a multi-dimensional approach to engaging women in land governance to ensure that governance processes give equal access to, use of, and control of land to women and men.**

- **Establish a range of win-win partnerships with stakeholders** through empowering women to map their realities, negotiate with authorities, and develop technical expertise to work directly with policy-makers to facilitate interventions at all levels.<sup>ix</sup>
- **Guarantee women's meaningful participation in the entire process, from data collection and enumeration** to fostering an understanding of land administration, management, and governance. Beyond these first steps, we ensure that women are active in the negotiations of land allocation, and have the capacity to access resources for making their land productive for economic income and food security.
- Support the development of **community based strategies and tools** in all phases of land governance and planning.

## **RURAL-URBAN NEXUS**

**Promote dynamic, equitable rural economies and support rural communities and settlements to become more secure and resilient.**

- **Support women's farmer organizations** by providing equitable access to credit, information and technology so that women can increase levels of food production through local storage, processing and marketing, and income generation. Scale-up market access for rural women and food access for urban women and improve their productive capacity as both producers and consumers.<sup>2</sup>
- Involve organized grassroots women in win-win **negotiations with local government** in land use planning and regulations that may affect various aspects of peri-urban areas, such as agricultural production, transportation and mobility, infrastructure, and use of natural resources as well as disaster risk management.
- Support and protect the **use of traditional knowledge** in production, conservation, and distribution of food, and return the power over this production process to the rural sector. This includes recognizing farmers' choice to use farming techniques that are environmentally sound and sustainable.
- Create **new direct trade relations** between urban and rural women.<sup>x</sup>

## **URBAN MOBILITY**

**Engender designing and monitoring of urban planning for public spaces and transport, recognizing that violence against women is linked to issues of mobility.**<sup>xi</sup>

- **Recognize that empowerment and leadership of women needs to happen** at all levels—at the household, community, and national levels—this requires shifting power relationships within families, communities, and governments.<sup>xii</sup>
- **Monitor legislation, policies, and programmes** to ensure they are implemented with and for women and girls, with particular emphasis on safer public spaces and mobility.
- **Provide innovative funding** and methodologies for creating safe and gender responsive public space, particularly those that channel resources to community level initiatives.
- **Improve the gender responsiveness in those who control and manage public spaces:** local authorities, police, gender desks, etc.

## **MUNICIPAL FINANCE**

**Strengthen municipal finance mechanisms that bring local communities, specifically grassroots women's groups, to the table in the devolution of money and budget allocation.**

- **Enable local communities and grassroots women's groups to prioritize the agenda** and access and shape allocations through mechanisms like local and citywide gender desks or participatory budgeting commissions.
- **Create financial mechanisms** that allow grassroots women groups, cooperatives, and enterprises to access funding for planning and livelihood projects.
- **Facilitate partnerships between grassroots women, local authorities, and technical experts** to build the capacity of grassroots women to track and submit budget proposals based on their community mapping results.

## URBAN RESILIENCE

**Address community resilience priorities by providing for collaboration with local and national government as well as mobilization, collective action, and transfers of knowledge within the community, allowing for responsive and accountable programmes.**

- **Invest in community-led transfers to scale up effective resilience practices** that enable grassroots experts to transfer effective practices, thereby expanding local capacities and recognizing expertise.
- **Incentivise community-government partnerships and create mechanisms that formalise community roles in government programmes.**<sup>xiii</sup>
- **Foster community organising and constituency building along with technical expertise** for community resilience, in order to expand impact.
- Set aside decentralised, flexible funds to **foster multi-dimensional resilience building efforts** that can be adapted to test localized solutions.
- **Recognise grassroots women's organisations and networks as key stakeholders** in planning, implementing, and monitoring resilience programmes.

<sup>i</sup> Pritchett, Regina and Jacqueline Leavitt. June 2012. *Women, Cities, and Economic Empowerment: Lessons from the Expert Group Meeting*. Harvard University Expert Group Meeting

<sup>ii</sup> Expert Group Meeting on *Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation*. Accra, Ghana; 20-23 September 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> Scaling Practices publication

<sup>iv</sup> Pinheiro, Carolina and Sarah Silliman (eds.). 2011. *Final Report: Global Summit on Grassroots Women's Leadership and Governance*. Huairou Commission. March 3-8, 2011. <<http://www.huairou.org/mdg3-initiative/global-summitgrass-roots-womens-leadership-governance>>

<sup>v</sup> Yonder, Ayse and Marnie Tamaki.. 2010. *Our Spaces: Grassroots Women Formalize their Leadership and Access to Essential Services*. Huairou Commission. Brooklyn, New York.

<sup>vi</sup> Gopalan, Prema, Suranjana Gupta, Shannon Hayes and Birte Scholz. June 2nd & 3rd, 2008. *FROM BENEFICIARIES TO STAKEHOLDERS: Grassroots Women's Groups Drive the Demand for Good Governance through Pro-Poor Development*. Discussion Paper for the World Bank Demand or Good Governance Learning Summit.

<sup>vii</sup> Huairou Commission and UNDP. 2014. *Engendering Access to Justice: grassroots women's approaches to securing land rights*. Brooklyn, New York.

<sup>viii</sup> Huairou Commission and UNDP. 2014. *Engendering Access to Justice: grassroots women's approaches to securing land rights*. Brooklyn, New York.

<sup>ix</sup> Huairou Commission and UNDP. 2014. *Engendering Access to Justice: grassroots women's approaches to securing land rights*. Brooklyn, New York.

<sup>x</sup> Expert Group Meeting on *Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation*. Accra, Ghana; 20-23 September 2011.

<sup>xi</sup> Falu, Ana and Olga Segovia, eds. 2008. *Living Together: Cities Free from Violence Against Women*

<sup>xii</sup> Pritchett, Regina and Jacqueline Leavitt (June 2012) *Women, Cities, and Economic Empowerment: Lessons from the Expert Group Meeting* Harvard University Expert Group Meeting,

<sup>xiii</sup> Huairou Commission. 2015. *Resilient Women: Integrating Community Resilience Priorities in the Post-2015 Agenda. Action Research of the Community Practitioners Platform for Resilience in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Brooklyn, New York.

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