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# GENDER EQUALITY FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

An overview of UN-HABITAT'S  
Gender Equality Action Plan  
(2008-2013)

**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Addressing inequalities between men and women helps to lift barriers  
impeding social and economic development of towns and cities.  
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UN-HABITAT's Gender Equality Action Plan unites all UN-HABITAT programmes and partners to improve gender equality in working towards sustainable urbanisation and adequate shelter for all. The plan contributes to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, especially around water and sanitation, environmental sustainability, and improving living conditions in slums. At the same time, the plan explicitly addresses the third Goal, to "promote gender equality and empower women."

With more than half of humanity now living in cities and 1 billion in slums, improving gender equality is a top development priority that needs to be supported within institutions by good coordination, technical assistance, effective advocacy, training and capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation. The Gender Equality Action Plan provides the strategic framework to bring about clear and measurable results.

### ADDRESSING GENDER GAPS IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING

Inequalities between men and women add extra barriers to social and economic development of towns and cities, which already have many pressing needs to address, especially in developing countries with rapid rates of urbanisation. Three million people per week are added to cities of the developing world, according to UN-HABITAT's 2008-2009 State of the World's Cities. Men or women, slum dwellers around the world face problems associated with poverty, poor living conditions and lack of social safety nets. But women constitute the majority of the urban and the rural poor—over 70 per cent in some African countries<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. *Beijing+10 Outcome Document, 2004*, p.6.

Women generally face more barriers than men in securing jobs, especially beyond the informal sector, and even when they do secure waged employment, they still often earn less than men. There is strong competition for land and housing among growing urban populations, and in many parts of the world, women start from a disadvantaged position, since their ability to access land and housing often depends on their relationship to men. Having an action plan to tackle these problems makes efforts more focussed and strategic.

### A STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN AN URBANISING WORLD

The Gender Equality Action Plan provides a road map for ensuring women and men have more equal access to public resources and services—all this in the course of UN-HABITAT's efforts to develop inclusive, productive and sustainable towns and cities. The plan also promotes women's equal participation in all aspects of urban development and housing.

There is still a long way to go in ensuring women's voices are heard in decision making. Only about one in five parliamentarians or local councillors is a woman.<sup>2</sup> UN-HABITAT is looking at ways for women and men to be more equally and meaningfully involved in projects and programmes to benefit their own communities.

In this way, the plan goes far beyond tackling the deprivations that women face—it boosts the potential for women and men to be partnered equally in tackling the challenges of rapid urbanisation together: from making cities more resilient to disasters related to climate change to improving safety and security in cities, and from combating urban pollution to building up local economies.

<sup>2</sup> The United Cities and Local Governments website (<http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/uclg/index.asp?pag=wldmstatistics.asp&type=&L=EN&pon=1>) revealed that 21% of councillors in 67 countries surveyed were women, and Women in Local Parliaments website (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>) reported that 18.4% of MPs are women. Both sites were accessed 7 July 2009.



Research on how men and women use public spaces differently, including how they make journeys to and from their homes or places of work, will help guide policies on public transportation and urban development. ©UN-HABITAT/Daniel Biau, China

### FOCUS AREAS OF THE GENDER EQUALITY ACTION PLAN:

The Gender Equality Action Plan covers each area of UN-HABITAT's Medium-Term Institutional Plan (MTSIP 2008-2013), ensuring that gender-concerns cut across all work. The six action areas are described in the following section.

#### 1) ADVOCACY AND MONITORING OF GENDER EQUALITY IN CITIES

Evidence-based information on the situation of women and girls in cities, as compared to men and boys, is essential in order to improve statistics, gender analysis and the knowledge base for policy making and programming. UN-HABITAT already incorporates issues of gender in its advocacy and monitoring work, but the agency is aiming to scale up these efforts. The work involves the following:

- Collection, analysis and dissemination of sex disaggregated data, using gender indicators;
- Documenting and disseminating best practices on gender-responsive policies, legislation and practical actions;
- Promoting and developing flagship global reports, tools and policy guides that reflect gender differences, using sex-disaggregated data.

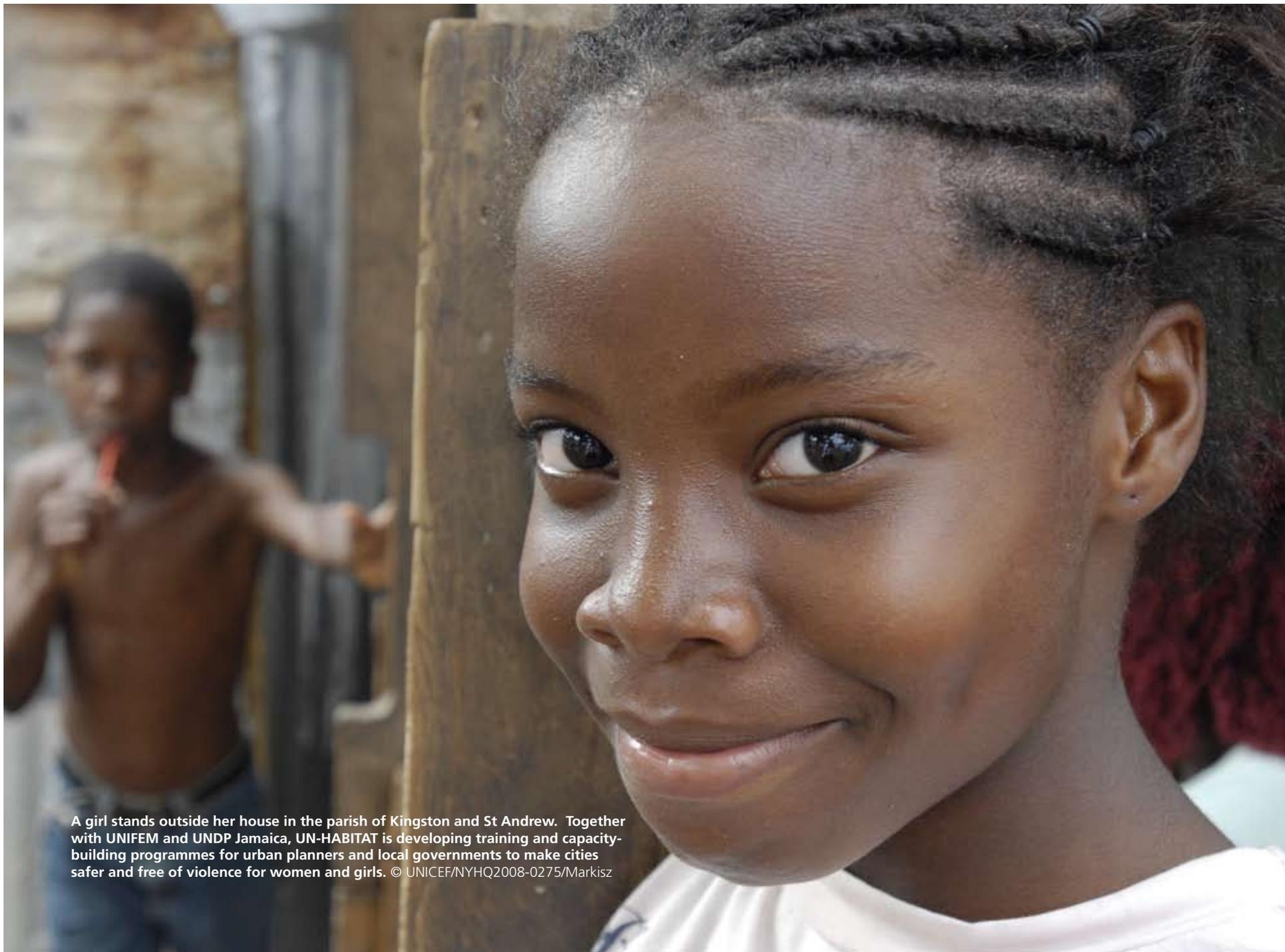


**By addressing safety concerns of women and girls in informal settlements, UN-HABITAT and development partners can contribute to improving overall safety for whole communities.** © UNICEF/NYHQ2006-0186/Kamber

## 2) URBAN PLANNING, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Good governance, especially at the local level, allows women and men to engage with the sphere of government closest to them on issues of accountability, transparency, participation and service delivery. UN-HABITAT's work is creating more opportunities for women to partner with men in decision-making within their own communities. This helps bring equitable benefits to their daily living conditions. UN-HABITAT's work in this area includes:

- Promoting women's participation in improving safety and security in their cities, disaster management and the creation of disaster-resilient-communities;
- Training and capacity building on gender mainstreaming for local governments;
- Capacity-building for women leaders of grassroots organisations and NGOs;
- Engaging parliamentarians on gender, housing, urban poverty and urban development.



A girl stands outside her house in the parish of Kingston and St Andrew. Together with UNIFEM and UNDP Jamaica, UN-HABITAT is developing training and capacity-building programmes for urban planners and local governments to make cities safer and free of violence for women and girls. © UNICEF/NYHQ2008-0275/Markisz



**Many hands make work light: in designing and implementing building projects, UN-HABITAT supports projects that enlist the knowledge and skills of both men and women.** © UNICEF/NYHQ2007-1368/Pirozzi



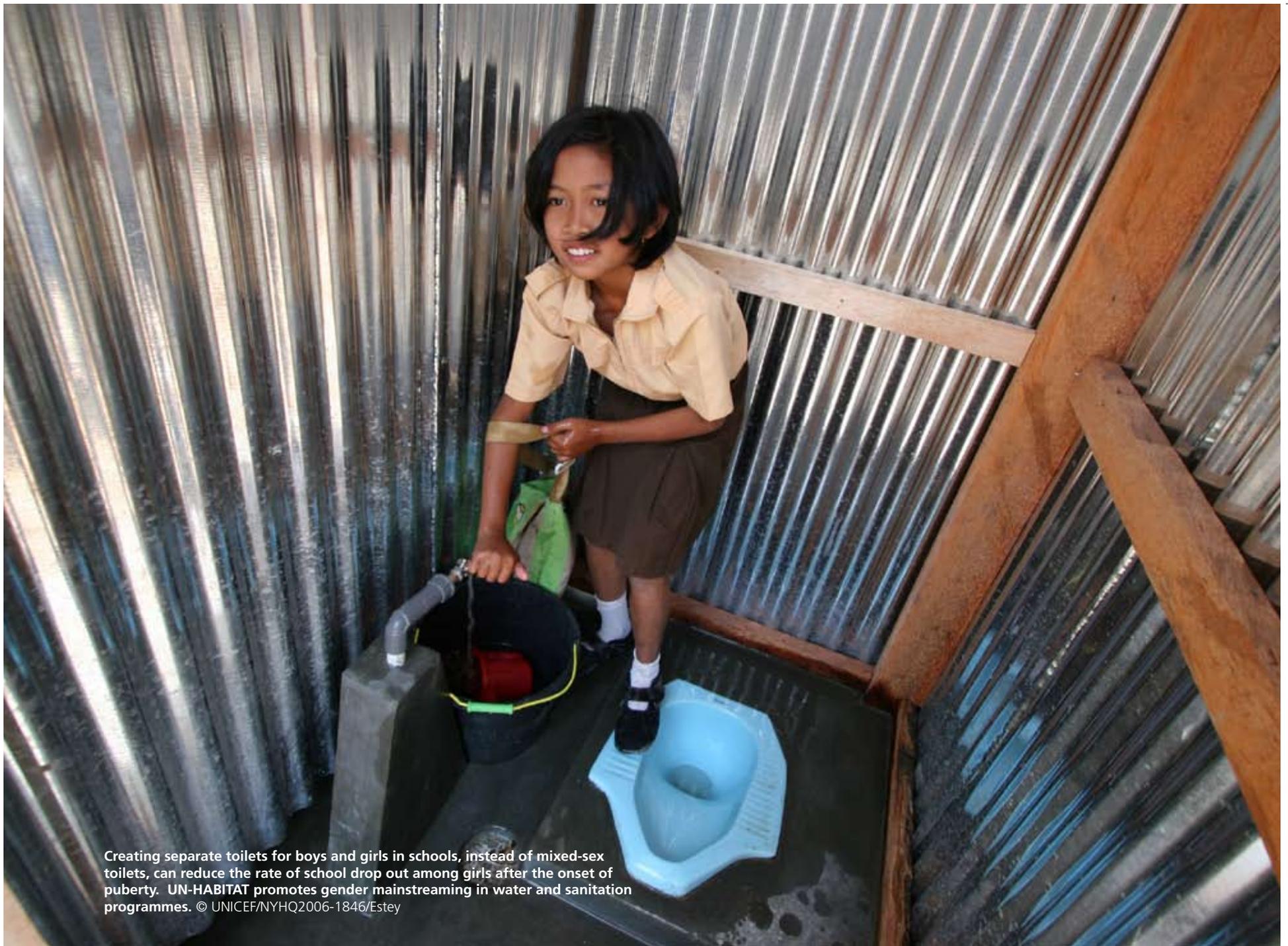
**The Gender Equality Action Plan places women's security of tenure at the centre of policy debate and advocacy.** © UN-HABITAT/ Caylee Hong

### 3) LAND AND HOUSING

Many States have constitutional guarantees and specific laws and policies aimed at promoting and safeguarding women's equal rights to land, property and housing, but in practice these are often undermined by cultural and social norms, and practices that are discriminatory against women. The Gender Equality Action Plan places women's security of tenure and access to land and housing at the centre of policy debate and advocacy.

Promotion of gender equality in urban land and housing will include:

- Advocacy in collaboration with partners to highlight the effects of tenure insecurity and evictions on women, especially as a result of losing a husband or domestic violence;
- Promoting women's rights to land and housing through a continuum of rights, including joint tenure, and practical alternatives to individual land titling, which is difficult for poor women to obtain;
- Working with governments, NGOs and international partners to develop gender-responsive land tools and to improve laws, policies and regulatory frameworks accordingly.



Creating separate toilets for boys and girls in schools, instead of mixed-sex toilets, can reduce the rate of school drop out among girls after the onset of puberty. UN-HABITAT promotes gender mainstreaming in water and sanitation programmes. © UNICEF/NYHQ2006-1846/Estey



Water collection is a laborious task that can take hours out of a woman or girl's day. © UN-HABITAT/Nepal

#### 4) ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENTALLY-SOUND URBAN SERVICES

The Gender Equality Action Plan helps to ensure that both men and women participate in the planning and provision of urban services that cater to their basic needs, while managing the risks of urban pollution. Concerns include fuel use, public transportation and, very often, water and sanitation. Women and girls in informal settlements are generally tasked with the laborious task of water collection for their families and when sanitation facilities are poor, women and girls suffer more from health problems, and the indignity caused by lack of privacy and risks to personal safety when having to relieve themselves in secluded places.

UN-HABITAT's work includes:

- Helping to establish better governance and infrastructure on basic services, such as clean drinking water, sanitation and transportation, for which women have different priorities and needs from men;
- Working with city planners to ensure women are engaged in the design, management and evaluation of services;
- Training municipalities and providers of water and sanitation services on gender-responsive planning, budgeting and programming;
- Developing women-led sanitation and microfinance programmes.



(Above) UN-HABITAT's collaborative work with Jinja Municipal Council and private sector partners enabled low-income women in Uganda to secure these new homes. © UN-HABITAT (Below) This women's housing cooperative is working with Tanzania Women Land Access Trust and UN-HABITAT to find affordable solutions toward decent housing. © Tanzania Women Land Access Trust



UN-HABITAT is committed to opening more doors for low-income women to access decent and affordable housing. © UN-HABITAT/ Olav Saltbones

### 5) ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLE FINANCE FOR HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Although there are more men than women in the workforce, women make up 60 to 80 per cent of the informal workforce in developing countries. Most workers in the informal economy are low-income earners and face difficulty accessing credit and housing finance, which in turn limits their access to land, housing and security of tenure. UN-HABITAT's work in this area will include special focus on empowering women and youth savings groups and housing cooperatives, so that they benefit from sustainable housing finance products that are affordable for the urban poor. The work involves the following:

- Helping low-income women who are normally excluded from mainstream banking systems to secure their own homes through special loans and credit guarantees;
- Leveraging the contribution of communities, local authorities, the private sector, government and international financing institutions toward improving access to finance for housing and infrastructure;
- Support to Women Land Access Trusts and housing cooperatives.



Young women and men train alongside in construction techniques through a UN-HABITAT programme in Kenya. © UN-HABITAT

#### 6) STRENGTHENED GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN ALL UN-HABITAT PROGRAMMES

UN-HABITAT will continue to strive for improvement in mainstreaming gender into housing and urban development work, and for an improvement of gender balance in UN-HABITAT, including in professional and senior management levels. The Gender Plan also encourages learning and sharing of experiences from field operations on gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women. The work in this area includes:

- Training and capacity-building for staff on gender-responsive programming;
- Developing tools and gender guidelines for programmes;
- Documenting good practises on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment programmes in field operations of different countries;
- Monitoring and reporting on gender mainstreaming and gender balance in UN-HABITAT.



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The full version of the Gender Equality Action Plan can be downloaded at  
<http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=6715&catid=303&typeid=24&subMenuId=0>

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