

INSIGHT

Building Inclusive and Climate-Resilient Cities



While women may not be inherently more at risk to climate change, they are more vulnerable to its impacts due to the socioeconomic, political, and normative inequalities they face. Photo credit: CDIA.

Mainstream gender inclusion and climate resilience into infrastructure development to improve quality of life and meet sustainability goals.

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Introduction

Deficient and outdated infrastructure systems and their inability to cope with the impacts of climate change hinder cities' long-term development and take a disproportionate toll on vulnerable groups, especially women.

For instance, inefficient transport infrastructure impacts people's ability to evacuate and receive emergency support during extreme weather events. Inadequate transport during such events can amplify gender-based disparity. In India and Bangladesh, saltwater intrusion into rivers from rising sea levels has deteriorated freshwater quality. Along with lack of adequate drinking water infrastructure, this has obliged women, who are largely responsible for fetching water for the household, to travel longer distances in search of cleaner water.

While women may not be inherently more at risk to climate change, they are more vulnerable to its impacts due to the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and normative inequalities they face.

By mainstreaming gender-inclusion and climate resilience into infrastructure development, cities can help address these differential vulnerabilities and gender disparity. Doing so will help improve quality of life in an inclusive manner while paving the way for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Analysis

Women in Asia and the Pacific spend more time than men performing domestic and family duties. The development of inclusive and resilient infrastructure in cities could free up time that could be reallocated toward more “paid market work” as well as social and community activities. McKinsey Global Institute estimates that advancing women’s equality could increase the region’s annual gross domestic product by \$4.5 trillion or 12% by 2025. In addition, participatory and inclusive resilience-building measures can help bring out women’s local knowledge and leadership (e.g., in water management practices and sustainable resource management) to ensure the effective planning, design, and implementation of resilient infrastructure that is attuned to community needs.

Building climate resilience in cities must go hand in hand with tackling gender disparity, offering a win-win solution. Development agencies and international climate funds are now making gender mainstreaming mandatory for securing climate funding. The Green Climate Fund, for example, requires applicants to undertake gender assessment and craft an action plan aligned with the fund’s gender policy. The Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) Strategy 2030 prioritizes building women’s resilience to climate change as part of its operational plan for accelerating progress in gender equality.

Areas of opportunity

How then can cities design gender-inclusive and resilient infrastructure projects? Here are some opportunities to consider in the early stages of project preparation:

Include gender impact assessment in vulnerability assessments

Climate risk and vulnerability assessments (CRVA) should be considered in projects to appraise risks and identify adaptation options that can be integrated into the design of the project. A gender impact assessment should be an indispensable part of CRVA to take into account the differentiated climate change impacts on men and women, identify the specific vulnerabilities of women and girls, and ensure everyone’s participation in developing adaptation measures.

There are different methodologies already in place that cities can adopt or customize based on their local context. For example, UN-Habitat provides step-by-step guidelines for tackling gender issues in urban planning and for facilitating the full and equal participation of women and other members of vulnerable populations throughout the critical early stages of the project cycle. Meanwhile, the UN Women’s guide on developing gender-inclusive infrastructure projects puts forward the need to conduct

a gender analysis, which evaluates the local distribution of resources and opportunities based on gender. It further recommends drafting a gender action plan to address gender-related constraints and opportunities during project preparation and implementation and undertaking community engagement with the participation of marginalized groups, among others.

Improve women's participation in decision-making in climate-resilient infrastructure projects

Women should be acknowledged as planners and decision makers in projects and not merely beneficiaries. They should be given an equal voice in the planning and implementation of projects, which directly affect their lives.

This does not mean only having women in the room but also providing them with an enabling environment and the most favorable conditions to express themselves. Establishing women groups, for instance, could be a solution in circumstances where cultural contexts or rules prevent them from fully participating in mixed assemblies. Conducting meetings, which are conducive for women to attend in terms of time, space, and safety, is also a way to maximize their involvement in these processes.

Including women's views can effectively influence the design of infrastructure projects by including in a way that benefits all members of a community. For example, adding accessibility features in public spaces and building nature-based infrastructure for strengthening livelihoods of women

Be conscious of unequal power structures and prevalent social norms

It is important to have an in-depth understanding of sociopolitical contexts and intersectionality when developing infrastructure projects to recognize the drivers of vulnerabilities, avoid reinforcing or exacerbating them, and identify effective routes for enabling inclusiveness.

In India, for instance, caste and sanitation work are intrinsically linked, and women sanitation workers' working conditions are often under the double burden of patriarchy and caste, which considerably reduces their ability to cope with and adapt to climate-related events, such as floods.

Women workers can play a crucial role in the planning, design, and implementation of sustainable sanitation infrastructure. Hence it is important to make sure that new infrastructure systems do not simply focus on hard adaptation solution, but also bring about a shift in behavioral aspects and social norms to ensure the effective inclusion of all. Integrating social and institutional dimensions within urban resilience building measures is imperative for addressing systemic poverty, vulnerability, and gender discrimination.

Budget for gender-responsive approaches

Gender-responsive budgeting refers to the effective collection and allocation of public resources to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, rather than merely creating separate budgets for women or solely increasing spending on women's programs. Cities need to allocate budgets to mainstream gender perspectives and ensure participation of women and vulnerable groups in project

planning.

Development organizations have published resources to help cities adopt gender-responsive budgeting. UNESCAP offers a [guide for cities](#) to mainstream good concepts and practices in gender-responsive budgeting into their urban planning and development operations. ADB's report on [Enhancing Women-Focused Investment in Climate and Disaster Resilience](#) provides guidelines for governments to identify key factors of gender and climate investments and make these investments effective.

Turn to project preparation facilities for technical assistance in integrating gender and climate considerations in development projects

Cities Development Initiative for Asia (CDIA) is a project preparation facility that can support cities in preparing bankable infrastructure projects that effectively mainstream climate resilience and inclusiveness. It can further assist them to implement gender-responsive and inclusive design in projects and develop a roadmap for strengthening institutions and building the capacity of implementers to ensure long-term sustainability of projects.

Gender is a critical component of CDIA's project preparation work. For example, CDIA's consulting teams consist of gender and/or social development specialists to ensure that gender considerations are fully integrated at the early stage of project preparation. It also endeavors to ensure women's participation in its various stakeholder consultation activities so they can be actively involved in shaping infrastructure projects for their cities.

Implications

The starting point for integrating gender considerations and climate resilience in infrastructure projects is in the early phase of project preparation. It is where project foundations are set up—vulnerabilities are analyzed, the scope is defined, and bankability is established.

To take advantage of this opportunity, there are several measures that cities can put in place to better integrate gender and climate resilience in infrastructure development. First, along with observed and projected climate data, cities should encourage the systematic collection of disaggregated socioeconomic data to better map the intersection of climate change, infrastructure, and gender issues, and their complex interactions. Knowing this will enable planners to better integrate inclusive adaptation measures in project design and ensure project sustainability.

Cities should also mainstream gender-specific priorities into their strategies and planning documents. Government tools like gender-responsive budgeting can further enable the development of more gender-inclusive infrastructure projects and take into account the needs of various population groups. Mainstreaming gender in governance goes hand in hand with awareness raising at all government and community levels.

Cities should also address the deficit in women's involvement in decision-making and throughout the value chain of infrastructure projects. It is essential that women are institutionally well-represented at the

regional, national, and local levels as key decision makers. Women should be actively involved in stakeholder consultations along the infrastructure investment cycle, and their views should be well-integrated into project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

Inclusive and resilient infrastructure reaps invaluable climate and development benefits for cities. At its heart, city resilience-building measures will be truly transformational if they address the root causes of systemic vulnerability, including power inequalities and gender-based discrimination.

Resources

Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2020. *Enhancing Women-Focused Investments in Climate and Disaster Resilience*. Manila.

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Maribel has more than 20 years of experience in climate change adaptation and finance, providing strategic guidance to governmental, multilateral, and non-governmental organizations on how to integrate climate change in their decision-making processes and access climate finance. She has led and/or contributed to over 70 consulting projects, including across Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa, for a diversity of clients.



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Uma lends technical, programmatic, and coordination support across climate resilience projects in Asia and globally. She has worked on climate resilience building and mainstreaming across various sectors, such as infrastructure, agriculture, and governance. She is involved in a Agence Française de Développement-funded project where she is working closely with Cities Development Initiative for Asia (CDIA) to mainstream climate change into the Trust Fund's approaches, methodologies and tools.



Fabienne Perucca

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Fabienne Perucca is an urban planner with more than 15 years of experience in international cooperation programs. She joined CDIA in 2018, via Expertise France, to support the development of infrastructure projects with climate co-benefits. Over the past 4 years, she has managed project preparation studies in Armenia, Cambodia, Georgia, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam. She has a Political Science and Urban Planning academic background from Sciences Po, France.



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Cities Development Initiative for Asia (CDIA)

Cities Development Initiative for Asia (CDIA) is a multi-donor trust fund managed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). As a project preparation facility, it helps secondary cities in Asia and the Pacific prepare bankable and sustainable infrastructure investments. CDIA is implemented by ADB and Agence Française de Développement. It receives funding support from Austria, European Union, France, Germany, Republic of Korea, Rockefeller Foundation, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Urban Climate Change Resilience Trust Fund.
