TURNING PROMISES INTO ACTION:

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Urbanization is advancing rapidly, and many rural-urban migrants today are women and girls in search of a better life. Yet, women's equal 'right to the city'—to use the benefits and opportunities that cities offer and to participate in their design and redesign on an equal basis with men—is still far from being realized, especially among lower-income women and those residing in informal settlements. Improving women's mobility, safety and security and investing in gender-responsive services and infrastructure—such as housing, transport, water and sanitation—are critical steps for making cities safe, sustainable and inclusive.

At a glance

- 3.5 billion people (55% of humanity) live in cities today, with an estimated increase to 68% by 2050.[1]
- 828 million people live in slums. In two-thirds of countries with available data more than half of the female urban population aged 15–49 lives in slums, meaning that they lack access to clean water, improved sanitation facilities, durable housing and/or sufficient living area.[2]
- Women rely heavily on well-functioning urban infrastructure and accessible services, as they perform 76.2% of unpaid care work, often in parallel to participation in paid employment.[3]
- Sexual violence in public spaces is widespread, with prevalence rates as high as 90% in some cities.[4]

Key messages

1) **Women living in urban slums endure many hardships with basic needs often going unmet.**
   Gender inequality and poverty are exacerbated for women in urban slums who lack access to durable housing and security of tenure as well as basic infrastructure and public services, such as transport, energy, water and sanitation, and sexual and reproductive health. Often several of these four basic needs go unmet. The most prevalent forms of unmet household need in countries with widespread slums are a lack of durable housing materials and lack of improved sanitation facilities. This imposes significant risks and burdens on women, as they spend more time in the home and are thus more exposed to hygiene and health risks.[5] Women's poverty of time and income is further compounded by pervasive gender-based violence both at home and in public spaces.[6]

2) **Violence against women in public spaces is rampant; laws and policies have been slow to respond.**
   Existing survey data point to the widespread prevalence of sexual violence in public spaces, including on streets and public transport. In many contexts, women living in rural and peri-urban areas express the fear of being harassed, molested or raped in their own neighborhoods, especially when reliant on collecting water, or walking to, from and using communal sanitation facilities.[7] Laws and policies have been slow to respond. While 76% of countries have laws against sexual harassment, coverage is varied and often disregards public places.[8] Reducing violence against women in public spaces requires more comprehensive laws as well as careful urban planning, investments in infrastructure, and community engagement to raise awareness and promote respectful relationships.[9]

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3) **Women are overrepresented in urban informal employment, often laboring under hazardous conditions and with limited support from urban planners and local authorities.**

In many cities, formal employment opportunities have not increased on par with the urban population; and informal work is often the only source of employment available, particularly for women.[10] Women in informal employment, such as street hawking or waste picking, often face discrimination, harassment and abuse by the public, local officials or the police who may issue arbitrary fines, confiscate goods and even arrest and imprison workers.[11] The legal recognition of their right to trade is critical to prevent this and enable women in informal self-employment to make a living and contribute to their communities.[12] Basic services and infrastructure investments are also needed to strengthen the viability of their businesses as well as their occupational health and safety.

4) **Urban planning, infrastructure and services need to respond better to women's work patterns and safety requirements.**

Women perform 76% of unpaid care and domestic work—more than three times as much as men—often in parallel to participation in paid employment.[13] But urban planning rarely takes this into account. As a result, infrastructure investments are often gender-biased and inequalities in access to public services are exacerbated.[14] Urban transport planning, for example, rarely consider the diversity of users' needs. Focused on connecting peripheries to the center during peak hours it inadvertently caters to commuting patterns that tend to be more common among men. Women, meanwhile, are more likely to engage in multi-purpose trips within peripheral neighborhoods where they combine income earning with domestic tasks, including dropping children off at school or household provisioning.[15] Isolated or low-lit areas transport stops, inaccessible platforms and overcrowded carriages further complicate these tasks, can expose women and girls to harassment and assault and foster fear of using the city.

5) **Making cities work for women requires strengthening their participation in urban governance, planning and politics.**

Urban policy and planning will only become gender-responsive if women are enabled to participate in decision-making about critical infrastructure investments from public transport routes to the location of sanitation facilities or public health centers.

References

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[15] Chant. 2013, op cit.; Levy. 2013, op cit.

For the full report, see: http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/sdg-report