

World Urban Forum III Round Table on Gendered Land Tool Development

Honourable Minister Sisulu, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I am a land surveyor – the tools I use include surveying instruments as well as mathematical and legal tools to define land boundaries in space. Land surveying is a crucial aspect in the provision of housing, it is the basis for property management and taxation, as well as for provision of economic and social services fundamental to human survival such as water, sewerage, roads etc. I am a user of land tools, and a woman practitioner in a traditionally male profession. My work environment includes working on site, not only the comfort of an office. This requires resourcefulness, fitness, and the willingness to endure hardship, even in the form of threats to personal safety. In short, professional land surveyors have their feet on the ground!

Much has been said about the need for a conducive environment in which gendered land tools can be developed. In the past our profession did not believe that women could do the job, and I was one of the first women graduates of surveying in South Africa. With less than a handful of others, we lead the way in informally conscientising the profession to gender issues, and the profession responded by making me the first woman President of a Professional Land Surveying Institute in South Africa. We have come a long way and it is exciting to be part of this formalized initiative towards equity for women in land.

The strategy of negotiation which Shack Dwellers International has adopted in its relationship to governments, is one that breeds lasting success – instead of one-sided demands, it facilitates understanding across the divide and is a mechanism for working together towards a common goal for which all sides can have a sense of ownership. Women and men with a passion for equity have also used negotiation and have found the land profession to be receptive to change and accommodating the needs and aspirations of women, as well as other marginalized groups. Internationally, FIG has used an inclusive, open and participatory approach to develop a set of gender guidelines. The mechanism used in its development was an inclusive international network similar to that now adopted by the GLTN. It is a mechanism that delivers, and the FIG guidelines bear testimony to the gendered vision and principles of the professional land development community, and a serious commitment to action.

However, one of the impediments highlighted by FIG is the number of women entering the profession, and a strategy needs to be developed to build capacity in this area. The requirement for high level mathematics and science at school-leaving level, an interest in technology and technical knowledge, lack of funding, lack of mentoring of women students etc. are all aspects which require attention. With the will and resources, these hurdles can be overcome. In South Africa, where I am an educator at the University of Cape Town, we have strong support from our Department of Land Affairs, which recognizes the importance of the profession and its outputs, and has entered into a partnership with us in the provision of bursaries for marginalized groups, including women. This demonstrates our shared goal, and is fast-tracking the transformation of the profession.

Our vision as South African land professionals is to consolidate and extend our partnership with government. It is in bridging the gap between land policy and land delivery that we have

an important contribution to make, not least of which is through the design of innovative gendered land tools. We are both willing, and able, to embrace the challenge.

Key strategies could be to create forums for the negotiating of womens issues into the land professions, to build mentoring programs from school level, to identify women champions to take GLTN and gendered land tools forward, and to provide bursaries for women to train and enter the land professions.

Thank you.
Jennifer Whittal
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