

“Unlocking and Building Working Women’s Housing: An Enabler for Improving Women’s Workforce Participation”

A roundtable discussion on providing safe accommodation to working women in India organised by the Udaiti Foundation and the Infravision Foundation

Highlights



As the Udaiti Foundation started looking into increasing the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR), one of the strongest enablers that emerged was creating safe accommodation and transportation for women.

Last year’s Union Budget (2024-25) included provisions for working women hostels, recognizing their role in enabling women’s workforce participation. However, the 2025-26 budget has shifted focus toward women’s entrepreneurship, skilling, and broader initiatives under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. While these efforts are crucial, access to safe and affordable accommodation remains a key factor in increasing women’s participation in formal, quality jobs and improving their retention and career longevity. Given this, Udaiti continues to support the development of diverse models of working women hostels to address the varying needs of different categories of women workers and professionals, ensuring a more inclusive and supportive infrastructure for their economic empowerment

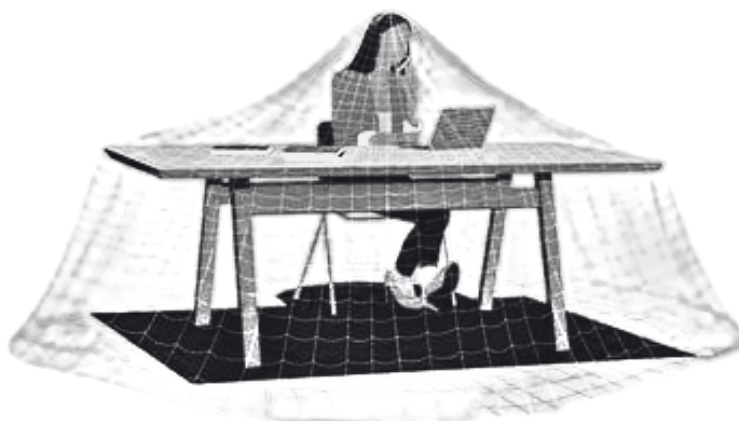
In furtherance of this, Udaiti foundation conducted a roundtable discussion on working women housing, 'Unlocking and Building Working Women's Housing: An Enabler for Improving Women's Workforce Participation', on 23rd January 2025, in Okhla, New Delhi, in consultation with the Infravision Foundation, a thought leader in the public infrastructure development space. The objective was to understand the existing state of working women accommodation, challenges, and discuss a way forward on the same.



In a closed door discussion with a select group of invitees including experts (in the field of infrastructure, gender studies, sociology, economics and urban planning), government stakeholders, social sector organisations, foundations, and private sector leaders. The discussion was divided into 2 sessions:

- Session I: Greenfield Projects: Large dormitory style women workers accommodation
- Session II: Unlocking the existing hostels and cluster housing for working women

The opening remarks, “If men can have bars in their own spaces, why can't women have salons in their housing quarters?” resonated with all the participants and set the right tone for an insightful and engaging discussion, leading to some clear actionables. The first conversation was to identify what makes women accommodation different from housing for workers, typically men, as it is thought of today. The question that was being asked was to understand the nuanced difference so that it could be integrated into the planning of housing for women.



I. Viewing housing/accommodation from a gender lens: what makes housing for women any different from men?

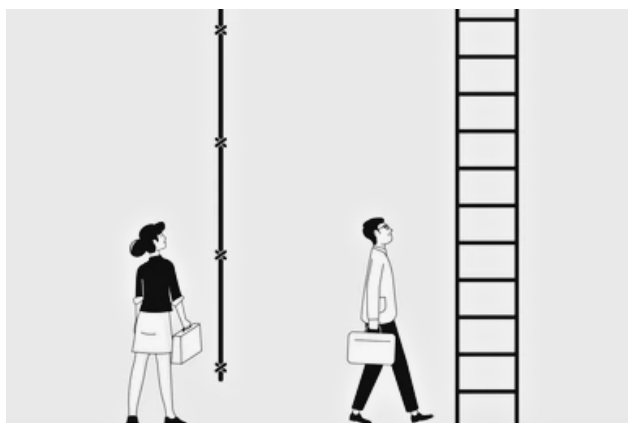
Some Interesting highlights:

- Women workers often depend on male family members for migration, leading to settlements in unauthorized colonies near industrial areas
- It was recognized that there is shortage of formal housing in industrial clusters
- Women struggle with finding housing due to the absence of a reliable network for women workers moving to a new city/industrial cluster for the first time.
- Limited information on government hostels like Sakhi Niwas, along with restrictive conditions (salary limits, time restrictions, bureaucratic approval for extensions, etc.).
- No collated information on credible and affordable private hostels and PG accommodations.
- Need of provisions such as childcare facilities, functional kitchens, guest visits, upskilling opportunities, community events, and networking opportunities.

2. Defining Workforce Housing Needs

The discussion led to the identification of three categories of workforce housing needs:

- **Where aggregated workforce exists** – E.g., Manufacturing, where women workers are living in dorm style housing
- **Where a disaggregated workforce exists** – Women in clusters near city centers or transportation hubs, at a distance from place of work- need access to safe transportation.
- **Women workforce with unique housing needs** – E.g., single mothers or single-headed households requiring customized solutions.



3. **Proposed Models for Working Women's Housing**

1. **Developing Large-Scale Dormitory Housing Projects**

- Conceptualizing greenfield projects for housing 2,000–3,000 workers.
- Targeting young women (15–24 years) hesitant to migrate for work due to safety concerns.
- Exploring capex and opex models leveraging central and state government schemes for financial viability.

2. **Upgrading Existing Infrastructure to Increase Occupancy**

- Improving government hostel facilities and enhancing the quality of private hostels/PGs.
- Leveraging the Affordable Rental Housing Complex (ARHC) scheme to enable women professionals to live with their families and stay longer in the workforce.



4. **Enhancing Workforce Participation Through Integrated Housing and Transportation**

• **Packaging Job Opportunities with Safe Housing**

- By offering accommodation along with jobs, will encourage more women to participate in the workforce.

• **Integrating Transportation as a Key Component**

- Including transportation costs in viability gap funding models for women's accommodations.

5. Addressing Key Challenges

- **Reassessing Viability Gap Funding for Women's Accommodation:** The current VGF Scheme for workers' accommodation does not consider the potential transportation needs for women, which will have a financial impact.
- **Access to existing infrastructure:** There were issues raised on finding suitable solutions to create access to unlock demand in existing Sakhi Niwas and evaluate models to upgrade these and make them financially sustainable.
- **Supporting MSMEs in Providing Housing and Safety:** MSMEs are unable to become an anchor client in public housing structures being built, however, they will benefit from the women workforce and are amiable. A need to develop a viable model.

Annexure: List of attendees

- Banashree Banerjee, Architecture & Planning Professional
- Dr. Debarpita Roy, Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)
- Jagan Shah, The Infravision Foundation
- Lohit Bhatia, Qness Corp Limited
- Megha Jain, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)
- Dr. Mukta Naik, National Institute of Urban Affairs
- Dr. Pallavi Choudhuri, National Data Innovation Center - National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER)
- Prabhsimran Kaur, Bhiwadi Cylinders Pvt. Ltd., and Left Brain & Design
- Kanika Singal, The Udaiti Foundation
- Ronak Pol, Foundation For Economic Development (FED)
- Sandeep Bedi, Janaadhar (India) Pvt. Ltd.
- Tanya Sharma, Lodha Foundation
- Vandana Vasudevan, Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)
- ANS Laguri (Odisha Administrative Services), Additional Secretary, Department of WCD, Odisha
- N.K. Singh, OSD, Greater NOIDA Industrial Development Authority (GNIDA), Govt. of UP
- Poonam Kashyap, State Consultant, UNICEF, Department of WCD, Odisha