



**UN-HABITAT**  
**GENDER**  
**JOURNEY**

## Gender History of UN-Habitat

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### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In common with most of women's empowerment and gender equality work in UN-Habitat, this document is a collective effort of many persons. It has benefited from the input of a cross-section of women (principally) and men – grassroots, professional, government and United Nations – who have contributed to UN-Habitat gender mainstreaming for more than three decades. Their names, networks and organisations are mentioned throughout the document. The Gender Equality Unit of UN-Habitat, the UN-Habitat Gender Advisory Board and the Huairou Commission have been central in advocating for and production of this history. Thanks to grassroots women worldwide, who have shown that solutions informed by realities and work on the ground can have significant policy impacts and must be recognised and supported.

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# UN-HABITAT GENDER JOURNEY



## FOREWORD

Gender equality is at the heart of the New Urban Agenda and of UN-Habitat activities. Since 1985 we have been carrying out many projects and programmes to advance gender equality in urban development.

The first step towards incorporating gender in the organization's work was the establishment of the Women and Habitat Programme in 1990. This was followed by an institutional gender policy approved in 1996, the year of the Second World Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). The policy titled "*Gendered habitat: working with women and men in human settlements development*," sought to ensure that women and men participated in, and benefitted equitably from interventions of UN-Habitat and partners. Successive gender policies and action plans have been based on the same principle: how the work of UN-Habitat can promote gender equality in the urban development process.

It was no accident that UN-Habitat approved the organization's first gender policy in 1996. The *Habitat Agenda* was adopted in Istanbul in the same year, and has been widely acknowledged as a vastly gender sensitive document. This was the result of concerted efforts of UN-Habitat staff, the women's movement, rights-based civil society as well as many supportive governments. The process of formulating the gender policy ran parallel to the preparations for the International Women's Conference (Beijing 1995) and Habitat II, and benefitted from both conferences and their outcomes.

Twenty years later, we continue to work intensively towards an urban design which provides security, confidence and inclusiveness for women in cities. In Habitat III, we are aiming at adopting a New Urban Agenda which encompasses the principles of equality and inclusiveness of which gender equality forms an integral part.

We are in a crucial moment for urbanization. Urbanization has become a global trend; an engine of development and a transformative force that can lead the world to overcome challenges related to sustainability, climate change, poverty, exclusion and gender inequality. Equality for women in an urban world is progress for all.

*Dr. Joan Clos*  
*UN-Habitat's Executive Director*



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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AGGI</b>	UN-Habitat Advisory Group on Gender Issues
<b>AWAS</b>	Asian Women and Shelter Network
<b>BP Programme</b>	Best Practices Programme
<b>CBO</b>	Community-based Organizations
<b>CDP</b>	Community Development Programme
<b>CHS</b>	Commission for Human Settlements
<b>CPR</b>	Committee of Permanent Representatives
<b>DED</b>	Deputy Executive Director
<b>DPU</b>	Development Planning Unit
<b>EGM</b>	Expert Group Meeting
<b>FEMUM</b>	Federation of Women Municipalists of Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>GC</b>	Governing Council
<b>GEAP</b>	Gender Equality Action Plan
<b>GLTN</b>	Global Land Tool Network
<b>GMU</b>	Gender Mainstreaming Unit
<b>GROOTS International</b>	Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood
<b>GWIA</b>	Grassroots Women’s International Academy
<b>HIC</b>	Habitat International Council (later Coalition)
<b>HIC Women and Shelter Network</b>	Habitat International Coalition Women and Shelter Network
<b>HIC-WHN</b>	Habitat International Coalition Women and Habitat Network
<b>ICW</b>	International Council of Women
<b>IYSH</b>	International Year of Shelter for the Homeless
<b>JPO</b>	Junior Professional Officers
<b>NCW</b>	Netherlands Council of Women
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organizations
<b>PREPCOMS</b>	Preparatory Committees
<b>PWG</b>	Partners Working Group
<b>ROAP</b>	Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
<b>ROLAC</b>	Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>SPARC</b>	Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers
<b>SWAP</b>	System Wide Action Plan
<b>TCBB</b>	Training and Capacity Building Branch
<b>ThemCom</b>	Thematic Committee
<b>UNCHS</b>	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
<b>UNCSDDHA</b>	United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UN-Habitat</b>	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>UN-INSTRAW</b>	United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
<b>WEDO</b>	Women, Environment and Development
<b>WHP</b>	Women and Habitat Programme
<b>WHSDP</b>	Women in Human Settlements Development Programme

## PREFACE

In 2012, UN-Habitat established the Advisory Group on Gender Issues (AGGI) as an independent body to advise the Executive Director on all issues related to gender matters in the agency's work. One of the first requests of AGGI members was for a document on the gender history of UN-Habitat, convinced of the value of such a document in informing the organisation's current gender work. This gender history is commissioned by UN-Habitat in response to AGGI's request. Many past and present staff members and partners of UN-Habitat have contributed through availing documents, giving interviews, writing text and making comments.

Gender equality is about power relations and rights. Mainstreaming gender in development programmes means addressing equally the needs of men and women, boys and girls, in the design and implementation of such programmes. Very often gender mainstreaming involves addressing specifically the situation of women and girls, a historically discriminated group, with targeted interventions including affirmative action where necessary. Gender mainstreaming also means equally bringing the voices of women and men into the development debate and agenda – an incredibly political process. The history of gender mainstreaming in UN-Habitat tells how government, professional, NGO and grassroots women made up a powerful constituency to bring a gender perspective to a gender neutral institution – UN-Habitat. It demonstrates the wide variety of strategies and organizing work that took place in order to bring about the change.

In common with many political processes, the UN-Habitat gender story involved identifying points of entry, finding appropriate champions, building alliances, lobbying and networking in order to continually safeguard and expand gained ground. The strategies took advantage of national, regional and international agendas and their processes as well as the governance structures of UN-Habitat. Both grassroots and professional women contributed - and continue to contribute - directly to programme formulation and implementation in a mutually reinforcing relationship benefiting both UN-Habitat and the women and their constituencies.

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