

Women's Major Group contribution for the Seventh Session of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (OWG7) *Sustainable Cities and Settlements & Sustainable Transport*

Analysis & key recommendations by the Women's Major Group¹

Sustainable Cities and Settlements will be integral to achieving sustainable development, human rights and intergenerational equity. The [TST Issues Brief](#) on the issue provides a good review of the projected growth of cities, changing demographics and existing trends in terms of urban contributions to energy use, emissions, GDP, violence, social and economic inequalities, vulnerability to disaster, fragmented communities, waste, consumption, etc., which make a focus on urban areas imperative.

Over 50% of the world now lives in urban areas, and approximately 60% of the area of cities expected by 2030 is yet to be built. Thinking beyond one urban center to the larger city-region is important in order to meet the claims in the High Level Panel report that cities are “poised to be the driving force of global sustainable development”. The city-region idea also helps to explicitly address and enhance the linkages between urban and rural, which must prioritize integrated planning and sustainable transport, among others.

Key Issues for Sustainable Cities and Settlements

The TST identified numerous potential challenges as well as a wealth of proposals with recommendations, goals and targets. It specifically acknowledges the special situation of women and girls, and identifies gender-responsive urban design as a means to improve social cohesion and safety, as well as increase freedom of movement, particularly for women and girls. What is missing is a clear recognition that addressing these issues is a matter of human rights.

Key issues include those in developed cities, where there is a need to reduce emissions; increase efficiency; address crime and violence, sometimes resulting from stress relating to crowding, insecurity and lack of services; improve transport systems and accessibility; reduce waste; tackle consumption and production patterns; ensure participatory processes; and improve access to services for populations made marginalized. Developing country cities face similar challenges, but may have numerous additional challenges that vary across size and location of the city: rapidly growing unplanned cities that promote inefficient and ad-hoc development; high level of vulnerability to consequences of climate change and low level of capacity to build adequate climate change mitigation and adaptation policy; shortage of green space, urban environmental areas, public zones and access to cultural resources; untreated waste; inadequate access to and poor quality of drinking water; exclusion faced by slum dwellers, impairing full citizenship; lack of land tenure and housing security; and pollution from industry/traffic. The risk from natural disasters is high in cities and among poor populations, in particular women who may have limited mobility due to gender roles and cultural norms, or due to lack of transport options.

¹ This briefing paper was elaborated by members of the Women's Major Group on Sustainable Development, <http://www.womenrio20.org/>. It is based on a more comprehensive report with recommendations for the post-2015 agenda by WMG members: http://www.womenrio20.org/docs/Womens_priorities_SDG.pdf. For more information, please contact Eleanor Blomstrom <eleanor@wedo.org>

If cities do not take action to become sustainable, the future is bleak for everyone; cities risk getting locked in to outdated infrastructure (transport, water, energy), sprawl (with jobs far from communities), replication of inequalities and discrimination (land tenure, access to financial resources, decision-making, burden of care, etc) that will thwart future innovation and adaptation. As cities grow faster than their development planning (whether city-specific or regional), housing, water, sanitation, energy, transportation and communications infrastructure are going to be a challenge. This will particularly impact women, as lack of appropriate infrastructure (especially in marginal areas prone to flooding, etc.) predominantly increases the time, care and economic burden of women. This in turn impacts education for girls and future opportunities for decent work, locking women into informal jobs. This lock-in also affects the ability to remain within planetary boundaries – driving fossil-fuel oriented development, landgrabbing for key resources and industrialized agriculture that can further impact urbanization patterns while decreasing capacity and indigenous knowledge in rural areas.

Key Issues for Sustainable Transport

The TST on sustainable transport makes the point that change must begin now to ensure transportation drives low-carbon societies before the individual car-focused, energy-intensive systems are further locked into place. It identifies issues of rural and urban transport, air quality, road safety and energy and climate, suggesting the need for multi-modal transport systems that provide mobility for all groups, improve the health of urban residents and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The TST identifies both transport infrastructure and transport services, which the WMG sees as equally important and needed to eradicate equality gaps.

The WMG highlights the gender dimension of transport. For example, men are more likely to use private transport and travel longer distances than women, thus contributing more to carbon emissions (up to double the energy compared to women). Women are more likely to use public transportation (60:40), tend to walk, travel shorter distances and have more complex travel patterns – combining multiple stops into one ‘trip’.

A people-centered approach to sustainable transport must take into account connectivity and accessibility in rural and in compact urban settlements to minimize negative impacts and maximize co-benefits for health, education and economic activities. In rural areas, it is the first mile or kilometer that determines if agricultural producers are able to engage in the local/regional market or are limited to the subsistence economy – with impacts on rural development and food security. In urban areas, current patterns of motorization diminish economic growth, undermine development objectives and contribute to poverty: road crashes are responsible for 1.23 million deaths each year, with economic costs estimated at \$ 2,240 billion, or 3% of global GDP (5% in low income countries) and transport is a contributing factor to the 3.2 million premature deaths caused by ambient air pollution (Partnership on Sustainable Low Carbon Transport, SLoCaT).

Opportunities

The opportunities within sustainable cities and settlements to address inequalities and eradicate poverty are immense. Participatory, inclusive actions at the local level can promote and improve gender equality and ensure exercise of women’s rights in a sustainable development frame that benefits all.

A gendered approach is needed. Urban and transport issues are not gender neutral (poverty, resource access, political power, emissions, opportunity, training/education, financing) and women and men influence and experience them differently due to socially determined gender roles, as well as structural factors and [macroeconomic](#), fiscal and trade policies. Gender roles can change over time, but urban development should take gender aspects into account. Women are critical to sustainable solutions, bringing unique knowledge and experience into practice, including coping skills that have community-wide impact, and thus must be recognized as more than passive ‘victims’.

Cities offer a certain ‘nimbleness’ and can thus pilot innovative and transformative ideas in planning, infrastructure, participation, and integrated projects that promote community well-being and cohesiveness, social protection, efficiency of densely populated societies, equal and equitable access to decision-making and productive resources, low-carbon development with its many co-benefits, and sustainable use of resources coming from rural areas. Education and lifelong learning play an important role in support of sustainable cities. There is a need to educate citizens about existing policies and programs to enable their active participation in city governance and to bring best practices into policies. Education about roles and responsibilities in taking ownership of the city and the neighborhood, including rational use of natural resources and risk reduction, will promote the concept of city sustainability. The time to act is now.

Recommendations

- Develop a goal for sustainable cities and integrate multiple gender-related targets that promote respect for and exercise of human rights.
- Promote changes to macroeconomic structures that perpetuate many of the unfair practices influencing unsustainable cities; for example, develop macroeconomic and fiscal policies to increase equity and redistribution of wealth via progressive tax reforms, social protection, etc.
- Develop principles and safeguards to ensure participation and the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities in urban and transportation planning and projects.
- Generate and incentivize decent work locally – with living wages, benefits, accessible in terms of place, schedule, requirements. Focusing on the promotion of green growth or green economy activities will not automatically translate into decent jobs, respect for human rights or poverty eradication.
- Ensure public sector responsibility and accountability and seek and implement alternatives to market-based or privatization solutions that ignore indigenous peoples, and other groups made marginalized (often women) and lead to increased costs of services.
- Enact binding measures so that private sector investors commit to safeguards and minimum standards for accountability, avoiding a race to the bottom, as it is cities and city-regions where many companies invest and put down roots.
- Promote diversity in leadership at the local level and awareness of its positive impact, with goals for women in leadership positions; men are [over-represented](#) in decision-making positions at local levels and in transportation/engineering.
- Develop articulated national urban policies/plans that are sustainable and transformative; work across the different ministries (health, transportation, environment, finance, social, industrialization) to develop and implement.
- Strengthen the larger enabling environment for cities and city-regions. Working on a small scale, cities can pilot transformative, targeted programs and then scale up within the known context of the region (e.g. in education, health, child care, transportation, enterprise development, activities related to local economies, etc.)
- Develop energy policies to encourage affordable, sustainable, climate neutral, locally owned and managed energy systems; provide incentives for implementation and scaling up. Growing industry can play a role in fostering sustainable energy sources and choices if it respects the principles of precaution and prevention.
- Prioritize participatory planning and participatory budgets with diverse groups – people of all ages, ethnicities, religions, abilities, gender identity and sexual orientation - to understand and integrate gender differentiated needs and priorities in the urban and transport planning.
- Engage in urban development within planetary boundaries to avoid exacerbating environmental degradation both in the territories concerned and in the remote areas where the resources are being exploited: resource extraction, minerals, water, land, polluting discharges.
- Relocate economic activities and strengthen urban-rural linkage to ensure access to affordable, quality food, water, energy and other resources.
- Build flexible transportation systems and services to facilitate mobility (e.g. pedestrian, cycling and non-motorized transport promotion) and allow for changing dynamics between rural and urban areas.
- Integrate gender aspects in transport services, since women are the most numerous users. Women also use public transport in the company of children, elder people, people with disabilities, and sick people, helping marginalized groups access the territory in a broader way and contributing to the care economy.
- Address the causes of urban challenges, don't just treat the symptoms. For example, safer transport (urban or rural) that is well-lit, with schedules and security measures (i.e. Mexico City's policy of differentiated transport at peak hours for women, children, people with disabilities, elder population) decreases incidence of gender-based violence (GBV). However, media and outreach campaigns (e.g. posters on Bogota BRT that discourage groping) are also needed to address GBV and the harassment women experience using all forms of transport. This also promotes accessibility of transport.

Targets could be developed around the following concepts:

- Improved collection of data disaggregated by sex, age, (among others), taking into account the different groups in cities. Capacity of city/municipal governments is built and national programs require collection according to internationally determined standards that allow for comparison across countries (encourage time use and household surveys to capture the intra-city diversity)
- Jobs created in urban sustainability are accessible to women and men, and women's decent work is increased. Not only does unpaid work sustain and reproduce the labour force through its nourishment and care, but it also absorbs the 'invisible' costs of poor infrastructure and service provision when governments are unable to provide them. Men are encouraged to take up more jobs in the care sector and women take up more jobs in the technology sector to promote balance, reduce differences in care economy responsibilities and salaries and revalue tasks that are traditionally assigned to women.
- Women and men in urban households are on average able to access jobs, goods and services within 30 minutes by quality public transport and/or quality walking and cycling infrastructure and women and men of rural households have access to paved or all-weather roads to take products to markets and reach essential services (SLoCaT)
- A just transition is ensured for people losing jobs in fossil fuel or other polluting/unsustainable industries, which have to adjust their activities or be closed.
- Low-carbon technologies and alternatives to fossil fuels are tested, safe, sustainable Infrastructure and industrialization projects mandate the participation of stakeholders, including women and men, and gender experts participate in the elaboration of these projects.
- Policy measures and tools by government agencies include consideration of the contributions of ecosystems, cradle-to-cradle systems, low-carbon strategies, fiscal reform shifts towards lower taxes on labor and higher ones on resource use, number of women with decent and safe jobs, number of women in decision-making positions in public and private sectors, etc.
- Investments shift to public transport/mass transit and safe cycling and pedestrian facilities from unsustainable investments; peak year for transport GHG emissions, and reductions by 2050; reduction by half of traffic-related deaths
- Financing for low-carbon urban development incorporates a gender lens / gender budgeting.
- Disparities and inequalities between urban territories and between urban and rural or peri-urban zones are assessed and diminished: fiscal and other policy reforms foster solidarity rather than the current competition between different urban poles that concentrate economic, banking and financial activities
- Lifelong learning along with formal education ensures that women, who often have unequal access to information and communication technologies, are equipped to participate in city governance and articulate their needs.
- Green urban and safe public spaces, or "green infrastructure" are protected, recognizing they are as important as the hard infrastructure of energy grids and transport networks, and provide ecosystem services as well as a range of social goods.
- Conservation and restoration of urban biodiversity, and removal of fiscal incentives that promote urbanization in precious landscapes and ecosystems
- Local policies for: gender-responsive climate strategies to achieve climate-resilient cities; equality amongst women and men; for environmental health (fighting all forms of pollution, including sound and visual pollution); food sovereignty and development of urban and peri-urban agriculture; sexual and reproductive health and rights; right to safe, clean drinking water and gender-responsive sanitation; water efficiency plans for building, supply systems, industrial processes; access and use of internet services for information and social integration; access to culture and promotion of cultural diversity
- Evictions without rehousing or to marginal/inaccessible locations in response to gentrification of disaster situation are eliminated; guarantee the right to housing provided by the International Protocol on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights