

# Gender, Urbanization and Democratic Governance

WHITE PAPER

WRITTEN BY THE INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH  
COMMISSIONED BY THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE





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IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy and public administration programs at The George Washington University.

## About this White Paper

Commissioned by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), this White Paper is intended to inform NDI's anticipated work in urban jurisdictions, as well as contribute to the larger global discussion taking place, including in the context of the proposed Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

The paper was authored by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR). Authorship credit goes to Lindsey Reichlin, Research Associate and Program Manager, and Elyse Shaw, Special Assistant, Office of the President & Research Associate, with editorial assistance from Ariane Hegewisch, Study Director, and Barbara Gault, Vice President and Executive Director. The authors extend their thanks to Mary Sykes, IWPR Research and Program Coordinator, and IWPR Research Interns Hero Ashman, Natalie Peterson, and Ho Kwan Cheung for their editing and fact checking assistance.

## Roundtable Event

Prior to publication, NDI convened a roundtable panel of former politicians, development practitioners, academics, and researchers, to discuss the issues raised in a first draft of this paper. This final document incorporates feedback and recommendations from the roundtable participants:

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In addition, written comments were received from: Anirudh Krishna, Professor of Public Policy and Political Science, Duke University; Mark R. Montgomery, Poverty, Gender, and Youth Program Senior Associate, Population Council and Economics Professor, Stony Brook University; Johanna Törnström, Equality Policy Officer, Council of European Municipalities and Regions; Rachael Wyant, Governance Campaign Coordinator, Huairou Commission.

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## Table of Contents

Introduction	8
Rural-to-Urban Migration	9
Challenges Faced by Urban Women	10
Women's Employment	10
Urban Women and Education	12
Health and Safety	13
Legal Barriers to Urban Women's Empowerment	15
Service Delivery, Infrastructure, and Mobility	15
Gender-Specific Effects of Climate Change	18
Women and Urban Political Participation	19
The Impact of Women in Policymaking	19
Gender-Sensitive Governance	20
Establishing Gender-Sensitive Governance	21
Implementing Gender-Sensitive Governance	21
Gender-Sensitive Urban Planning and Design	22
Gender Sensitivity for Sustainable Urbanization	22
The Political Engagement of Women	23
Increasing Women's Agency in Policymaking	23
Formal Political Participation of Women	26
Conclusion	31

## Executive Summary

With two-thirds of the world's population predicted to live in urban areas by the year 2050, the global landscape is changing rapidly. Urbanization brings with it numerous benefits, but the growing inequality between and within cities has complicated implications for urban residents, especially for those that have been historically marginalized. For women in particular, accessing the increased social, economic, and political opportunities ostensibly available to them in cities can be, in reality, incredibly difficult to take advantage of.

As the world shifts its focus to a new post-2015 development agenda, women's empowerment and gender equality have become priorities for sustainable development that lifts up the well-being of all global inhabitants. Achieving such far-reaching, sustainable change is contingent upon the establishment of good governance – governance that is accountable, transparent, and which necessarily includes women as stakeholders in decision making processes.

The incorporation of women's voices in policy and planning would contribute to the building of cities that allow all urban inhabitants to thrive equally. For example, better resourced local governments that are inclusive of women can help ensure city policy recognizes the needs of women and girls as distinct from those of men and boys. Gender-aware urban planning and design can more effectively accommodate for women's significant care and domestic responsibilities, facilitating their ability to support their families through paid employment and relieving substantial demands on their time and wellbeing. And applying a gender lens to the development of a sustainable urban environment can help mitigate urban vulnerability to climate change.

This White Paper outlines the challenges faced by urban women in more depth, demonstrating how city policy and design fundamentally overlook women's experience of urban settings and providing the context for women's ability to participate in urban decision making processes. It explores the systemic changes that would lead to an ideal system of gender-sensitive urban governance. Finally, it reviews the progress women have made in achieving greater voice and agency in urban power structures, despite the gender-specific challenges they continue to face.

## Key Findings

Urban women, especially those who are poor, older, disabled or nontraditional, face substantial barriers in cities compared with their male counterparts. These barriers include, but are not limited to:

- the absence of full labor and citizen rights, which reduces women's access to quality employment opportunities and public services;
- unequal access to education;
- gendered challenges to health and well-being, such as women's increased vulnerability to gender-based violence and in situations of natural disasters;
- legal restrictions, especially discriminatory property rights, that limit women's full participation and independence in urban society;
- the protracted division of labor which holds women responsible for the majority of unpaid family care and domestic work responsibilities, while also demanding their increased time in paid employment; and,
- time poverty resulting from this double duty to the home and to work, which limits women's ability to fully access the public sphere.

These barriers contribute to the range of obstacles women also face to their substantive participation in political processes, yet women worldwide have found ways to successfully enter the political sphere. Strategies to meaningfully increase women's political voice and agency include:

- collective action, in the form of unions, grassroots organizing, social justice movements, and the use of technology and social media, to help women access existing social, economic, and political resources;
- gender quotas at the local, regional, and/or national levels;
- well-resourced and strategically-located governmental bodies, such as parliamentary caucuses or bureaucratic offices, dedicated to the advancement of women's interests in policy;
- trainings in political literacy;
- increased financial resources for women running for office; and,
- improved social supports, like child care, for women elected officials.

Many questions remain unanswered, however, not least when trying to prepare for the future. Gaps in research on the experiences of diverse subsets of urban women complicate the development of gender-sensitive strategies to support their needs. For example:

- lacking data on women in local government inhibits understanding of women's political participation at the local level;
- the absence of accurate and reliable information on women in the informal sector means city planners have an unclear picture of how urban development impacts their ability to make a living; and
- inadequate attention to gender-specific roles in and vulnerabilities to climate change inhibits the establishment of sustainable urban communities.

Improved and expanded data collection that disaggregates by sex must therefore be a top priority for urban settings to truly understand and address gendered experiences of cities. This understanding is central to acknowledging women's contributions to urban settings in the formation of policy responses, and to finding effective ways to involve women as substantive actors within urban decision making.

## Introduction

Today's increasingly urban world simultaneously brings great benefits and daunting challenges to the world's growing cities. It is estimated that cities generate 70-80 percent of global economic production (World Bank 2013a). Urbanization is also, in general, associated with increased prosperity (Chant and Datu forthcoming; UN HABITAT 2012a), enhanced social, economic, and political opportunities for women and men (Chant 2013; UN DESA 2014), better access to social services and health care (UN DESA 2014; United Nations 2010; World Bank 2013a), and a reduction in overall poverty (Ravillion, Chen, and Sangraula 2007).

For women, urbanization is linked to progress in a number of areas, including increased legal protections, a narrowing gender gap in primary schooling, and greater numbers of women attending university (Klugman et al. 2014; World Bank 2011; World Bank and IFC 2013). Urban women, on the whole, have greater access to services and infrastructure, more opportunities to engage in paid employment, and a relaxation of gendered sociocultural restrictions when compared with their rural counterparts (Chant 2013; Chen and Skinner 2015; Tacoli and Satterthwaite 2013).

Yet, the benefits of urbanization are nuanced and unevenly distributed both between countries and within cities. Poverty largely defines the urban landscape of the global South, and as of 2012, 828 million individuals, or one-third of the developing world's urban population (estimated to be 2.6 billion, as of 2012), are estimated to be living in slums (UN HABITAT 2012a). With cities in the global South growing at almost 10 times the rate of those in the developed world (Moreno 2011), a combination of stalled economic growth, low wages, and insufficient country and city capacity to house and provide basic services to rapidly increasing urban populations has led to a spike in urban poverty rates (UN HABITAT 2003; Moreno 2011). This poverty has deepened with the widening gap between the rich and poor over the past three decades (OECD 2011). Inequality, exclusion, and segregation have emerged as common features of today's globalized world, both internationally and intra-nationally (UN HABITAT 2012a; UN HABITAT 2012b). As a result, the world's urban poor and marginalized populations largely lack access to the benefits of urban living that serve as the basis for upper- and middle-class prosperity.

The economic, social, and political consequences of growing inequality can be seen in the lives of urban women, particularly poor women, who experience profound additional disadvantages when compared with their male counterparts. Women and girls are more likely to live in poverty, to experience discrimination, and to be marginalized in urban power structures. Poor women and girls, older women, disabled women, and women who defy traditional social norms, such as women who identify as LGBTQ and women who live independently, face the most significant barriers to capitalizing on the benefits of urban living and experience the greatest risks to their health and well-being (Chant 2013).

As women worldwide are increasingly participating in paid work, but without a significant change in their responsibilities for domestic and family work or significant public supports such as child care and elder care, they are experiencing a "diversification and intensification" of responsibilities and obligations (Chant 2014). The time poverty that women face as a result of such dual responsibilities leave women with restricted ability to pursue the range of opportunities, economic or otherwise, offered by urban areas. As will be described below, improving access to basic services, infrastructure, and public transportation, as well as to affordable, accessible child care, would drastically reduce demands on women's time and energy and facilitate their ability to participate fully as urban citizens. Enhancing women's empowerment, therefore, must be accompanied by simultaneous changes in law, in policy, and in sociocultural norms to effectively address the gender disparities that obstruct their full economic, social, and political participation in urban life.

This White Paper outlines the barriers experienced by women in urban settings – barriers that are often fundamentally different from those of urban men – with a focus on the developing world. The paper then describes the context in which women participate in urban decision-making processes, including a discussion of both the achievements of women in the political sphere to-date, and the systemic change that would lead to an ideal system of gender-sensitive urban governance. It concludes by explaining the importance of gender-aware policymaking and planning to the building of sustainable city environments that can effectively support growing urban populations – populations that are, and will continue to be, largely comprised of women.

## Rural-to-Urban Migration

Rural-to-urban and urban-urban migration, within or between countries, play an important role in the increased urbanization of the global landscape. Today, women represent 48 percent of international migrants worldwide and more than half (52 percent) of all international migrants in developed regions. In the global South, women make up 43 percent of the international migrant population (UN DESA 2013c). Women have typically made up a slightly higher proportion of internal migrants worldwide, with rural-rural movement the most common form of female migration, particularly in Africa. In 15 countries, however, women most often move between urban spaces (UN DESA 2008). Estimates of women's share of internal migration are not readily available.

### Push and Pull Factors

Migration to urban areas is influenced by a number of push and pull factors. Many migrants seek the economic opportunities offered by urban areas as a way to escape rural poverty and insecurity. Urban jobs, either in the formal or informal sector, are more numerous and reliable, and often provide higher and more stable incomes than rural jobs, which are often prone to fluctuation due to seasonal changes, environmental stress, or market mechanisms (COHRE 2008; Deshingkar and Grimm 2004; Tacoli 2012).

Expanded independence, the possibility for social mobility, and the economic opportunity associated with city life are often viewed as a potential path to a better standard of living for women and their families (Deshingkar and Grimm 2005; IOM 2009). Urban areas offer an escape from restrictive gender roles and heightened risks of violence that can characterize rural women's lives, while also providing increased opportunities for paid work, property ownership, improved health, and education (Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women 2012; IOM 2009; Tacoli and Mabala 2010). Formal employment is more abundant for women in cities, stemming from trends like the preference for female labor in export-oriented industries and the growing need for domestic care workers (Moghadam 1999; Tacoli 2012). The informal economy can also be an attractive option, offering more opportunities for paid work to groups, like women, that have historically experienced discrimination in employment (Deshingkar and Grimm 2004).

Push factors originating in rural areas also motivate women's migration to urban settings. Rural women are particularly disadvantaged in comparison with their male counterparts, as well as in comparison with urban men and women (Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women 2012). Rural women are faced with greater (unpaid) reproductive and household responsibilities that significantly limit their opportunities for employment in comparison with women in urban areas. When able to find paid work, rural women are typically relegated to jobs that have fewer protections than those held by men, are more likely to be precarious and temporary in duration, are lower-paid, and often involve inflexible work hours that leave little time for women to attend to their home and care duties (Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women 2012). Women in rural areas also often face difficulties accessing assets, especially land, credit, and information essential to their ability to enter the agricultural industry or other areas of entrepreneurship common to rural settings (FAO, IFAD, and ILO 2010; Tacoli and Mabala 2010).

Migration can also stem from conflict, political instability, or the abuse of human rights; displacement following climate change or natural disaster; a lack of rural education opportunities; or a lack of resources and basic services (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2013).

### Challenges Facing Women Migrants

Rural women migrants who seek better lives in cities face challenges when accessing the range of rights and opportunities available to other urban residents. Migrant women, especially those who are undocumented, are more likely to experience labor market exploitation and are at greater risk of kidnapping or trafficking. Migrants who are unable to acquire legal urban residence are often excluded from accessing public sector jobs or government-provided education and health care, applying for a driver's license, and registering to vote. In China, for example, the *hukou* household registration system assigns rural and urban status to individuals according to the location of their birth. In consequence, rural migrants are subordinated to their urban counterparts, denied permanent urban residency and viewed as a source of cheap labor to be used and exploited by the urban labor market (Zhang 2014).

Restrictive work permits cause additional problems for women migrants' rights and mobility in cities. Migrant workers often live at the whim of employers to whom such permits are issued (and who may have confiscated their passports, visas, and other identity documents) (United States Department of State 2012). Tied to a specific job, wage level, and working conditions, these workers are frequently unable to change employers or seek justice for exploitation, without risking becoming undocumented and criminalized, or outright deportation (UN Women 2013). The threat of deportation is also linked to health screenings migrant workers must undergo to gain and renew their documented status, including screening for HIV and periodic pregnancy tests. In Singapore, for example, women found to be pregnant must either leave the country to give birth or have an abortion (IOM 2010). Finally, women migrant workers have limited or no access to legal assistance or gender-sensitive support services to provide them with recourse for human rights violations they experience in the course of their employment (United Nations General Assembly 2013).

### **Increasing Women Migrants' Voice and Agency**

Increasing women migrants' access to information has the potential to improve their ability to exercise their rights and protect themselves against labor market exploitation, trafficking, gender-based violence, and other human rights violations. As reported by the Secretary General of the United Nations (2011), a number of countries have implemented strategies to spread awareness regarding migrant rights, immigration procedures, and violence against women. Information portals in Mexico, guides and brochures in Lebanon and Jordan, and targeted awareness-raising in Portuguese immigrant communities are just a few ways some states facilitate access to information as way to prevent human rights violations against migrant women (United Nations General Assembly 2011).

While migrant workers are often prohibited from organizing or forming unions, they are increasingly utilizing alternative ways to join together to make their concerns heard. The Migrant Worker Forum, part of the Malaysian Trade Union Confederation, was formed by migrant workers who were unable to form their own union. The Forum allows them to communicate their human rights concerns to the Malaysian government (Grumiau 2012). The Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME), a migrant rights nonprofit organization in Singapore, has used Facebook to connect thousands of women migrant domestic workers and organize them around common interests, such as their campaign to advocate for the establishment of regular days off (HOME n.d.; UN Women 2013).

Additional initiatives supported by various agencies of the United Nations system and employed by member states have also been undertaken to learn about the experiences of women migrants and enact policies and legislation to better support their needs and concerns. For example, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs launched a research study examining the experiences of Indian women migrants to the Gulf and Arab States, and UN Women supported Nepal and Vietnam in their development of gender-sensitive migration policies (United Nations General Assembly 2011). A number of international and regional mechanisms also exist to assist governments in their protection of women migrant workers, such as the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (United Nations General Assembly 2011), though these mechanisms, as of now, lack the governmental support and adherence needed to meaningfully improve conditions for women migrants worldwide.

## **Challenges Faced by Urban Women**

### ***Women's Employment***

With more than half of the world's population now living in urban areas, women's employment has been growing, especially in service, manufacturing, and public sector jobs. As a result, more women are engaged in paid employment than at any other time in world history (Chant and Datu forthcoming).

Entrepreneurship and employment, often seen as a direct path to urban women's economic empowerment, are central to the 'feminization' of the urban labor force (Tacoli 2012; UN HABITAT 2013). As women's employment in urban settings

has increased, women have become better able to provide for themselves and their families, while also experiencing a relaxation of the gendered social norms that have traditionally subordinated women to men (Tacoli and Satterthwaite 2013). According to the World Bank (2013b), “The potential of urbanization to close the gender gap in earnings and enhance women’s empowerment is enormous” (pg. 101).

Economic empowerment, prosperity, and poverty reduction, however, are not inevitable outcomes of paid employment for urban women. Significant barriers hindering progress towards true gender equality in employment and economic empowerment remain, demanding policy change that supports the full engagement of women as urban citizens. As will be discussed below, employment options for women in cities perpetuate the association of women with the private sphere while providing few supports for them to easily balance care and household responsibilities with paid employment. At the same time, women are increasingly responsible for unpaid work at the community level, increasing even further the time poverty that women face on a daily basis (Brouder and Sweetman 2015).

### **Formal Employment for Urban Women**

Women now represent more than 40 percent of the global labor force (UN HABITAT 2013). Economic opportunities for women are often still limited, however, especially when age, education, and socioeconomic status are taken into consideration. Urban economic sectors have opened many doors for women, especially in commerce and domestic service. Domestic service employs between 4 and 10 percent of the workforce of developing economies alone, with women making up 74 to 94 percent of domestic service workers (World Bank 2011). Caregiving and domestic work, however, is often under-paid and under-valued, specifically because gender discrimination has led society to devalue jobs that are seen as traditionally “female” work (Brouder and Sweetman 2015; World Bank 2014).

Globalization has also brought about the rise in manufacturing as a new sector for women’s formal employment in developing countries. Women make up 70 to 90 percent of the workers at multinational electronics and garment factories alone, most of which are located in urban areas (ILO 2014; UN Habitat 2013). Women are the preferred laborers for manufacturing jobs – jobs that are traditionally low-paid, low-skilled, labor intensive, and precarious – because they are stereotypically seen as docile, cheap, and efficient. (Chant 2013; Chant and Datu forthcoming). Poorer and less educated women, in particular, are often siloed into arduous, low-paid manufacturing jobs, which can be both physically and emotionally harmful (Elson and Pearson 1981).

New opportunities for women have also come from the expansion of the information and communication technology (ICT) sector. Some women have been able to take advantage of the expansion of call centers and IT technical assistance jobs that often come with higher pay and shorter hours. These jobs, however, are almost exclusively filled by middle- and upper-class women who are English speaking and educated (UNRISD 2010). Chant and Datu (forthcoming) have also found that even where women are employed in ICT jobs, they are more likely to be confined to entry level or routine jobs, such as data entry. Women, especially poor women, are less likely than men to learn advanced computer skills. Additionally, in middle- and lower-income countries, computer skills are often not taught in school until the secondary or tertiary level. As a result, girls who are withdrawn from school before completing these levels of education miss out on these lessons (Chant and Datu forthcoming; UN HABITAT 2013). Thus, the emerging opportunities in developing countries for formal employment in the ICT industry are limited and only benefit more advantaged subsets of urban women.

### **Informal Employment for Urban Women**

The majority of women in developing countries, especially poor women, work in the informal sector, although the extent of women’s informal employment varies greatly by region. In South Asia, for example, 83 percent of employed women work in the informal economy, as do 74 percent of women in sub-Saharan Africa, and 54 percent in Latin American and Caribbean (Chen and Skinner forthcoming).

Women’s informal employment includes work such as street vending, waste picking, and work in small-scale family businesses (which is sometimes unpaid). No matter what type, however, informal jobs are largely unregistered, poorly paid, and lacking in social protections (Chant 2014; Chen and Skinner forthcoming). For example, women who are waste pickers – those who collect, sort, recycle, and sell valuable materials – often work in deplorable conditions, are subject to

street harassment, receive little to no support from authorities, and are subject to arbitrary pricing by middlemen. Additionally, as in the formal economy, women are often confined to the lower levels of the informal workforce. Women are most often employed in the actual work of waste picking and sorting through garbage to find valuable materials and recyclables, while men collect and sort the recyclables before they are sold to vendors (Chen and Skinner forthcoming). Unregistered street vendors are also likely to experience harassment by police, who may confiscate their wares and make them pay a fine before their goods are returned. Women, who are more likely than men to sell perishables such as fruits and vegetables, suffer doubly from this type of confiscation, as their wares can spoil and become unsellable after confiscation (Roever 2014).

Women who live in slums face heightened barriers to money-making opportunities due to the location of slums on the periphery of urban areas where they lack access to markets and/or resources. For home-based workers, living in slums also poses challenges to entrepreneurial activity (Chant 2013; Chant 2014; Chant and Datu forthcoming). Women in slums spend more time and energy accessing basic services than their non-slum dwelling counterparts, limiting their ability and time to earn a profit through paid employment (UNFPA 2007; UNHCS 2000).

Recently, much attention has been paid to increased microfinance for women and home-based enterprises as a promising opportunity to promote women's economic empowerment. Women use funds from micro-loans to support enterprises like seamstress or laundry work, the preparation and/or sale of food and drinks, the fabrication of crafts or household goods, the operation of small general stores, or the operation of hairdressing parlors. While not as prevalent, some women will run eateries, diners, bars, gambling parlors, or tiny neighborhood cinemas out of their homes (Chant 2014; Chant and Datu forthcoming). Though microfinance has been seen as successful, the home-based work it supports is usually small-scale and profits are often too sparse to allow an expansion of economic activities beyond the micro-enterprise level, leading to a limited impact on poverty reduction (Casier 2010; Chant 2014; Garikipati 2010; Sweetman 2010). Using mobile phone technology is a cost- and time-effective way to deliver financial services to women. Through the use of mobile phones, women can access microcredit loans and conduct financial transactions without having to travel long distances, or go through potentially predatory middlemen (Buvinić, Furst-Nichols, and Pryor 2013). However, women who lack access to mobile phones are unable to take advantage of such opportunities.

Despite the increasing prevalence of microfinance initiatives, many women still lack access to the assets and capital necessary to successful entrepreneurship. Land and property can be key to women's ability to start a home-based business, as most lending is dependent on the use of land or property as collateral for loans or other financial services (Chant 2007; COHRE 2004). The legal barriers and cultural norms that restrict women's rights to own property or land, however, compound the difficulties facing women who want to pursue new opportunities to better provide financially for themselves and their families.

### ***Urban Women and Education***

Education can play an important role in increasing a woman's access to quality formal employment, yet the benefits of an education extend beyond enhanced economic opportunities. Educated women are more likely to delay marriage and childbirth, are generally healthier and less vulnerable to diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tend to hold more power in their homes, and have fewer children who are more likely to be healthier and better educated (Chant and Datu forthcoming; UN HABITAT 2013). While there have been major reductions globally in the gender gap between boys and girls enrolled in primary school, girls still lag behind boys in secondary and tertiary enrollment. Even in countries where women outnumber men in tertiary enrollment, there are still fewer women who chose to study science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, field which often lead to better quality and higher paying jobs (UNESCO 2007; UNCTAD 2011).

While, in general, urban women have higher literacy levels than their rural counterparts, girls who live in slums tend to face the greatest barriers to obtaining an education. They are more likely than boys, or than girls in higher income families, to have domestic chores and activities that interfere with school or studying; they face difficulties studying due to the lack of space, light, security or basic infrastructure in their homes; and they are more likely than their non-slum counterparts to drop out of school, often as a result of early pregnancy (Chant and Datu forthcoming). Additionally, girls may

be taken out of education early to take up paid work because in some contexts, it is less stigmatizing for a family to have a daughter, rather than a wife, that contributes to household finances (Chant and Datu forthcoming).

For these reasons, a vast gap exists between the educational attainment of girls in slums compared with their non-slum counterparts (Chant and Datu forthcoming; Gupta, Arnold, and Lungdim 2009). One study of slum and non-slum areas in India finds that in all eight cities examined, slum dwelling women were significantly more likely to have no education than women not living in slums; in Delhi, for example, 41 percent of women living in slums have no education, compared with only 17.5 percent of their non-slum counterparts (Gupta, Arnold, and Lungdim 2009).

The confinement of women and girls to the largely unpaid private sphere has influenced how families and society value the contributions of girls and women. The perception that women and girls are unable to “meaningfully” contribute (i.e. monetarily) to the family and community has led to chronic underinvestment in women’s human capital, creating a vicious cycle (Buvinić, Furst-Nichols, and Pryor 2013). With no expectation of a return on their investment in education for their daughters, families frequently opt to maintain the gender status quo, removing their daughters from education so they can share the care and household responsibilities with their mothers. The resulting disadvantage experienced by women and girls in the realms of education and literacy only compounds the challenges they face – both in the home and in the public sphere. Two recent studies from India and Bangladesh, however, have found that the creation and expansion of jobs for women has changed social norms regarding the value of education for girls and is associated with increased enrollment and educational attainment of girls (Heath and Mobarak 2011; Oster and Millett 2010).

## ***Health and Safety***

Women’s experience of urban life is defined by an intersection of social, cultural, and economic factors that together play an important role in their overall health and safety. The lack of safe water, sanitation, and secure housing, combined with laborious reproductive and household work and restrictive social norms for acceptable female behavior, all contribute to high rates of ill-health and increase women’s risk of experiencing violence. Though this paper is unable to comprehensively explore the varied threats to women’s health and safety, the following section provides an overview of some of the major risk factors affecting women’s well-being in urban settings.

### **Women’s Health**

The nature of women’s daily activities can involve significant physical strain. Women typically hold the responsibility of providing the water, fuel, food, and other household needs for their family; procuring such necessities can be physically and mentally strenuous (Chant 2013). Women are also more likely to be the formal and informal health care providers for their families and communities (WHO 2009; 10/66 Dementia Research Group 2004). Women in health care roles experience heightened health risks, such as the increased likelihood of contracting infectious diseases, injuring themselves through physically strenuous activities, being exposed to chemical hazards, or experiencing depression (Menéndez et al. 2015; WHO 2009; 10/66 Dementia Research Group 2004).

Women in slums or other impoverished, overcrowded city communities often reside in insecure housing with poor ventilation and limited or no access to much-needed basic services or sanitation. Without electricity, poor urban families tend to rely on fuels like coal or charcoal, which are detrimental to their respiratory health (Chant 2013). Polluted air, both within the home and from the increasing use of motorized transportation and industrialization, is a leading cause of premature death among the urban poor in the global South (UN HABITAT 2008). Women and children are most likely to be affected by low-quality internal air given the amount of time they spend in the home (Sverdlík 2011).

While the rate of HIV/AIDS has declined significantly since 2002, globally just over half of all HIV-affected individuals are women (UNAIDS 2010). In Sub-Saharan Africa, that share is even greater, with women comprising 60 percent of all HIV-affected individuals. Young women are particularly at risk: women aged 15-24 are eight times more likely to be HIV-positive than men of comparable ages (UNAIDS 2010). A combination of biological factors and manifestations of gender inequality contribute to women’s heightened risk of contracting HIV/AIDS (WHO 2009). Urban women, especially young women and unmarried women, have been shown to be more likely to engage in transactional sex (Chatterji et al. 2004).

Stigma, restrictions on women's ability to negotiate for safe sex, limited knowledge of safe sexual practices and of HIV risk factors, sexual violence, and drug use, also heighten urban women's risk of being exposed to HIV/AIDS (WHO 2009).

Access to reproductive health services and information, including family planning, contraception, safe abortion, and maternal health, is crucial for urban women to effectively safeguard their health and well-being. Impoverished urban women are particularly vulnerable to unplanned pregnancy, poor maternal health outcomes, high fertility rates, and high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (Mberu et al. 2014). Family planning and contraceptive resources are scarce for the urban poor, with slums experiencing the most poignant absence of reproductive and family planning services, and making it extremely difficult for urban women to control their reproductive health choices (Mberu et al. 2014).

The numerous stressors affecting women's daily lives, including the greater likelihood that they live in poverty, their vulnerability to violence, and their work burden, mean urban women are more likely to experience mental health problems (WHO 2009). Other cohorts at higher risk for depression include older women, especially as related to health issues like dementia, and women caregivers (10/66 Dementia Research Group 2004; WHO 2009).

Older women are likely to experience a number of age-specific health problems. By 2050, the developing world is expected to house 84 percent of the world's population ages 60 and older. Because of their longer life expectancy, women feature heavily within this ageing population (WHO 2009). The numbers of older women living in urban areas are particularly pronounced. Women ages 80 and older, for example, feature prominently in Latin American and Sub-Saharan African urban populations, outnumbering men of the same age two to one (UN HABITAT 2013). Advanced age is associated with greater poverty, especially for older women who are more likely to be widowed, living alone, or heading their own households (WHO 2009).

Heart disease, cancer, arthritis, osteoporosis, overweight, falling, and dementia are just a few of the health issues that impact quality of life for older women (WHO 2009). Older women in developing countries are often less likely to seek out treatment compared with their counterparts in the developed world. Widowhood, common among older women given the likelihood for men to die earlier and the fact that women tend to marry older men, can increase women's vulnerability to poverty and violence, as well as increase their need for domestic care. As populations of women over age 60 continue to grow in the developing world, particularly in urban areas, developing high-quality systems of geriatric care will become increasingly important. Today, however, health care provision in low- and middle-income countries leaves much to be desired in its ability to meet the health care needs of ageing women (WHO 2009).

Health care services are, in general, of poor quality or limited availability for the urban poor (Sverdlik 2011). Where services are available, the cost is often prohibitive. Given that urban women tend to work primarily in informal employment, they often are unable to access health insurance systems that are generally linked to employment in the formal sector (WHO 2009). As a result, women, especially poor women, must either forgo costly medical treatment, or face heightened financial insecurity as a result of seeking out formal care (Amnesty International 2010; WHO 2009).

## **Violence against Women**

The expanded independence of women in urban areas can simultaneously increase their risk for experiencing violence (McIlwaine 2013). Rates of violence are higher in cities than in rural areas, and women, who are already twice as likely to experience violence as men, are at even greater risk in cities (Klugman et al. 2014; UN HABITAT 2013; WHO 2013).

Gender-based violence comes in multiple forms, including physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological violence (Klugman et al. 2014). It can be perpetrated by a range of actors, from youth gangs to employers to intimate partners (Amnesty International 2010), and can occur anywhere along the spectrum of private and public urban space (Chant and McIlwaine 2013). Women are most likely to experience violence within their own homes, often by a male family member (Klugman et al. 2014). Women who head households or live independently, older women, and women who identify as LGBTQ are particularly vulnerable to violence (UN HABITAT 2013).

Violence against women is especially likely in urban areas characterized by insecure housing and inadequate access to basic services (UN HABITAT 2013). Walking long distances to conduct household chores, such as fetching clean water or

using the bathroom, can heighten risk, as can poor lighting, overcrowding, and absent staffing at transportation hubs, which makes daily movement a precarious activity for women (Chant and Datu forthcoming). Forced evictions can be a trigger for violence towards women, increasing the stress and insecurity experienced by the family, especially men (COHRE 2008). Despite the fact that gangs are largely comprised of men, community violence, such as gang violence, can also affect women and girls living nearby (Chant and Datu forthcoming).

Inability to secure safe housing plays a large role in whether women feel able to leave their husbands or homes. The prevalence of male-biased land tenure policies and restrictions on women's right to own property significantly decreases the likelihood that women will have alternative housing options if they need to escape a violent domestic situation. Poor quality housing, or eviction and homelessness, can also increase the risk of break-ins and sexual violence (Chant 2013; COHRE 2008; McIlwaine 2013).

### ***Legal Barriers to Urban Women's Empowerment***

Legal barriers cut across demographic differences and are a major contributor to inequality and women's poverty (World Bank 2013b). According to the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation's *Women, Business and the Law 2014*, 90 percent of the 143 countries tracked have at least 1 legal restriction that impact women's economic empowerment and 28 have 10 or more legal differences that treat women differently than men (World Bank 2013b). Legal restrictions for women range from limits on obtaining identification cards, to differences in laws owning or using property, to limits to getting a job. In at least 15 countries women are still required to get their husbands' consent in order to work (Klugman et al. 2014). Legal restrictions such as these ensure that women will continue to experience poverty at greater rates than men as it restricts their ability to be economically self-sufficient and full political participants in their communities.

### ***Service Delivery, Infrastructure, and Mobility***

With spiking urban population growth expected in the coming decades, particularly in areas like Asia and Africa that are still largely rural, building capacity to support the livelihoods of urban residents is critical. Service delivery, infrastructure, transportation, and housing have arisen as key challenges to cities struggling to cope with this urban growth (UN HABITAT 2012b). Though the dense nature of urban areas often facilitates the provision and availability of services and infrastructure, urban planning has largely ignored marginalized urban groups' uses of and needs from cities. As a result, the urban poor are significantly more likely to face limitations in access to clean water, adequate sanitation, reliable electricity, and safe, affordable public transportation options. At particular risk are residents of informal settlements, especially slums, where formal service provision, infrastructure, and secure housing are often almost completely absent (World Bank 2013a; UN HABITAT 2012b).

For a variety of reasons to be explained below, urban planning and design – traditionally determined by, and largely focused on meeting the needs of, men – disproportionately affect how women experience the city on a day-to-day basis (UN HABITAT 2012b; Warner 2014). Women's confinement to the domestic space has meant they have been excluded from planning and decision-making processes critical to ensuring cities can meet their gender-specific needs. Additionally, where cities fail to provide for the needs of urban (poor) residents, urban women are expected to fill the gaps (Tacoli 2012). This expectation adds to the already numerous demands on women's time, and to the stressors they encounter daily, as it can mean long distance travel or travel to multiple locations, waiting in lines or dealing with crowds, and competition for scarce resources (Brouder and Sweetman 2015; Chant 2013).

Recent research has found an association between better access to services and infrastructure and improved outcomes for women. In a qualitative study of five serviced and non-serviced Indian slums, Parikh et al. (2015) found that service provision was significantly associated with decreased household spending on health care, decreased incidence of disease, increased literacy, and increased school attendance. The presence of female family members, in particular, was found to be associated with improved outcomes in school attendance, health, and health care spending when their families received infrastructure services (Parikh et al. 2015).

## Access to Shelter

Urban women living in poverty face particular barriers to secure housing for themselves and their families, a factor which is inextricably linked to health outcomes, child mortality, provision of care, safety, income generation, social mobility, and access to basic services. Housing policies can prioritize the ownership rights of men, restricting women's ability to purchase or own land or housing, independently or jointly, even if they have the funds to do so. Women, therefore, are exposed to greater risk of eviction and are subordinated in their independence and decision making within the family (Chant 2013; Varley 2007). Especially for women who are the sole economic providers for themselves or their families, eviction and homelessness can result in "utter destitution" (COHRE 2008). As stated by UNFPA (2007), "Shelter is at the core of urban poverty: Much can be done to improve the lives of people through better policies in this area" (pg. 38).

The increasing commodification of urban land, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, can threaten women's security of tenure (Hill 2011; IIED 2006). Population growth, economic growth, and an increased demand for commercial land use has meant that land customarily held and used by low-income populations is diminishing, as are non-commercial avenues for poor populations to access land and housing (Hill 2011; IIED 2006; Owusu 2007). As land is bought up by wealthy developers, customary rights to property are being formalized and primary rights-holders, usually men, are privileged in the resulting agreements (IIED 2006).

When women do own land or property, they may not have *de facto* rights over the control, sale, or transfer of their land; instead, the men in their lives control those household decisions (Chant 2007). Because women are sometimes prohibited from owning property, they are more likely to rent, which itself is associated with heightened insecurity compared with owning, especially when renting in informal settlements (Masika, de Haan, and Baden 1997). Challenges are amplified for single, divorced, widowed, or women who identify as LGBTQ. These women often face discrimination or do not have the funds needed to secure a rental contract with a down payment (Chant 2013; Chant and Datu forthcoming).

Restrictions on women's rights to own property are additionally concerning because property can provide opportunities for entrepreneurship and income, and is often necessary to access vital financial services, such as bank loans (IFC 2011; World Bank 2013b). Women represent less than 15 percent of land and property owners worldwide and, in low-income urban communities in developing nations, only about one-third of property owners are women (Chant 2013; MirafTAB 2001). Unequal access to assets and laws prohibiting land ownership by women continue to stand as a barrier to women's economic independence.

## Access to Safe Water

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation was identified by the United Nations Human Rights Council as a basic human right in 2010 (UN HABITAT 2013), yet millions of poor urban residents still do not have piped water or cannot afford privatized water services (Bayliss and McKinley 2007). Women and girls, as part of their duty to maintain the household, undertake the responsibility of procuring clean water for cooking, cleaning, bathing, and washing. Water, however, is not readily available in poor urban areas, which are less likely to be serviced by the government. They must rely instead on inconsistent supplies provided by sources ranging from wells to standpipes to limited communal sources shared between numerous families (Bapat and Agarwal 2003).

Given the high cost of private water sources, the urban poor often rely on informal providers that can be, on their face, cheaper than private providers, though are actually sometimes more costly than what higher-income families pay for formal services (World Bank 2013a). Informal providers are also more likely to provide lower-quality water that poses serious health risks to children, potentially increasing health care costs for families and creating additional time burdens on women, who are often the providers of care to sick family members (Masika, de Haan, and Baden 1997; Sverdlík 2011; World Bank 2013a).

Trips to fetch water often also involve increased risks to women's physical and mental health. The time women spend fetching clean water from these sources can be significant and stressful. Women travel in rough conditions, sometimes over long distances, and often carry heavy containers, putting considerable stress on their physical well-being. Women

also face competition with other consumers and with male providers, creating stressful and sometimes dangerous conditions (UN HABITAT 2013).

### **Access to Sanitation**

Inadequate shelter and water provision experienced by the urban poor are intertwined with poor access to sanitation. Informal settlements often lack sanitation facilities that allow for clean, safe living environments, posing significant health risks to the urban poor (Amnesty International 2010; Joshi, Fawcett, and Mannan 2011). Exposure to human waste, decomposing rubbish, and waterborne diseases arising from poor drainage systems all increase the risks to women and families (UN HABITAT 2009a).

Private or separate bathrooms for men and women are a rarity in slums and other poor urban areas; this presents a particular challenge to women whose dignity, self-respect, and respectability in the community are threatened by having to go to the bathroom in unsanitary, public areas (Tacoli 2012; Amnesty International 2010). The absence of adequate bathrooms also means women must be concerned with personal safety, and the safety of their children, especially when toilets are located far from their home, or when they feel pressure to use the facilities at night (Tacoli 2012; Bapat and Agarwal 2003; Amnesty International 2010). Menstruation presents another level of complexity to women's lives when bathrooms lack privacy, sanitary products, or disposal facilities, compounding the social pressure which women face due to negative cultural perceptions and taboos related to menstruation (Tacoli 2012; Mahon and Fernandes 2010).

Expectations of cleanliness have long contributed to the discrimination of the urban poor (Tacoli 2012). The absence of affordable clean water with which to bathe, and the lack of a private location to wash can create considerable challenges for women whose cleanliness can affect social acceptability, the ability to get and maintain employment, and the health of oneself and one's children (Joshi, Fawcett, and Mannan 2011). Cleanliness, therefore, plays a role in poor women's ability to fully participate in society, as well as for their feelings of dignity and self-respect.

### **Access to Energy**

The lack of or limited supply of electricity, a problem heightened in slums and other informal settlements, can create additional work for women. As they are expected to provide water for their families, women are similarly expected to make up for shortfalls in energy provision. Women trek to purchase fuel or collect wood for fires; spend time making fires, heating water, and cooking; and must grocery shop daily due to the absence of reliable refrigeration (Chant 2013).

### **Barriers to Mobility of Women in Cities**

The combination of cultural norms surrounding appropriate female behavior in public with the association of women with family and home creates an environment that can be detrimental to women's ability to move freely around the city or engage in "extra-domestic activity" outside the home (Chant 2013). Challenges to mobility are heightened for women at the lowest income levels, older women, disabled women, and women who live counter to social norms, such as women who live independently or women who identify as LGBTQ.

Public transportation is usually not designed to fit women's patterns of movement (Peters 2013). Daily travel for women can include multiple trips to and from peripheral and central city neighborhoods off and on throughout the day, and often while carrying children or other heavy loads. Systems of public transportation, however, are usually designed around the needs of employed men who travel to and from city centers at peak hours of the typical workday (Beall 1996b; Peters 2013; UN HABITAT 2013). Women living in societies that restrict their movement due to cultural or religious traditions – requiring that women and men remain separate in public spaces, or impose a dress code that limits women's full access to public space – are doubly hindered in their ability to effectively access educational or labor force opportunities that would enable them to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families (Dersnah 2013).

Safety presents another barrier to the ability of women to move unencumbered around the city. The lighting or isolation of transport connections, for example, can make women more vulnerable to violence, as can risks from transportation that is overcrowded, understaffed, or unsafe for travel during off-peak hours (Patel 2010; Peters 2002; UN HABITAT

2013). Many countries have utilized women-only compartments on subways and trains, women-only bus and taxi services, and women-only parking areas as policy solutions to make women safer on public transportation. Segregating women on public transit, however, may not always be appropriate in all contexts, especially when it deepens existing gender stereotypes (Peters 2013). Additionally, the perception of safety in urban areas, especially in spaces used mostly by men, plays a significant role in women's comfort in moving around the city, a factor which is made more poignant when city residents, women in particular, distrust the police or other urban authority figures (ActionAid 2014; Sur 2014).

Safe, identifiable community spaces, ranging from parks to markets to public water sources, therefore, are critical to women's mobility and livelihoods, as are reliable avenues to get to and from those spaces. Community areas where, for example, women can meet and organize freely, are "symbolically and literally, an important step towards greater social, economic and political roles and visibility for women as active citizens in the public sphere" (Yonder and Tamaki 2010, pg. 3). Walkways and paths that are safe and connected to various areas of the city also allow women to extend their daily lives beyond their home or immediate community. City walkability can serve to enhance the wellness of residents, as well as facilitate the ability of women to safely access basic services, education, social networks, and opportunities for employment (Peters 2013; Riverson et al. 2005).

### ***Gender-Specific Effects of Climate Change***

Questions of how to build on the progress made by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) characterize today's debates surrounding the creation of a new development agenda. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have emerged as a foundational framework for this new agenda, focus on climate change as the primary, defining trend that will shape its future success (United Nations 2013). The SDGs provide a blueprint for the steps to both ensure a mitigation of the effects of climate change, and increase the resilience of rural and urban areas so they can effectively adapt to such changes over time. These steps, as highlighted by Goal 2 (Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality; United Nations 2013), must include an active focus on the effects of climate change on women, and in turn, on families and communities more broadly.

For urban areas in particular, understanding and implementing gender-sensitive urban design, planning, service delivery, and disaster preparedness is crucial to their capacity to cope with climate-related changes and natural disasters (UN HABITAT 2009a). Urban areas are particularly vulnerable due to their rapid growth in population, their location near low-elevation coastal areas and on earthquake fault-lines, the alteration of the built and natural environment without regulated planning and building standards, and the development of settlements in environmentally hazardous areas (UN HABITAT 2009b). While all urban populations face threats to their well-being in disaster situations, women, particularly poor women, face heightened risks (UN HABITAT 2015).

One widely-cited study of natural disasters between the years of 1982 and 2002 in 141 countries found that women are more likely to die as a result of natural disasters than men, or die at younger ages, and that poor women are at greater risk of being killed by disasters than their higher-socioeconomic counterparts (Neumayer and Plümper 2007). Importantly, the study also found that greater socioeconomic rights for women lessened the negative effects of disasters on women's life expectancy (Neumayer and Plümper 2007). Given the gender-specific impacts of natural disasters, and the fact that the world has seen a fourfold increase in natural disasters since 1975 (UN HABITAT 2009b), cities have a responsibility to understand the experiences of women and girls in disaster situations and build their capacity to mitigate and respond to those experiences accordingly.

### **Sources of Women's Vulnerability to Climate Change & Natural Disaster**

Shelter deprivation is just one factor that makes poor urban populations, a large share of who are women, more vulnerable to climate-related changes and disaster. Informal settlements are increasingly built in peri-urban areas located on environmentally hazardous land, such as flood zones, hilly areas, areas with poor drainage, or areas prone to landslides (Gencer 2013; UN HABITAT 2009a). The absence of planning in the building of these settlements means housing is often unsustainable, which only maximizes poor communities' vulnerability in climate-related weather events and disasters (COHRE 2008; UN HABITAT 2008). And because women, especially women who are the sole breadwinners for themselves and their families, are more likely to be poor, they are also more likely to experience shelter deprivation: in Haiti, 60 per-

cent of female-headed households, and one-third of female-headed households in Kenya and Nicaragua, experience numerous aspects of insecurity related to shelter (UN HABITAT 2008). This insecurity is amplified by the fact that these women heads-of-household also lack the financial resources needed to recover when they have lost their homes or jobs as a result of weather-related disasters (Buvinic et al. 1999; UNFPA 2009a).

Natural disaster and climate-related changes to the environment, like desertification, drought, or rising sea levels, can also disrupt the common forms of paid work in which women engage, such as home-based businesses or peri-urban agriculture, making post-disaster income generation more difficult and heightening financial insecurity (UN HABITAT 2007). Women's paid and unpaid workload is also amplified as a result of climate change and disaster, as their existing responsibility to provide resources for their family is increased due to disrupted service delivery and depleted or destroyed sources of food, water, and energy (UN HABITAT 2009a).

Women and girls, who are already limited in their ability to access social and legal protections and opportunities, are further burdened by their inability to exercise their rights or utilize aid or public services critical to their well-being during times of natural disaster (UN HABITAT 2007). For example, women are more likely to be confined to the home, sometimes unable to leave without being accompanied by a man, limiting their ability to seek a safe haven in times of crisis. Women and girls also often lack skills and information necessary for survival. Boys are much more likely to be taught how to swim or climb trees, as well as to have access to education and information about weather (UNFPA 2009a).

The social unrest following disasters can pose considerable risks to women's safety, with increased rates of sexual and gender-based violence common during and immediately after crises, both at home and in shelters or displacement camps (UN HABITAT 2009a; WHO 2005). Though this section is focused on climate-related and natural disasters, situations of conflict can similarly amplify gender-specific experiences of insecurity and heighten women's risk of experiencing violence and rape (UNFPA 2009a; UN HABITAT 2009a).

Post-disaster responses rarely pay enough attention to the gender-specific needs of women and girls, and plans to deliver and manage humanitarian relief have traditionally neglected to take into account women's voices and perspectives (Buvinic et al. 1999; Rex and Trohanis 2011; UNFPA 2009b). During Hurricane Mitch, which hit Central America in 1998, for example, women and girls were not provided sanitary products for menstruation or other resources that would have helped safeguard their reproductive health (Buvinic et al. 1999). The lack of sex-disaggregated data collection following disasters or other climate change-related events can make the gender-specific effects of such situations difficult to discern (UNFPA 2009b).

## **Women and Urban Political Participation**

The same social norms and gendered stereotypes that restrict women's opportunities and rights pose challenges for their ability to participate in social and political processes. Women who experience multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination, related not only to their gender, but to their nationality, citizenship status, minority background, sexuality, or other factors, are at an even greater disadvantage in their ability to access formal and informal political spaces (Dersnah 2013).

Women's voices, however, are needed in urban planning and policymaking to ensure cities better meet the unique needs of urban women, in addition to men's. In many cases, policymakers and urban planners are blind to the differences between women and men's uses of and contributions to the city, and how this inherently affects women's needs and experiences in cities. When women are involved in governance, either as participants in the political realm or through community organizing, advocacy, or lobbying, outcomes are likely to be better for not only women, but for communities more generally.

### ***The Impact of Women in Policymaking***

Research suggests that increasing the number of women in policymaking can increase the likelihood that lawmakers will be more responsive to women's. In a study of five Norwegian municipal elections occurring from 1975 to the early 1990s, Bratton and Ray (2002) find that as the number of women elected to municipal councils rose, so did the provision of

state-funded child care. Holman (2014) finds that, in the United States, the presence of a female mayor is correlated with greater city spending on social welfare, as well as with the likelihood of a city participating in social welfare programs. Increased welfare spending is particularly important to the well-being of U.S. women, as they are disproportionately represented among those living below the poverty line (IWPR 2015).

The presence of women policymakers has been shown to produce gender-sensitive policy results for women in developing countries contexts as well. Examining the policy outcomes related to a reservation policy for local village councils in India, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) find that the alignment of female village officials' preferences with that of their female constituencies resulted in the enactment of policies that better met the expressed concerns of women (and men): in this case, improvements to the provision of drinking water and road quality. Having higher numbers of women policymakers in India has also been found to improve satisfaction with and utilization of the city services, in particular, the police. Another study of these reservation mandates finds that the presence of women council officials was associated with an increase in reports of crimes against women and in satisfaction with police response to such crimes (Iyer et al. 2011).

Another example comes from the Philippines, where the Gabriela Women's Party has made important strides for Filipino women's political participation and rights. Employing grassroots organizing, campaigns and legislative efforts, Gabriela Women's Party has amassed a party membership of 100,000, and has achieved important electoral success for their female representatives since entering the political arena in 2001. Since their election, these women policymakers have played a significant role in the passage of women-friendly legislation, including the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act and the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act (Gabriela's Women's Party n.d.; UNIFEM 2008).

Though the aforementioned examples provide promising evidence that women's participation in policymaking can have positive implications for women and families, more research and data is needed to understand this link. The assumption that women in politics will always work for the needs of women is a simplification of the intersection of identities, priorities, and goals of elected women officials. Female policymakers may not always be aware of or responsive to the diverse needs of their female constituents, especially those of the most marginalized (UN Women 2015; Weldon 2002), or their participation and voices may be inadequate to affect meaningful change in existing systems of implementation and accountability (UNIFEM 2008).

Facilitating policy change that supports the concerns of women will ultimately demand an equal effort on behalf of both women and men. Attitudes regarding men's engagement with traditionally "women's" issues are increasingly viewing men as central partners in the advancement of gender equality. While it is not within the scope of this White Paper to fully explore how men can partner with women to further these goals, their role is integral to the sustainable establishment of gender-sensitive policy and practices.

## **Gender-Sensitive Governance**

Gender-sensitive governance is defined as both the substantive representation of women in urban decision making, and an enhanced awareness and understanding of gender-specific needs within the governance structure (Beall 1996a). It elevates the voices and participation of women in urban decision making processes, giving them agency to affect change for issues of importance to both women and men. It works to identify gaps in policy and service provision that disproportionately affect the lives of urban women, and acknowledges women's unique contributions to urban settings in the formation of policy responses. It involves the meaningful interaction between representatives of government at all levels with grassroots women's movements and civil society groups that actively advocate for women's issues and gender equality (Beall 1996a; UNIFEM 2008). And finally, gender-sensitive governance fundamentally keeps power holders and institutions of governance accountable to women, demanding dedication to the goals of gender equality in policy and planning, and ensuring that institutions of governance have the capacity to acknowledge and respond to the disparate experiences of women in cities (UNIFEM 2008).

## ***Establishing Gender-Sensitive Governance***

Establishing governance that is gender-sensitive requires certain fundamental transformations within existing relationships and institutions of public affairs to effectively eradicate the wide range of barriers to women's full participation in urban society and public affairs. As Weldon (2002) points out, the establishment of government and its systems of administration include organizational choices that favor the interests of the dominant group. These choices thereby institutionalize biases that inherently facilitate or obstruct policy based on dominant group preferences (Weldon 2002). Unsurprisingly, women often do not benefit from the institutionalization of dominant – i.e. male – policy interests and understandings. Successfully establishing gender-sensitive governance, therefore, must involve a shift in gendered power relations within the institutions of governance to avoid replicating the underlying social norms that have historically excluded women from public policy and urban decision making (Brody 2009; UNIFEM 2008; UNRISD 2005).

Establishing modes of communication that are transparent, that incorporate the voices of women and men equally, and that encourage dialogue between, within, and outside institutions is critical (Brody 2009). This communication is necessary to build the competency of institutions of governance and the people within them to respond to the particular needs of women, including a mutual acknowledgement of those needs and of how those institutions have failed in the past to meet them. Rethinking budgeting processes to ensure financial resources are allocated equitably to causes that affect women; ensuring gender parity at all levels to avoid clustering female public servants at the most vulnerable rungs of government; or equipping institutions with the capacity to apply a gender lens to policy implementation, are just a few necessary reforms needed to make good governance gender sensitive (UNRISD 2005).

Finally, gender-sensitive governance must involve women and men equally in formal and informal accountability processes. Women have often utilized collective action as an informal method of holding urban decision makers accountable, including social movements at the grassroots level, protests, and advocacy and lobbying. While important forms of social expression, however, these informal methods may be inadequate to hold authorities accountable for their public actions (UNRISD 2005). Governance systems must develop formal procedures to assess the application of a gender lens in all policy and planning decisions, and to implement policy solutions or corrections when failure is identified (UNIFEM 2008). Processes and performance indicators should be developed to hold decision makers accountable, both to their constituencies as a whole and to women in particular, and to remove them from positions of power when they have been unable to deliver results. Accountability measures should include an evaluation of progress towards meeting gender-sensitive development goals, including goals of gender equality. Women must be full participants in this oversight of decision makers and of institutional change, included in both the development of gender-sensitive accountability mechanisms and the actual determination of accountability (Brody 2009; UNIFEM 2008). This formal participation will complement the vibrant informal, grassroots action women undertake worldwide to assert their rights and demand answers from urban authorities.

## ***Implementing Gender-Sensitive Governance***

While few instances of true gender-sensitive governance exist as of yet, the implementation of Cities for CEDAW (The Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) in San Francisco provides a current example of how gender-sensitivity can be successfully integrated into the system of governance of a major metropolitan area.

In 1998, San Francisco became the first city in the world to implement the principles of CEDAW at the city level. Using the United Nations CEDAW as a guide, San Francisco's local ordinance to institute CEDAW focuses on health care, employment, economic development, educational opportunities, and violence against women and girls. Oversight for the implementation process is provided by a county-wide CEDAW task force, which is responsible for integrating gender equity and human rights principles into all local government operations, including the budget. The city developed and utilized a gender analysis tool to examine gender relations within city departments and policy bodies. This tool allowed the city to identify and remedy instances of discrimination, with the ultimate goal of ensuring the equitable distribution of government resources (Menon 2010).

The gender analysis exercise spurred changes like the institution of citywide gender-sensitive budgeting (making San Francisco the first local government in the United States to use a gender budgeting framework); the creation of a "Girls

Unit” within Juvenile Hall to provide gender-specific, trauma-focused services to girls; and the creation of the San Francisco Gender Equality Principles Initiative, which aims to engage the private sector in creating gender-sensitive workplaces. Urban planning decisions were also affected. For example, the city increased the number of curb cuts on sidewalks to facilitate the mobility of women who are more likely to walk with children in strollers (Menon 2010). While varied in focus and scale, the policies and practices developed by the City of San Francisco demonstrate that, by viewing governance through a gender-sensitive lens, a breadth of opportunities to improve women’s lived experiences in urban settings become visible.

### ***Gender-Sensitive Urban Planning and Design***

Integrating a gender-sensitive approach into processes of urban planning and design has the potential to make cities more inclusive in terms of the groups they serve and the rights of whom they respect and protect. These processes, situated in the broader context of urban governance and management, must mainstream diverse perspectives so that the development of urban policies, programs, and practices can effectively address the discrimination and exclusion experienced by traditionally marginalized groups (UN HABITAT 2012c). Given that gender plays a cross-cutting role in all such groups, raising awareness of and addressing gender-specific needs in city planning can bring benefits to a number of different sections of the urban population (UN HABITAT 2012d). Gender mainstreaming has emerged as a potential mechanism for integrating gender-sensitive awareness across levels of government, as well as throughout municipal functions, service delivery, and other elements of urban planning and design (UN HABITAT 2012c).

The Office for Gender Mainstreaming in Vienna, Austria illustrates how a city can implement gender mainstreaming across its functions, services, and decision-making processes. Applying five principles of gender mainstreaming, the City integrates gender sensitivity into all processes of urban planning and decision making in order to ensure that diverse groups can utilize city services and infrastructure equally, with a focus on women and minority groups (Damyanovic and Weikmann 2013). Improving the accessibility of public transportation, widening sidewalks, increasing the number of street lamps, and designing housing to facilitate women’s care needs are just a few of the steps that Vienna has taken as part of its wider project to promote gender-equality within urban planning (Damyanovic and Weikmann 2013; Sangiuliano 2015).

One specific effort to make the City of Vienna more gender equitable was its alteration to the design of city parks. The City found that park spaces tended to be dominated by groups of older boys, and 82 percent of girls who attempted to share these spaces reported being turned away, sometimes with insults or threats of sexual violence (Office for Gender Mainstreaming n.d.). To make Vienna’s parks more accessible to girls, the city constructed volleyball and badminton courts, sports in which girls had reported taking part, and ensured that the courts contained well-lit seating and meeting areas within sight of play areas and walkways (Damyanovic and Weikmann 2013). The use of surveys to help determine the needs of different groups gives a voice to groups who are not typically included in planning and design processes, increasing the likelihood that cities are built to be women- and children-friendly (Warner and Ruckus 2013).

### ***Gender Sensitivity for Sustainable Urbanization***

Women’s unique relationship with and use of city environments and resources can inform sustainable urban planning, and better hold governments accountable for the sustainability of the urban environment. Improving the provision of clean water and sanitation would help women avoid perilous treks to fetch water or firewood, or trips to insecure, unsanitary bathrooms, which would benefit the health and safety of the community as a whole. Facilitating women’s mobility around the city through public transportation that better fits their patterns of movement would similarly make women’s lives easier, while reducing pollution and facilitating their ability to contribute to betterment of urban society. Exposing women to clean cook stoves and other innovative technology for them to use in their daily lives can create a safer, healthier living environment for women and their families, while also alleviating environmental stress that contributes to climate change.

The efforts of women in Jinja, Uganda, the second largest urban center in the country, exemplify how actively involving women in the management of limited natural resources is an effective way to promote sustainability of the urban environment. Conflict, in-migration, and poverty have led to the collapse of Jinja’s service delivery and infrastructure, putting

unsustainable stress on the lived environment, particularly the wetlands of Lake Victoria. The Jinja Urban Women's Wetlands Project was employed to protect the wetlands that serve as the source of women's livelihoods, such as the harvesting of local vegetation for handicrafts or medicinal purposes. Women were also key players in wetland management responses. The project engaged women in environmentally-friendly approaches to their traditional income-generating activities, including new agricultural techniques, the use of alternative fuel and energy sources, and education on the wetland ecosystem (WEDO 2001).

Women also can play an important role in making themselves and their communities more resilient in times of climate change and disaster. For example, the Women's Construction Collective (WCC), a nonprofit organization in Kingstown, Jamaica, has worked both nationally and internationally to train communities in disaster-proofing construction methods, community mapping, and strategies for building communities that are resilient to disaster (Yonder and Tamaki 2010).

## **The Political Engagement of Women**

Economic and social policies contribute to stronger communities, and if they are designed with gender issues in mind, they will only contribute to stronger economies and more sustainable growth benefiting all urban inhabitants (UN Women 2015). Ensuring that women have voice and agency within their communities and are part of decision-making processes, through voting, local organizing, advocacy, or working in government, is key to making sure women's issues are at the forefront of urban policy and planning.

Yet, many women do not have the access to needed information regarding politics and decision-making processes, severely limiting their voice and agency. Women, especially poor women and women living in slums, often lack access to political spaces and have no knowledge of their political rights, including the right to vote, the right to be registered in cities and access basic service, or where to go when seeking justice. (Krishna 2006; Krishna 2002; World Bank 2013c). Women attempting to enter the political sphere also often lack a basic understanding of political networks and systems that is needed to negotiate the political landscape as a candidate (Beall 1996a; UNIFEM 2008). This lack of information and access not only keeps women from participating in political and decision-making processes, it means that, for all practical purposes, laws and rights do not exist for these women.

Accomplishing the full integration of women and women's issues into sphere of governance, however, is difficult, as "women's limited decision-making power within the household means that their relationship to the public sphere or the market is often mediated by men" (UNIFEM 2008, pg. 6). Relegated to the private, domestic domain of home and family, women are often excluded from the ability to negotiate for their interests. Gendered stereotypes extend to the idea that women do not have the capacity for leadership, decision making, or political participation. Women's exclusion from the political arena, a sphere of life reserved for public – i.e. male – actors, therefore, is just another extension of the subordination that women often experience in their own homes (Bari 2005; Dersnah 2013).

Reproduction, caregiving, household chores, and paid work take up significant time and energy, leaving women with little of either at the end of the day to devote to "extracurricular" activities such as political activism (Beall 1996a; UNIFEM 2008). As a result, and due to the fact that political and governmental systems are not set up to accommodate childrearing and other domestic responsibilities, female politicians are more likely to be older when launching their political careers (between the ages of 45-50), to spend more time caring for their families, and to have fewer children compared with their male counterparts (Rosenbluth, Kalla, Teele 2015). Yet, even with these constraints, women have found a number of entry points through which to promote a more gender inclusive policy agenda within their communities. Equality advocates have continued to demonstrate the ways in which women can access policymakers and influence decisions to make them more gender equitable.

### ***Increasing Women's Agency in Policymaking***

The power of collective action to influence policy is essential for raising women's voices in policy discussions and the cornerstone of political empowerment at the local level (Beall 1996b; UNIFEM 2008; UN Women 2015). At its most basic level, political empowerment is "people's capacity to influence policy, make demands, and call to account the state institu-

tions that impact on their lives” (Eyben 2010). Collective action enables citizens to join together in making demands on institutions of government, and women’s collective action, as will be described below, has led to substantive changes in policy and practice that more fully meet the needs of women and girls.

Women have seized upon innovative strategies to make their voices heard in public and political processes. Collective action, in the form of unions, grassroots organizing, social justice movements, and the use of technology and social media, has proved instrumental for navigating existing social, economic, and political restrictions, and for making women’s concerns known in ways that lead to meaningful policy change. This action can result in broader changes to the sociocultural setting in which women operate, such as changing the gender norms that govern women’s lives, or having sustained impacts on development goals, such as increasing women’s access to infrastructure, resources, education, or property and land (Evans and Nambiar 2013). As Evans and Nambiar (2013) note, the power of collective action to affect change stems from the “*act of associating and women’s psychosocial wellbeing*” (pg. 4), which can both build individual and group self-confidence and provide access to spaces beyond that of home and family.

## **Labor Unions**

Women’s participation in non-state organizations can complement their political participation, while also ensuring that the concerns of women and men are given equal consideration in local, regional, and national decision-making processes. Labor and trade unions, interest groups, and professional associations represent potential entry points for women to influence public discourse at multiple levels (UNDAW 2005a).

In India, the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) is the first and largest trade union for poor, self-employed women working in the informal economy. SEWA’s ultimate mission is to obtain full employment – meaning job security, income security, food security, and social security (i.e. health care, child care, and shelter) – for all its members (SEWA 2009). Formed in 1972, SEWA is now both an organization and a movement, with its members spanning urban and rural areas of the country. The union not only organizes women around common interests and goals, but provides services to its members to help them be successful both professionally and personally. SEWA provides leadership training and opportunities, a space for collective bargaining related to trade or specific issue areas, and allows women to organize into cooperatives or producer groups. SEWA also helps its members balance work and family through the provision of child care, health care, and insurance (Chen, Khurana and Mirani 2005).

From its inception, SEWA has worked to influence policy at the local, state, and national levels to achieve social and economic justice for its members. For example, the government of India now counts self-employed women workers in the national census, and SEWA’s work on microcredit and banking has effectively influenced how the government allocates credit to the poor. Involving women as leaders and as increasingly legitimized economic contributors, SEWA has successfully changed policy in ways that support women workers in the informal economy, as well as shifted national discourse surrounding the concept of full employment for informal workers (Datta 2003).

## **Grassroots Women’s Movements**

Grassroots organizing and women’s movements can support the advancement of more gender equitable policies in urban settings. The advocacy for women’s issues by organized groups of women or community members who support women’s interests has been one of the main drivers of change at the local level. Yet, women’s advocacy within their communities can sometimes maintain gendered divisions of labor, with women’s activities reinforcing their roles as caregivers simply on a larger scale (Tacoli and Satterthwaite 2013). This expansion of the “domestic” to include the improvement of neighborhoods allows women a voice in the public sphere, but it can also keep their agency limited to the neighborhood level (Haritas 2013).

When groups of women are able to come together to take on an issue essential to their health or well-being, however, they improve the chances of influencing the decision-making processes. For example, the domestic worker alliance in New York was able to mobilize nannies and caregivers to protest poor working conditions. This mobilization and uplifting of women’s voices to protest their working conditions resulted in the passing of one of the most progressive bill of rights for domestic workers worldwide (UN Women 2015). In Pakistan, the member-based organization of home-based

workers mobilized women in the community to challenge the installation of a new network of high extension power supply over their community, which is not properly constructed according to urban planning standards. After meeting with a local authority, the installation plan was changed, and the community did not have the added fear of power lines over their homes (WIEGO n.d.).

Women have also come together to create women's manifestos to deliver to politicians prior to elections to make them aware what issues are of central importance to women in those communities. This practice goes back to the early 1990s, when women in Botswana attempted to get politicians to sign onto their women's manifesto in 1993 prior to the 1994 general election. While no politicians were willing to sign the manifesto, it was widely used during the campaign, ensuring that women's issues were central to that election (UNIFEM 2008). Collective action is not only a way to magnify women's voices and bring gender equality to the forefront of political action and policymaking, it is a way to unite women from different socio-economic backgrounds. Building solidarity between women from different socio-economic backgrounds can be difficult, however, as these women rarely interact and often have little or no appreciation or understanding of the other's challenges or concerns, making establishing a unified "women's" mission more difficult (Sultana, Mohanty, and Miraglia 2013).

### **Social Justice Movements**

In their most recent report, *Progress of the World's Women*, UN Women (2015) has found that "the success of autonomous women's movements in mobilizing for women's rights critically depends on the alliances women are able to build with other social justice movements, and with sympathetic insiders in political parties, parliaments, government bureaucracies, research institutions and international organizations" (pg. 17). It is essential that any activity or civil society movement engage those who are in positions of power, which can be difficult to achieve for the most vulnerable groups. As seen in previous sections of this paper, women who are employed in the informal economy often lack basic protections and rights and are usually the least likely to have voice and agency in decision-making processes. Civil society organizations and special interest groups have been central to these groups of women gaining increased protection for those who work in the most vulnerable occupations.

As the Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) Network has shown, advancing women's rights is contingent upon the active engagement of informed workers with city bureaucrats, politicians, and private sector actors. WIEGO is a network focused on building the capacity of home-based workers, street vendors, waste pickers, and domestic workers to advocate for policy change that better supports the livelihoods of informal workers, particularly women (WIEGO 2015a). In Accra, Ghana, WIEGO facilitated a health policy dialogue between civil society organizations interested in health, organizations of *kayayei* – head porters who are traditionally young women migrants – and representatives from the National Health Insurance Authority and the Ghanaian Ministry of Health to discuss the *kayayei's* inability to easily use the National Health Insurance Scheme (NIHS). This dialogue resulted in a reduced annual premium of \$2.50 for health services and a special registration event for *kayayei*, at which 1,000 *kayayei* were able to register for the NIHS (WIEGO 2015b).

Similarly, in Bogotá, Columbia, the Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá, a network of informal waste picker organizations including many women, filed a lawsuit challenging the city's announcement of a public bidding system that would take recycling away from waste pickers. The lawsuit opened the door for the association to develop a strategy for the inclusion of waste pickers in the formal waste management system, which was adopted after months of negotiations between the waste picking community and city officials (WIEGO 2015c).

### **Digital Technologies and Social Media**

Ensuring that women have access to public spaces includes utilizing the increasingly important digital sphere. Researchers have noted the increasingly important role of nontraditional forms of political participation and civic engagement, including internet campaigns, which blur the lines between the public and the private (Dersnah 2013). While this new form of citizen engagement has led to some censorship of the internet, the emergence of new technology and increased internet access means women are finding new avenues through which to exert their voice and agency. Posting online

through forums such as blogs and social media allows women's voices to enter the larger public sphere despite cultural restrictions on physical movement, which otherwise limit and silence their voices (Dersnah 2013).

The digital space has been utilized by women to more effectively promote gender equality, as can be seen through the Iranian female blog community known as "Weblogestan." This community of female bloggers includes journalists based in Tehran, nongovernmental activists, academics, and social critics, and covers issues that range from personal likes and dislikes to gender equality and politics (Skalli 2006). In 2008, the "Weblogestan" bloggers began to discuss their bodies, sexuality, and the limits of freedom of expression for women in Iran, challenging traditional cultural and religious norms that restrict Iranian women (Amir-Ebrahimi 2008).

The internet, via sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and online petition sites, has become an effective medium for political participation and community organizing, especially for women. In fact, "the gender gap was reversed in 2002, with women now being significantly more active than men in acts such as signing petitions and joining boycotts and protests" (Dersnah 2013). Women activists in Egypt used the internet to mobilize support for the 'Free Mona' campaign to bring pressure to the Egyptian government to free Mona El-Tawahy, who was arrested in Tahrir Square. In order to ensure that they had the ability to demonstrate in a public space, these women also used texting, micro-blogging, and social networking to help prevent violence against demonstrators and to address the issue of women's safety (Dersnah 2013).

As women's activism in Egypt shows, mobile technology is an important part of mobilizing and organizing for women. In 2007, the constitutional commission in Kosovo was persuaded to allow women to speak about gender concerns with regard to drafting the new constitution. However, the activists were only allowed 48 hours to mobilize. Because of mobile technology, these advocates were able to mobilize 250 women to speak at the forum, many of whom stressed the importance of considering women's issues. This resulted in Article 7, which ensures women's full participation in all aspects of public life in Kosovo (GSMA 2010).

Increasing access and decreasing costs to ICT has brought new risks to women and girls. In particular, the internet created a new space for women's sexual exploitation and has enabled the creation of unregulated online communities where violence and misogyny is the norm. The anonymity provided by the internet, which contributes to the increase of gender-based online harassment, has led to more questions surrounding the need to monitor and govern the cyber sphere (Hughes 2002; UNDAW 2005b). However, technology can also help identify and address instances of harassment. In Egypt, Harassmap maps out instances of harassment reported by women via the internet or their mobile phones (Harassmap n.d.). Apps such as SafetiPin, used in India, Indonesia, and Colombia, and Swaziland's U-Report, are free mobile tools to report violence, collect data and map reports of gender-based violence through public crowd-sourcing (Viswanath and Basu 2015). These mobile safety tools collect data on public incidences and where they took place, as well as raise awareness, inspire activism among women and girls, and refer victims to support services. As with physical spaces, cyber spaces and communities can be utilized as a tool for female protection and empowerment.

Not all women have access to these technological resources, however. While internet access and phone ownership is generally higher in urban areas, the poorest and least educated women and women who do not work outside the home are the least likely to have access to mobile or internet technology (GSMA 2010; UNIFEM 2008). Additionally, a persistent gender divide in technology access and ownership exists throughout low- and middle-income countries. Women are 21 percent less likely to own a mobile phone than men globally (GSMA 2010). Furthermore, there are still many parts of the world which limit people's ability to use emerging technology as a means of increased political participation.

### ***Formal Political Participation of Women***

Increasing the participation of women in formal political processes is the most obvious way to raise women's voices in politics and policymaking. Doing so, through both voting and running for elected office, can help ensure the inclusion of a broader range of backgrounds and viewpoints in policymaking processes, and strengthen the position of women's interests and voices in political discourse (Beall 2010; UNIFEM 2008; UN Women 2015; Wängnerud 2009).

Increasing the number of women in government can be critical for the sustainability and acceptance of women's participation in the political realm. Research suggests that the "role model effect," or the observation of women successfully gaining entrance into the political sphere, plays a potential role in inspiring political interest and activism in girls, motivating women to run for political office, and increasing the likelihood that major political parties will field women candidates (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2015; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Gilardi 2014).

### **Voter Engagement**

Voting represents the most basic means of formally exerting voice and agency in the political process. Women's engagement in the democratic process through voting gives individual women the opportunity to voice their opinions regarding policy and to keep politicians accountable to their concerns. When women come together as voters, they can more effectively push a more gender-inclusive agenda and establish themselves as a legitimate voting bloc with the power to affect election outcomes. The gender gap in voting has become more prevalent in recent years, with women voting differently from men and making gender equality issues central to the political process. This is especially true in developed countries, where women are emerging as defined constituencies that raise their issues to the forefront of elections (UNIFEM 2008).

Barriers to women's full participation in electoral processes do exist, and include barriers to voter registration, lack of knowledge or access to information regarding voting processes, or limited time or ability to travel to polling locations. Making voter registration easily accessible to all citizens, either by bringing voter registration processes to slums, marketplaces, and urban centers, or making sure that women have accessible transportation to voter registration offices and voting centers, can help ensure all women have the opportunity to participate. For example, in Liberia, women's groups have helped provide transportation to women who worked in marketplaces to voter registration office that were far from the markets to ensure that women had the opportunity to vote (UNIFEM 2008).

### **Gender-Equitable Government**

Some countries are vastly ahead of others when it comes to the representation of women in elected office. No one type governing system has proven most effective in promoting women in politics. Countries with the largest numbers of women in office span all levels of development, democratic freedom and liberties, and can be found in all regions of the world. In fact, all regions of the world, excluding the Pacific, have made at least a five percentage point increase in the averages of women in parliament in the past decade. The highest increases have been in the Arab states, mainly as a result of the recent improvements in Algeria and Saudi Arabia and the changes in Morocco, Libya, and Iraq from the early 2000s (International IDEA, IPU, SU 2013).

In fact, 37 countries have reached the 'critical mass' of 30 percent women in the lower house of parliament mandated by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1990. Of these, 30 (81 percent) use some type of gender quota as a means to reach a more gender inclusive government – 14 use legislated candidate quotas, 10 use voluntary party quotas, and 6 use a reserved seat system (International IDEA, IPU, SU 2013). Some scholars have questioned the 'critical mass' threshold of 30 percent, instead stating that a more nuanced understanding of substantive representation of women should be used to examine how women's interests are promoted in policymaking, which actors are passing legislation, and what makes their actions successful (Bratton 2005; Childs and Krook 2008; Dahlerup 2006). Yet, even with this critique of the 'critical mass' threshold, all scholars agree that getting more women into elected office will only benefit countries and local communities.

### **Gender Quotas**

Factors that impact outcomes for women candidates include the "informal norms involved in the selection process, perceptions of women as politicians and the political will to change women's historical under-representation through, among others, the use of candidate quotas" (International IDEA, IPU, SU 2013, pg. 20-1). Quotas thus far have proven to be the most effective means of getting women into elected office. The Americas have seen a steady increase in the number of women in parliament – going from 18.4 percent in 2003 to 24.8 percent in 2013 – mainly as a result of the widespread use of gender quotas. Additionally, places where gender quotas have been discontinued have seen a drop in

women's representation in elected office. In Egypt, for example, the discontinued use of gender quotas led to women's representation dropping from 13 percent to 2 percent (International IDEA, IPU, SU 2013).

There is "no one size fits all" for quota systems, and some are more effective than others, but all seem to be effective at getting women into elected office. Rather than reserving a certain number of seats for women in government, quota systems will often have legislative candidate quotas that require a minimum number of candidates are women. Others have additional requirements for the alternation of female and male candidates on candidate lists. Attention should be paid to gender quota law, given that there are often barriers to their proper implementation due to the language of the law, where the law originates, and the guidelines for implementation written into the law (Hubbard 2014).

Gender quotas alone will not remove the structural, institutional, cultural, and societal barriers facing women in politics. One area in which women do better than men, however, is regarding their perceived level of corruption. Both women and men perceive women as less corrupt, and therefore, in places with high levels of government corruption, women may be seen as preferable candidates for election (Barnes and Beaulieu 2014).

### **Equal Access to Resources and Opportunity for Women Politicians**

Entering the realm of politics and policy demands a level of political literacy that enables one to navigate the existing networks of entrenched relationships and interests that have traditionally governed who can and cannot participate in decision making for the city. Acquiring this literacy requires social know-how, social networks, and control over resources. Women, historically excluded from ownership of the social, economic, and political resources of the city, must overcome such barriers to gain an in-depth understanding of the institutions of government and governance, as well as of the political dynamics governing relationships and power structures (Beall 1996a; UNIFEM 2008). Women are likely to enter elected office with limited or no political experience, and often lack the confidence, skills, and connections to resources that men do (Hubbard 2014). Training on rules and regulations, codes of conduct, among other issues would help build the capacity of women candidates and elected officials.

Women-only political parties with a gender-specific agenda can help promote gender equality and women's interests at the party level, as well as within legislative agendas, while also serving as a mechanism to remedy the gender disparities some women politicians experience within mainstream political parties. Iceland's all-women party, formed in 1983, received about ten percent of the votes, and since then, women's political parties have formed in Sweden, India, the Philippines, and Afghanistan, among other countries (UNIFEM 2008). In the Philippines, GABRIELA, the largest alliance of progressive women's organizations, was able to form as its own political party thanks to the "Party List System" law passed in 1995 aimed at increasing the representation of excluded groups in government. GABRIELA has continued to be a force within Philippine politics, playing a major role in the passage of pro-women legislation and continuing to file legislative proposals to promote the equal rights of women in Filipino society (UNIFEM 2008).

Not all women's parties, however, have achieved long-lasting or widespread success. Many fail because of their inability to gain independent legitimacy and are seen as a means of mobilizing women voters using the ideology of preexisting political parties. For example, the Women of Russia party, formed in the early 1990s, was able to win 23 seats in the 1993 National Parliamentary elections. In 1995, however, the party came up short of the 5 percent threshold of votes required by the proportional representation system, winning just 3 seats in total. The ultimate demise of the Women of Russia party stems from its inability to run a large-scale campaign – they were only able to run candidates in 20 of the 224 single-member districts – and vague programmatic messaging (Ishiyama 2003).

Some women's groups, such as EMILY's List in the United States, focus on campaign finance and campaign finance law enforcement. Women usually start campaigns with less money and fewer access points to financial resources (Baer and Hartmann 2014; Political Parity 2014). Thus, organizations like EMILY's list work to level the playing field by bolstering financial support for women candidates. At the same time, in places where campaign finance laws are weakly enforced, women are at an even greater disadvantage (UN Women 2015). In Sierra Leone, for example, buying votes from your constituency is the norm – one that undermines democracy, and is expensive and sometimes prohibitive to women's political involvement as a result (Castillejo 2009).

Ensuring the safety of women candidates is key to guaranteeing that they are able to participate in the political sphere. Violence is sometimes used as a tool to keep women from entering the political arena. Female candidates in Kenya during the 2007 elections, for example, experienced instances of electoral gender-based violence that included beatings, sexual attacks and threats, sexual harassment, and murder (UN Women, Embassy of Sweden, and USAID 2013). In Sierra Leone, supporters of female minister and district candidates were beaten at campaign events to force the candidates to cease campaigning in public, in addition to collective intimidation and threats from opposition parties against public appearances (Castillejo 2009).

Women still face barriers once they are in office, including high turnover rates of elected women officials (Beall 1996a). In a study of 31 upper- and middle-income democracies, Schwindt-Bayer's (2005) findings suggest that female officials' sometimes short political life relates to the retention of male incumbents: the more male incumbency in a race, the less likely women are to be electorally successful. In addition, once in public office, women are typically concentrated in issue areas that are largely social in nature, such as those related to education, women, children, or the family (Dersnah 2013; UNIFEM 2008). While not all women political figures focus solely on women's issues, they are often linked to issues important to women and families once in office.

### **Women at the Subnational Level**

Local governments are uniquely positioned to have the most impact on women's lives, making it essential that their voices are included (UCLG 2013). However, research that examines women's political participation at the subnational level is lacking. While some regional and country specific studies exist, many gaps remain in the available data. Additionally, where the data are available, drawing comparisons between countries and regions is still difficult, as the types of government vary greatly from region to region (UNDP 2010). The first step in gaining a better understanding of women's political participation in urban areas is to do more research about the number of women running for local offices and holding positions in local government, including mayoral positions, and to better understand the multitude of barriers preventing higher representation and participation.

The data that does exist show that, though there has been an increase in women in government at the national level, this increase has not been seen locally. In Latin America, for example, the gains that women have seen at the national levels have not been replicated in regional and local governmental bodies (Llanos and Sample 2008). In fact, globally women make up only 5.1 percent of capital city mayors, 6.1 percent of mayors in cities with over 1 million inhabitants, and only 20 percent of city councilors worldwide (UCLG 2013).

Similar to the national level, countries with subnational quotas, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India, have higher political participation of women than those that do not (UNDP 2010). In fact, in these three countries, because of the use of quotas at the subnational level, there is a higher representation of women at the subnational level than at the national level (UNDP 2010). Even with the use of quotas, women in local governments are more likely to be found at the council level and are less likely to hold leadership positions, such as council chairs or mayors (Llanos and Sample 2008; UNDP 2010). Quotas are an effective means of getting women into local government, but must be supported by a multitude of other initiatives, as "women tend to engage in social activism that, paradoxically, does not translate into adequate political representation" (Llanos and Sample 2008, pg. 25).

Women's lack of political knowledge and understanding of political processes presents a barrier to their running for and winning local office. While there are sometimes resources and training for women running for national office, in many countries this same support is not provided to women at the local level (Danielson, Eisenstadt and Yelle 2013; NDI 2015; UNDAW 2005a). Even when women do run, they usually receive less support overall than their male counterparts, including difficulty accessing political power holders within political parties and major donor networks, and the lack of child care. In fact, women receive fewer resources, not just from political parties, but from their families and communities, making it more difficult to wage successful campaigns or to take on the many responsibilities of office (NDI 2015). This is especially true for women who struggle to provide for their families, as the many demands on their time leaves them unable to participate in politics. Allocating a specific percentage of financial resources to women may be one way to help more women enter local government, as happens in some countries like Mexico (Llanos and Sample 2008), as would supports like child care. The creation of networks and associations of women in local government from different municipali-

ties and regions would also facilitate women's political participation, allowing women to learn from each other and strengthening any collective interests and demands (Hubbard 2014; Jayal 2005).

The inability to access resources also restricts women once in office. Local government bodies are often under-resourced and women's contributions often go unpaid or women are confined to membership status rather than given leadership positions. Additionally, women are frequently pigeonholed into issues associated with women and families; in essence perpetuating the feminization of "women's" issues instead of engaging women policymakers more broadly (Chant and Datu forthcoming; Beall 2010). Women in local governments also face larger constraints due to existing power dynamics. In India, for example, votes of no-confidence and rescheduling of meetings without the knowledge of women members diminish female involvement in local decisions (Jayal 2005). Again, training programs that equip women with knowledge of laws, procedures, and programs of local governments is key to women's full participation as elected leaders.

### **Bringing Women's Voices to the Forefront**

Simply increasing the number of women in office is insufficient to achieve meaningful progress towards gender equality in policy and practice. As stated by Macaulay (2005), "differing life experiences, multiple social positionalities, and adherence to various political or religious doctrines all shape how women – as much as men – come to define what they believe is in women's 'best interest'" (pg. 4). Strategies do exist, however, to enhance the substantive participation of women in political office, as well as facilitate collective action among women policymakers that can help make the passage of women-friendly policy and legislation a reality.

Parliamentary caucuses can allow elected women to reach across party lines and join their voices together to advocate for issues central to women, while also serving as an entry point for engagement with civil society (Beall 1996b; Macaulay 2005). The *bancada feminina*, the women's caucus in Brazil's national congress, for example, has successfully worked to pass a number of laws advancing women's rights, including issues such as maternity and paternity leave, the rights of women prisoners, reproductive rights, and gender-based violence (Macaulay 2005). Comprised of women from across the political spectrum, and with varying levels of prior political experience, the *bancada feminina* has effectively established itself as a change agent within Brazil's national government. The caucus's work with feminist nongovernmental groups on key legislation exemplifies how collaboration between government bodies, women legislators, and key civil society actors can lead to meaningful change – both for the lives of women on the ground, and for the empowerment of women in elected office (Macaulay 2005).

Bureaucratic units and civil service offices can also play a key role in coordinating and providing oversight for the implementation of policy that aims to achieve goals of gender equality. Chile's National Office for Women's Affairs (Servicio Nacional de la Mujer, or SERNAM), led by a Minister of State who participates in cabinet meetings, exemplifies how a well-positioned bureaucratic unit dedicated to the concerns of women can effectively influence policymaking (UNIFEM 2008). Most women's units or machineries, however, are located on the periphery of governments and lack the resources needed to bring about large-scale change, existing as "institutional expressions of the low priority accorded to gender issues" (UNIFEM 2008, pg. 28).

Increasing the number of women who work in bureaucratic units and civil service offices at national and local levels can additionally help bring women's issues to the forefront of policy implementation. Gender quotas for the civil service in both Bangladesh and Timor-Leste have increased the presence of women, and some studies show that greater numbers of female civil servants lead to greater responsiveness to women's needs (Zafarullah 2000). Most of the civil service positions filled by women, however, are entry-level positions, and more commitment is needed to advancing women to managerial positions at all levels of the civil service, including local government (UN Women 2015).

## Conclusion

Cities worldwide need to develop the capacity to provide for their growing urban populations, populations that do and will continue to include a large number of women. As cities respond to this growth, they must also work to reform approaches to urban policy and planning so that women and girls can better seize upon the opportunities offered to them in cities, such as greater availability of paid work, shifting gender norms and expanded independence, and access to services, infrastructure, and technologies that can empower participation in the social, economic, and political spheres of urban life. When successfully implemented, the principles and tools of gender-sensitive urban governance and development can more effectively meet the diverse needs of women, as well as impact other traditionally-disadvantaged groups that are often excluded from the resources of the city. Gender-sensitive urban planning also holds particular promise for goals of sustainability, another key component of city capacity to support urban populations in the long-term. Sustainability can imply both the longevity of change, and the effective maintenance and protection of the urban environment. The institutional, relational, and normative transformations needed to establish gender-sensitive governance can include the integration of urban sustainability goals into gender-aware urban development.

As the world continues to experience rapid urbanization, it is essential to recognize the opportunities available to urban women and the challenges they face in availing themselves of such opportunities. This White Paper has identified many of those challenges, such as the lack of labor and citizen rights, which reduce women's access to better employment opportunities, as well as to urban services; the lack of equal access to education and property rights; and the protracted gendered division of labor which holds women responsible for much of family care and domestic work, while also spending increasing time in paid work. The White Paper also, both implicitly and explicitly, explores how a better-designed and better-resourced urban infrastructure which acknowledges care-related responsibilities and addresses women's needs for physical, emotional, and economic security can be a true boon to women's empowerment in cities, as well as to the well-being of families and communities more broadly. Most importantly, it highlights the imperative for urban planning and design to build on an understanding of the specific experiences of the female urban population, and identifies political and social processes for ensuring that women's needs are identified and addressed in their diversity.

Yet many questions remain unanswered, not least when trying to prepare for the future. For example, what will work look like in 2050 when two-thirds of the population live in urban settings? What are the political dimensions of the systems needed to support employers and employees? Throughout the process of answering these questions, women's status in cities must be comprehensively tracked to truly understand how this period of rapid urbanization affects their lives. Better data collection would help to fill existing gaps in research, such as the lack of data on women in local government; the absence of accurate and reliable information on women in the informal sector; and insufficient knowledge of gender-specific roles in and vulnerabilities to climate change. Broadening urban understanding of women's lived experiences is central to acknowledging their contributions to cities in the formation of policy responses, and to finding effective ways to involve women as substantive actors within urban decision making.

Expanding women's access to decision makers and to positions of power within cities is crucial to ensuring that cities are able to serve and protect the human rights of all groups equally. Increasing women's voice and agency must become central to the establishment of good governance, which includes the interaction between government actors at all levels, with grassroots and civil society organizations, as well as active efforts to increase the number of female elected officials and civil servants. In this increasingly technological world, use of mobile technology and the internet will play an important role in expanding women's empowerment and agency within the public and political sphere. If cities can effectively provide the space for women's voice, agency and action, and integrate gender-sensitivity into urban policy, planning, and development, cities will be better equipped to address the needs of all its residents, and to meet the challenges of the future.

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