**Habitat International Coalition**

**Women and Habitat Working Group -HIC Africa (WHWG)**

**(Draft Program Document)**

**1.Introduction and Background**

The Vancouver Action Plan of 1976 acknowledges that the ideologies of states are reflected in their human settlement policies, these being powerful instruments for change.[[1]](#endnote-2) A gender perspective on these policies reveals that villages, cities and neighborhoods, particularly in Africa, have been shaped by the values of patriarchy, which continues to influence social relations and material development.

The physical form of spaces in our settlements contributes to perpetuating and reproducing these values. WHWG is aware of these historic challenges and proposes work with relevant organizations, institutions and agencies to put women’s lives at the center of habitat decisions, particularly in Africa. The feminist approach to human settlements entails bringing about the alternative of gender equality in the built environment.

The Women and Habitat Working Group – HIC Africa (WaHWG)is a group of Habitat International Coalition (HIC) Members and Friends across Africa committed to consolidating, developing and mainstreaming the feminist approach in HIC Africa processes, projects and activities.

HIC had led the way with this expression of feminism in its Women and Shelter (HIC-WAS) Network, 1988–99, introducing gender into the UN Human Settlements Commission. The Commission’s resolution 13/13 of May 1991, adopted in General Assembly proceedings of the same year, “…Invites governments and UN Habitat to develop closer cooperation with HIC Women and Shelter Network and similar non-governmental organizations at national, regional and international levels.”[[2]](#endnote-3)

HIC-WAS further influenced the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, whose silver anniversary we commemorated last year. That global policy instrument featured a commitment government actions to “Give women full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and other property.”[[3]](#endnote-4)

Similar wording was adopted in the Habitat II Agenda of 1996, in which states committed to “The empowerment of women and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, whether rural or urban, are fundamental to sustainable human settlements development….”

And “to give women full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technologies…”.

It must be recalled that HIC-WAS activities coordinated from Africa gave rise to a genderizing initiative inside UN Habitat and enabled the “super coalition” of women’s civil society partner organizations at Beijing (1995), which was to monitor and evaluate gender-aware implementation of national plans of action, as well as the inclusion of women in decision making in human settlements.

However, when WAS coordination left Africa, it soon ceased to exist, and the new formation and process havedeparted from HIC’s foundational approach and core contribution of human rights and corresponding criteria in habitat and human settlements development. This initiative seeks to transform the past record of HIC-WAS to a contemporary consolidation of efforts so that HIC *is*, once again, a center of the feminist perspective as a needed instrument and counterforce for change.

In light of these developments and new vigor, knowledge creation and project activity in Africa, HIC Members now faces the need and opportunity to revive its strong and human-rights specialized feminist perspective and gender leadership, in order to mainstream this corresponding critical thinking. HIC globally needsalso to restore itswomen’s rights focus to reinvigorate Africa-wide, inter-regional and global action and leadership on the subject.

**2.Purpose**

Consistent with the HIC’s post-Habitat III Human Rights Habitat Observatory (HRHO) approach, restoring both the holistic and territorial habitat concept and human rights priority of Habitat II,HIC’s emphasis on women’s human rights related to habitat embraces the “human rights habitat” concept and approach initiated at Nairobi, Kenya in 2002. That was when the Nairobi Civic Forum declared the city a “human rights habitat,” whereby human rights with the corresponding permanent and binding human rights obligations of states inform sustainable development across the rural/urban divide.

Despite the attempted narrower approach of the current iteration of the global human settlement development policy, New Urban Agenda (2016), this former treatment of “villages and cities as points on a human settlements continuum within a common ecosystem” is otherwise expressed in the current temporary and voluntary 2030 Agenda commitments. The HRHO approach seeks to uphold that holistic perspective within the framework of prior, permanent and binding human rights obligations. Within that approach, HIC-WaSWG specializes in women’s and girls’ human rights related to habitat.

The work of African Members of HIC combines these *obligations* and *commitments* as commonly shared, cross-border criteria for their respective and complementary efforts at capacity building, policy analysis, physical solutions, strategic planning and programming, advocacy and other constructive problem solving. Reinvigorating these actions with a specific focus on women’s land and housing rights engages HIC’s two greatest strengths—learning and advocacy—to apply social force for change.

For over a decade (1988–1999), HIC Women and Shelter Network was one of HIC’s most prominent activities. During that time, it had major successes internationally. It established the rights of grassroots women’s groups to influence habitat policies. UN General Assembly Resolution 13/13 of May 1991 “……Invites governments and UN Habitat to develop closer cooperation with HIC Women and Shelter Network and similar non-governmental organizations at national, regional and international levels.”

HIC-WAS also entrenched women’s equal rights to own and inherit land and housing through the Beijing Platform for Action 1995 and in the Habitat Agenda 1996.

HIC’s failure to keep the Women and Shelter Network going in the 21st Century led to renewed calls for it to be revived, including in the most recent Evaluation. Nevertheless, HIC’s constituent body, the Housing and Land Rights Network (HIC-HLRN), has maintained its efforts to further entrench women, land and housing rights through education, advocacy and other programs especially in Middle East and Africa, as well as India.

The Women and Habitat Working Group is purposed to renew and build on these efforts and to revive the HIC Women and Shelter Group and its network, starting in Africa. We will link upwith many HIC member organizations in Africa as well as with the ongoing projects of HIC-HLRN on Women Land and Housing Rights.

**3. Vision, Goals andObjectives**

Within the HIC vision of a world in which everyone, everywhere enjoys adequate housing and community in which to live in peace, dignity and wellbeing, WaHWG seeks to realize this vision for women and girls. Its mission is to work collectively and individually with HIC Members and allies in Africa to develop and carry out their regional and global roles to bring about that vision. WaHWG’s goals and objectives align with these vision and mission by building civil society capacities to meet the historic challenges facing women and girls in their habitat to achieve equal realization and enjoyment of their habitat-related human rights. These include the human rights to adequate housing, land, food, water and sanitation and all of the process human rights and corresponding services to bring this about.

More specifically, these include enabling women to realize full and equal access to, use and control ofnatural and economic resources through decent work, credit, equal and equitable inheritance,legally secure tenure—including, but not limited toownership—of land, housing and other property, and the use of appropriate technologies. The effort also seeks to align HIC Member activities with principles and approaches associated with feminist urbanism.[[4]](#endnote-5)

**4.The Strategy**

Women’s voices on these matters should not only be heard, but given spaces and due respect at the tables and in the forums where policies and decisions regarding habitat issues are made. This calls for a strategy of enhancing the capabilities of all categories of women, girls and their allies to operate within relevant organizations, institutions and agencies to put women’s lives at the center of habitat-related decisions and policies affecting them, particularly in Africa.WaHWG, will build on human rights knowledge and methods, combined with development expertise with the wider group of HIC Members and allies. WaHWG officers and constituents will work with bodies and specialized organizations of the United Nations,regional organizations such as the African Union, and subregional multilateral organizations and affiliates, as well as Member States and their equally treaty-bound organs, including local governments and authorities, to ensure that women’s voices continue to be heard on habitat issues, and that womenachieve gender equality in leadership positionsin policy, legislative, decision makingand other public services.

WaHWGwillapply women’s human rights with a territorial perspective, appropriate to the African context, whichaligns with the habitat approach defined in the Habitat Agenda. The Working Group will also apply the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda, both with their reference to protecting, promoting and/or achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.[[5]](#endnote-6)However, additional to these voluntary commitments, WaHWG will consistently apply the binding human rights treaty obligations and their interpretive instruments, including, but not limited to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDaW) and its General recommendations.[[6]](#endnote-7)

In so doing, WaHWG intends to leverage the representation and contributions of HIC’s Africa Members and officers in UN Commission on Social Development (CSocD); Commission on the Status of Women (CSW);the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC); relevant sessions of CEDAW periodic reviews of African states;UN-HabitatAssembly (UNHA) and Executive Board (UNHEB); sessions related to NUA implementation, monitoring and evaluation; the World Urban Forum; the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Africa states’ Voluntary National Reviews and progress of specific Goals (especially on 1, 5 and 11,Targets1.4, 5.a, 11.1, 11.3 and 11.7,Indicator 1.4.2); and the African Union Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (AUCHPR) and its Special Mechanisms (SMs).

There is also the need to consider contemporary research and training activities of HLRN’s Women’s Land and Home project with HIC Members in several African countries and to use the findings and outcomes in advocating remedies for women deprived of their wealth, wellbeing and habitat through violations of their human rights to adequate housing and land, among other human rights.

**5.WaHWG Projects and Activities**

The Working Group willfocus its activities and projects on learning and capacity-building functions to enable HIC Members in Africa and their communities to advocate the feminist perspective and corresponding change at all levels. Constituents will take the responsibility to undertake advocacy and lobbying efforts within their own state or local jurisdiction, consistent with the operational principle that HIC and its Structure support, but do not supplant or compete with constituents in their own spheres of operation. Meanwhile, direct WaHWG actions will involve supporting HIC Members and allies through, among others,on the following:

* Training and capacity building
* Research
* Quantification of impacts
* Policy analysis.
* Vibrant social media advocacy.
* Advocacy before the United Nations and African Union
* Consultation and negotiationwith local governments and local authorities
* Linking and partnering with HIC organs and Members in other regions in any of these efforts.

Below is an illustrative 24-month calendar of currently scheduled advocacy opportunities available to HIC’s WaHWG.

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| Timing🡺 | 2021 | | | | | | | 2022 | | | | | | | | | | | | 2023 | | | | |
| Forum🡺 | J | J | A | S | O | N | D | J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D | J | F | M | A | M |
| ACHPR |  |  |  |  |  | 69th | |  |  |  | 70th | |  |  |  |  |  | 71st | |  |  |  | 72nd | |
| CEDaW |  | 81st[[7]](#footnote-2) |  |  | 80th[[8]](#footnote-3) | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| CSocD |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 60th |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 61st |  |  |  |
| CSW |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 66th |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 67th |  |  |
| HLPF |  | [[9]](#footnote-4) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | [[10]](#footnote-5) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| NUA IM&E |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| SMs |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| UNHA |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| UNHEB |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| WUF |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**6. Administrative Arrangements**

In addition to the public advocacy opportunities already calendared above, WaHWG’s administrative start-up will entail the following anticipated and sequenced steps in 2021:

* Secretarial
  + HIC Africa Member mapping (with GS) to determine priority outreach to solicit inputs on this concept note;
  + Documentation (video, writing, social media outreach, other)
* Communications
  + Open call to all HIC Africa Members to express interest in cooperating in the WAHWG initiative;
  + Conduct consultative meeting to collect inputs and discuss ongoing activities to input into a regional calenda reflecting all Member activities and plans;
  + Regular communiqué/newsletterreporting activities of the collective and raise awareness on issues and events;
* Budgeting and finance:
  + Initial activities could include consulting with HIC-GS and HLRN on existing HIC resources available to support the initial effort;
  + Develop specific proposals with Members and partners for specific activities and projects based on the consultations and resulting priorities.

**7. Endnotes**

1. The Vancouver Action Plan, A/CONF.70/15, 11 June 1976, para. 3, <http://www.un-documents.net/van-plan.htm>. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Promoting the Advancement of Women in Human Settlements Development and Management, resolution 13/13, in Report of the Commission on Human Settlements on the work of its thirteenth session, 29 April–8 May 1991, A/46/8, 8 May 1991, p. 34, para. 5, at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/135795/files/A_46_8-EN.pdf>. *See also* Wandia Seaforth, with Aliye Pekin Çelik, Catalina Hinchey-Trujillo, Lily Hutjes, Diana Lee-Smith, Anne Margarethe Lunde and Jan Peterson, *UN Habitat Gender Journey* (Nairobi: UN Habitat, 2017), at: <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/UN-Habitat%20gender%20journey.pdf>. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4–15 September 1995), A/CONF.177/20. 17 October 1995, under Strategic objective A.2. Revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women’s equal rights and access to economic resources, para. 61(b), at: <https://undocs.org/A/CONF.177/20>, endorsed by the General Assembly in A/RES/50/42, 17 January 1996, at: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/50/42>. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Focusing on at least five qualities of the built environment: 1. That everyday needs should be fulfilled be close to home, on foot or by safe public transport; 2. Facilities, services, equipment, shops, public transport should accommodate all regardless of age, origin, functional diversity, type of family or dependencies; 3. Physical security and the perception of security with which one can use the spaces safely, freely and at any time; 4. Sufficient life spaces for socializing, finding each other, asking for or providing help if need; and 5. Meaningful participation in decisions affecting life and environment, design, functionality, safety, and history (collective memory). *See Urbanismo feminista: Por una transformación radical de los espacios de vida* (Barcelona: Col·lectiu Punt 6 (Collective Point 6), 19 December 2019), <https://www.txalaparta.eus/es/libros/urbanismo-feminista>. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015, Preamble, para. 3,<https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>;New Urban Agenda, A/RES/71/256, 25 January 2017, paras. 5, 13.c, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/71/256>. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Notably, General recommendation Nos. 12 (1989), 19(1992) and 35on violence against women, <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CEDAW/GEC/5831&Lang=en>, <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CEDAW/GEC/3731&Lang=en>and

   <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/35&Lang=en>, respectively; General recommendation No. 16 (1991) on unpaid women workers in rural and urban family enterprises,

   <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CEDAW/GEC/3730&Lang=en>; General recommendation No. 21 (1994) on equality in marriage and family relations,

   <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CEDAW/GEC/4733&Lang=en>; General recommendation No. 23 (1997) on women in political and public life,

   <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CEDAW/GEC/4736&Lang=en>; General recommendation No. 29 (2013) on economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution,

   <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/29&Lang=en>; General recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women,

   <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/34&Lang=en>; and General recommendation No. 37 -- sixty-ninth session, on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/37&Lang=en>. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. Pre-sessional Working Group: lists of issues – Djibouti; lists of issues prior to reporting – Niger, 5–9 July 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
8. States party reports: Egypt, Maldives, South Africa, South Sudan, 18 October–12 November 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
9. VNRs: Angola,Cabo Verde, Chad, Egypt, Madagascar, Namibia,Sierra Leone, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, 6 July–15 July 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
10. VNRs: Djibouti, ?, 4–16 July 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)