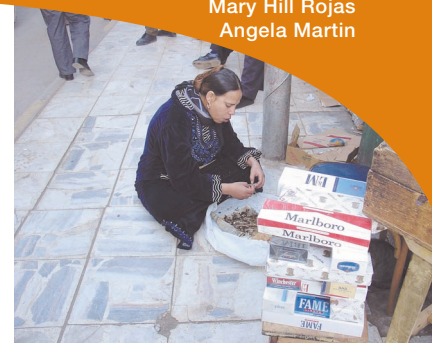


Gender Makes the Difference

- High population densities, poor urban planning, marginal environments and skewed gender relations can create many problems for urban women, young and old, single and married. Poor quality housing and inefficient stoves generate more air pollution and force women to use more fuel than would be necessary under sustainable and equitable living conditions.
- Women's workloads are increased by the excessive amount of time they have to spend collecting potable water and fuel. Both men and women's health is endangered by high rates of violence; exposure to air, water, food contaminants and vermin; lack of sanitation facilities and solid waste disposal services and exposure to infectious diseases.
- Women bear heavy responsibilities related to the urban environment as they are the sole head of many urban households. Female-headed households typically are poorer than those where two or more adults share responsibilities.
- Towns and urban settlements in rural settings often have a disproportionate number of households headed by women, who have moved to the city with their children in order to access schools and health services. The agricultural and forest experiences of these women can be a great asset to programs such as urban agroforestry, reforestation and safe water management.
- Urban renewal/development activities and pro-business/industry policies often focus on land where the poorest households are living illegally. Displacement and resettlement disproportionately affect more female-headed households, as they tend to be the poorest of the poor. While urban renewal and development could benefit women and their families in the medium-long term, planners, developers and city officials should ensure that these households are not pushed further into poverty due to such activities.
- Credit policies of financial institutions, even those targeted to the poor, often exclude women because they do not have the required collateral of a secure land title or a reliable male co-signer for loans, preventing them from owning their houses or developing enterprises. These gender barriers to financial support could prevent or slow women's investments in wells for drinking water, reforestation or other improvements in managing natural resources.
- Home-based energy saving technologies have primarily benefited richer women who can afford these technologies, and have not always been suited to the energy consumption patterns of poorer women.
- Transportation policies focused on private cars and buses with daytime schedules often favor formal sector workers, who are primarily men. Women and the poor more often work irregular hours in informal jobs that are not located close to main roads.
- Women are referred to as dual consumers because they purchase for themselves and for their household needs, including those of their family members. In urban areas, they make important environmentally related choices with regard to fuel, food, clothing, housing, cleaning supplies, transport and appliances.

Women and men experience cities differently because of their access to different resources, social networks and even physical spaces. There are also differences among women and men, due to their economic status, family composition, and length and location of residence in cities. For example, a woman in Saudi Arabia cannot cross the street to her neighbor's house without being accompanied by a male escort.



FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CAN BE FOUND AT:

Urban Governance
www.gdrc.org/u-gov

Institute for Development Studies – ELDIS
www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports.html

International Organization for Migration
www.iom.int

United Nations Conference on Human Settlements
www.unchsh.org

World Bank Infrastructure, Urban Development and Gender
www.worldbank.org/gender/resources/research

SOURCES:

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Urban men and women face different issues because of their different roles, activities and needs. Most of the needs of women, even from different economic levels, are seldom addressed by urban policy and planning activities. In addition, women are under-represented as advocates, professionals and elected and appointed municipal officials. Even if women have an influence on economies (as in the coastal cities of Benin and Ghana), they do not have political power. Until gender equity and gender relations are addressed and opportunities are expanded for urban women, sustainable development strategies are unlikely to alter the lives of poor families.

Stakeholders of gender-related urban environmental programs are extremely diverse. Gender and social justice groups may prioritize rights to urban natural resources, access to credit and extension services, and health concerns related to sewage and sanitation. Because of economic interests, they may also find overlapping interests with municipal economic development, industry, tourism, renewable energy/energy efficiency, wetlands, drylands and forestry advocates. By working on gender components of land reform and credit policies, urban environmental programs can increase the productivity and sustainability of urban agriculture and meet the housing needs of some of the poorest households. Gender and urban environment advocates can also find common interests on health agendas, particularly those related to indoor air pollution and industrial water pollution.

WHY GENDER MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

- With better waste disposal and safe drinking water, there have been improvements in household health and energy savings (for example less need to boil water.) As women are primarily responsible for sanitation in urban homes, these improvements particularly benefit women of all ages.
- Campaigns to reduce crime have better results when women have been actively involved.
- Both household energy expenditures and rates of respiratory and eye disease have been lowered as a result of reduction in indoor air pollution from improved cooking technology and fuel substitution.
- Women have gained greater access to housing, improved their housing (including water and sewage-related improvements) and started or expanded businesses with modified collateral requirements for credit.
- The families of men who have participated in workshops on masculinity and reproductive health experience less domestic violence and have fewer children.
- The creation of municipal environment funds that earmark funds for civil society initiatives contribute to gender equity.
- Urban planning decisions have included broader and more diverse perspectives and needs, and design choices have better reflected women's needs and preferences (e.g., better lighting to reduce violent crimes, more flexible transport, neighborhood toilet and bathing facilities).
- Community and national regulations and enforcement such as household energy use and transportation, have become more effective through broader consultation with female consumers and users.
- Disaster mitigation, relief and reconstruction strategies have been able to tap women's expertise and creativity.
- Municipal staff and elected officials have become more aware and capable of responding to the needs of all urban constituents.

TO CONTACT US:

Lorena Aguilar,
Global Senior Gender Advisor
IUCN - The World Conservation Union
E-mail: lorena.aguilar@iucn.org
www.iucn.org

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