Wikigender online discussion: summary

Exploring the gender dynamics of Africa's structural transformation

30 May – 3 June 2016

Context

Africa is experiencing unprecedented urbanisation that is transforming communities and societies. The African Economic Outlook (AEO) 2016 puts the spotlight on Africa's rapid urbanisation and the new opportunities and challenges that come with it. The AEO shows that although urbanisation has often been associated with economic growth, slow structural transformation in Africa is holding back development and hindering inclusive growth. OECD research has found that gender equality is also an important pillar of inclusive growth. However, less is known of the gender dynamics of Africa's urbanisation and women's and girls' voices are rarely heard in urban planning and decision-making processes.

Recently, issues around gender and cities have gained increasing attention in the international development arena. Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG), "Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'', provides new impetus for the development community to better respond to the needs of women and girls in urban settings. In October 2016, countries will come together at the United Nations Summit on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, Habitat III, to define the "New Urban Agenda" that will guide policy and decision makers. In this context, it is imperative that the experiences of women and girls in urban settings are

> "Understanding how women and girls experience the city, and the consequences for their position in society, personal safety and opportunities for participation are fundamental to the achievement of SDG 11 and the New Urban Agenda to be determined at Habitat III"
>
> Hilary Murphy, UN-Habitat

better understood and incorporated if cities are to be truly inclusive environments where "no one is left behind".

From 30 May to 3 June, Wikigender hosted an online discussion on "Exploring the gender dynamics of Africa's structural transformation" with partners UN-Habitat, Women in Cities International and the OECD Development Centre. Over five days, experts from these organisations, among others, shared knowledge and experiences of supporting women's and girls' rights and well-being in African cities. The discussion aimed to identify key areas of concern, knowledge and data gaps, as well as innovative programmes and policies to make African cities safe and inclusive for women and girls.

Cities as places of opportunity and empowerment for women and girls

Cities can open new windows of opportunities for women and girls. Hilary Murphy, of the UN-Habitat Safer Cities Programme, started the discussion by highlighting the positive side of urbanisation which "can hold much potential and opportunity for sustainable development and the realisation of inclusive, save and resilient cities." For women and girls, she added that "cities can be sites of opportunity, participation and empowerment", provided that their needs and personal experiences are assessed and taken into account. Women in urban areas may have increased access to economic resources, thus benefitting from a favourable environment for economic empowerment. Women's important contributions to Africa's urban economies are often missed in official data due to their large share of informal employment.

As noted by participants, cities are also places where social inclusion and cohesion can be built. Urban connections can ease the task of finding a peer community, within which women and girls can build safer spaces and advocate for their rights.

Urbanisation and safety in cities

While cities may be sites of expanded opportunities for women and girls, challenges remain that limit their ability to fully benefit from and participate in urban life in Africa. The issue of **urban safety** was raised throughout the discussion as a cross-cutting problem that exacerbates the existing vulnerabilities of women and girls. As Hilary Murphy stated, "safety is the junction where urban and gender narratives meet". While urban violence does not affect exclusively women and girls, they have been found to be more susceptible to perceived threats of violence and harassment. Data from a Gallup Poll in Algeria found that 66% of men feel safe walking alone at night in a city compared to only 32% of women. According to the AEO 2016, over half of women surveyed in Kigali were concerned about sexual harassment when traveling to an education institution after dark. In Africa, infrastructure investments have not kept paced with the security needs of urban spaces. Poor street lighting or insufficient public transportation contributes to women's and girls' sense of insecurity.

> "Women's and girls' awareness of her sense of safety shapes how she experiences the city curtailing her mobility and access to urban opportunities".
>
> Kathryn Travers,
> Women in Cities International

Women and girls: diversity and different needs

Participants in the discussion also highlighted the need to take into account the **different needs of women across their life course, as well as different categories of women in urban planning**. As the AEO 2016 points out, urbanisation has been beneficial for some in terms of human development gains, but this progress has been uneven and unequal. Indeed, the barriers that women and girls face in African cities are compounded by other factors such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, and sexual orientation that manifest in different ways throughout a woman's life course. Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed, of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), noted that elderly women who often work into old age or undertake unpaid care work, are left out of urban policy agendas and decision-making processes. Questions around the LGBTI community were raised as to whether or not cities are places of inclusion or increased insecurity. In addition, the specific needs of young girls, particularly female street children, were mentioned as they may be exposed to greater risks than boys and require gender specific interventions.

Data gaps and inclusive policymaking

Finally, participants raised concerns about the **lack of comparable and representative data** making it difficult to create a comprehensive picture of women's and girls' experiences in African cities. Africa's rapid path to urbanisation coupled with slow structural transformation adds another layer of complexity to comparisons with other regions that have already undergone urbanisation. While a selection of data sources were shared (see *Key Resources*), participants highlighted the lack of data in areas such as transport use and safety. Data on marginalised groups, such as the LGBT community are also scarce.

> "Should the lack of detailed, official statistics really be to blame for gender-blind policy?"
>
> Sebastian Markley,
> OECD Development Centre

Many national surveys do not collect data on women over 49 or girls under 15, deepening the knowledge gap on elderly women and young girls. Participants stressed the need to hold public officials accountable for considering the diversity of urban communities. "Place-based" and "participative policies" that include women and girls in decision-making bodies and policy planning processes, as mentioned by the AEO 2016, can help fill in where data is lacking and ensure gender issues are properly addressed.

Tools and initiatives shared

➢ **Improving women's safety in cities with new technology**: Safetipin is an application that helps urban dwellers, especially women, track unsafe zones through an individual reporting method. The app was launched in Nairobi in 2015 and allows women to navigate urban spaces more confidently while at the same time collects data to support evidence-based policymaking.

➢ **Promoting women's voice in urban planning and decision-making**: In Uganda, the Transforming the Settlements of the Urban Poor (TSUPU) programme seeks to coordinate urban development efforts at the national, sub-national and community levels while including the urban poor, in particular women, in mapping of slums and data collection to identify areas of concern and local solutions.

> "The TSUPU programme institutionalised spaced for dialogue between communities, academia, business and local governments where urban stakeholders reflect on the rich, community gathered data."
>
> Arthur Minsat
> OCED Development Centre

➢ **Facilitating the emergence of work associations to promote fair wages**: In Agadir as in other Moroccan cities, women workers unite in argan oil cooperatives, which share profits among members. In Agadir, the argan oil cooperatives employs hundreds of women, providing them with greater independence and better job security.

➢ **Connecting women through access to mobile phones**: Weena is Moov Togo's mobile phone offer designed for resource-poor women in Togo. Weena is being distributed through local community groups in peri-urban areas to women that could normally not afford to own a cell phone.

➢ **Providing bikes to increase girls' access to education**: The Bicycle Education Empowerment Programme (BEEP) gives bikes to young girls in South Africa to allow them to get to school safely and faster, with the general goal of increasing school attendance rates and access to health care.

➢ **Mobilising women to improve crime prevention**: The women's safety audit methodology allows women to document the features of the built urban environment that impact their sense of safety, such as street lights. Gender safety audits have been conducted in many cities in Africa providing local authorities with data on women's and girls' ability to participate in urban life.

Key resources

Action Aid (2011), Women and the City,
http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/actionaid_2011_women_and_the_city.pdf

Anderson, M. (2015), "Tanzania: the smartphone apps putting Africa's fastest-growing city on the map", The Guardian, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/sep/22/tanzania-smartphone-apps-africa-fastest-growing-city-dar-es-salaam-mapGender In Site, http://genderinsite.net/

FIA Foundation (2016), Safe and Sound: International Research on Women's Personal Safety on Public Transport, http://www.fiafoundation.org/media/224027/safe-and-sound-report.pdf

GSMA, Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, Vital Wave Consulting (2010), Women & Mobile: A Global Opportunity; A study on the mobile phone gender gap in low and middle-income countries, http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/GSMA_Women_and_Mobile-A_Global_Opportunity.pdf

OECD Development Centre (2016), The African Economic Outlook 2016, http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/

Plan International, WICI, UN Habitat (2013), Because I am A Girl : Adolescent Girls' Views of Safety in the City, https://plan-international.org/adolescent-girls%E2%80%99-views-safety-cities#download-options

Population Council (2013), Contracting World of Girls at Puberty: Violence and Gender-Divergent Access to the Public Sphere among Adolescents in South Africa, http://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/wp/pgy/025.pdf

UNDP India (2009), Addressing Gender Concerns in India's Urban Renewal Mission, http://www.undp.org/content/dam/india/docs/addressinggenderconcerns.pdf

UN-Habitat (2013), Planning and design for sustainable urban mobility, http://unhabitat.org/planning-and-design-for-sustainable-urban-mobility-global-report-on-human-settlements-2013/

UN-Habitat, The Safer cities programme, http://unhabitat.org/urban-initiatives/initiatives-programmes/safer-cities/

United Nations 2016 Summit on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development 'Habitat III', 17-20 October, 2016, Quito, Ecuador https://www.habitat3.org/

United Nations, SDG Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities/

Women in Cities International (2012), Tackling Gender Exclusion: Experiences from the Gender Inclusive Cities Programme, http://www.jagori.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/GICP_Final-report.pdf

World Wide Web Foundation (2015), Women's Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment, http://webfoundation.org/docs/2015/10/womens-rights-online_Report.pdf

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