Wikigender online discussion: summary

Engendering the city: women and urban governance

3 – 7 October 2016

Context

There is increasing recognition that inclusive urban governance is important for empowering women and girls; this has recently been anchored in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable). Inclusive urban governance entails responding to the needs of women and girls and ensuring that their voices are heard equally in decision-making processes. Yet, despite growing international consensus, urban policies and practices are often gender-blind, and women continue to be underrepresented in urban governments.

From 3 October to, 7 October 2016, Wikigender hosted an online discussion on the theme "Engendering the city: women and urban governance", in partnership with UN-Habitat, Women in Cities International (WICI) and the OECD Development Centre. The discussion took place in the lead up to the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, Habitat III (17-20 October). It brought together members of civil society and gender and urban policy experts.

Participants exchanged and shared their experiences on the topic, focusing on the two main pillars that form the foundation of inclusive urban governance: gender mainstreaming in urban policies and effective representation of women within urban governments. Participants suggested ways forward to strengthen leaders' accountability on these matters and generate concrete political and financial commitments to promote inclusive urban governance.

Promoting gender mainstreaming in urban governance

Participants stressed the need to mainstream gender through all aspects of urban governance. Gender mainstreaming allows local governments to more effectively respond to women's and men's different experiences of the city. Indeed, women and girls face different obstacles to accessing urban services and participating in urban life, framed by concerns about safety. Thus, taking into account women's lived realities is crucial to craft transformative urban policies that are not reinforcing or exacerbating existing inequalities. Despite this, there was a consensus that gender mainstreaming in local policymaking is still not widespread, and urban policies are too often gender blind (IWPR, 2015; UN Habitat, 2012).

> **"Gender disparities in participation in and benefits from urban governance are significantly shaped by societal expectations on gender roles."**
>
> Gaelle Ferrant, OECD Development Centre

Data looking at gendered experiences of urban settings would be a first step to supporting gender mainstreaming and designing gender-responsive policies. One area proposed by Claudy Vouhé from

the NGO, Genre en Action, was on gender-responsiveness of public service delivery; using indicators that look at "access" and "control" in assessing the extent to municipal services take into account gender-specific needs. One initiative launched by Genre en Action was "exploratory walks", where citizens report on their urban environment, which can be a way to demystify the "expert diagnosis", to easily collect data and influence policy formulation.

Another area requiring better data were discriminatory social norms that influence gender inequalities. Data on social norms are useful to tackle issues such as street harassment yet despite its importance for women's safety, measuring social norms remains complicated by questions on methodology, approach and data gaps. As Hilary Murphy pointed out, one of the key challenges identified by UN-Habitat's Safer Cities Programme relates to gathering data on attitudes that will enable researchers to effectively measure a "cultural and value-based shift". Participants lamented the scarcity of data on perceptions and social norms, while stressing the need to encourage urban leaders to do more on these issues: as participants noted, inclusive urban governance will not be a reality without first collecting more data.

Ensuring women's voices are heard in local structures of governance
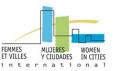
Participants discussed different approaches to address women's underrepresentation in city and municipal governments. Women account for only 5% of mayors in capital cities, 6% of mayors in cities with over 1 million inhabitants and 20% of city councillors worldwide (UCLG, 2013). Gender quotas were mentioned as an effective temporary measure to facilitate the entry of women in places of power (*cf box*). However, participants stressed that quotas alone are not enough to ensure that elected women's voices are heard: greater representation does not necessarily signify empowerment. As Kathryn Travers from WICI explained, experience shows capacity-building programmes for women can strengthen their position in fora where they are still a minority, by training them on "how to speak out on the issues they face, and how to negotiate for change".

> **"We have to build the capacity of both women and their municipal counterparts in order to bring both parties to the table as space opens up for participation in local governance."**
> Kathryn Travers, Women In Cities International

It is also important to take into account the compounding effects of discrimination on marginalised groups of women. Ellen Woodworth, a city councillor in Vancouver, Canada, argued that to be truly inclusive, urban governance must take into account women's diversity. She stressed that women who are marginalised because of their sexuality, their race and/or their socio-economic status, find themselves at the intersection of multiple discriminations. Their exclusion from decision-making processes can fuel urban governance "blind spots".

Finally, participants highlighted the need to go beyond increasing numbers of female representation and advocate that all urban leaders pursue gender-sensitive policymaking. Indeed, although representation is a central issue in the discussion about inclusive urban governance, the participants pointed out that the presence of women at the top leadership level does not guarantee that gender

issues will be taken into account. As Hilary Murphy from UN-Habitat explained, women leaders might not always promote gender-sensitive policies. Therefore, she argues that "another route towards greater representation might be to advocate and lobby that our elected leaders [men and women] be feminists". Specialised training for male officials on gender and urban issues will also be key to ensure that "women's issues" are not relegated only to women.

Calling for a concrete commitment to a women-friendly local governance

A key concern evoked during the discussion centred on the lack of trust in local leaders and institutions, and accountability in matters of gender equality. According to Hilary Murphy, UN-Habitat, "creating cities that work for women, and ensuring women's representation and participation requires a significant amount of trust-building at the local level". Kathryn Travers further explains that "when working with gender issues at the local level, it can safely be assumed that the starting point is often one of mistrust in government". For instance, if women do not trust their government to respond properly, they may be less likely to report incidents of street harassment or turn to elected officials to address problems in urban areas.

> **"Achieving gender equality in cities relies heavily on a steady system of governance with legitimate, accountable and transparent institutions."**
> Hilary Murphy, UN-Habitat

Tools and initiatives shared

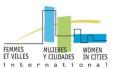### Canada: Boosting young girls' voices at the local level

As part of the Safe Cities Programme led by Plan International and UN Habitat, the Canadian NGO, Women in Cities International (WICI), develops curriculum to empower girls to play an active role in transforming their communities. WICI encourages a dialogue between girls and municipal stakeholders so that they can exchange on the challenges faced by young girls and their ideas for change. This exercise pushes leaders to acknowledge that girls themselves must be given an opportunity to speak about the issues they encounter in urban settings.

Turkey: Taking a multi-sectoral approach to make cities more inclusive

Since 2006, the United Nations supports the "Women Friendly Cities" programme in several provinces of Turkey, with the objective of "mainstreaming gender equality in planning and programming processes of local administrations". Project activities include capacity building workshops for local institutions and women NGOs, the development and implementation of "Local Equality Action Plans", advocacy and legislative work at both local and national levels.

India: Implementing parity quotas at the local level

In 1992, the Indian Parliament passed two Constitutional Amendment Bills which stipulated that one-third of chairperson positions in all p*anchayats* (bodies of local governance at the village or block level) should be reserved for women. The Indian government is currently discussing a law that would increase the quota to 50% of women in *panchayats*.

Senegal: Promoting gender budgeting to strengthen local democracy

In the Senegalese regions of Saint-Louis and Matam, the association *Genre en Action* is currently developing a pilot project that aims to mainstream gender within local budgets. Project activities include strengthening the skills of local associations, elected officials and citizens in matters of gender-responsive budgeting, collecting data and setting the grounds for the assessment of future local budgets.

Canada: Providing a gender-sensitive guide to municipalities

In 2015, the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI) partnered with several Canadian cities, NGOs, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to produce "Advancing Equity and Inclusion: a Guide for Municipalities". Taking an educational approach to issues of gender inequality within cities, the report serves as a reference for policy-makers and officials, arming them with the necessary tools to champion gender equality and diversity within their municipality.

Spain: Supporting female local politicians in their role

In 2012, the Association of Basque Municipalities, in partnership with the Basque Institute for Women and the Basque Directorate for Victims of Gender Violence, created a school for women local elected politicians. Through workshops and training sessions, "the Virginia Woolf Basqueskola" offers female politicians a place to share their experiences, acquire skills for municipal management, and remain up to date with the key issues related to equality policies.

France: Mainstreaming a culture of equality in all aspects of urban governance

In 2012 and 2013, the association *Villes au carré* led a pilot project in five small cities with the objective of durably mainstreaming gender within these municipalities' policies. Over eighteen months, *Villes au carré* organised several conferences and training sessions, while conducting in-depth gender analysis. The findings from the project were then compiled in a website, which includes toolkits, examples of good practices and resources for advocacy, among other materials.

Resources

- IWPR (2015) White paper: Gender, Urbanization and Democratic Governance https://www.ndi.org/files/Gender Urbanization and Local Governance White Paper.pdf

- UN Habitat (2000) Policy paper: Women and Urban Governancehttp://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/drivers_urb_change/urb_society/pdf_gender/HABITAT_policy_paper_women_urban.pdf

- UN Habitat (2012) Gender issue guide: Gender responsive urban planning and design http://unhabitat.org/books/gender-responsive-urban-planning-and-design/

- UCLG (2015) The role of local governments in promoting gender equality for sustainabilityhttps://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/the_role_of_local_governments_in_promoting_gender_equality_for_sustainability.pdf

- UCLG (2013) The equality agenda of United Cities and Local Governmentshttp://www.uclg-cisdp.org/fr/node/1947

- UNSD (2015) The World's Women 2015: Chap.5, Power and decision makinghttp://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015_chapter5_t.pdf

- Zebracki, Martin (2014). Sex in the city: gender mainstreaming urban governance in Europe http://ojs.tsv.fi/index.php/fennia/article/view/7894

- ESCAP, LOGOTRI (2001) Women in Local Government in Asia and the Pacifichttp://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/drivers_urb_change/urb_society/pdf_gender/UNESCAP_Drage_Women_Local_Government_Asia_Pacific.pdf