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**GENDER AND URBAN
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**
WOMEN'S COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO
RESTRUCTURING AND URBAN POVERTY

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and
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UNRISD Discussion Papers are preliminary documents circulated in a limited number of copies to stimulate discussion and critical comment.

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The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous agency that engages in multi-disciplinary research on the social dimensions of contemporary problems affecting development. Its work is guided by the conviction that, for effective development policies to be formulated, an understanding of the social and political context is crucial. The Institute attempts to provide governments, development agencies, grassroots organizations and scholars with a better understanding of how development policies and processes of economic, social and environmental change affect different social groups. Working through an extensive network of national research centres, UNRISD aims to promote original research and strengthen research capacity in developing countries.

Current research themes include: The Challenge of Rebuilding War-torn Societies; Integrating Gender into Development Policy; Volunteer Action and Local Democracy: A Partnership for a Better Urban Future; Environment, Sustainable Development and Social Change; Crisis, Adjustment and Social Change; Participation and Changes in Property Relations in Communist and Post-Communist Societies; Ethnic Conflict and Development; Political Violence and Social Movements; and Socio-Economic and Political Consequences of the International Trade in Illicit Drugs. UNRISD research projects focused on the 1995 World Summit for Social Development included Rethinking Social Development in the 1990s; Economic Restructuring and Social Policy; Ethnic Diversity and Public Policies; and Social Integration at the Grassroots: The Urban Dimension.

A list of the Institute's free and priced publications can be obtained from the Reference Centre.

The United Nations Volunteers Programme (UNV) was established by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1970, under the aegis of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to promote volunteer contributions to development. It works together with governments, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, United Nations agencies and other volunteer-sending agencies to mobilize national and international volunteer resources throughout the world. UNV's contributions are made directly to programmes and institutions in the countries concerned, or through programmes funded and implemented by the United Nations and its agencies. The majority of UNV's volunteer contributions continue to be made to the long-term economic and social development efforts of member countries. In recent years, its activities have grown quickly in the electoral, humanitarian relief and peace-related efforts of the United Nations system, together accounting for nearly half the current total of serving UNVs. Some 2,500 United Nations volunteers serve at any one time internationally in over 100 countries; they come from over 120 countries, with the majority from developing countries.

The Inter-American Foundation (IAF), an independent agency of the United States government, was created in 1969 as an experimental US foreign assistance programme. Its operating budget consists of congressional appropriations and funds derived from the Social Progress Trust Fund. The IAF works in Latin America and the Caribbean to promote equitable, responsive and participatory development by awarding grants directly to local organizations throughout the region. It also enters into partnerships with private and public-sector entities to scale up support and mobilize local, national and international resources for grassroots development.

The IAF boasts a myriad of partners ranging from community groups and non-governmental organizations to local corporations, banks, philanthropic organizations and public institutions. Together, the IAF and its partners have created a grassroots experimental laboratory for testing cost-effective, participatory models for social and economic development, including practical methods for training primary school teachers, boosting agricultural production, protecting the environment, managing community pharmacies, and financing micro-entrepreneurs. These models are often replicated and expanded by governments and larger donor agencies, providing access to services and the promise of improved standards of living for hundreds of thousands of poor families throughout the hemisphere.

◆ Preface

As one of their contributions to preparations for the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, March 1995), UNRISD and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) undertook a project on **Social Integration at the Grassroots: The Urban or “Pavement” Dimension**. Its purpose was to survey and highlight the current and potential contributions of volunteer effort towards social integration at the local level. The project emphasized two elements: to hear from the volunteers, as far as possible, in their own words; and to provide an urban “pavement” perspective from marginalized communities in large cities around the world.

The project was implemented quickly, with much of the survey work completed between July 1994 and March 1995. In this short span, field visits were made to 17 cities on four continents; in each city local researchers prepared several case studies of innovative or especially instructive efforts by community organizations and volunteer groups to combat grave urban social problems. With some 40 case studies underway, the project’s researcher-activists and supporters met in Cyprus in late November 1994 to discuss the main themes raised by their studies, as well as to plan a series of short-term exchanges between community groups participating in the project and to formulate recommendations for strengthening community and volunteer action for inclusion in the Social Summit’s Plan of Action. At the Summit itself, UNV and UNRISD organized a series of roundtable discussions to present the early findings of the project. Some of these findings are contained the project’s draft report **Their Choice or Yours? Global Forces or Local Voices**, released at the Summit. The report is being revised and will be published along with other case studies and reports in a series of UNRISD Discussion Papers on the theme of Community Perspectives on Urban Governance.

In the course of the project two themes emerged with force: women are at the forefront of many of the most important and innovative community responses to urban crisis; and community responses to urban social problems, regardless of their gender components, could achieve much greater multiplier effects if they occurred in a context of genuine support from a stronger, more open local government. Taking the latter theme as a point of departure, UNRISD and UNV have embarked on a new project to better understand the successes of and constraints on collaboration between community organizations (including volunteer groups) and local authorities. This project, **Volunteer Action and Local Democracy: A Partnership for a Better Urban Future**, which is under way in eight cities, presented its preliminary findings at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul.

The present paper represents a collaborative effort by UNV, UNRISD and the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) to extend and deepen the analysis of UNV-UNRISD Social Summit project case studies and recent work carried out by IAF. Following discussions at IAF in the summer of 1995 in which UNV, UNRISD and IAF found that their recent work on urban community-based organizations would lend itself to and benefit from a focused analysis of the gender dimensions of women’s community action and local governance, the three institutions decided to pool their case studies and undertake a collective analysis. The analysis highlights the fact that far too little is known about the

social impacts of development (economic) policy on low-income groups where women, either individually or collectively, have become the main providers of their community's social safety net. Drawing from IAF studies in Latin America, the study also points out that decentralizing political and administrative functions to the local level will not always result in the empowerment of women. Rather, such processes may have the opposite effect, if decentralization creates new structures of local decision-making that are monopolized by men.

The UNRISD Discussion Papers on the theme of Community Perspectives on Local Governance will draw upon the research from both the Social Summit project, **Social Integration at the Grassroots**, and its follow-up project, **Volunteer Action and Local Democracy**. As the first paper on this theme, the present paper signals the Institute's intention to continue to integrate gender concerns fully into its research programme. This process began in 1992 with the inception of Institute's five-year project on **Integrating Gender into Development Policy** and deepened progressively with the projects the Institute carried out in preparation for the Social Summit.

The dual concerns of this paper — mainstreaming gender in development policy and strengthening local governance through support of community action and reform of local government — find attention in the operations of both IAF and UNV as well.

In recent years UNV has worked to ensure that gender concerns are addressed through the action of international and national volunteers (UNVs) at the community level. UNVs work closely with women to support their efforts to identify and develop solutions within the context of their own cultures and communities. Volunteer contributions are strengthening initiatives of women's organizations, community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations that facilitate the empowerment of women and the mainstreaming of gender in national development plans and policies. Feedback received so far on volunteer contributions to gender mainstreaming as an integrated part of community-based activities suggests that UNV can have a significant role to play in advocacy at the policy level.

Amy Lind is a Visiting Faculty Fellow at the Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies. Martha Farmelo was, until May 1996, Foundation Representative for Bolivia at the Inter-American Foundation. At UNRISD, research on **Community Perspectives on Local Governance** is co-ordinated by David Westendorff. Research on **Integrating Gender into Development Policy** is co-ordinated by Shahra Razavi. This paper will be distributed in both English and Spanish by UNRISD and IAF.

June 1996

Dharam Ghai
Director

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◆ Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACT-UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
CCH	Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
CDC	community development corporation
CEAP	Centro de Articulação de Populações Marginalizadas (Centre for the Articulation of Marginalized Populations)
CNC	Comisión Nacional de Comedores
ESIF	Emergency Social Investment Fund
FCPA	Federación de Comedores Populares Autogestionarios (Federation of Self-Managed Popular Kitchens)
FEPOMUVES	Federación Popular de Mujeres de Villa el Salvador
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IULA	International Union of Local Authorities
MAV	Mothers Against Violence
NEW	New Economics for Women
NGO	non-governmental organization
SAP	structural adjustment policy
UCC	uniform civil code
WEP	Women's Empowerment Project

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