

## EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR, SOCIAL AFFAIRS

### d) Housing programmes & equality between women and men

#### How are gender equality issues relevant in housing programmes?

Attempts to integrate a gender perspective in housing programmes have often focused on increasing the involvement of women-headed households. Several Sida programmes (including FUPROVI and PRODEL) and have made inroads in recognising the obstacles faced by women-headed households and developing strategies to encourage their participation.

Although the participation of women-headed households is a fundamental issue, gender equality considerations are relevant across housing programmes and across all types of households. In fact, a focus on women-headed households may obscure the equality issues for other households.

- **The vision of the ‘household’:** It is important that housing professionals and government officials not view the household as a homogenous unit. For example it cannot be assumed that a male representative will act in the interests of all members. There are important differences within and among households.
- **Home ownership and equitable control of domestic resources:** Title to land and housing provides guarantees and security to the holder. Does the programme provide for joint tenure to the lot and house? Are women’s ownership rights promoted within the programme?
- **Equitable decision-making in the housing programme:** Given differences within households, it is important to ensure that both women and men are consulted on the primary direction and components of a programme. A participatory approach that only involves men is fundamentally flawed.
- **Promoting community leadership and increased involvement in decision-making:** Some housing programmes aim to increase the community’s ability to interact with local authorities (for example, negotiate improved neighbourhood services or improve the accountability of local officials). These initiatives should seek to involve women as well as men and ensure that women benefit from training and capacity development.
- **Housing design and productive activities:** Given women’s domestic and childcare responsibilities (and only limited options), many women (often

more so than men) attempt to run a small business out of their home. A standard housing design may not support this. Features could include workspaces, storage facilities (for bulk purchases and finished articles), light to work by and electrical capacity. (It might also be necessary to consider zoning requirements.)

- **Housing design and domestic responsibilities:** A poorly designed or inadequate home can intensify domestic work – increasing women’s workload more than men’s. Earth floors can make cleaning more difficult. Overcrowding can increase health problems and women’s work in caring for the unwell. Lack of space may mean constant re-organising of rooms to facilitate various functions (i.e. cooking, sleeping, and studying in the same room).
- **Gender division of labour in housing construction:** Women and men tend to face different obstacles when attempting to work in housing construction. There may be stereotypes about appropriate work for women. Women are often allocated the fetching and carrying tasks with little opportunity to learn new skills. Or they may be given inferior tools since “they won’t be doing the real work anyway.”
- **Labour contributions:** When housing programmes require direct participation in construction, several features can contribute to more equitable participation between women and men. Women’s participation has been improved through complementary supports that recognise their domestic responsibilities (such as childcare). Research has also shown that allowing women to hire labour for their contribution is often a preferred option. Although this makes the process more expensive, women are often willing to make significant investments to acquire a house. Finally some programmes have offered a broad range of options for labour contributions – not just construction (for example, bookkeeping, supply inventory or meal preparation)
- **A focus on participation to the detriment of other factors.** Some initiatives have worked to increase women’s involvement without a consideration of what this will mean to their overall workload. In the end, they are worse, rather than better off. Creative approaches are needed to address equality issues at the level of impact, not just participation.

### Gender Equality: Excerpt from the *Habitat Agenda* (Istanbul – 1996)

Paragraph 46. We commit ourselves to the goal of gender equality in human settlements development. We further commitment ourselves to:

- a) Integrating gender perspectives in human settlements related legislation, politics, programmes and project through the application of gender-sensitive analysis;
- b) Developing conceptual and practical methodologies for incorporating gender perspectives in human settlements planning, development and evaluation, including the development of indicators;
- c) Collecting, analysing and disseminating gender-disaggregated data and information on human settlements issues, including statistical means that recognise and make visible the unremunerated work of women, for use in policy and programme planning and implementation;
- d) Integrating a gender perspective in the design and implementation of environmentally sound and sustainable resource management mechanisms, production techniques and infrastructure development in rural and urban areas;
- e) Formulating and strengthening policies and practices to promote the full and equal participation of women in human settlements planning and decision-making.

### Tips: How to Include a Gender Perspective in Housing Projects

1. Acknowledge diversity (between women and men, within groups of women and men and among household structures). Check all assumptions about who does what work and who has what responsibilities relating to housing before moving ahead with an initiative.
2. Use technology appropriate to women's (and men's) needs and capabilities, and to local materials, traditions, and the environment.
3. Support the provision of infrastructure (potable water, sanitation and energy) that meets women's as well as men's needs.
4. Establish close contact with community organisations and NGOs promoting gender equality in the area.
5. Encourage the active participation of women users in project design, implementation, and evaluation.
6. Make provision to facilitate women's involvement in the project, such as convenient hours, collective childcare and transportation.
7. Minimise paperwork and bureaucracy to encourage the involvement of uneducated or illiterate women and men.
8. Ensure that both women and men are offered training in project management, shelter design, construction and maintenance (skills transferable to the formal economy after project completion).
9. Offer appropriate financing, including flexible down payment, repayment and collateral requirements.
10. Publicise the project through information channels accessible to women, such as community centres, trade unions, and women's groups.
11. Promote collective organisation and action by women to increase their bargaining power and leadership skills.
12. Plan for a design that will allow women to build and improve their homes in stages as their incomes grow.
13. Promote an architectural design that will provide women with adequate space for productive home-based activities, both cash earning and non-cash-earning. The design shouldn't assume that women are solely responsible for domestic tasks.
14. Create mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation by women and men users, including communication channels with programme planners so that the women users may continually articulate their concerns.

Adapted from: Decent Shelter: A Women's Right. Posted on the gender page of a Habitat II Website:  
<<http://www.cedar.univie.ac.at/habitat/gender/gender.html>>

### Resources

- J. Beal & C. Levy (nd). *Moving Toward the Gendered City*. A paper commissioned by the Women in Human Settlements Development Programme of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat).  
<<http://www.cedar.univie.ac.at/habitat/gender/gen2.html>>
- S. Chant (1996). *Gender, Urban Development and Housing*. United Nations Development Programme, Publication Series for Habitat II, Volume 2. <<http://www.undp.org/undp/gender/resource/housing.htm>>
- A. Lind & M. Farmelo (1996). *Gender and Urban Social Movements: Women's Community Responses to Restructuring and Urban Poverty*. UNRISD Discussion Paper No. 76. <<http://www.unrisd.org/engindex/publ/list/dp/dp76/1gov3.htm>>
- Two other Sida equality prompt sheets are especially relevant for Sida's housing programmes: Sida Equality Prompts #6: Micro-credit and #10: Participatory Processes.