



Live Learning Series hosted by UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat

Gender session

Speech by the UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif

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**City leaders, colleagues and friends,
A very good morning/afternoon/evening from Nairobi!**

As we all know, existing social inequalities facing women and girls living in urban areas are likely to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in the social, political and economic systems that underpin cities and metropolitan areas.

As primary caregivers to children, the elderly, and the ill, we must recognize the strong engagement of women and women leaders in the Covid-19 response. Many do so for their family and as workers in essential services, including health services, and other municipal services.

When I was the mayor of Penang, I ensured that women were empowered to have strong roles both in the administration and in communities. I was also determined that gender had to be strongly mainstreamed in the New Urban Agenda, and as the mayor and representative in the Global Task Force, I worked hard for that.

In the first UN-Habitat Assembly, one year ago, I was tasked by the Member States to put Gender Equality strongly in UN-Habitat's work programme and in our system focal point role for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

I am happy to see that this month, UN-Habitat and UN Women will jointly focus on Gender Responsive Cities, supporting the Inter-Agency Network on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

Here in Nairobi, I also take my role as International Gender Champion very seriously, working with Member States on gender and women's leadership issues. Covid-19 challenges will be front and center in the coming months if not years.

In short, as the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, I would like to urge national and local governments and all stakeholders to put women and girls at the center of



their efforts and recognize women's leadership and contributions at the heart of the COVID-19 response, resilience, and recovery efforts.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends,

I have always believed that **cities designed for women and girls are designed for all**. I would like to focus on three main issues for you to consider.

1. Women are more engaged in **unpaid care work**, and the **burden to them has significantly increased with COVID-19**, which include looking after the sick, the elderly and the children who are home schooling. Their significant role needs to be recognized, and special support need to be offered to these women when there is distribution of material goods (food and home supplies) as well as psychosocial support.
2. The spike in **domestic and gender-based violence** must be highlighted. Women and girls are facing increased risk due to reduced family income and increased poverty, alcoholism and substance abuse, desperation as a result of lost jobs. Authorities and community leaders need to keep high vigilance to intervene early where violence is found, and ensure that measures are taken to curb this menace of violence and abuse.
3. Women need to be at the **center of decision making and must have a seat at the table**, to ensure their needs and concerns are factored into the response mechanisms and interventions. Focus should also be given to elderly and disabled women and girls, who can easily be forgotten due to their limited mobility and voice. In the communities where we have installed handwashing stations, such as Kibera and Mathare in Kenya, the UN-Habitat teams have been working with community leaders, and making extra effort to ensure the older persons and people with disabilities, both physical and mental, are catered for in the handwashing exercises.

Despite all these challenges, we need to look on the bright side. How can this pandemic become a driver for change and enable greater learning and upscaling for innovation and creativity? Transition to a "new normal" after the pandemic should include gender dimensions within response plans and budget resources to build gender expertise into response teams.



By joining forces, the world can emerge stronger from this COVID-19 crisis and move closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by enabling inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and communities to thrive and prosper.

I would therefore like to thank you all for your continued leadership and solidarity during these trying times!

Thanks very much to all of you!