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# Editorial: Gender and urban change

CECILIA TACOLI AND DAVID SATTERTHWAITE

Urbanization is often associated with greater independence for women. This is the result of better opportunities than in rural areas to engage in paid employment outside the family, better access to services, lower fertility rates, and some relaxation of the rigid social values and norms that define women as subordinated to their husbands and fathers and to men generally. Yet, most urban women experience profound disadvantages compared to men in their daily lives. As this issue of the Journal goes to press, the horrific attack, rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi has shocked and provoked anger and indignation, not only in India but the whole world. And as Caren Levy notes in her paper, women in Cairo experience increasingly high levels of sexual harassment in public spaces despite having played a major role in one of the most transformative events of the “Arab spring”. Occasionally, these events attract much media attention, but fear for personal safety is an essential and pervasive element of urban life for women. Such widespread levels of threat reflect the deep gender-based inequalities that persist in urban centres, even as gender relations are transformed by the economic, social and political changes linked to urbanization. As Sylvia Chant observes, while women make significant contributions to their households, neighbourhoods and the city through their paid and unpaid labour, building and consolidating shelter and compensating for shortfalls in essential services and infrastructure, they face persistent inequalities in terms of access to decent work, physical and financial assets, mobility, personal safety and security, and representation in formal structures of urban governance.

The papers in this issue explore the nature of gender-based disadvantage in urban contexts by focusing on specific angles that take into account the often neglected impact of urban form and urban labour markets; the disturbing pervasiveness of gender-based violence; the often ambivalent role of paid employment in

promoting more equal gender relations; also the role of women in improving the infrastructure and services in low-income neighbourhoods and the constraints they face in securing recognition for this. To a large extent these themes overlap and are addressed in all the papers, although with varying emphasis. A common thread underlined by all the authors is the critical importance of avoiding the assumption that women are a homogenous category.

## URBAN WOMEN: A HIGHLY HETEROGENEOUS GROUP

While urban women share a common identity based on the prevailing social norms that assign them the major responsibility for reproductive activities (which include not only biological reproduction but also social reproduction or care work), they are also a highly diverse group. Poor women face very different constraints from those faced by higher-income women, who are likely to have greater access to education and incomes that enable them to hire domestic workers. Indeed, domestic work is one of the main employment opportunities for poor urban women as well as for young rural women migrating to the cities.<sup>(1)</sup> Urban centres also have higher proportions of women who are heads of household and who have a different set of responsibilities and often a heavier work burden, but also in many cases more independence than women who live with a male partner. The stage at which a woman is in her lifecycle – whether she is a young girl, a young woman with young children or an older woman – also makes a fundamental difference, as it determines her care responsibilities and her ability to combine these with paid work. It also

1. See Tacoli, Cecilia (2012), “Urbanization, gender and urban poverty: paid work and unpaid care work in the city”, Working Paper 7, Urbanization and Emerging Population Issues Series, IIED/ UNFPA, 48 pages.

largely defines her identity within the household as daughter, wife, mother or grandmother, each of which entails different gender relations.

In her paper, Nicola Banks describes the different perceptions men have of women engaging in paid work. Although these low-income households in Dhaka desperately need women's earnings to survive, a wife working outside the home is seen as a major loss of social status, which affects the whole household's perspective of improving their circumstances through access to patronage networks. Daughters' work in the thriving garments industry, however, is encouraged as it is not perceived in the same way – that is, a failure of the male breadwinner to provide for his family. From a social perspective, daughters' work does not count, although from a financial perspective it is often crucial. Like all social relations, gender relations intersect with a multitude of other socially constructed positions that include age, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and disability. The paper by Julian Walker, Alexandre Apsan Frediani and Jean-François Trani shows how recognizing these multiple sources of identity is of critical importance to understanding the constraints experienced by disabled children in the Leonard Cheshire Asha Community-based Rehabilitation project in a slum rehabilitation scheme in Mumbai.

## URBAN FORM AND GENDER

Urban form includes housing and infrastructure and is one of the key elements of urban change. Urban planning is typically portrayed as technical and non-political, although it often results in spatial segregation. This is especially the case for intra-urban travel planning but, as Levy points out, investment in and provision of public transport is such a central urban investment, with widespread implications for residents in each locality – from changes in land values and forced evictions to access to livelihoods and social opportunities. This can hardly be devoid of politics. At the same time, transport provides access to urban spaces and to a range of activities that are important for everyday life. With urban growth, public transport is increasingly essential and, in many cases, expensive and time consuming: in a growing number of cities such as Bangkok, Dar es Salaam and Accra, it is not unusual for people to leave home before dawn

to reach their place of work. Patterns of transport use reflect differences in income, education and location in the city, and are heavily shaped by gender responsibilities. Women are generally more likely to use public transport or walk, and their mobility is related to a variety of activities, from work to shopping to school trips, unlike men who are more likely to move between their home and their workplace. Balancing paid work with domestic responsibilities increasingly requires mobility in more and more segregated urban spaces, where home and workplace, production and consumption (and social reproduction) are separated. At the same time, the growing cost of essentially private “public” transport in most cities, as well as the very real threat of sexual harassment and physical violence for women travelling alone on public transport or walking, act as powerful restrictions on women's mobility and their right to the city.

A similar lack of recognition of diverse needs and constraints is described in the paper by Walker, Frediani and Trani. Under Mumbai's Slum Rehabilitation Scheme, slum dwellers, with the exclusion of tenants, are offered new apartments in blocks. This has recognized benefits – such as the provision of water and sanitation – however these are offset by the limited space, which makes it difficult to work at home, an important income-generating option for women with child care responsibilities. The move from low-rise, mainly pedestrianized slums to high-rise apartments with new neighbours can also contribute to feelings of social isolation. For young teenage girls with disabilities, this is exacerbated by the expectation that they contribute to housework; moreover, because of their disability they are seen to be particularly at risk of sexual harassment and violence, especially since rehousing entails, in most cases, the loss of the protective networks of neighbours. As a result, their social interactions are curtailed by limited mobility and the long time spent in the home.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND URBAN CHANGE

A general observation in all papers is the high sense of vulnerability to attacks felt by women and girls, both in public spaces and within the home. But as Cathy McIlwaine notes, cities themselves

do not generate gender-based violence. Rather, processes of urbanization can heighten the risk factors for women, making them more vulnerable to violence while simultaneously creating opportunities for them to deal more effectively with it, whether through informal or formal means. Urban centres can provide access to economic resources and institutional support to help women cope with violence. Yet, a number of urban-specific factors can lead to greater incidence of violence in cities. These include more fragmented social relations, which erode support for the most vulnerable as noted by Walker, Frediani and Trani. Engagement in certain types of occupation also exposes women to violence. McIlwaine notes that sex workers are particularly vulnerable to attacks, but Banks also describes how for factory workers in Dhaka, sexual harassment both on their way to work and in the workplace is a routine occurrence. For a very large number of women in urban areas, the constant threats, from verbal harassment to outright violence whenever they leave the home, are an unwelcome reality. This, as McIlwaine describes, can significantly affect women's health and their ability to work.

While McIlwaine underlines the difficulty of comparing the rates of violence against women in urban and rural contexts, the main differences seem to lie in nature rather than incidence, with violence by non-partners higher in cities than in rural settings. This is exacerbated by poverty, especially in low-income and informal settlements with poor infrastructure and limited, if any, sanitary facilities.<sup>(2)</sup> The distressingly high number of murders of women workers in Mexico's *maquiladoras* (assembly factories) suggests that important factors that increase risk include living in low-income settlements that lack street lighting and have secluded, un-policed spaces, having to walk home at night, and their migrant status and lack of social networks.

## EMPLOYMENT

Paid employment and the generally greater opportunities for income generation offered by urban centres are a critical element of

transformations in gender relations. But, as Chant notes, women tend to work in less remunerated and more insecure jobs. Women are more likely than men to be employed informally and to earn less. Even in emerging new economic sectors such as information technology services, women tend to be concentrated in low-end occupations as labour markets remain heavily segregated along lines of gender, caste and class. Despite these limitations, paid employment is widely seen as providing opportunities for independence and self-development. In her paper, Sarah Bradshaw describes how this does not necessarily translate into more equal relations between men and women within the household, especially with regard to decision-making. Comparing the perceptions of rural and urban women and their male partners, she suggests that it is not so much income and earnings but, rather, the value attached to women's contributions to the household that is important. Crucially, a large proportion of men and rural women do not recognize unpaid care work as a contribution, unlike urban women who also appear to understand the opportunity costs of paid work.

However, as Banks observes, it is important to take into account the fact that, in many cases, women's work is not so much a choice but rather a lack of choice. Women's work is essential for the survival of the urban poor and is especially high among the poorest households; at the same time, it is not a guarantee of moving out of poverty. Balancing paid work and care work remains one of the major constraints for urban women, and especially so for poor urban women. Life in the city is more expensive than in rural areas and, in many cases, is more expensive for the residents of low-income settlements who have to pay higher prices for inadequate accommodation, for water provided by private vendors and for access to latrines, where these exist. The cost of poor health, exacerbated by lack of sanitation and living in locations with high concentrations of environmental hazards, is also high, when missing a day's work means a considerable reduction in income, even if the pay is low. But there are also huge costs for those who are responsible for unpaid care work. Poor housing conditions, distance from health services and schools, unsafe neighbourhoods – both because of environmental hazards and high rates of violence and crime – and limited access to water

2. Amnesty International (2010), "Insecurity and indignity: women's experiences in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya", Amnesty International Publications, London, 59 pages.

and sanitation places an additional burden on those who are responsible for child care, food preparation, cleaning and washing. These are typically women's responsibilities, to which they often have to add paid work. The resulting time poverty and emotional stress are important non-income elements of urban poverty, which are made much worse at times of economic crises when prices rise, incomes decline and public services provision is cut.

### WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF LOW-INCOME SETTLEMENTS' INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

Despite these heavy constraints, women increasingly play a key role in urban poor movements, and their active participation in broad-based urban poor networks has transformed perceptions of urban poor mobilizations. The paper by Celine d'Cruz and Patience Mudimu describes in detail how community savings groups managed by women form the basis of citywide and national federations in many nations, and they have also formed their own international umbrella organization (Shack/Slum Dwellers International). Building on communities' strengths rather than on their weaknesses helps develop a voice and identity, and these federations can negotiate with governments and other stakeholders to improve and upgrade their settlements. One crucial aspect of this is the influence of women leaders in moving from the control of information and resources often typical of male leadership, as described by Banks for Dhaka, to a more open sharing of information and seeking negotiation and dialogue with local governments rather than confrontation.

Women's engagement in improving living conditions beyond their home is, to a large extent, an extension of their domestic responsibilities. Neighbourhood activities are considered to be domestic ones; the neighbourhood is an extension of the home, especially since domestic chores depend heavily on neighbourhood conditions. As Kaveri Haritas points out in her case study of Bengaluru, the gendered division of domestic responsibilities enables women's entry into the public sphere, but also limits their engagement at the neighbourhood level. This is especially the case for women who need to balance care work

with paid employment: for the poorest ones, a day's missed wages has a tangible impact on their family's expenditure and can restrict their ability to pay for food, education and health services. Hence, she notes that it is almost always women not engaged in paid work, and with relatively fewer domestic responsibilities, who are able to dedicate their time and energy to community initiatives and leadership. This, again, highlights the importance of recognizing the heterogeneity of urban women: while all of them juggle domestic responsibilities, marital relationships and paid work, they do so in different ways and with varying levels of constraints.

### CLIMATE CHANGE AND CITIES

Two papers in this issue make substantive contributions to the literature on climate change adaptation in urban areas. The paper on Durban describes the design and application of a benefit-cost model on climate change adaptation options. It reports on benefit-cost ratios for 16 clusters of interventions (many of which are primarily the responsibility of one municipal department or agency) in each of four future scenarios (defined by minor or major climate change and weak or strong socio-institutional capacity). It discusses how these are influenced by choices of time frames and highlights how the most efficient interventions across all futures and time frames tend to be socio-institutional – for instance, creating a cross-sectoral disaster management forum, sea level rise preparedness and early warning system, and creating adaptation capacity within the water services unit. It also shows how interventions with high benefit-cost ratios fall within many sectors and how, generally, infrastructure-based clusters usually had the lowest benefit-cost ratios.<sup>3</sup>

The second paper compares and contrasts patterns of adaptation in low-income settlements in Khulna by "squatter" households who "own"

3. This paper is complemented by three previously published papers on Durban that provide many insights into the possibilities for and constraints on city governments developing climate change adaptation – see Roberts (2008), Roberts (2010) and Roberts et al. (2012), all listed at the end of the Editorial. A further paper on environmental challenges and climate change action in Durban that considers the relevance of Durban's policies for other cities will be published in the October 2013 issue of *Environment and Urbanization* – see Roberts and O'Donoghue (2013), also listed at the end.

their land and tenants who rent dwellings from private landlords. It notes how low-income settlements are increasingly likely to be on private land and comprise rented dwellings, so policy lessons generated from settlements with “squatters” may be inappropriate. Agencies seeking to assist low-income urban dwellers in Bangladesh will need to craft different strategies for settlements according to different types of land tenure.

## FEEDBACK

All six papers in the Feedback section focus on improving housing and/or services in informal settlements – although with different focuses (for instance on water, sanitation, land acquisition, solid waste collection or reconstruction after a fire) and different agents (municipal authorities, an NGO, water utilities, political structures and residents).

Sheela Patel’s paper assesses the Indian government’s Basic Services for the Urban Poor, drawing on fieldwork in 11 cities. Although this programme was meant to support upgrading in informal settlements – i.e. government authorities working with the inhabitants to improve housing and provision for water and sanitation – many of the initiatives were contractor-built public housing with the limitations common to most public housing in terms of small size and poor quality buildings and infrastructure. In addition, many initiatives were not in situ upgrading but relocations. However, even where there was in situ upgrading, there was little consultation with the inhabitants and usually the site was cleared (hence no incremental improvements to existing houses) and the inhabitants were not provided with any support for temporary accommodation. The paper notes some instances where new approaches were tried with more success, and suggests that the institutional structures needed to support slum upgrading at scale are not yet in place at municipal, state and national level.

The paper by Kwame Adubofour, Kwasi Obiri-Danso and Charles Quansah looks at provision for sanitation in two informal Muslim settlements in Kumasi, Ghana. This highlights the extremely low coverage for improved sanitation (toilet) facilities within households. Most residents depend on a very inadequate number of poorly maintained public toilets

or toilets shared by several households. Waste management practices in the two communities are also very poor.

The paper by Shahadat Hossain describes the contestation and negotiation process in an informal settlement in Dhaka with regard to obtaining land and a water supply. Inhabitants’ location in the prevailing power relations matrix defines their differential access to urban utilities. The powerful and relatively well-off dominate in the contestation and negotiation process for land and water and there is little scope for others to enter into the process. The dependency of the inhabitants on these powerful and well-connected inhabitants also limits any possibility of countering this.

The paper by María Zapata Campos and Patrik Zapata describes a household solid waste collection service in informal settlements that is provided by Manos Unidas (Joined Hands), an informal waste picker cooperative in Managua, Nicaragua. Using horse carts, these provide for the first time a regular collection service. The initiative was supported by an NGO that sought to enhance the agency of the residents and the waste pickers – and this also addressed other problems such as illegal dumping by the cartmen and residents and the cartmen’s low and irregular incomes.

The paper by Mensah Owusu describes how the residents of Accra’s largest informal settlement (Old Fadama) responded to a disastrous fire in May 2012. Although they received no official support for reconstruction, they organized to rebuild using permanent materials, which reduced fire risks. It also demonstrated to city authorities their capacities – which has long been one of their strategies to avoid eviction.<sup>(4)</sup>

The paper by Deborah Cheng examines the politics of non-payment for water in Manila and the techniques that the two private concessionaires use to address this. While some customers from all income levels may evade payment, the mechanisms for obtaining payments from low-income consumers focus on increased policing that transfers responsibility for getting payment to individuals and communities – for instance, with the water company providing a water connection with a bulk meter

4. For more details, see Farouk, Braimah R and Mensah Owusu (2012), “If in doubt, count: the role of community-driven enumerations in blocking eviction in Old Fadama, Accra”, *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 24, No 1, April, pages 47–57.

at the edge of a settlement and the residents being responsible for household connections and payments. The paper also discusses the implications that include an over-emphasis on repayment, the under-counting of those who are unserved or underserved, and small water providers that become the policing arm of the utilities rather than competitive alternatives.

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### Perween Rahman

Perween Rahman, Director of the Orangi Pilot Project Research and Training Institute in Karachi, was murdered on 13 March 2013 by masked men who shot at her car as she travelled home from work. Those of you who know *Environment and Urbanization* will know that it has included many papers on the work of this remarkable Institute – in community sanitation, microfinance, technical support for builders, mapping of informal settlements and much else. The Editorial team at *Environment and Urbanization* mourn a wonderful and generous friend and a very exceptional colleague and teacher. For tributes to Perween, see: <http://www.achr.net/People/Perween/Perween%20Links.html> and <http://www.iied.org/iied-mourns-long-term-partner-friend-perween-rahman>.