

**UNITED NATIONS EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON  
AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS FOR ALL TO  
ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS:**

**Policies to reduce Homelessness among Women and  
Female Headed –Households.**



**Presented By**

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# INTRODUCTION



This presentation will attempt to build on the objectives of this expert group meeting, which includes, a review of major drivers of homelessness, identifying the existing gaps and priority areas for interventions, as well as making specific policy recommendations on effective housing and social protection policies to address homelessness in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



Homelessness refers to a person who do not have a place to call home. The word "homelessness" also includes people who sleep in warming centers, homeless shelters, or in abandoned buildings, parking garages, or other places not meant for humans to live in.



There are different reasons why people become homeless in the first place, so also are the challenges and effects of homelessness on individuals and societies.



## INTRODUCTION..

In line with the stated objectives, the presentation will attempt to highlight the following issues:

1. The drivers of homelessness among women and female headed households and the challenges faced by them.
2. How we can ensure that women and female headed households have access to affordable housing.
3. Policies and measures to reduce homelessness among women and female-headed Households

## BACKGROUND

- The Sustainable Development Goals talks about leaving no one behind, and reaching the furthest behind first. Incidentally the group that has been left behind is the homeless persons.
- We are yet to have agreed definition or language on homelessness in any official United Nations document or resolutions that can inspire global and national policy. There are documents on adequate housing for all and housing as a human right.
- For instance, article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 states that: **“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment .....”**
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979; Article 14 (2)(h) of CEDAW states that: “State parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and in particular, **shall ensure to such women ..(h) enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing**, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transportation and communication.



## BACKGROUND.

- Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes housing as a human right.
- While homelessness is a global issue, the bulk of homeless persons may be found in Sub-Saharan Africa, given the level of poverty, unemployment, inequalities and challenges to social inclusion existing in the region.
- One major concern is that a good proportion of these homeless persons are women and female headed households.
- Women become homeless because they do not have a home, and not because they are lazy or useless or not responsible. The systems and institutions have failed them hence they are homeless. Many live in shelters, shanty settlements and slums.





# Homelessness and the SDGs.

- The SDGs, indicator 11.1 states that “**By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade the slums.**”
- This means that homeless persons are entitled to a safe and affordable housing, including women of course.
- Therefore in proposing policies and measures to reduce homelessness among women and female headed households, we need to look at some possible drivers of homelessness among them.





This Lady carrying her baby was evicted from the spot where her home used to be in, a waterfront slum n Lagos, Nigeria. (Amnesty International Nigeria)

## Drivers of homelessness among women and female headed households

### Women as Slum dwellers.

- These are women living in inadequate and overcrowded places. About 1.2 billion people are said to live in slums. As a result of urbanization, women form a sizable proportion of those who migrate from rural areas to urban areas in search of a better life.
- Due to lack or limited educational qualifications, many women are not able to secure high paying jobs in urban areas.
- They are then confronted with drudgery, poverty and lack of adequate housing. They end up in slums and shanty settlements from where they are often evicted without notice by town or municipal planners and administrators.
- The women become homeless, even though they bear the burden of raising their children.
- They do not have security of tenure, they are open to hunger, no hygienic toilet facilities, vulnerable to crime and violence and no good source of income.



Drivers of homelessness among women and female headed households..(2)

### Women as Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP).

- A case in point is that of Syria, Venezuela, Nigeria, DRC, and so on. About 70 million persons are displaced due to war, conflict and extremism. In these cases women live in open tents and camps, without adequate facilities.
- Some women have been raped and sexually abused by soldiers and men who were supposed to protect and help them.
- An example of such case in point was the story, which was reported by Daily Sun newspaper on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 2010 that Liberian women were searching for soldiers, who fathered over 250,000 children during the Liberian crisis.
- The soldiers served in the ECOWAS monitoring group peace keeping force during Liberia's war. Many of the women became homeless due to the war.







## Drivers of homelessness among women and female headed households..(3)

### Women and Forced evictions.

- The problem of homelessness is a problem of forced evictions, lack of housing and ownership of land.
- In most of the world's poorest areas, more than half of the households are headed by women. Traditionally, in many African communities, women lack access to land and property ownership, credit facilities and finance for affordable housing.
- Of particular mention are the women who are separated or divorced from their husbands. They are often sent out with only few clothes, as the husbands tend to keep the house and other properties.
- Similarly, widows particularly those without male children are evicted by their in-laws who dispossessed them of their homes and lands.
- Other evictions are those carried out by government authorities which also result to homelessness among many women. Homelessness and landlessness increases women's vulnerability to physical violence.





Drivers of homelessness  
among women and female  
headed households..(4)

### Violence Against Women:

- Around the world, at least one out of every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. In order to escape the violence in their homes, some women have become homeless.
- They run to safe spaces, such as shelters, women's centers or transition homes, to find refuge, because their homes or communities are unsafe. The Global Network of Women's Shelters was founded in 2008, to provide and strengthen these safe spaces and women's shelter globally to make a change and end violence against women.
- This group of homeless women is often not accounted for when homeless people are discussed, yet there are many of them spread across the world living in temporary shelters run by civil society and faith based organizations.
- The critical work of women's shelters and shelter networks in helping homeless women and their children fleeing violence can be seen in the case of about 53,230 women and 34,794 children who sought refuge and were helped in such shelters in 46 countries on one day in 2014-2015. GNWS has such women shelters in Africa, America, Asia, Europe, Oceania, Middle East and North Africa.

# What can we do to ensure that women and female headed households have access to affordable housing?



We need to carry out measurements on homelessness. Civil Society Organizations can assist the governments to measure and collect data on homeless persons. We should also note that problems and challenges affect men and women differently. Therefore we need disaggregated data.



A number of conventions and protocols state that housing is a human right. We should use existing housing rights provisions as a basis for more advocacy and applying pressure on governments to ensure that these rights are protected and enforced.



More efforts should be made to increase awareness among communities, women groups and civil society organizations, on the conventions and provisions on housing rights, and invoking these provisions in legal courts in support of housing rights for homeless persons especially for women and female headed households.

# What can we do to ensure that women and female headed households have access to affordable housing? (2)



We should advocate for housing finance to be available for women to end homelessness. We realize that shelter is expensive, however it must be provided for all.



The United Nations and its relevant commissions and agencies should focus on homelessness among women in its 58<sup>th</sup> session priority theme. There should be a special task force or Working Committee at the United Nations level on homelessness, and among women in particular.



In addressing the Sustainable Development Goal 10: (to reduce inequalities,) should be made to emphasize homelessness, inequalities and poverty, with women being the central focus.



Implementation of Resolutions and policies reached on homelessness should be monitored and evaluated periodically. Offenders should be named and shamed.



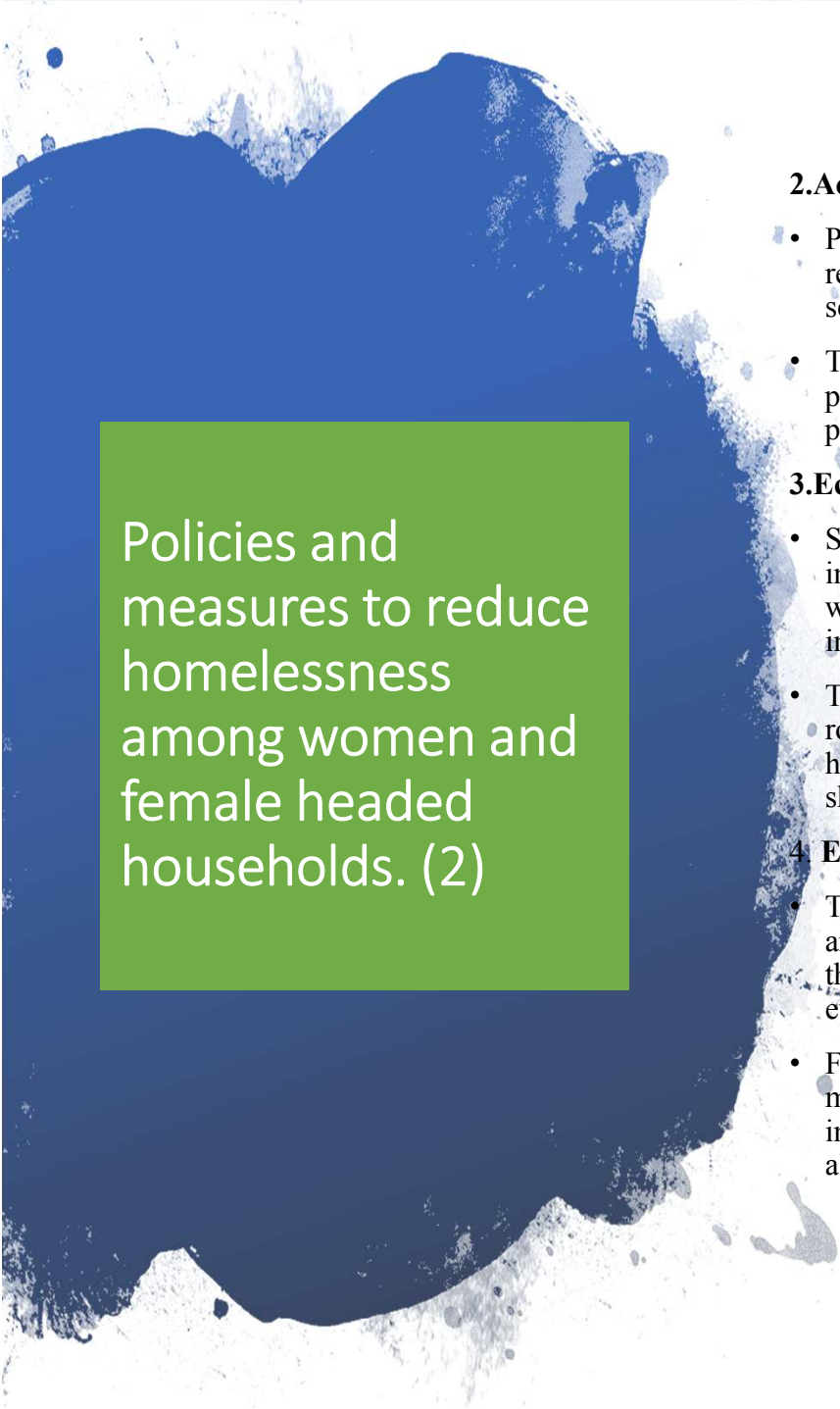
# Policies and measures to reduce homelessness among women and female headed households.



Every measure and policy we adopt should aim at preventing, assessing, measuring and systemically ending homelessness among women and female headed households.

## 1. Social Housing:

- The National Social Protection Policy of Nigeria, states that there should be “Decent and affordable housing for the homeless, the monetary poor, and families living in overcrowded and unhealthy conditions”.
- This policy objective is to improve access to housing for extreme poor and people living in poor housing conditions.
- To prevent homelessness among women, member states should have social protection policies on the provision of social housing for low-income persons.
- Such deliberate measures can ensure that women and female headed households have access to adequate and affordable housing which will definitely reduce homelessness.



Policies and measures to reduce homelessness among women and female headed households. (2)

## **2. Access to Land and Secure Tenure.**

- Promulgating or reforming pro-poor and women friendly land use act can reduce homelessness, as well as make inhabitants of slums and informal settlements to obtain security of tenure and regularize their status.
- There should be enforceable policies such that will give all women equal property rights, rights to inheritance, affordable housing and including the property rights of widows.

## **3. Economic Empowerment Policies:**

- Sound economic empowerment policies to reduce poverty among women and increase their earning power should be pursued by the government. In addition, well-funded employment and community programs to help women to become independent should be encouraged.
- There should also be equal wages for men and women carrying out similar roles. Social protection policies and programmes aimed at supporting female headed households to cater for their family and provide adequate housing should be implemented and enforced.

## **4. Equal Participation in Decision making.**

- There should be a policy towards reshaping legal and institutional frameworks and governance systems. In many countries, particularly in Africa, we have less than 35% of women participating in decision making and leadership positions, even when such provisions have been made in the constitution.
- Finally, we need policies and partnerships on continuous data gathering / measurement of homeless persons, to ascertain, those exiting and those coming into homelessness, as well as identifying emerging issues which may affect already implementing programmes.