

# **Prof Mitullah Moderates UN Meeting on Women Empowerment**

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Prof Winnie Mitullah was a Moderator at the recent UN-HABITAT Twenty Fourth Session Dialogue on Sustainable Urban Development: The Role of Cities in Creating Improved Economic Opportunities for All, With Special Reference to Youth and Women.

The forum was hosted by the UN-HABITAT Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlement Programme in Nairobi between April 15 and April 19. Prof Mitullah, who is also the IDS Director, moderated “Dialogue on Economic Empowerment of Women” session.

In her opening remarks, Prof Mitullah observed that a critical element of empowerment is self actualization, which cannot be realized without adequate access to resources and services. She said Land remains a major asset, although it is diminishing due to population pressure.

“Land on its own is not an empowering asset. It is how we plan land, what we do with land or how we use land that determines its influence on economic empowerment, including influence on women’s empowerment,” said Mitullah.

She observed that all human activities require land and therefore land use planning is critical to women, especially in urban areas. She said across many cities in Africa, women are engaged in various small scale economic activities and site of operation endowed with services remains a major challenge.

“Many programmes provide finance, related financial services and technology to women but hardly bother about their sites of operation. Issues such as access to sites, mobility, and infrastructure, including availability of water, sanitary facilities, health and education are viewed as dockets falling under other jurisdictions. These elements together are major pillars for economic empowerment and yet across the world women are comparatively worse off than men in accessing the resources,” Prof Mitullah told the session.

Mitullah, however, acknowledged the progress made across the globe but noted that it is not adequate and women are continuously struggling to access required resources for basic livelihoods.

She said most of the women are found in non protected insecure employment without social protection. “A number of countries are attempting to change this situation by designing targeted programmes for women, but such programmes face challenges largely relating to finance and management. This dialogue is expected to generate rich experiences of policy and practice from around the globe for moving the Economic Empowerment of Women Agenda forward,” observed Prof Mitullah

Mitullah said the meeting was taking place in a country that had made several attempts to address economic empowerment of women but dismal success had been registered, noting that Kenya is still to achieve the global recommended 30 per cent gender parity in all spheres of life.

“Economic Empowerment programmes which have been put in place, such as the Women’s Enterprises Fund, face challenges with many women unable to access the fund due to either technicalities or lack of information and knowledge on related processes,” she concluded