

# GENDER SENSITIVE URBANIZATION IN INDIA

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#### Contribution:

This document was prepared by Swetha Kutty with the support of Mrunmayee Velukar under the overall supervision and guidance of Priyesh Salunke.

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# 01 Introduction



*Given that India is a rapidly urbanizing economy, urban planning and development interventions have an interdependent relationship with equality. More specifically, SDG 5 has close interlinkages with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities).*

Global trends towards increasing urbanization and its negative consequences are disproportionately borne by the poor, persons with disabilities (PwDs) and women. Urbanization is perceived as an integral tool to achieve economic growth and development in India, and the country is urbanizing rapidly with women constituting roughly half of the urban population. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognises women's equality and empowerment as a goal (SDG 5) in itself as well as a necessary step towards ending poverty and inequality.

Given that India is a rapidly urbanizing economy, urban planning and development interventions have an interdependent relationship with equality. More specifically, SDG 5 has close interlinkages with SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation) and 11 (Sustainable Cities). Although India has various initiatives, institutions and programs that work towards monitoring development goals as per SDGs, much work needs to be done in India to achieve the targeted outcomes by 2030. SDG 5. Gender based urbanization promotes cities that respond to the needs of men, women, girls, and gender minorities.



**GENDER BASED URBANIZATION PROMOTES CITIES THAT RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF WOMEN, GIRLS, AND GENDER MINORITIES.**

## Gender and Urbanization

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Urban planning as a development tool is often viewed as a 'gender neutral' activity, that makes equal consideration about men and women. However, these processes are governed by systemic issues resulting from patriarchal norms which render them "gender insensitive" rather than gender neutral. Due to the lack of a gender lens, cities and urban spaces in the country end up being designed primarily for able-bodied, heterosexual, cis-gendered men. In other words, the current urban planning and design of Indian cities fail to consider how women, PwDs, sexual and gender minorities experience different aspects of the built environment.

Gender mainstreaming is widely accepted strategy globally to achieve gender equality. It aims to restructure and incorporate gender into all aspects of planned action such as policy, legislation, institutional structures and resource allocations. Thus, gender sensitive urbanization is an integral tool that can contribute to gender mainstreaming in India.

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Urban women while sharing common gender interests, constitute a fairly diverse group such as elderly women, working women, poor women living in low resource areas like slums. Slum dwellers in cities undoubtedly experience unequal access to services, and amongst them, women are doubly disadvantaged. They face different challenges as compared to women from the urban middle class. However, the shared concern for urban planners and policy makers is to ensure the needs of these diverse groups are catered to during the development process. To this effect, building gender sensitive cities require the amalgamation of gender knowledge and institutional support through national and sub-national governments.



**BUILDING GENDER SENSITIVE CITIES REQUIRE THE AMALGAMATION OF GENDER KNOWLEDGE AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT THROUGH NATIONAL AND SUB-NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS.**

## 02 Identifying the Nature of Problem



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*In low resource areas, such as slums, access to water supply is irregular due to various developmental concerns. Here, women are generally responsible for water collection and storage.*

An isolated street may be inconsequential to a man, but for a woman it falls under the list of areas to avoid due to safety concerns. While there have been discussions on how women, gender minorities, people with disabilities face significant challenges in the urban environment, a thorough understanding of how existing conditions in the built environment exacerbate inequalities towards these groups is still not fully understood and accepted by planning professionals. There is a need to understand how various aspects of planning and development of the city - be it transportation, design of pavements or lack of infrastructure like public toilets- impedes women's access to public spaces.

### Access to Municipal Services

In low resource areas, such as slums, access to water supply is irregular due to various developmental concerns. Here, women are generally responsible for water collection and storage. The time spent on filling and fetching water increases if the water supply is irregular, the number of outlets is insufficient or if the water pressure is low, this is apart from the time spent waiting in lines to access the resource itself. This greatly affects the amount of time women can spend on economically productive, income earning activities. Access to sanitation facilities in slums are insufficient for its high-density population or non-existent. Non-



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availability and unfriendly community toilets that are poorly designed with lax maintenance, increases health risks among slum dwellers. In particular, women residing in such communities, struggle in their search for safe spaces, which are increasingly difficult to find in cities, to relieve themselves. They also maintain strict timings (before sunrise and after sunset) and travel in groups to guard themselves (Khosla, n.d).

## Access to Urban spaces and Mobility

Spatial planning in India follows traditional methods such as, land-use based zoning that create specific area-based zones for 'commercial', 'industrial', 'residential' uses. This spatial division has been criticized for its linear approach towards planning, but it also creates formally segregated zones that are often physically far away from one another (World Bank, n.d). It is a well-known fact that most cities have major employment centres and a large majority of the workforce live in the outskirts or suburbs of the city. Working women, who also devote time to care-giving activities at home, are essentially doing a 'second job'. However, these tasks often go unrecognized because domestic household work are considered to be their traditional responsibilities. For women who live in the peripheries of cities, this segregation of land use zones means that they have to travel greater distances while handling multiple responsibilities, with added travel time and expenditure.



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*Women are less likely to have access to private transportation (Khosla, n.d). This means that they are largely dependent on public transportation to meet their employment needs.*

Moreover, women in India are often more likely to work in the informal sectors and are also less likely to have access to private transportation (Khosla, n.d). This means that they are largely dependent on public transportation to meet their employment needs. Since public transportation comes with the limitation of fixed timings, women dependent on them have fewer economic opportunities. As women also fulfil the role of primary care givers, their travel patterns are complex as it includes several stops to meet domestic chores such as grocery shopping, school pickups etc. They spend longer time travelling and pay more for transit due to professional as well as household needs in addition to safety concerns (World Bank, n.d). These needs are often left unaddressed from transit planning in terms of routes, time tables, payment options.

Among women who travel to work, the tendency for women to walk to work is higher than men (Tiwari & Nishant, 2018). However, women often prefer taking longer routes to avoid perceived unsafe areas, prefer



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paratransit modes even for shorter distances to feel safer. This means that poor infrastructure such as lack of pavement, inadequate public lighting, lack of road crossings disproportionately limits their mobility. However, women's access to transportation is most restricted by safety concerns that revolve around a complex set of reasonings and choices that women are forced to make to safeguard themselves. For example, women are less likely to go out after dark in order to avoid putting themselves at risk of violence. 89 % of women in Delhi have faced some form of harassment while traveling or walking in the city. This study conducted in Delhi indicates that women choose lower-ranked institutions and pay significantly higher transportation costs so as to ensure their daily commute constitutes of safer routes (Borker, 2018). These limitations on mobility have greatly affected the economic status of women including their access to education and employment.

**WOMEN OFTEN PREFER TAKING LONGER ROUTES TO AVOID PERCEIVED UNSAFE AREAS, PREFER PARATRANSIT MODES EVEN FOR SHORTER DISTANCES TO FEEL SAFER. THIS MEANS THAT POOR INFRASTRUCTURE SUCH AS LACK OF PAVEMENT, INADEQUATE PUBLIC LIGHTING, LACK OF ROAD CROSSINGS DISPROPORTIONATELY LIMITS THEIR MOBILITY.**

## 03 Identifying Policy and Resource Gaps

Gender mainstreaming through gender sensitive urbanization can only be achieved if gender knowledge and dialogue is intertwined with policy and government institutions. However, gender is not considered to be a core concern for urban governments who are burdened with the provisioning of basic municipal services. Gender related initiatives are generally seen to be the responsibility of Women and Child development Department or conventional women's agencies and NGOs. An analysis of the current policy landscape and development schemes also indicate a lack of concern for gender issues.

*...in the higher echelons of power like the Lok Sabha only 10% MPs are women as of 2019, as compared to 5% in 1952. Obligatory designation of female constituencies in local bodies improved women's role active politics, but most women have become proxy candidates for male family members...*

The state town planning acts that form the basis of land use planning in the country lack any mention and inquiry towards the question of women's safety. JNNURM has no mention of gender considerations, Smart cities mission mentions the need to address such concerns without providing any clear guidelines. The URDPFI guidelines remains the only document that acknowledges and provides special requirements for gender sensitive planning that includes guidelines for urban design of compound walls to avoid creating isolated and opaque streets.

Under-representation of women in government institutions remains yet another resource gap. While the 74th Constitutional Amendment mandates

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that one third of all elected representatives in urban local bodies should be women. However, in the higher echelons of power like the Lok Sabha only 10% MPs are women as of 2019, as compared to 5% in 1952. Obligatory designation of female constituencies in local bodies improved women's role active politics, but most women have become proxy candidates for male family members, where the latter continue participating in decision making processes. Skewed participation and denial of women's entry into higher decision-making roles is mimicked in local urban governments, institutions as well as the decision-making process.

Cities have proved to be an incubator for social change and by targeting elements in the built environment they can make significant improvements in gender equity around the world. To ensure that cities are planned for women, girls and gender minorities the following aspects (World Bank, n.d) must be kept in mind during the planning process:

**Accessible** – Everyone must have the opportunity to access the public realm freely and be able to use spaces and services that the city offers.

**Connected** – The city should be well connected to ensure that everyone can move around the city safely, easily and affordably to reach opportunities and services.

**Safe and Healthy** – Everyone must be free from danger; may it be real or perceived and should have an opportunity to lead an active lifestyle free from risks.

**Secure** – Everyone must be able to obtain access to secure housing, land to live and security of tenure.

**Participatory** – The voices of women, girls, sexual and gender minorities must be actively included through a participatory planning process.

*“Imagine our streets full of women talking, strolling, laughing, and gesticulating.*

*Imagine parks and beaches dotted with young women sitting alone.*

*Imagine street corners taken over by older women reflecting on the state of the world.*

*If one can imagine all of this, one can impact a radically altered city!”*

*– Why Loiter: Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets*



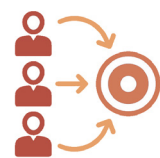
## 04 Suggestions and Way Forward

Gender sensitive urbanization in India requires a clear road map and strategy to achieve the tangible and intangible goals. While policies, schemes and other tools must be context specific to avoid 'one size fits all' approach, general strategies can be used as a starting point to work on a wide range of identified issues. The following steps are essential to begin the gender mainstreaming process (UN Habitat, 2012):



### 1. Gender Based Data Collection

Conduct gender analysis across projects to gather gender disaggregated data collection required for evidence-based policy and planning.



### 2. Cohesive Approach

Gender mainstreaming should become a national concern and directives must be given to apply a gender lens across national and sub-national policies.



### 3. Representation

Establish monitoring mechanisms led by women and encourage women's participation and empowerment through grass-roots initiatives in the country.



### 4. Gender sensitization & Advocacy

This maybe the most important and challenging task to achieve a gender sensitive society. Training must be offered to key stakeholders (defence personnel, transportation workers, urban planners and other government officials) to begin a dialogue and create an understanding of key concerns.



### 5. Education and Capacity Building

The current curriculum for urban planning, management or relevant fields fail to address gender concerns. The long-term goal must be to educate future resource personnel of these challenges and instil a gender sensitive

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