

“Women, gender equality and governance in cities”

**Keynote address by Carolyn Hannan
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**At the Asia Women’s Network Roundtable:
“Envisioning gender governance strategies for Asian cities”**

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Distinguished roundtable organizers, panellists and participants,

It is an honour to make the keynote address at this roundtable on a critically important issue – women, gender equality and governance of cities. I wish to commend the organizers – the Seoul Foundation of Women and Family, the Seoul Metropolitan Government and the Seoul Regional Office of the Metropolis Women International Network – on the initiative to bring together so many actors to share visions and strategies on increasing the participation and influence of women in the governance of cities. I look forward to hearing more on the practical experiences from many cities in Asia later this afternoon.

The Second Metropolis Women International Network Forum, of which this roundtable is a part, is particularly timely in the context of the 15-year review of implementation of the global framework on gender equality, the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The issue of women’s participation in decision-making is one of the critical areas in the Platform where reliable data and information is lacking (with the exception of information on representation in national parliaments). The information that is available indicates a serious lack of progress in women’s involvement in decision-making processes in many areas. Women’s participation in governance in cities is one area on which there is still very little easily accessible information. The Forum and this roundtable will therefore make an important contribution in the context of the 15-year review.

The United Nations context

‘Governance’ has been defined by the United Nations as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels – including local city level. Governance refers essentially to the manner in which power is distributed and exercised in society – how decisions are taken and how citizens have their say. It covers both formal and informal institutions and processes and cannot be narrowly defined in terms of political decision-making processes. In its broadest sense, governance is equally related to social processes and concerns the exercise of power in the management of resources which are critical for human wellbeing. Consultation with all stakeholders and development of participatory approaches are critical to effective people-centred governance.

At city level, governance is related to economic, social and environmental development, including such diverse issues as the legal framework, resource allocations, economic strategies – including taxation and user-fees, and critical policy areas such as education, health, housing, transportation, security, and environmental sustainability, as well as interaction between government structures and civil society. It is therefore critical that women are equally represented and that gender equality perspectives are given systematic explicit attention.

Both the global policy and legal frameworks on gender equality and empowerment of women – the Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) - place great emphasis on women's equal participation in decision-making. The Platform for Action states that: *“Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives into all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.”* Two strategic objectives were identified: a) taking measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making; and b) increasing women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership positions. Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) obligates States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination in political and public life and to ensure that women enjoy equality with men in the political and public life of a country.

The frameworks clearly indicate the need for efforts to both increase the participation and representation of women and influence the agendas, processes and outcomes of decision-making bodies from a gender equality perspective. The Beijing Platform for Action called for a dual strategy – efforts to incorporate attention to women in all policies, programmes and activities (gender mainstreaming), alongside targeted activities for women.

One Millennium Development Goal gives attention to urban development - MDG7: “Ensure environmental sustainability”, with a specific target on cities: “Achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020”. Successful implementation of this MDG must systematically ensure consultation with and participation of women and include attention to gender equality perspectives.

The United Nations also works to ensure the full implementation of the global policy and legal frameworks, including in the area of local government. A range of United Nations entities, including UNHABITAT, UNDP, UNIFEM and the regional commissions support Member States in increasing the participation of women and ensuring explicit attention to gender equality perspectives in the governance of cities. In this region, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), for example, carried out an innovative project between 2001-2005 which produced reports on the participation of women in local government in cities in 14 countries; convened a regional summit; established the Regional Information Resource Facility on Women in

Local Government; and developed regional training materials. The national summits held in four countries led to the establishment of national networks and the development of national strategies and action plans as well as training materials. This work provides important lessons learned and promising practices which can be built on in the region.

Gender-sensitive governance of cities

There are significant development and democracy dividends from women's agency and more effective partnerships between women and men in all spheres of life. Where women are empowered politically, socially and economically and can actively participate in public life, including in cities, the greatest gains are achieved by societies. Increasing the participation of women in decision-making in cities constitutes an important step towards democracy – among other things, women's participation ensures diversity in contributions to policy-making and can offer new perspectives and priorities. Broader participation of women at local levels of decision-making may also be an important first step towards increased political participation at the national level.

The planning and management of urban areas – including housing, facilities, services and infrastructure - should be based on the needs, priorities and contributions of women as well as men. Women's voices are, however, not systematically brought into the consultation and dialogue around city planning. Women are still far from being represented equitably in political and administrative decision-making. As a result, city institutions, facilities, and services are not always conceived with women's needs, priorities and contributions in mind, which can result in, among other things, neglect of critical areas or inefficient public services.

Given the importance of women's equitable participation, there is a clear need for accelerated efforts to ensure their involvement and influence in local government in cities. The 2006 figures from United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) indicate that women constitute only 9 per cent of mayors and 20 per cent of councillors globally. In 2001, data collected by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) showed that in 13 countries the representation of women in local government ranged from 33 to 2 per cent. According to the 2007 monitoring report of the joint project on Women's Participation in Society of the Asian Network of Major Cities 21 (ANMC21-WPS), women make up less than 15 percent of local assemblies and councils.

Increasing women's participation in decision-making in cities requires actions on a number of fronts. Three broad strategies can be identified under which specific actions/measures need to be identified. Firstly, ***equal representation in decision making*** must be promoted to ensure that the needs of women as well as men will be taken into consideration in municipal planning and management. Successfully implementing this strategy requires political will by municipal authorities and clear targets, backed if necessary by legislation, for example legislation to reserve a percentage of seats in municipal bodies for women. Secondly, women must also be encouraged to ***participate in the***

management of municipal services. City councils must develop measures to encourage women to take up key positions within the administration. These measures must ensure that the workplace is secure and non discriminatory, with clear policies on equitable promotion procedures, prevention of sexual harassment and promotion of safe working environments. A third strategy is to facilitate women's involvement by *making public consultation procedures more accessible to women*, and finding ways to engage and channel the energy and action of women in local informal associations and networks and the spaces they have created or claimed for themselves.

In a number of countries, including some in this region, quota systems have been introduced to increase the number of women in decision-making processes. In some cases, one third of local government seats have been reserved for women. This has allowed large numbers of women to enter political life for the first time. Some challenges have, however been noted. The extent to which women councillors have been able to influence decision-making has depended on the way the quota system was designed. In some cases, women were elected through a special ballot or party lists and did not have their own constituencies. Where women were nominated and elected by their parties, they were beholden to party leaders and had no power base of their own. This led to their marginalization.

Quotas bring women into predominantly male structures and systems and do not necessarily tackle traditional patterns of power which can hinder the effectiveness of women's participation. The discourse, procedures, structures and functions of local governments often remain heavily skewed in favour of participation of men and attention to their priorities and needs. Values, norms, rules, procedures and practices can effectively restrict women's potential to make real choices, and make efforts to give explicit attention to relevant gender perspectives very difficult. Affirmative action measures may not be sufficient by themselves. Because women have traditionally been excluded from decision-making processes they have not been exposed to the structures, processes and rules of engagement in decision-making fora. Sensitization campaigns may be necessary to promote acceptance of increased participation of women and/or to assist women take on new roles.

The local context, such as the city level, is not always inherently more democratic or more open to women's involvement. Because women's participation is a recent innovation in many contexts, the local environment may be very hostile to their involvement. Prejudices against women's involvement can be more strongly held at local than at higher levels. Local government in many areas has been shown to be particularly responsive to informal institutions and relations of power, rather than more formal rules and procedures, which often advantages men rather than women. Considerable specific support is required to ensure that women can participate effectively.

It is also important to keep in mind that representation of women in different bodies and processes does not necessarily ensure their effective participation. Ensuring that both women and men will be able to influence decisions and resource allocation requires going beyond increasing the

numbers of women in different positions to providing real opportunities for influencing the agendas, institutions and processes of decision-making.

In addition, the presence of women does not in itself guarantee that gender equality issues will be placed on the agenda or that outcomes will be gender-sensitive. All actors – men as well as women – must have the awareness, commitment and capacity to bring attention to gender equality perspectives. Efforts to increase the participation of women must always be complemented with the effective implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy.

Men must become partners in achieving the goals of gender equality and empowerment of women, including the increased involvement of women in local government at city level. Progress toward this goal is dependent on men's willingness to question gender stereotypes and change existing structures and processes, including redefining the roles of women and men in both public and family life. Awareness raising and capacity building must be specifically targeted at men, including public officials at all levels.

Ensuring that gender equality perspectives are taken into account in urban planning and management requires the full implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy, i.e. ensuring that the contributions, priorities and needs of women as well as men are considered on an equal basis from the beginning of planning processes, so that both women and men can be involved and fully benefit. An important first step in gender mainstreaming is undertaking gender analysis. No decisions should be taken or resources allocated without analysis of the existing roles and contributions of women and men and the potential impact of planned actions on both women and men. The responsibility for implementation of gender mainstreaming rests with all actors, with management having particular responsibilities for demonstrating commitment and leadership, providing opportunities for capacity development and demanding accountability.

Increasing women's representation and strengthening attention to gender equality perspectives requires a focus on the institutional environment, to ensure that it is conducive to women's participation and the incorporation of gender equality perspectives. The male environment within political institutions can be a significant deterrent for women. It is for this reason that the "critical mass" target of 33 percent women in all institutions is an important strategy/target. One or two women in organizations, no matter how knowledgeable, skilled and committed, cannot make the difference needed.

Specific targeted actions for women remain very critical as a complement to gender mainstreaming, given the serious remaining gaps and challenges to gender equality and empowerment of women which need to be specifically addressed. It is important to recognize, however, that separate projects for women – no matter how many, how relevant and how well-designed and delivered - will not adequately ensure the full incorporation of gender perspectives into local government. Effective systematic implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy is critical.

Since 1995, a number of persistent obstacles to women's equitable participation in decision-making, and to fully incorporating gender perspectives into decision-making processes, have been identified. Among the most common and persistent barriers to increased representation of women in all regions are stereotypes on the roles and expected behaviour of women - perpetuated by institutions and society at large - which relegate women to subordinate positions in public life. Attitudes towards gender equality and empowerment of women among the general public and within bureaucracies have not changed at the same pace as policy, legal and institutional frameworks. Stereotypical attitudes and behaviours can be difficult and sensitive to identify and address. Whether embedded in perceptions and practice, or codified in law, these barriers limit women's opportunities in public life at all levels, including local government in cities. Educational institutions and media can play a negative role in maintaining or exacerbating such existing gender stereotypes.

In many countries, poverty also negatively impacts women's ability to participate in public life. In relation to elected positions, the high cost of seeking and holding public office may also be a constraint – both in terms of financial and time costs. Women may lack the required finances for campaigning. The unequal division of unpaid domestic work, including care-giving, between women and men also constitutes a significant barrier for women in all regions of the world, constraining the time available for involvement in political processes and limiting opportunities for full-time employment outside the home.

Among the most pervasive factors limiting women's participation in many countries is their lower levels of education and training. In low-income countries, women may continue to be constrained by illiteracy. Women's limited participation in decision-making in all areas results in a lack of the required skills and experience.

A direct consequence of the fact that women have been excluded and marginalized in the past is that those who are elected to political positions or seek employment in public administrations enter predominantly male environments which are not conducive to their presence. Politics and public decision-making are often seen as a male preserve and women are often perceived as less capable than men in political and management roles. Conservative attitudes, particularly towards women at senior management level, negate women's potential and contribute to the lack of confidence that many voters and constituencies may have in women. The traditional working methods in many government structures can discourage women from seeking office. These can include discriminatory attitudes and practice and lack of consideration of work-life balance.

Obstacles to implementation of gender mainstreaming in city governance include a lack of awareness of the importance of addressing gender equality perspectives; lack of knowledge on gender equality issues; and lack of capacity to identify and address gender equality in the context of daily work. Stereotypical attitudes may also be a problem. Addressing these obstacles requires an institutional commitment to capacity-building which will enhance awareness, encourage commitment

and develop capacity for all actors to work with gender equality issues in relation to urban development and city governance.

In discussing women's participation, representation and influence, the informal context should also be considered. Women are frequently actively engaged as leaders and participants at community level. They have demonstrated considerable enterprise in addressing the challenges of urban poverty, providing some of the most creative grassroots initiatives, such as savings clubs, soup kitchens, communal care facilities and organizing efforts to engage and co-operate with local authorities around access to services. The contribution of women to slum upgrading and services delivery, whether in cash or in kind, has been considerable. They are often the first to find the user fees required or provide community labour, and they are invariably involved in maintenance responsibilities associated with community management of utilities and services, particularly when these functions are unpaid.

Many women have pressed for participation in civic organizations to ensure that these have a distributive agenda which meets the needs of poor families and communities. Given the important role of civil society for democratic governance, it is important to note the difficulties women may have in relation to access and voice in NGOs and civil society groups – which can be similar to those they face in interaction with local government structures. It is critical that women are equitably represented in all civil society organizations and that gender equality perspectives are identified and addressed as an integral part of the agendas of these organizations.

The role of local authorities

Global policies and legal frameworks on gender equality and empowerment of women are only as effective as their implementation. Government authorities and other actors at national and sub-national levels must translate these frameworks into concrete action on the ground. In many countries there has been significant development of national policies, legislative frameworks and strategies and action plans. Much less has been done at sub-national levels, including local and city levels, in translating government commitments on gender equality and empowerment of women into tangible action. A lack of gender sensitivity on the part of local authorities in municipal planning and management, and a lack of capacity to work effectively with women's groups and networks, may result in neglect of attention to women's needs, priorities and in the failure to recognize their contributions. This is a net loss for communities and cities as the potentials of women go unutilized.

In discussing possible concrete action by urban governments, it is useful to identify and build on recommendations that have already been made in different contexts. It has been widely recognized, including by the Metropolis Women International Network, that it is not possible to develop a global blueprint – strategies need to be adapted to specific socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental contexts. Nonetheless, there are some important generic recommendations that can be adapted to local contexts.

Already in 1995, the Platform for Action, for example, recommended the organization of leadership and gender-awareness training; the development of transparent criteria for decision-making positions; and the creation of a system of mentoring. In the Asia-Pacific region, these strategies were also highlighted in the Phitsamulok Declaration on the Advancement of Women in Local Government, adopted at the First Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors in Thailand in June 2001. The Declaration also called for, among other things, attention to the barriers that hinder women's participation, development of concrete strategies, establishment of networking, and provision of financial and other support.

Other important measures that can be taken by urban governments, include the development of explicit gender equality policies, strategies and action plans, including affirmative action policies and equal employment opportunity policies; incorporation of gender perspectives into policies, strategies and action plans in all policy areas, for example health, transport, security and the environment; establishment of requirements for consultation with and participation of women; development of gender-sensitization programmes for public officials and capacity-building for different groups of women; collection, compilation and utilization of sex-disaggregated data in all policy areas; development of women-specific mechanisms – such as networks, committees, and summits - as appropriate; provision of support to women candidates in elections; and establishment or strengthening of collaboration with and support to women's groups and networks in civil society.

A further critical measure that must be taken by urban governments is the full implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy. This requires that gender analysis and gender impact assessment is made mandatory at the initial stage of all work. Capacity on gender mainstreaming should be regarded as a required competence and be included in all job descriptions and terms of reference. Gender-sensitization programmes should be mandatory for all public officials and gender equality modules included as part of regular training offered at local government training and research institutes. Management should also establish clear responsibilities and develop effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms to assess progress. Where necessary, guidelines and other tools should be developed.

Participatory budgeting is one of the main strategies for securing public participation in local governance. Gender-responsive budgets are mechanisms by which city governments can integrate gender analysis into public expenditure policies and budgets in different sectors. This does not imply separate budgets for women, but rather the political will to disaggregate expenditure according to its differential impact on women and men, with the aim to increase resource allocations in support of gender equality. Gender-responsive budgets provide a unique opportunity to link policy commitments with resource allocations and are important mechanisms for holding governments accountable. There are many areas of concern to women in cities in relation to budgets, for example in the areas of infrastructure and services. Local revenue collection also has implications for women, such as licenses and site fees for street traders that particularly affect low-income women in the informal sector.

Urban governments must take specific measures to address the identified obstacles to women's full and equal participation in decision-making in urban contexts. This can include awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns which take advantage of the potential of the media to change attitudes and behaviours, and organization of conferences, workshops and other public fora to increase awareness, commitment and action on increasing women's participation in decision-making processes.

Many local governments have already taken positive concrete steps to address the lack of representation of women in political and administrative bodies and to increase the consultation with and involvement of women in decision-making in urban planning. There are numerous lessons learned and promising practices which should be more effectively documented and disseminated. Measures taken include legislation reserving seats for women in local legislatures; the stipulation of a clear requirement on increasing the participation of women through the use of consultative and participatory approaches; establishment of equal employment opportunity programmes and affirmative action policies on political positions; efforts to improve access to sex-disaggregated data; provision of orientation and training programmes for newly elected/appointed women to increase their knowledge and capacity on critical issues such as municipal legislation, budgeting and taxation, service delivery systems, environmental management, and special programmes such as poverty alleviation schemes or shelter programmes; and provision of training programmes and mentoring schemes for building women's self-esteem and negotiation and communication skills.

Efforts have also been made to increase the incorporation of gender perspectives in city government planning and management processes. Municipal governments have developed training programmes, methodologies and tools to provide the required guidance to employees on gender mainstreaming.

A number of municipal governments have established specific mechanisms for women. According to the Asian Network of Major Cities 21 (ANMC21-WPS), 5 Member countries had established women's divisions in city government bodies and 7 had women's committees. A cautionary note is necessary in regard to special mechanisms for women. Promotion of gender equality should not be regarded as a "women's issue" but should be considered as an integral part of the work of both men and women involved in city governance. Similarly, some caution is needed in closely linking women to issues of family and social development. The stereotyped perception that social development in general, and care-giving roles in particular, are the sole responsibility of women persist in all parts of the world. Many well-intentioned efforts therefore focus solely on women and disregard the fact that men are parents and should have the same responsibilities as women for care-giving in families. This can be counterproductive for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.

The unequal sharing of unpaid domestic and care-giving work has implications for women's access to education, employment, public office, training opportunities and participation in voluntary activities. Women cannot devote as much time to these activities as men. Even when

women's participation is secured, the institutional environments are also not always conducive to women's participation because activity schedules and the lack of child care facilities cause conflicts with family obligations. Rather than treating this as a "women's issue", the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, as recently as March 2009, stressed the need for equal sharing of these responsibilities between women and men and for ensuring that both women and men can have public and family roles. This must be taken fully into account in urban planning and management.

In some local government contexts, efforts have been made to more effectively utilize the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Awareness-raising seminars have been organized – for municipal staff and civil society actors, and implementation plans developed. In United States, for example, even though the Government has not yet ratified the Convention, many counties and cities have endorsed the Convention and passed resolutions in support of implementation.

Strategies for women's collective action in Asia

The final issue I would like to address is the collective action that can be taken by women to accelerate the process of increasing women's involvement in and influence on decision-making processes in cities in the region. The Metropolis Asia Women's Network is in a unique position to influence and contribute to this process.

Firstly, efforts could be made to increase the awareness of, commitment to and action on the global policy and legal frameworks on gender equality and empowerment of women among city governments. These frameworks form the basis for national policy-making and should also influence the goals, policies and strategies at city level. They could be used much more effectively than is currently the case. As already mentioned, a number of countries have made efforts to utilize CEDAW by holding seminars to raise awareness and develop concrete strategies to ensure its full implementation. A further development could be to ensure that the national reports, and where necessary the NGO shadow reports, to the CEDAW Committee include evaluations of the extent to which local governments have worked to implement the articles of the Convention. Since States parties are required to report to the Committee every four years, this would provide a regular opportunity for internal assessment and review by an external body of independent experts – resulting in concrete tailored recommendations to guide further development.

Although the issue of women in cities has relevant for all regions of the world, in particular in the context of increased urbanization, it has never been specifically addressed in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Members of the Network could lobby their respective governments to promote increased attention to the issue as a "priority theme" or an "emerging issue" at one of the annual sessions of the Commission.

Networking remains a key strategy. The Metropolis Asia Women's Network has already done significant work to develop common goals and approaches and to enhance the sharing of information on strategies and outcomes. The value of fully utilizing all available modern communication methods should be recognized, in particular in efforts to reach out to young women. There are a number of specific areas where it would be useful for the Network to strengthen efforts and increase the sharing of experiences, lessons learned and promising practices. These include the use of the gender mainstreaming strategy, including gender-responsive budgeting; increasing data collection, and addressing gender stereotypes.

Innovative measures are needed to address the stereotypical attitudes and practices which hinder the participation of women in decision-making. Efforts should be made to engage educational institutions and the media in actively promoting positive change. The achievements of women in leadership roles in cities should be made visible and celebrated – for example the achievement of Helen Zille, the Mayor of Cape Town in South Africa on winning the 2008 World Mayor Award. Change in attitudes is needed among women as well as men. It is therefore critically important that women who have achieved leadership positions in local government actively support other women and promote gender equality and empowerment of women. Mentoring programmes should be used to provide positive role models for younger women. Career guidance should provide information on potential openings in urban governance.

An urgent priority for the Network must be to advocate for and support the collection of sex-disaggregated data in all areas of urban government in order to improve assessment of progress made. The Network could also consider identifying a limited number of areas of common concern to all countries where measurement of process is critical and discuss the feasibility of developing indicators. A major constraint to the development of indicators is, however, the lack of data at national level. Indicators are only useful if collection of reliable and comparable data is possible.

Capacity-development must remain a key strategy – for women seeking election to public office, for women taking on new roles for the first time, and for women citizens on ways to increase engagement in urban decision-making processes. “Budget literacy” for example is one critical area where capacity needs further development. This involves increasing the understanding of what a budget is, how it is developed, what limits there are on the power of elected officials, and what rights citizens have in relation to resource allocations and budget processes. Increased capacity in this area can empower women to make unprecedented demands for information and accountability.

Effective action requires a broad coalition of actors. The Metropolis Asia Women's Network could strengthen contacts and collaboration with NGOs and other civil society groups. Increased collaboration with academics can ensure that relevant issues are adequately researched and that research results are packaged and disseminated in a useful manner for policy-makers.

The Network can play a pivotal role by supporting the increase of awareness, commitment and capacity to act on the gender mainstreaming strategy. Measures the Network could take include

the development of training programmes, tools and guidelines and the organization of seminars and conferences, as well as regular monitoring and reporting on progress.

Conclusions

Fundamental to the promotion of gender equality is the opportunity for women as well as men to develop basic human capabilities and participate in all aspects of political, economic, and social decision-making, including at city level. Women in decision-making positions contribute to redefining socio-economic and political priorities, placing new issues on the agenda that reflect and address women's specific values, experiences and priorities, and providing new perspectives on mainstream issues. The broader the base of participation in power structures and decision-making processes, the greater the transparency and accountability. The impact of efforts to bring gender equality perspectives to bear in urban government must, however, be assessed not only in terms of the number of women in decision-making positions, but also by outcomes which bring needed change in the lives of women and girls.

The positive links between gender equality and empowerment of women and the effective and sustainable development of cities and the improvement of the quality of life for all citizens are increasingly clear. Women represent half the resources and half the potential and are important agents of change in all contexts, including in cities. Policies, plans, resource allocations and programmes in cities need to more effectively target the particular needs and priorities of, and build on the contributions of, women as well as men to guarantee more effective and sustainable management of cities. An effective means of increasing attention to gender equality perspectives in city government could be to systematically highlighting the costs of not consulting and involving women and including gender equality perspectives in policies, legislation, programmes and activities.

The conviction expressed by the Heads of State in the United Nations in 2005 that "progress for women is progress for all", is also true in the cities of the world. The full involvement of women and gender-sensitive development is needed to ensure that cities provide safe and empowering living conditions and can contribute to equitable, effective and sustainable urban development for the benefit of all.

Finally, the concerns of the Network and of this Roundtable and Forum take on increased urgency in the context of the current financial crisis. There is a risk that it may become more difficult to achieve many of the desired policy responses because of the impact of the lack of resources, or that an alleged lack of resources may become an excuse for not taking action. A challenge will be to keep the focus of the response to the crisis at city level on social development and gender equality. This may be difficult in the context of a response to the financial crisis that is, to date, largely couched in terms of macro-economic policy.

Thank you