

## **Big Cities and Women: The Importance of Gender Mainstreaming in Local Policies**

Chapter 1 of the Beijing Platform for Action states: “The Platform for Action reaffirms the fundamental principle [...] that the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights.” As an agenda for action, the Platform seeks to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle.

In accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action, celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and in keeping with the lines of action established in the 2015-2017 METROPOLIS Action Plan, the METROPOLIS Women International Network has prepared the following document in an endeavour to lay the foundations for the type of city model we need in the future, i.e. a city that integrates gender mainstreaming.

### **Women and men are the centre of cities**

Traditionally, cities have been planned to meet certain needs considered homogeneous for everyone. This apparent neutrality did not take gender differences into consideration; by contrast, city planning only focused on male roles, which places the interests of economic groups ahead of the demands of broad swathes of the population, excluding the experiences and interests of women and other marginalised sectors from development decisions.

This is still a reality. Even today it must be borne in mind that men and women experience different socialisation processes by virtue of which unequal gender power relations are structured, based on the naturalisation of maternal roles, thereby justifying the subordination of women to men’s will and their exclusion from the decisions of the city and public life in general. Thus, gender neutrality in fact conceals gender differences and women’s specific needs, interests and citizen proposals.

We therefore need to strengthen and develop actions, processes and public policies on gender equality to build and improve cities that include every voice and experience, especially those of women. It is women who enable development and support life in the territories we inhabit; they are the ones that still perform most of the tasks related to reproduction, care-giving and the home. We face major urban challenges; when discussing cities, we must start by acknowledging the fact that the number of people living therein is growing all the time. Since 2008 more than half of the world population has been living in urban areas. According to UN estimates, the global urban population is expected to grow by approximately 1.84% per year between 2015 and 2020, by 1.63% per year between 2020 and 2025, and by 1.44% per year between 2025 and 2030. Most of this growth will occur in developing countries. This will call for a response to a greater demand for resources, infrastructure, services, work and security, in order to offer city inhabitants suitable conditions as regards productivity, habitability and quality of life.

When it comes to thinking about the cities that must be built in the future, policymakers, urban planners, architects and technicians will have to bear in mind that urban development is the physical pillar of human development, that people constitute the centre of cities. It is from this perspective that our cities must be planned and built.

**Inclusive cities** must be achieved. We need to push the boundaries of creativity and innovation in order to achieve high-quality cities that are capable of providing residents with opportunities to thrive and reach their full potential. In terms of action, this involves including and facilitating the diversity of voices and distinctive features in urban planning. It implies that cities will be inclusive insofar as their planning and urban development are redefined according to society's needs, interests and proposals, reflecting the diversity of situations women and men are a part of.

Accordingly, city design must be functional in order to support the needs of all kinds of people, making places and programmes accessible and user-friendly for the widest possible audience. This means getting the entire community involved in hands-on planning, where projects are always context-driven and emerge from the needs, resources and culture of the communities and the environment in which they exist. By means of participatory projects, communities strengthen their sense of ownership and commitment to the project, thereby making interventions sustainable.

Extending the provision of public safety, which strengthens violence-free cohabitation in cities, involves ascertaining the prospects of building places, territories and relations that are more inclusive and more balanced for men and women. The commitment to **safer cities** implicitly involves, as a fundamental condition, the eradication of violence against women, their empowerment and the promotion of their rights as citizens.

Violence against women, which has deeply-rooted structural and ideological causes in city development models, includes a string of complex dimensions that citizens face in relation to cities, where one of the emerging challenges is the growing population and the reception of people, which is sometimes a source of fear. Forms of violence and insecurity manifest themselves in different ways and affect all citizens; however, they are experienced differently by men and women, the young and the old, the poor and the wealthy. Violence bears an impact on the quality of people's everyday lives and the capacity to exercise their rights as citizens.

Cities will be inclusive provided the principles of social justice, equality and non-discrimination, democratic civic responsibility, quality of life and the promotion of their inhabitants are taken into account.

### **Gender mainstreaming in local policies is the key**

The importance of gender as an analytical approach for policymaking and implementation is undeniable. In order to take a comprehensive approach to the different forms of discrimination that women still

experience, the gender perspective must be integrated in a cross-cutting fashion in the design, execution and evaluation of public policies<sup>1</sup> (procedural change), and the structures and forms of organisation of the public administration (structural change) must be reviewed.

Gender mainstreaming is the inclusion and application of the principle of equal treatment and opportunities between women and men in public policies in a manner that guarantees access to all resources under equal conditions, that public policies be planned taking existing inequalities, women and men's different circumstances and social positions into consideration, and that the resulting outcomes and impacts produced are identified and evaluated in the progress toward real equality.

Public policy holds the capacity to either perpetuate or eliminate discrimination and gender inequality. It is only by making gender a key factor in the development and implementation of public policy that we can hope to advance gender equality and human rights across our cities.

### **Implementing gender mainstreaming in local policies to achieve gender equality**

Gender mainstreaming has been defined as “the reorganization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes so that a gender-equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking” (Council of Europe, 1999), and constitutes one of the priorities as a more effective strategy to build an equal society between women and men.

Indeed, “gender mainstreaming is a strategy that organizations (and local authorities of big cities) adopt to promote gender equality in the end. The strategy ensures that policymaking processes can be accessed equally by both sexes, and that the needs and demands of men and women are integrated in a fair manner, thus minimizing unintended gender discrimination and ultimately improving gender equality in the long run”<sup>2</sup>.

Mainstreaming the gender perspective in city planning is an example thereof. Gender mainstreaming involves recognising the knowledge and needs gained from women's experiences as a basis for urban development, distinct from the predominant discourses based on the generalisation and neutrality of experiences (that is to say, male discourses), without considering the real diversity of the people inhabiting the territories.

Although the different uses that men and women make of the city is clear, the gender perspective is not always taken into account. Consider Jane Jacobs in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* as a precursor to this approach, which she defines in her own publication as “an attack on current city

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<sup>1</sup> The UN's Economic and Social Council's agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system in the ECOSOC Coordination Segment of 18 July 1997. The importance of the strategy for mainstreaming the gender perspective was reiterated by the General Assembly in its 23<sup>rd</sup> special session of June 2000 and in subsequent resolutions. In 2004, the Council examined the application of the agreed conclusions 1997/2. The most recent resolution concerning the mainstreaming of the gender perspective was approved at the 2006 substantive session of ECOSOC (Resolution 2006/36)

<sup>2</sup> “Guideline on the Gender Mainstreaming Policy in Seoul. Revisiting Urban Policy from Women's Perspectives”, Seoul Foundation of Women and Family (December 2013)

planning and rebuilding [...], an attempt to introduce new principles of city planning and rebuilding, different and even opposite from those now taught..." She asserts that people and their daily lives are undervalued, are not considered and are not part of the equation of major urban projects.

Along the same lines as Jacobs, it is important to consider that integrating the gender perspective involves understanding that the role of the female gender comprises a use of the space and the city different to the use that is considered and presented as predominant, and which therefore must be approached from other logics and other viewpoints that make cities friendlier and safer for women. We shall thereby achieve more inclusive cities not just for women but for everyone, regardless of their age, origin, physical health and state of mind, etc.

Making the experiences, perceptions and realities of women today more visible involves placing value on reproduction-related tasks, both socially and economically, that is, childcare and household tasks. In this regard, we must show what these tasks mean for the health and lives of women and, therefore, for fully-fledged access to equal opportunities and the exercise of citizenship. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that women bring a comprehensive vision to the table thanks to the multiple roles they play within their families and in their communities.

This incorporation and visualisation of women's needs is approached from an intersectional perspective, i.e. considering a wide diversity of women's situations, according to the following variables: age, origin, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and health, among others. In short, cities must integrate and bring to light the needs, interests and proposals of all women in their diversity.

In a context in which cities are growing exponentially, making progress toward inclusive cities is a veritable challenge for architecture, urban planning, programmes, projects and public policies. We need cities that are planned on the basis of an urban appraisal that includes the view of women and all citizens; an appraisal that makes it possible to identify whether the features of any particular environment adapt to daily needs, considering people's uses and perceptions with a view to designing and managing urban spaces. This is a cross-cutting task to be performed by each government, a task that must also be assumed by non-government actors and by each society as a whole in order to promote more democratic ways of building cities.

**Cities are democratic** when city inhabitants have the **right to the city**, that is, when the people who live in or use them experience full citizenship as rights holders, which means, among other things, the freedom to choose where and when they can move around, the enjoyment of the public space, access to housing and decent urban environments – in short, equal access to opportunities. In this regard, it is necessary to ensure the right to the city, defined as the equitable use of cities within the principles of sustainability, democracy, equity, civic participation and social justice. It is the collective right of city inhabitants, in particular of vulnerable and marginalised groups, which grants them legitimacy of action and organisation, based on their uses and customs, in an endeavour to achieve the full exercise of the right to free self-determination and an adequate quality of life.

We strongly believe that there is no full and solid democracy without the equal participation of women, who represent more than 51% of the world's population. Their voices, experiences and the possibility of networking will enable us to generate new practices aimed at empowering more women who can actively engage in politics and in civil society.

Women's political participation and representation must be fostered because their involvement contributes to the strengthening of democratic governance and institutional quality, to the forging of more equal bonds. It guarantees scenarios of greater diversity, promotes the construction of citizenship, generates the conditions for their empowerment and a more prominent role, and raises awareness concerning the exercise of their rights.

Participation is a right and a duty, a democratic principle, and the impact of women's participation is concentrated in the spheres of public and private decisions, in plans and policies with a gender perspective that guarantee access to and the equal distribution of resources, goods and opportunities.

The role of local governments is to ensure all citizens enjoy the Right to the City.

### **Major challenges of big cities to achieve gender equality**

- Eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls (physical, psychological, sexual, work-related, sociopolitical, economic, symbolic, domestic violence, sexual harassment and exploitation, among others).
- Promoting studies on the use of time and space for men and women. Promoting a new organisation of time in cities, enabling better reconciliation of working, family and social lives for people in order to reconcile women's productive and reproductive roles. Driving a new culture of responsibility for men to achieve a more just and equitable distribution of reproduction-related tasks.
- Enhancing positive actions to achieve responsible paternity and to assume childcare as a collective and social responsibility, not only as a maternal responsibility.
- Enrolling all boys and girls in compulsory education and supporting lifelong learning to empower women and ensure they reach higher ranks within an organisation (thereby avoiding the glass ceiling).
- Gender mainstreaming in all policies, planning, programmes and actions in cities while partnering with different stakeholders (local governments, women's organisations, academia, the private sector, political parties, the media, etc.) as an effective mechanism to bring about real and positive change in our cities.

- Improving employment opportunities and working conditions for women. Addressing the gender pay gap and eradicating any additional employment disadvantages experienced by women.
- Providing increased support for disadvantaged women (i.e. women with disabilities, immigrants and single mothers). Implementing mentoring programmes for women.
- Providing lifelong health support, especially with regard to sexual and reproductive health.
- Granting guaranteed financing to support gender mainstreaming policies and programmes. Applying gender-responsive budgeting within local administrations to ensure monitoring and control mechanisms.
- Promoting women's civic participation and representation.
- Securing women's suffrage and ensuring women's leadership and political participation, guaranteeing fair access to all political spheres (as voters, candidates, elected officials and civil service members), amongst others.
- Ensuring women's access to all kinds of information (social policies, credits, etc.).
- Improving the urban space to ensure greater security for women.
- Ensuring access to ICT for women and girls so they fully benefit from technologies. This would contribute to bridging the digital divide.
- Increasing accessibility to public and private transport and improving mobility that takes women's needs and specific roles into account.
- Integrating gender criteria in monitoring and evaluation systems.

**How can we promote gender mainstreaming in local public policies to achieve gender equality in our cities?**

Some METROPOLIS member cities have already effectively applied gender-mainstreaming strategies in all aspects of their urban policymaking processes to promote and guarantee gender equality. Although the reality and priorities of our member cities vary, some elements are key:

- Strong and concrete commitment by the major local political representatives. Full support from municipal agents in ensuring that gender equality policies are fulfilled (avoiding gaps between the political discourse and actual implementation).
- Implementing a dual strategy within the municipality/metropolitan area: on the one hand, by developing specific policies for women living in the city to protect their rights and to empower

them and, on the other, by committing to the integration of the gender perspective in all municipal areas and prioritising policy projects (by establishing a gender equality committee or gender focal point with a clear mandate and resources).

- Recognising that gender-segregated statistics is a core element of the gender-mainstreaming strategy that must be gathered and analysed. GSS offers basic information on the needs of citizens and women that should be incorporated into developing gender-mainstreaming policies.
- Establishing and institutionalising supervisory committees that include women and gender experts to monitor and examine how gender mainstreaming is executed in public policies.
- Promoting capacity building and gender training in curricula.
- Changing the mindset: from fulfilling legal requirements to a real and positive commitment to gender equality.
- Involving society as a whole (including men and different generations) in policymaking processes, i.e. the planning, execution and monitoring of gender mainstreaming. Through their participation, we can identify the diverse needs of women and men citizens. To accomplish this goal, involving citizen groups that include civil society, civil servants and specialists and calling on them to collect opinions on policy matters, to monitor implementation and to make suggestions for improvement on various aspects of policymaking are recommended.
- Designing and implementing gender-sensitivity training programmes (formal and informal education) for municipal agents to improve their skills and expertise in this regard.
- Dismantling or restructuring gender roles and gender stereotypes (related to cultural aspects) through education.
- Allocating the necessary financial, administrative, human and material resources, as well as implementing gender-responsive budgeting initiatives.
- Establishing gender-oriented communication campaigns to promote a social agenda for change based on gender equity.
- Promoting workshops dedicated to inspiring and guiding women to regain self-esteem and a sense of self-identity, and to setting and achieving personal and professional goals, tapping into various empowerment tools.
- Promoting and strengthening women's access to all stages of local development planning, including gender-sensitive participatory budgets.



In conclusion, the government's firm commitment and citizens' full support are the keys to achieving gender mainstreaming in our cities.

## **METROPOLIS Women International Network**

### **In collaboration with:**

Women in Cities International

Centre per a la Igualtat i Recursos per a les Dones, Ajuntament de Barcelona

Empowerment Hub

Secretaría de Hábitat e Inclusión, Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires

Seoul Foundation of Women and Family

Gender Hub, UN-Habitat

Red Mujer y Hábitat de América Latina

UN Women

Secretaría Distrital de la Mujer, Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá