

## The City as an Inclusive Space from a Gender and Equity Lens

It is argued that most cities and towns are planned and built to suit the needs of a particular category—the able-bodied, childless, working male. These spaces and structures, designed mostly by male planners, privilege their living and working conditions over that of the other residents of the city – the women and the poor. Women experience and use the urban environment in different ways from men and thus have different priorities in terms of services and infrastructure.<sup>1</sup>

For instance, women and men have distinct transport requirements. Men's use of public transport is mono-dimensional - home to work to home, along major arteries - where work is located and only during peak rush hour. Women, however, are the major users of public transit, using it mostly during off-peak hours and for journeys that are broken several times in pursuit of various domestic responsibilities. Additionally, lack of public transport and housing facilities cut-off the households of the poor from the rest of the society. Women of poor households often pursue domestic as well as productive activities at home, but lack of access to basic services and infrastructure such as safe water, sanitation and energy endanger their livelihood capabilities. Lack of gender sensitive transport and housing planning thus hinders women in carrying out their domestic and caring responsibilities, impede their productivity and even threatens their safety.

Safety for all citizens, particularly women is another crucial issue of inclusive cities. Access to and safety of public spaces such as parks, public squares, shopping malls, and community and recreation centres is an issue requiring an immediate solution with the rising cases of rape across the metro cities in the country. This rise is explained, it is argued, by the increasing visibility of women in areas that have traditionally been male bastions of power, challenging their sense of superiority and entitlement thus turning into sites of crisis of masculinity.<sup>2</sup> The fact that basic facilities and amenities like public transport, hygiene, sanitation and roadways are planned and designed without any consistent effort to accommodate gender specific needs and concerns, reflects the unpreparedness or reluctance to accommodate this increasing visibility of women in public spaces. Incidents such as the brutal gang rape of a 23 year old girl by six men in a moving bus on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2012 in Delhi highlight the complex links between the lack of inclusivity in the ways in which urban spaces, infrastructure and the laws governing them are designed.

There is a need to not only plan cities with keeping women in mind but also actively integrate women into the planning process. An inclusive city will not only improve the quality of life of its female residents and so the other residents but also enhance their livelihood earning potential and so generate economic growth. Also, with increased safety women may take up more active roles in urban governance, particularly in their neighbourhood by way of community participation.

*Today's forum shall reflect on how inclusive our Indian cities have been and if/how government policies have addressed these concerns.*

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<sup>1</sup> Khosla, Prabha. "Gendered Cities: Built and Physical Environments". *National Network on Environments and Women's Health*. 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Source: The Hindu. Accessed on 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2013.

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/rape-and-the-crisis-of-indian-masculinity/article4214267.ece>