

“Promoting gender equality and empowerment of women in cities”

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I would like to begin by congratulating the Seoul Foundation of Women and the Family, under the auspices of the Seoul Metropolitan Government, for taking the initiative to organize this important conference and for the many other initiatives it is taking to ensure a focus on women in cities. I am honoured to make this keynote address.

Gender equality and empowerment of women is a development goal in its own right and is essential for the achievement of all other development goals. The positive links between gender equality and empowerment of women and effective and sustainable development in all areas are clear, including in relation to urban development, human settlements, poverty eradication and improvement of the quality of life for all citizens. Women represent half the resources and half the potentials of families, communities and nations. Women are important agents of change in all contexts, including in cities.

Background

The goal of gender equality and empowerment of women has been endorsed by the Member States of the United Nations in many different contexts over the past 60 years, including in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by 189 Member States in consensus at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.

The actions required to ensure gender equality and the fundamental rights of both women and men have been elaborated over the past three decades through the world conferences on women organized by the United Nations. The Beijing Platform for Action clearly established the responsibility of governments for promoting equality between women and men and highlighted the importance of protecting and promoting women’s human rights and facilitating their empowerment.

Today, 185 Member States of the United Nations have also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

(CEDAW), the human rights treaty which was adopted by the United Nations in 1979. The Convention addresses the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women, in both public and private spheres of life. Both direct and indirect discrimination is prohibited in the convention, including

actors across all sectors. An important first step in gender mainstreaming is to carry out gender analysis. No decisions should be taken or resources allocated without analysis of the existing roles and contributions of women and men, and of the potential impact of planned actions on both women and men. Capacity to effectively utilize such gender analysis must be developed as required competence at all levels of staff in all areas of work.

Specific targeted actions for women also remain very critical as a complement to gender mainstreaming, given the serious remaining gaps and challenges to gender equality and empowerment of women in many areas which need to be specifically addressed.

Global assessment of progress in achieving gender equality

Recent global assessments of progress in gender equality and empowerment of women have indicated many achievements over the past decade, but also serious obstacles and challenges in every area. There is a huge gap between policy commitments at global and national levels and practice on the ground. More than 60 years since the founding of the United Nations, and more than thirty years since the first world conference on women, we know very well what needs to be done to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women. The challenge is ensuring effective implementation of the commitments to action that have already been made in many different contexts.

Among the positive achievements is the fact that, in almost all countries around the world, policies and strategies for gender equality have now been developed and important human rights instruments, such as CEDAW, have been ratified. A broad range of mechanisms have been established at national level to promote and monitor gender equality (such as women's ministries, gender equality commissions, ombudspersons offices and parliamentary networks). Important processes, such as gender evaluations or gender audits have been initiated in many countries.

Even though significant gains have been made in these areas, there is still much work to be done. The global gender equality and empowerment agenda is ambitious and requires sustained political commitment and resources. The global gender equality and empowerment agenda is ambitious and requires sustained political commitment and resources. The global gender equality and empowerment agenda is ambitious and requires sustained political commitment and resources.

organizations. There is evidence from all parts of the world that women remain under-represented in decision-making in both formal and informal contexts, and that, as a result, gender equality concerns are often neglected.

Other critical gaps and challenges which have been identified at the global level include the persistent, and in some cases increasing, incidence of violence against women; the unequal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men; and persistent stereotypes on the roles of women

boys must be involved in the process of change. The attitudes and behaviour of men and boys can have significant impact on the lives and well-being of women and girls. In many areas of the world, these impacts are far from positive, including in relation to violence, exclusion from decision-making, harassment in the workplace, and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Increasing efforts are being made to engage men and boys in the work for gender equality and empowerment of women. These efforts will have little effect unless they explicitly identify and address areas of continuing male privilege which hinder gender equality and empowerment of women.

A further constraint identified in the review of implementation was the lack of comparable, reliable statistics with which to measure progress in most areas. The need for identifying indicators of progress has also been highlighted.

Women in cities

All the critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action have relevance for the issue of women in cities, including poverty, education, health, economy, decision-making, human rights, violence, conflict, environment, media, the girl child and institutional arrangements. There are no specific references to women in cities in the Beijing Platform for Action and its follow-up but a number of references to important elements of the urban environment, such as water, sanitation, transport and health care.

During the 1970s and 1980s women and urban development was given considerable attention among researchers and policy-makers. In 1994, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) held a conference on "Women and

Compared with rural areas, many cities offer better facilities and services, such as water, transport, education and health care. They provide more opportunities for social, economic, cultural and political participation. Women can also usually access more at

Human settlements – housing and communities - in urban areas involve many important elements, such as health care services, child care, education facilities, and transportation systems. All facilities, services and infrastructure in cities need to be considered from the perspective of women as well as men.

Let me start with access of women and girls to *education*. Girls have higher enrollment rates and cultural acceptance of their right to education is more widespread in cities. However, many girls in poor urban areas also drop out early. The reasons for the low retention and achievement levels of many girls in urban schools are similar to those

lack of quality child care and other care services in urban areas primarily affects women, hindering their education, training and employment opportunities, which in term impact negatively on their potential to provide income and ensure sustainable livelihoods. New forms of child-care, and care of older persons, the sick and disabled, need to be developed which are based on the notion of th

has declined. In these circumstances, workers are buying more outside services to meet their daily subsistence needs, such as child-care, meals, laundry and other services. This has meant an increase in the number of non-work trips per person, as well as in “trip-chaining” where a single trip outside the home (or the office) might have multiple destinations or stops, which some researchers claim leads to increases in vehicle-kilometers traveled and exponential increases in emissions from the transport sector.

In many cities, women are responsible for a disproportionate share of the household's transport burden, while at the same time having more limited access to available means of transport. In middle-income households where only one car is available, men tend to use the family car for work trips while women rely on public transport. In poor families, it is usually the male head of household who will use public transport, leaving the women, who actually might earn more money for the family, to walk. With limited access to individual means of transport, the vast majority of poor women in cities in developing countries are dependent on either walking or on public means of transport, which can be both motorized (e.g. buses, subways) or non-motorized (e.g. rickshaw taxis and bicycles).

Cultural factors may constrain women's abilities to use public transport or bicycles. In many countries there is also a problem of safety and security of public transport for women, especially after dark. Poor route planning for public transport tends to exacerbate the problems women face and force them to depend on more expensive alternatives.

Poor women make more frequent and shorter trips than men. They make more trips at off-peak hours and more trips that are off the main routes, and engage in more complicated multiple trips, all of which tend to make their movements relatively expensive for public transport to provide, and hence more highly priced or more poorly supplied. Even poor women have to “trip-chain,” combining their travel related to domestic and care-taking responsibilities with their trips related to income generation.

Transport systems targeted only at peak-hour male commuter trip patterns do not serve women's needs. In most cities and towns around the world, infrastructure planning continues to primarily cater to the needs of the car- or motorcycle-driving, largely male majority. Women typically have to make multiple stops, pay multiple fares, and travel during off peak hours, when service is less reliable and waiting areas are less safe.

Gender analysis needs to be incorporated into all aspects of transport development. By focusing on planning interventions that directly target the particular

Affordable housing

Participation in decision-making

Women are still far from being represented equitably in political and administrative decision-making in cities. Their voices are not systematically brought into the consultation and dialogue around city planning. As a result, city institutions, facilities, and services are not always conceived with the needs, priorities and contributions of women as well as men in mind, which can result in, among other things, inefficient public services with inappropriate opening hours.

Local government is often perceived as a relatively autonomous sphere of government, with close links to civil society, and as such, crucial to democratic decentralization. However, unless the interests of women have been fully represented, the local level systems are not fully democratic.

As the tier of government closest to civil society, local government is often seen as the most accessible level of government to women and one which provides opportunities for locally-organized women. Local governments traditionally provide services utilized by individual households, such as electricity, waste disposal, public transport, water, schools, health clinics and other social services. The decisions of local governments therefore have a direct impact on women. Women have important contributions to make to the development and appropriate management of these services.

It is often assumed that women will have no difficulties in engaging in local urban politics because eligibility criteria for the local level are less stringent, and local government is the closest to the women's sphere of life, and because engagement at local level is easier to combine with rearing of children. The fact that women in many areas have developed informal organizations and networks in their neighborhoods is seen as a step towards getting them involved in more formal political decision making at the local level. There are expectations that decentralization will make service delivery more responsive to the needs of women through the proximity of locally-elected representatives to their constituents.

While the ideal of democratic decentralization does hold promise for women, the impact expected is rarely achieved. The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) provides data on women's representation in local governance, including in cities. Based on 2006 figures, 20 percent of councilors at the local level are women, while women make up only 9 per cent of the world's mayors. The participation of women in local government has been increasing steadily but there are serious challenges to be overcome, and the pace of change is far too slow.

Prejudices against women's involvement are often more strongly held at local than at higher levels. Local government in many areas has been shown to be particularly responsive to informal institutions, systems and relations of power, rather than more formal rules and procedures. This serves to advantage men rather than women. Women's historical exclusion from local government means that they do not have access to the

same kinds of networks as men and are less experienced. The informal institutions of local governments can also often be openly very hostile to women's involvement.

Women face discrimination both when standing for office and when elected or appointed to local government positions. Politics and decision-making are often seen as a male preserve and women are perceived as incapable of management and governance roles. Conservative attitudes, particularly towards women at senior management level, negate women's potential and contribute to the lack of confidence that many voters may have in women.

The male environment within political institutions can also deter women. The fact that there are few women in decision-making bodies means that these women are expected to work within styles and approaches that have been developed by men for men. They are not expected/allowed to stand out and take different approaches. It is for this reason that the "critical mass" target of 33 percent women in all institutions is so critical. One or two women in organizations, no matter how knowledgeable, skilled and committed, cannot make the difference needed.

Increasing women's participation in decision-making in cities requires actions on a number of fronts. Firstly, promoting *equal representation in decision making* is an important means of ensuring that the needs of women and men will be taken into consideration in municipal planning and ma

Women within local government have also initiated programmes themselves to encourage women to participate and have established their own associations for support and training. The Australian Local Government Women's Association is one example in which branches have initiated mentoring programmes for women, targeted councils where women were either not represented or under represented, conducted pre-election seminars and worked with NGOs to develop initiatives to support women candidates. The

them infinitely qualified to detect problems and offer solutions. One of the ways in which women can reclaim their city in order to gain the full benefits of its resources is to actively work on changing the environment, together with municipal authorities and other

affect low-income women in the informal sector. Some progress has been made in South Africa, for example, towards raising awareness about the impact of local government revenue and expenditure on women. This has involved informing women about local government expenditures and revenues, and advocacy for resource allocations that promote gender equality.

Conclusions

Although cities belong to both men and women, developments within cities are often carried out without consulting and involving women, thereby hindering them from exercising their fundamental right to full citizenship. This can have very negative implications for women, not least in the area of safety and security. Some researchers are calling for efforts to be made to allow women to “reclaim” the city.

Women’s reality is not the same as men’s - socially, politically or economically. For cities to meet the needs and priorities of all its citizens, both women and men, and take into account their contributions and potentials, urban planning must explicitly incorporate gender perspectives in all areas. Policies, plans, resource allocations and programmes in cities need to more effectively target the particular needs and priorities, and build on the contributions, of women as well as men, to guarantee more effective and sustainable management of human and financial resources.

This requires that gender analysis is carried out to make policy makers and planners aware of the situation of men and women of all ages, ethnic and religious groups, income brackets, marital status, etc. It also requires that the situation of particularly vulnerable women is identified and addressed, including poor women, HIV/AIDS affected women, disabled women and migrant women.

A number of elements for establishing an enabling environment for gender equality and the empowerment of women have been identified which are highly relevant for cities. I have already discussed many of these in this presentation. They include:

- improving women’s *capabilities*, for example through access to education and health services;
- increasing their access to and control over *opportunities and resources*, such as employment, economic assets, housing and transport;
- enhancing their *agency and leadership* roles, including through increased participation in decision-making;
- protecting and promoting their *human rights*; and
- ensuring their *security*, including freedom from violence and the threat of violence.

All of these elements are critical in working to promote gender equality and empower women in cities.

In some countries, cities and local and provincial governments are trying to use the global intergovernmental agreements such as the Platform for Action and obligations under CEDAW to support work on gender equality and empowerment of women on the ground. Some local government bodies in Sweden have, for example, worked to find ways to use the concluding comments on Sw