

**Women's Group Position and Common Ground
Statement at the Habitat III Africa Regional Meeting
Abuja, Nigeria: 23-26 February 2016**

Good afternoon, Delegates and colleagues.

My name is Violet Shivutse, from Kenya. Today I am presenting a joint statement on behalf of the Huairou Commission, Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). My remarks reflect the collective priorities and recommendations of our constituencies -- women and the urban poor across Africa.

It is important to know that our three networks serve as active members of the Global Assembly of Partners, an initiative of UN-Habitat's World Urban Campaign, and the official multi stakeholder platform for Habitat III. Our responsibility has been to engage and consolidate the priorities and action agendas of two constituencies—women and grassroots, including the urban poor and informal workers—who stand to gain or lose the most in the New Urban Agenda.

We sincerely appreciate the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the excellent organization of this meeting and, indeed, all Nigerians for the warm hospitality accorded to us as participants. We also thank Habitat III Secretariat and International Women Communications Center Nigeria for their support.

To move forward, we must recall the long path we have travelled to arrive at today. The theme of Habitat II in 1996 held in Istanbul was "Bringing People's Voices to Habitat II". Today, I feel honored to bring voices of women and the urban poor to the Habitat III Africa Regional Meeting.

The outcome of the 1996 Habitat II Agenda made 133 references to women and many to the urban poor, and explicitly outlined actions for collaborative engagement. Previous UN resolutions likewise included commitments to empowerment of women and marginalized communities and to sustainable development. However, actualization of these commitments is still lagging behind.

Today, almost exactly 20 years later, gender, income, and other social inequalities are still rampant and the problems that plagued the urban poor in Africa have only grown in magnitude and depth.

Here, at our Abuja stakeholder forums, grassroots women, informal settlement dwellers, and informal workers, have joined forces to consolidate issues and priorities we feel are essential to address. Participants spoke to the suffering caused by unfettered privatization and arbitrary acquisition of the lands they occupy for real estate speculation and projects for private benefit. Others emphasized how women and the urban poor are generating income and contributing to the urban economy but often face arrest, harassment, criminal sanctions like fines and imprisonment – rather than business subsidies. Many outlined the urgent need to close gender and socio-economic gaps and promote equity and inclusion in the New Urban Agenda. Among the examples of current challenges they cited were:

Land grabbing by rich developers who connive with government to build big homes and shopping malls for the rich, while the urban poor are displaced from their homes and places of work and forced to move from place to place.

Governments that continue to collect taxes and levies from the urban poor without delivering social services or amenities in return. (Instead, the urban poor are harassed and thrown into “Black Marias” (police vans) for trying to make a living.)

Participants also traced how they saw poverty, dispossession and

cycles of violence and abuse of the urban poor being compounded by:

- (1) the lack of legal recognition of informal workers and informal settlement dwellers who contribute enormously to the cities in which we live,
- (2) the lack of participation by women and the urban poor in planning and problem solving; and
- (3) the unequal access to resources and affordable finance.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and with the overriding principle of leaving no one behind, we are organizing to ensure that the New Urban Agenda promotes inclusion and produces equitable social and economic outcomes. We are calling for:

- Recognition of all forms of work, both informal and formal, in all sectors in which women and the urban poor are active such as caregiving, market and street trading, domestic work, waste picking, etc.
- Greater access to affordable financial services, access to training, access to new technologies, and decent and secure workplaces for all women and men.
- Adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services (security, health, electricity, water, sanitation, education) for all urban inhabitants.
- Security of tenure for the urban poor and a stop to all forced evictions.

With regard to all of these demands, we also recognize that women are uniquely marginalized, and consequently special consideration must be taken.

We want a New Urban Agenda that prioritizes the needs of women and the urban poor, the following:

- 1. Formalize engagement and partnerships between local government, national government and grassroots groups to**

sustain collaborative planning, implementation, and monitoring of housing and urban development initiatives

2. **Recognize and support organized networks of grassroots women, slum dwellers and informal workers** who contribute to urban economic growth and build movements towards influencing and enhancing their own development and the cities in which they live
3. **Support and utilize community led data collection** documenting tenure and informal settlement upgrading priorities and encourage grassroots community learning in the areas of land and housing planning and administration, especially those where women take the lead.
4. **Develop pro-poor laws and other urban policies that mitigate risks of land grabbing and displacement** to promote the economic and social security of women and their families and their contributions to the local economy.
5. **Guarantee security of tenure from one generation of women to another** through strong inheritance protections and through measures that help women protect the vitality of land against climate change and other environmental threats
6. **Empower local government to be the primary provider of basic social and municipal services**, such as sanitation, water supply, healthcare and primary education.
7. **Empower the urban poor and especially women to participate in equal partnership with local government** in all urban planning and decision-making, including participation in the budgeting, implementation, and monitoring processes.



- 8. Create pathways for incremental formalization and integration of informal workers and settlements, rather than criminalizing the urban poor.**
- 9. Develop partnerships with communities, the State, and private sector to provide accessible housing and livelihood finance for the urban poor.**

The Huirou Commission, Shack/Slum Dwellers International and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing look forward to partnering with our governments, UN Habitat, the private sector, civil society organizations, other key partners.

Thank you for your time.

Signed this 24th day of February, 2016,

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Huirou Commission

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Women in Informal
Employment:
Globalizing and Organizing

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Shack/Slum Dwellers
International

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Dr. Yusufu Corro Corro
IWEI
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