What are the barriers to FEE associated with urbanisation? What interventions have addressed these?

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Overview

Urbanization offers opportunities for furthering gender equality, but the challenges of urban life also have gender dimensions such that women are often less able to take advantage of these potential benefits. For example, much of the impact of poor housing conditions and services in urban settlements where the poor live are absorbed by women's time. At the same time, the monetised nature of the urban economy means that women – like men – are under pressure to earn income. These competing obligations can result in a situation of 'time poverty' for urban women. Other gender dimensions include that home based workers – who are mostly women – are particularly impacted by poor living conditions at home. Some studies have shown that women headed households are more likely to live further from the economic core and therefore have less access to the city's opportunities.

Mobility is a key issue which enables people to take advantage of the opportunities of urban life. Women's travel patterns in the city may be quite different from men's due to their competing responsibilities, but their needs are less widely considered in transport planning, and they often have less access than men to intermediate transport technologies such as bicycles or handcarts. Personal safety in public spaces and on public transport offers a particularly stark form of inequality in urban areas as GBV and sexual harassment is common in these spaces in many parts of the world.

Urban working conditions also have gender dimensions: they differ, on average, for women and men due to women's concentration in informal sector activities and particularly in low status, low security activities such as waste picking, domestic work and street vending. Women workers in the informal sector are likely to have some issues relating to working conditions in common with men in similar situations, and some distinct issues. One multi-city study has found that the most important driver of work conditions among street vendors related to the abuse of authority in urban governance. Basic infrastructure was also seen as important, and women had less access to some types of infrastructure (such as storage facilities).

Evidence on what kind of interventions can support gender equality in urbanisation processes is not very well developed – most examples offer promising directions rather than evaluated impact assessments. For example, although policy level action has been taken to integrate a gender perspective into infrastructure projects, there is little information about actual gender aware interventions or their impacts. On the other hand there is scattered evidence of how – intentionally or not – women can benefit from infrastructure inputs via positive impacts on their home and work conditions and opportunities.

A number of recent interventions have focused on involving women in training for maintenance and other roles in infrastructure projects as a way of ensuring that women benefit more equally from them. The alternative energy sector has been particularly active in involving women in associated business opportunities – such as through direct sales networks to disseminate products.

Initiatives working with women street and market vendors also offer interesting examples of how women's working conditions can be improved. These usually include work on governance – such as establishing liaison with municipal authorities; sanitation – such as systems to maintain hygiene; and basic infrastructure – such as storage space and sun/rain-proof shelter. These kinds of projects aiming to improve conditions of work also emphasise women's organising, collective action, and supporting women's leadership in worker associations and governance bodies. Collective action can empower women to confront governance issues as well as to demand practical improvements.

Organising women in market locations has also sometimes been the focus for interventions aiming to reduce gender based violence (GBV) in public spaces. Other projects tackling GBV include working with public transport operators; community level lighting projects; and safety audit processes to assist urban planning, including via mobile phone app.

1   Gender issues in urbanisation processes

Several opportunities are available during transitions to urban life to further gender equality and women's empowerment, including an association of urbanisation with lower fertility levels, women's increased independence, and greater access to employment opportunities (Tacoli 2012). It has also been observed that the mixed populations in urban areas tend to foster tolerance of differences; and can undermine assumptions about gender differences and cultivate support for equality (Evans, 2014; 2015; Pozarny 2016). For businesses – potentially including women's businesses – urban growth and the associated infrastructure development can also be a positive force (Roever 2014).

However, the benefits of urbanisation are not necessarily equally distributed; commentators note that urban poverty in low income countries is growing (Schwarz 2015); that urban residents are more dependent on cash incomes to meet basic needs; and that conditions in cities often present extreme challenges for the urban poor. Accommodation is inadequate and expensive; the areas where the poor live and work often have limited access to basic infrastructure and services; good mobility is usually essential to be able to respond to the city's opportunities; and exposure to environmental hazards is high, as are rates of crime and violence (Tacoli 2012). Each of these challenges has a gender dimension, such that women are often particularly thwarted in how far they are able to take advantage of the potential benefits of urban life (Tacoli 2012). These result, variously, in gender unequal access to decent work; unequal access to services; unequal workloads and distinct personal security concerns for women (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016; Tacoli, 2012; Reichlin & Shaw, 2015).

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1.1   Living conditions and time poverty

Women's greater responsibility for domestic spaces mean that they are generally expected to absorb much of the impact of poor housing conditions and services in the parts of the city – often slum and temporary settlements – where poor families live. Tacoli (2012) and others emphasise that the urban economy cannot be properly understood without an appreciation of this unpaid, 'care economy'. Women's obligations in urban slums may include managing not just the household itself and caring for its occupants, but also maintaining the public or shared spaces around the household – in Accra, Ghana, for example, women are considered primarily responsible for maintaining the spaces between family compounds (Tacoli 2012). Maintaining basic hygiene can be taxing and take time when conditions are poor in crowded living areas. When services – such as water supply – are absent or poor, it is women's time that will be drawn on to wait in queues for water. Distance from shared latrines is a common problem in slum areas which has time implications – in Nairobi, for example, women are reported to have to walk more than 300m to a toilet (Amnesty International, 2010).

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These 'extra' demands on women's time in domestic work and meeting the needs of dependents are added to the increased compulsion in the urban economy to earn income. Many women face a constant struggle to fulfil both paid activities and domestic obligations, creating a strongly and specifically gendered characteristic of urban poverty in 'time poverty' (Gammage 2010; Schwarz 2015; Pozarny 2016; Chopra 2015). Chant (2007) notes that women's days may involve 17 working hours in and outside the home and argues that many urban areas have seen a 'feminisation of responsibility and/or obligation' as pressure on women to cover for poor urban living conditions and maintain their caring responsibilities as well as earn income increases.

Other gender dimensions include that home based workers (mostly women) are particularly impacted by poor home conditions, and that in some cities, women headed households are more likely to live further from the economic core.

Others have noted that particularly for home-based workers – a group which is disproportionately represented by women – the condition of the home, as well as its location, has a direct impact on their income generating potential as well as on their working conditions (Mohan and Biswas 2016).

In some locations (e.g. South Africa), it has also been found that women headed households are more likely to be located in outlying areas of the city and in older, more stable residential localities – which may be safer, and less 'turbulent' but are further from the economic core where better employment opportunities might be found. In Cross's (2009) study, men's households were found to have, on average, a significant spatial advantage in economic access.

1.2   Mobility and transport

Issues of access to employment and urban services are clearly affected by other dimensions of infrastructure. Mobility in cities has been found to have strong gendered dimensions – not simply due to women's restricted mobility arising from domestic ties or family control, but also due to their mobility patterns and how these are – or are not – serviced. Masika with Baden (1997) accumulate evidence that there are significant differences between the travel patterns of men and women, and that women are often responsible for the majority of non-work trips require for a household, as well as work-related trips. They also find that women are more likely than men to combine several purposes into one trip in order to fulfil their different types of responsibility. Chant (2013) describes this as 'patching together' activities separated across urban spaces, such as income earning, shopping and child care (see Pozarny 2016).

Women's travel patterns in the city may be quite different from men's due to their competing responsibilities but their needs are less widely considered in transport planning, and they often have less access to intermediate transport technolgies such as cycles or handcarts.

Other commentators cite that women in many urban centres are the main users of public transport (Gaynor and Jennings 2004), even while the public transport sector rarely includes women in decision making roles nor explicitly seeks their views as the basis for design.

In addition, in Africa in particular, women as load bearers perform a transportation function without the assistance of technology. At the same time, Masika with Baden (1997) cite evidence that in sub-Saharan Africa there is a reluctance by men to allow intermediate means of transport (such as cycles or handcarts) to be used for 'women's work.' Women petty traders in urban Ghana were found to face harassment in response to their use of bicycles as a means of transport.

1.3   Gender based violence (GBV) and harassment

Violence and fear of violence presents a major form of urban inequality which can prevent women from accessing the economic opportunities the city may have to offer (Schwarz 2015). While GBV also takes place within the home, in cities it is also common in public spaces, including on public transport. Tacoli (2012) cites studies finding that in Bangladesh, 87% of women have faced harassment in bus terminals and train stations; in Sao Paolo Brazil, a woman is assaulted in a public space every 15 seconds; in Egypt, 83% of women experience sexual harassment on the street and half of these experience it daily. Closer to home, a study in Nairobi found that latrine facilities in slums present a security risk for women since most women live far from a toilet and also consider it unsafe to walk alone in the settlement after 7pm. (Amnesty International 2010).

Personal safety in public spaces and on public transport offers a particularly stark form of inequality as GBV is common in urban areas in many parts of the world.

1.4   Work conditions

The conditions under which women and men access the economic opportunities of the urban environment also differ. As the informal economy has grown globally, so has women's representation in it. Over 60% of women workers in low income nations are employed in the informal sector, and 74% in sub-Saharan Africa (Kabeer *et al*, 2013; Tacoli 2012; Reichlin and Shaw 2015). Informal sector activities – especially those in which women are even more disproportionately represented such as street vending, waste picking and domestic work – are characterised by precariousness, poor pay, and an absence of social protection (Pozarny 2016).

Urban working conditions also differ, on average, for women and men due to women's concentration in informal sector activities and especially in low status, low security activities such as waste picking, domestic work and street vending.

Workers in these women-heavy sectors face a number of challenges, some common to women and men and some unique to women. The Informal Economy Monitoring Study (IEMS) is a study among street vendors, waste pickers and home-based workers in ten cities (Accra, Ghana; Ahmedabad, India; Bangkok, Thailand; Belo Horizonte, Brazil; Bogota, Colombia; Durban, South Africa; Lahore, Pakistan; Lima, Peru; Nakuru, Kenya; and Pune, India) and seeks longitudinal data from 2012 to 2016 on how they are affected by and respond to economic trends, urban policies and practices, value chain dynamics, and other economic and social forces (Roever 2014; Pozarny 2016). The 2012 data on street vendors showed that they lack legal and social protection and face injustice in several dimensions, resulting in dependent relationships and vulnerability. The most significant driver affecting their working conditions related to urban governance and the abuse of authority. Many vendors noted their lack of leverage regarding city officials, with the result that it is cheaper for them to absorb the costs of harassment and merchandise confiscations than it is to resist them (Roever 2014).

Basic infrastructure was also important to street vendors consulted in the study – shelter being particularly an issue in the African cities where sun and rain both affect work conditions. Vendors of both perishable and non-perishable goods reported spoilage due to lack of shelter, and many have to stop working during rain, thus losing income. Lack of storage facilities was also cited, and appears to affect women disproportionately – only 68% of women compared with 87% of men had storage space for their goods. Since most vendors pay rental fees to the municipal government, many view this lack of storage space as a breach of contract. Other infrastructure failings cited include lack of water, electricity and toilets in their working areas. (Roever 2014)

A multi-city study has found that the most important driver of work conditions among street vendors related to the abuse of authority in urban governance. Basic infrastructure was also seen as important.

The gendered dimensions of these drivers of working conditions mean that women struggle to turn the potential of the urban situations to their advantage. Studies have found women's 'advantage' gained from being in an urban area over being in a rural area is less than that of men. A study by Cross (2009) in South Africa, for example, found that urban women's household income is on average 49% more than rural women's income; while urban men's household income was nearly double their rural counterparts at 94% more.

2   Intervention approaches

This rapid review found only scattered and patchy evidence on interventions designed to address gendered barriers to FEE in the context of urbanisation, and, like other researchers (El Chaar 2016; IFC 2012) even less on impact measurement and evaluation of these interventions. Some documents, however, present projects in progress, which offer models of potentially promising approaches.

2.1   Infrastructure-focused approaches

One approach has been to attempt to get better at addressing the gendered dimensions of urban infrastructure. Gender has been increasingly recognised as an important issue to factor into selection, design and implementation of infrastructure projects, and several commentaries discuss the positive potential effects of gender aware infrastructure approaches. Effects discussed include that infrastructure which releases women from time consuming tasks can create more time for income earning opportunities in paid work or other market based activities; that electricity enables study which can improve women's employability as well as allowing work – whether paid or domestic – to carry on into the evenings (Masika with Baden 1997; IFC 2012).

Although policy level action has been taken to integrate a gender perspecitve into infrastructure projects, there is little information about actual gender aware interventions or their impacts.

Some literature – including checklist and implementation advice – has now also developed on how this might be done (e.g. NCPE 2012). However there is less information available on projects or locations where this integration has in fact been carried out; and even less on what the actual demonstrable impact on women and girls may have been. An IFC synthesis literature review (2012) finds that despite the policy level commitment, there is very little evidence of infrastructure projects taking conscious action on accommodating gender awareness. This provides little scope for enquiry into how infrastructure actually can be a positive enabler of gender outcomes.

A few examples do exist, however, of how infrastructure inputs have – intentionally or not – made positive impacts on women both in relation to their 'living conditions' and for their working conditions, business practices, and profitability. For example, water services in Ghana meant that women potters had time to increase their production and trade, and also meant that other business options became available such as cola nut and palm oil processing. Energy is also a key input to improve businesses: when women's groups in Ghana, for example, became able to change from wood to LPG for fish preservation their product quality improved and thus their incomes. Energy also has important implications at household level: Mohun and Biswas (2016) report how an energy awareness programme in informal settlements on the outskirts of Arusha, Tanzania, found that access to affordable clean energy technologies resulted in significant reductions in household expenditure and time spent cooking and collecting fuel. Other projects which deliberately intended to take a gender aware approach, using gender analysis and gender consultations, have taken strategies which more explicitly address women's needs – such as a Bolivian slum upgrading project which included building day-care facilities alongside improved lighting and sanitation etc. Other innovations of this type include mobile crèches in India (ODI, 2016) and the provision of crèches in informal settlements in South Africa (El Chaar 2016).

On the other hand there is scattered evidence of how women can benefit from infrastructure inputs via positive impacts on their home and work conditions and opportunities.

An increasingly common method for implementing infrastructure projects has been through Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). However, this review found virtually no information about how far PPP projects have succeeded in taking a gender aware approach nor of the extent to which women and girls may have benefited from such projects. IFC, similarly, in 2012 found "very little empirical evidence' on gender mainstreaming approaches especially in the case of PPP projects (IFC 2012).

2.2   Direct employment in infrastructure projects

Some evidence is available and growing, however, on the potential effects of involving women closely in the design and management of infrastructure inputs, as well as in any individual or community based business or employment opportunities associated with the project.

For example, an electrification and renewable energy development project in Bangladesh trained both men and women as technicians to support the infrastructure and reserved certain jobs in billing, collection and accounting for women. The renewable component – mostly solar – targeted household energy for cooking and lighting under a microfinance arrangement. Reported results include that "thousands of village women got employed in the energy sector and newly established industries" (El Chaar 2016).

A number of recent interventions have focused on involving women in maintenance and other roles in infrastructure projects. The alternative energy sector has been particularly active in involving women in associated business opportunities – such as through direct sales networks to disseminate products.

Mohun and Biswas (2016) also cite examples of how infrastructure projects can provide direct job opportunities for women including in non-traditional sectors, such as in the design and construction of the facility, with women as contractors, semi-skilled and skilled workers. Earlier studies have also noted a significant role for women in water supply management – for example, in Honduras in response to high water prices from private vendors, women have taken on and managed their own licensed water vending points. These sell water at lower and fixed prices which supports domestic use as well as small businesses, provide part time employment to vulnerable women, and generate a surplus which can be used for neighbourhood projects (Masika with Baden 1997).

Alternative energy projects have been particularly active in this approach of involving women in associated business opportunities. For example, the Solar Sister Initiative in Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda has employed women as vendors and promoters of the clean energy systems. Solar Sister is a direct sales network of women that reaches the most low income and remote areas with affordable solar lamps, mobile phone chargers, and fuel efficient stoves. Management staff train and recruit locally-hired Business Development Associates (BDAs) that work as Solar Sister field staff. Each BDA then recruits, trains, and supports a group of 1-25 self-employed Solar Sister Entrepreneurs (SSEs). In total, Solar Sister has recruited and trained 65 BDAs and over 2,000 SSEs. 171 Solar Sister entrepreneurs have created micro-businesses and the benefits of solar power have been brought to more than 31,000 Africans. (Mohun and Biswas 2016; Gaynor and Jennings 2004). In a similar example, in Bamako, Mali, women work in the production and marketing of solar cookers (UN Habitat n.d). In India too, ONergy, a solar energy company is training women entrepreneurs in the technology and supporting them to promote the products as a business venture (Maheshwari and Finestone 2016). Chant and McIlwaine (2016), cited in (Pozarny 2016), present examples of where women have engaged in environmental-friendly activities, such as in the Burkina Faso "Green Brigade" of women's street cleaners, where women have opportunities to engage in paid work.

2.3   Improving work places: markets

Besides infrastructure projects, a different focus for initiatives addressing gender issues in urban environments has been marketplaces – in many locations the sites in which a majority, or a substantial minority, of women are engaged in income earning. Several commentators note that initiatives to support women informal sector workers can contribute to removing barriers to their economic empowerment, observing that the cost of commuting to markets, adequate water and sanitation in public spaces, shelter, and storage facilities are all important issues for women street vendors and market vendors (Mohun and Biswas 2016; Roever 2014).

Practical improvements

Initiatives to support women in the informal economy include SEWA Bharat's work with women street vendors and market traders in Delhi. Part of this includes action to improve the working conditions or work areas by developing and beautifying markets; maintain hygiene in public spaces and streets; creating adequate and well-planned hawker zones where vendors can vend legally with dignity; and the creation of model markets. Establishing and exclusive 'Ladies Market' was a major initiative (Sankrit 2015). Here, only women are allowed to vend, and are able to do so without harassment from authorities. Vendors pay weekly rent to the municipal government as well contributions to ensure the functioning of the market. SEWA supports the vendors by monitoring sales; encouraging diversification of goods sold; publicising the market widely, liaising with government departments to establish traffic control and necessary permissions, making arrangements for drinking water and toilets for vendors, and advocating for the municipality to install sewerage connections in the area.

Initiatives working with women street and market vendors offer interesting examples of how women's working conditions can be improved. These usually include work on governance – such as establishing liaison with municipal authorities; sanitation – such as systems to maintain hygiene; and basic infrastructure – such as storage space and sun/rain-proof shelter.

In a recent initiative, UN Women have been working with women market vendors in three Pacific locations – Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu – in a project called Markets 4 Change (M4C). Noting that market vendors face unhealthy and unsafe work environments, violence against women and little recognition from national and local governments on their economic contribution to local councils, the project set out to build the capacity of both local government and women market vendors to engage with each other on improvements to market governance and infrastructure (UN Women 2013). It works with both local government and market management to adopt and implement bylaws, policies and budgets to ensure safe market infrastructure, adequate services, and transparent revenue collection and expenditure. Gender responsive infrastructure design and building includes toilets and washing facilities, better shelter especially for the low-status vendors such as temporary/migrant vendors who usually vend in the open. It also works on accessibility for people with disabilities, child care services at the market, and inputs to reduce the risk of crime and violence.

Collective action and women's leadership

Both these projects are significant, however, for their focus not only on strategic infrastructure inputs but also their emphasis on organising women, collective action and generating women's leadership. The M4C project notes that despite the dominance of women market vendors, women are often excluded from market governance and decision making. The project aims to build organised groups to advocate for women market vendor's rights and enable them to have a voice in market management. Promoting women's leadership and representation in market management councils is a central and explicit objective of the project.

Projects aiming to improve conditions of work also emphasise organising women, collective action, and supporting women's leadership in worker associations and governance bodies. Collective action can empower women to confront governance issues as well as to demand practical improvements.

Similarly for SEWA Bharat, the organisation has its origins in a mandate to organise informal sector workers in Delhi and established the SEWA Delhi Union in 2011 to this purpose. SEWA Delhi now has 40000 members. The idea of 'struggle' is central to SEWA's strategy, and aims to express the process through which women vendors would build and lead their own organisations to represent their issues. SEWA's objectives include a vision of collective action: 'to organize and unite the vendors in order to fight for their rights; to implement the National Policy for Urban Street Vendors; and to get licences, and therefore legal identity for street vendors from municipal authorities (Sankrit 2015).

Other projects have also centralised the need for collective action: the IIEMS study (n.d), too, responding to the drivers and of working conditions identified among Nakuru's street vendors in Kenya and members of the Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT), place the need for a statutory bargaining forum for the sector at the top of the agenda. Creating a forum for structured dialogue with local government is the objective.

Several authors emphasise how the process of demanding improvements in infrastructure and/or housing by low-income women can in itself be empowering (Kabeer *et al* 2013; Mohun and Biswas 2016). Mohun and Biswas describe the case of Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), a network of community-based organisations run by the urban poor in over 600 cities across 33 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. A key objective is prioritise women's leadership in federations setting out to negotiate with local authorities for upgrading of informal settlements including water, sanitation, drainage, solid waste removal, electricity connections, street lighting etc.

Other commentators note how organizing can get results: traders in Durban report how an organization of local traders setting out to address crime had developed a positive relationship with the police and more customers had since been attracted to the area because they felt safe (Roever 2014). Tacoli (2012) reports how initiatives that help reduce the time constraints of paid work and unpaid care work are often central to the activities of similar women's organisations such as the Women's Network of Street Traders in Lima, Peru.

2.1 Addressing safety in public spaces

Markets have also been the focus for interventions addressing violence against women and safety more broadly. UN Women's Safe Cities programme includes a project in Papua New Guinea which works in Port Moresby's main and smaller markets to improve security for women vendors. Prior to the project, research had found that 55% of women had experienced some form of sexual violence in market spaces in the previous year. Aside from building women's participation in vendor's associations – a central strategy – the project has facilitated the upgrading of infrastructure including toilets, shaded areas and running water, as well as initiating cashless methods for the collection of fees to prevent extortion and theft. Regarding the smaller markets, Rooney (2016) notes that since many of these operate in the evenings, supporting their upgrading – particularly lighting – has implications for urban safety more generally if they can contribute to a greater sense of security in the neighbourhood.

Other achievements of the Safe Cities programme include strengthened legal action against sexual harassment in public spaces in Ecuador; government financed training on the prevention of sexual harassment against women in public transportation in Rwanda, and the adoption of women's safety audits by the Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Development in Egypt. Similarly, UN-HABITAT's project in association with the NGO Jagori in India is making bus drivers and conductors more aware of harassment of women and training them to take appropriate action.

Markets have also been the focus for interventions aiming to reduce GBV in public spaces. Other projects tackling GBV include working with public transport operators; community level lighting projects; and safety audit processes to assist urban planning, including via mobile phone app.

Other innovative methods for addressing safety in public spaces include a public-private partnership in Kenya known as "Adopt-a-Light" which keeps Nairobi's streets and slums lit up at night to enhance road safety and reduce the risk and fear of crime. The globally operating SafetiPin Initiative takes the safety audit process to a new level, using a free mobile phone app that allows users to complete safety audits at any location in the city. This information is then disseminated widely, and in some cases – for example in Delhi, India, – is used by various government departments to stops to improve planning, including the deployment of limited resources for lighting, security, CCTVs and night-time public transport (Mohun and Biswas 2016; Chant and McIlwaine 2016).

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