State of Women in Cities Report 2012/13

GENDER IS ESSENTIAL IN UNDERSTANDING URBAN PROSPERITY

Nairobi, 17 April 2013: Equitable, inclusive and prosperous cities need to harness the full potential of all citizens—men, women, and the youth. This is important as the world grapples with the effects of the global economic and financial crisis that has resulted in climate change, food insecurity and widespread unemployment among women and youth. This report presents the findings of a survey on perceptions of policy-makers, decision-makers, academics, and city dwellers on gender and the prosperity of cities. The report is UN-Habitat's contribution towards understanding the plight of women in cities. Following from the study, it suggests policy recommendations to enhance gender equality, equity and prosperity of women in cities.

Reasons why it is important to consider gender in relation to the prosperity of cities

- **First**, cities of the future will comprise a majority female component with pronounced ‘older’ population (>60 years) especially among the ‘older generations’ (>80 years), and increasing numbers of households headed by women.

- **Second**, urban dwellers face specific circumstances which can exacerbate and perpetuate poverty and which have gendered implications. For instance, the poor spend a disproportionate amount on water, accommodation, transport and food. They also face many practical and health problems due to lack of adequate sanitation and services. Many of these conditions affect women most because they undertake unpaid caring and social reproductive activities such as childcare, caring for the sick, disabled and elderly, washing, cleaning and other community services, as well as building and consolidating housing and providing basic services and infrastructure. All these activities allow the urban economy to function and prosper, even if this labour is seldom recognised or valued.

- **Third**, women make crucially important economic contributions to the prosperity of cities through their paid work. The ‘feminisation’ of the global labour force tends to be associated with urbanisation, with the related concentration of women in export-manufacturing, the service sector and Information, Communication and Technology (ICT). This can have other important implications for women such as declining fertility, increasing education levels and rising aspirations. Women are key drivers of economic growth and that wealth in the hands of women leads to much more equitable outcomes in terms of the quality of life of families and communities.

- **Fourth**, women are disadvantaged compared with men in cities in terms of equal access to employment, housing, health and education, asset ownership, experiences of urban violence, and ability to exercise their rights. These disadvantages are especially marked for poor urban women residing in slums and informal...
settlements. Also, women’s contributions are often ignored, especially by city officials, urban planners and development practitioners.

Addressing the barriers to women’s participation in cities creates a situation where women’s potential is more fully realised and households, communities and governments also reap rewards. It is imperative that women and men should enjoy equal rights and opportunities in cities on moral/ethical, economic and political grounds. This will not only engender women’s well-being but it will increase their individual and collective prosperity as well as the prosperity of the cities in which they reside.


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