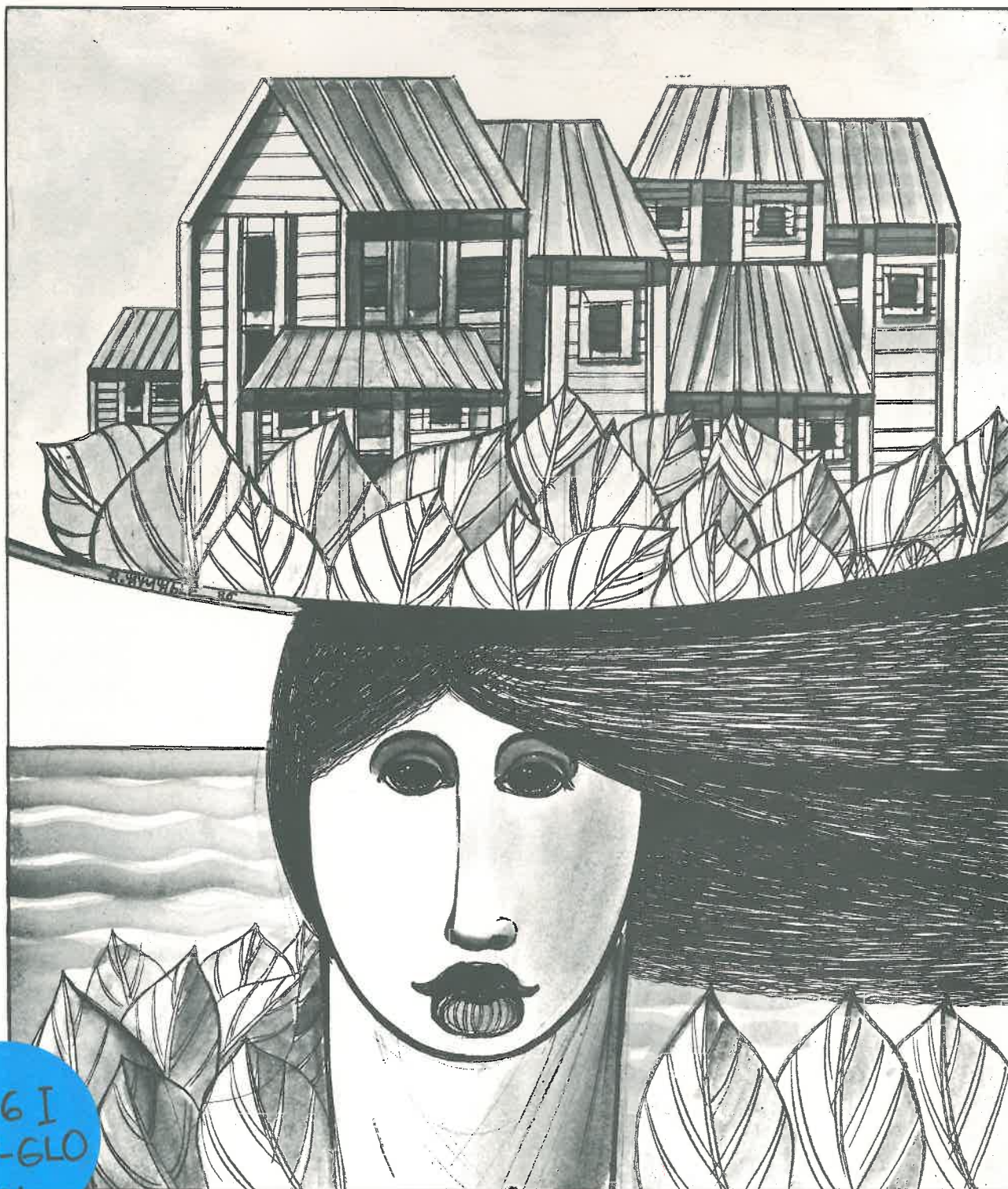


Decent shelter is a woman's right



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International Research
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1987
International Year of Shelter
for the Homeless

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A time for thought and action.
A time for research and training
A time for networking.
A time for sheltering women

As our contribution to IYSH, INSTRAW, a research institute devoted to women in development, would like to point some directions for individual and collective exploration.

A time for thought and action

Every day and every night, in squatter settlements, in refugee camps and urban ghettos, women and their families live and die in squalor and filth, lacking basic housing facilities, with drastic consequences for their health, nutrition, education and employment. For all these reasons, shelter is a basic component of development – yet one often overlooked, where little funds are allocated. Notwithstanding, applying resources to building and construction, specially when using local materials and techniques, is a boost to the economy. One major task during the IYSH entails raising the awareness of national authorities and development officials that investing in shelter improves not only the well-being of the people, but the state of the economy as well.

A time for research and training

Systematic and accurate appraisals of the housing needs of women are hampered by the shortage of precise, easily available, sex-specific data, particularly in such areas as employment, migration, household headship and civil status, among others. Generating improved statistics and indicators for women has been one of INSTRAW's major concerns since its inception: without these data, planning and programming cannot adequately cover women's

needs or take their contribution into account. This is relevant for all areas of social and economic life, and rather obvious in the case of homeless women. For, how can you fulfill housing needs if you cannot assess the extent of the problem?

Training, at the formal and informal levels, should be used to heighten awareness of these issues. Schools can ask students to write short essays. Non-governmental organizations can mount campaigns on behalf of homeless women. Development officials and politicians should be sensitized to the specific needs and requirements of women and their children. All national and international policy actors must be mobilized in this effort.

A time for networking

How can the issue of homeless women, as a distinct policy domain, be placed in the national political agenda? And why should it be? Are the housing needs of women different from those of men, is it mainly a problem of women's difficult access to shelter, or is there a complex web of social and economic issues determining that there is, quite simply, less shelter for women? Collective efforts can bring the issue of homeless women to the limelight and thus secure prompt action, as demanded in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies: "Women and women's groups should be participants in and equal beneficiaries of housing and infrastructure construction projects. (210)".

And the time is now

We hope that individuals, organizations and governments will find the IYSH is a time for thought and action, a time for research and training, for networking. A time for sheltering women: *Because decent shelter is a woman's right.*

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