

Helpdesk Research Report

Gender roles and opportunities for women in urban environments

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Question

What does the literature tell us about different gender roles and opportunities for women in urban environments compared to rural? Highlight when gender roles are perpetuated and when they change with particular attention to factors influencing women's economic empowerment.

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1. Overview

The literature included in this rapid review brings together evidence from urban environments in different regions and contexts. It focuses on various urban issues and their impacts on gender roles, particularly women's economic empowerment, in comparison to rural settings. This review focusses on access to employment opportunities, care responsibilities, power, decision-making and use of earnings, gender-based violence, and flags other relevant issues as appropriate. The literature included in this review is from academic books, journal articles, and development and implementing agency literature. Examples are highlighted at the end.

The key points raised in the literature include:

- Women are becoming the majority in urban areas, and many people live in female-headed households. Women's experiences in urban areas vary depending on their situation and profiles, e.g. age, living space—largely determined by wealth, education levels, household profile and care

responsibilities (e.g. head of household, married or multi-generational households), and networks and health (Tacoli & Satterthwaite, 2013; Chant & Mcllwaine, 2016).

- Urban women, on the whole, have greater access to services and infrastructure, more opportunities to engage in paid employment, and enjoy a relaxation of sociocultural restrictions compared to women living in rural areas. However, urban environments also provide tremendous challenges, inequities and insecurities for women (Reichlin & Shaw, 2015; Evans, 2015a; 2015b).
- Women do not benefit equally to men in urban environments. Gender inequalities are experienced in many areas of everyday life, accessing decent work opportunities, increased workloads with the double-burden of earning income and care work, accessing financial assets and housing security, fair tenure rights, access to services, asset accumulation, engaging in public governance structures, and personal security, the latter due in part to unfavourable infrastructure and transport designs (Chant & Mcllwaine, 2016; Moser, 2016; Tacoli & Satterthwait, 2013; Tacoli, 2012; Reichlin & Shaw, 2015).
- Homogeneity and limited exposure in rural areas can limit awareness of alternative gender roles discouraging contestation of gender norms and confidence in the possibility of social change, e.g. in the division of labour. Urban heterogeneity fosters tolerance of differences, and can erode existing assumptions of gender differences and cultivate support for equality (Evans, 2014; 2015b).
- Increasing feminisation of labour in urban areas has accompanied an informalisation of labour, but informal sector activities (e.g. street vending) are precarious, mostly unregistered, poorly paid, typically lacking contracts and social protection (Tacoli, 2012).
- Although women in the global South are increasingly engaged in paid and unpaid work, this does not necessarily result in a more equal distribution of domestic responsibilities complemented by male participation in care work (Chant, 2013; Evans, 2015b). Time poverty that women face as a result of their dual responsibilities of earning income and care responsibilities leave women with reduced ability to pursue other opportunities (economic or otherwise) offered in urban areas (Reichlin & Shaw, 2015; Chopra, 2015).
- Urban environments provide advantages for education compared to rural areas, but there are barriers particularly for girls from poor urban households. Educating girls is a low priority, especially when help is needed in domestic chores or income-generation (Chant & Mcllwaine, 2016). In slums, after-school study is often limited by lack of space, peace, light and other infrastructures (Chant & Mcllwaine, 2013). This reflects persistent gaps in 'human capital' (e.g. education, vocational skills and training) found in urban contexts.
- Women can increase their empowerment and agency to make choices and control assets when they have increased asset accumulation and diversified asset portfolios combined with supportive structural policy measures and instruments – this can lead to transformation of gender power relations and more gender equality (Moser, 2016).
- Gender-based violence is a core area of focus in analysing women's economic empowerment, and in urban settings, more particularly, where gender norms may be challenged (expert comment).
- Transformation of gender roles in urban contexts will require wider community involvement and in many contexts collective action to promote group interests and entitlements (Moser, 2016).
- A multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral lens is useful in understanding the intersection of poverty and gender roles in urban contexts. This approach can show how women do not necessarily benefit from urban prosperity, and are disadvantaged in income poverty, asset poverty, time and power (Chant, 2013; Chant & Mcllwaine, 2016).

2. Gender roles in urban and rural environments

Conceptual background

There is a prevailing conception and some literature suggesting that living in urban areas in lower-income countries brings great benefit, opportunities and independence for women (e.g. employment, access to health care, family planning and other services, and relaxed social norms). Based on ethnographic research in the Kitwe city, Zambia (2010-2011), interviewing 200 participants and living with families, Evans (2014; 2015a; 2015b; 2015c) finds that the urban context has capacity to disrupt gender inequalities due to three important features: heterogeneity, more income-based livelihoods and greater access to services. Evans (2015b) argues that urban areas are typically heterogeneous due to multiple intersecting migration channels.

Continuity in gender ideologies seems more likely in rural contexts according to Evans (2015c). In rural areas, even if there are shifts in interests (for example, increased need/desire for incomes due to decreasing soil fertility and rising living costs), homogeneity found in rural areas and limited exposure to alternatives can discourage contestation of gender norms and confidence in the possibility of social change. In this context, gender ideologies are reinforced and gender divisions of labour are reproduced and perpetuated.

For Evans (2015c), urban heterogeneity does not only foster tolerance of differences, but it can erode assumptions of differences between men and women and cultivate support for equality. A critical mass of women who undertake socially valued men's work can undermine gender ideologies. It can generate a change in people's views regarding women as equally competent and deserving of this status. Assumptions about men and women's different competencies seem to weaken with prolonged exposure to women performing work traditionally viewed to be beyond their capabilities. Evans (2014) finds that a weakening of gender beliefs, and not women's increased access to resources per se, is what seems to undermine gender-status inequalities. Evans (2014) also notes that her findings of growing gender egalitarianism contrasts with previous accounts during the economic crisis in Zambia, which emphasised women's increased burdens. Shifts in beliefs around cultural expectations concerning gender roles can foster a positive feedback loop according to Evans (2015b; 2015c), which in turn can trigger rising support for female education, employment and leadership in urban areas. In addition, opportunities for social interaction appear to be significant. Evans (2015b) suggests that women sharing experiences of performing socially valued activities provides external validation of egalitarian beliefs and can shift views about cultural expectations.

However the breadth of evidence from the literature also indicates that women's experiences in urban environments and their effects on beliefs and practices concerning gender roles is complex, and that women in fact typically confront formidable barriers and inequities compared to men, although perhaps not in comparison to rural women (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016; Tacoli & Satterthwaite, 2013; Reichlin & Shaw, 2015). Gender inequalities are experienced in a range of areas of everyday life, such as accessing decent work opportunities, increased workloads – carrying the double-burden of earning income and care work – accessing financial assets and housing security, engaging in public governance structures, and personal security, the latter which is due in part to unfavourable infrastructure and transport designs. There are also new sets of stresses created by the loss of former social networks causing isolation (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016).

The specific profile of women can have profound effects on their experiences in urban settings. Elderly women are reported to outnumber their counterpart men in urban areas across regions of the global south (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016). In Latin America, female-headed households rose by a mean of 9.8 per cent between the late 1980s and the end of the 2010 (Chant & McIlwaine, 2013). Elderly females typically live in female-headed households associated with greater poverty. In areas of high prevalence of HIV/AIDs, grandmothers are often the major caretakers (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016).

Education, training and work opportunities

Reichlin and Shaw (2015) report that educated women are more likely to delay marriage and childbirth, are healthier, typically hold more power in their homes, and have fewer children, who in turn, are often healthier and better educated. Urban girls tend to be more advantaged than their rural counterparts. Urbanisation can offer girls and women education opportunities and employment unavailable in rural areas. Further, in urban areas, girls see women working as role models, which erodes gender stereotypes and broadens their aspirations and their resolve to progress in education (Evans, 2015a). However for poorer urban households, educating girls is often a low priority and less valued than boys, especially when help with domestic chores or small-scale income-generating activities is needed (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016). These factors can inhibit development and higher aspirations among younger women (Chant, 2013). In addition, in slums, prospects of after-school study may be limited by lack of space, peace, light, and other basic infrastructure (Chant & McIlwaine, 2013). This reflects a persistent and widespread gender gap in ‘human capital’ such as education, and vocational skills and training found in urban areas.

Although urban environments provide advantages for education for children compared to rural areas, there are several barriers, particularly for girls from poor households. Young women are often required to assume multiple caring and financial responsibilities (for both children and elderly). They manage these tasks typically in un-serviced or underserviced neighbourhoods, i.e. with inadequate access to water, sanitation, health, education, livelihood options and security. The high numbers of slum dwellers come at an expense of girls and women working in the care and informal economy who spend more time in slums than men, which further exacerbate their future prospects (Kholsa, 2012).

Research indicates that older adolescent girls are more likely to find employment in urban settings than rural villages. But, even when young women are able to access education/vocational training and enjoy wider opportunities for employment than their rural counterparts, they are often guided into “feminine” occupations (e.g. hair dressing), curtailing longer term earnings and career mobility, and ultimately, their own empowerment (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016).

Early marriage and family planning

Fertility is often associated with school drop-out among adolescent girls, which has implications on their prospects of future jobs and lifetime earnings. High fertility rates combined with expectations of girls’ contribution to household care work and income earning activities curb progress towards gender equality (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016). High fertility rates are commonly found in rural areas and in poorer urban groups, rather than in wealthier urban neighborhoods, which Chant and McIlwaine (2013) report, is largely attributed to uneven information and limited access to family planning. As the case example on Nigeria urban centres below indicates, improved family planning is associated with women’s increased economic empowerment (Corroon *et al*, 2014). Evans (2015b) asserts that greater proximity to services in urban areas makes it easier for women to control their fertility and secure external intervention against

gender-based violence. It has been reported that in urban areas in some African countries, young girls are less likely to marry at an early age. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, Khosla (2012) reports that 50 per cent of young women in rural areas are married by the time they are 18, which is about twice the rate of young women in cities.

Employment

Urban women's opportunities to join labour forces are higher than their rural counterparts. Chant and McIlwaine (2016) explain that in rapidly urbanising environments, this is even higher. In Bangladesh, for example, women aged 20-24 years entering the work force between 1995-2000 rose 250 per cent. Most female rural workers, in contrast, are engaged in unpaid family work. Entrepreneurship and employment are paths to increase women's numbers in the urban labour market and central to gaining economic empowerment (Reichlin & Shaw, 2015), but economic empowerment is not an inevitable outcome of employment.

When comparing rural to urban gender division of labour, inter-regional differences exist in employment and income opportunities. In sub-Saharan Africa, women have a large presence in the rural labour force, sometimes constituting up to 50 per cent of agricultural workers. This is because in many contexts, African women entitled to land and migration may be less pronounced; a degree of empowerment may be enjoyed. But women in rural areas often face difficulties accessing assets, such as land, credit, and information, essential to entering the agricultural industry or other areas of entrepreneurship common to rural settings. In Latin America, in contrast, women's participation in farming is lower, at less than 20 per cent in most of the region. Even if there is some involvement in agriculture, it is secondary and minor, as norms confine them to tasks closely associated with household reproduction. Women often have a comparative advantage moving to towns and cities because urban areas tend to offer women a greater range of job opportunities, e.g. domestic service and factories, than in rural areas (Chant, 1998).

In the formal economy in urban environments, women tend to be positioned at the less preferred occupations (Chant, 2013). In urban areas, and particularly slums, opportunities for human capital development (e.g. through training and education), decent work and income-generating activities are constrained for women (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016). A key factor for this is that women need to reconcile paid work with their primary unpaid domestic and care work responsibilities within their households. It is also due to gender segmentation of labour markets, which prevents women from entering better paid and more protected work dominated by men (Tacoli, 2012). In the formal paid economy women are largely found working in the multinational processing plants (e.g. garments or electronics) (women make up 70 to 90 per cent of the workers), where they are seen as reliable and docile (more than men) (Reichlin & Shaw, 2015). A second sector common for women's paid labour is paid domestic work.

Engaging in paid employment, bringing income into the household in urban areas does not necessarily translate into more equal decision-making and power relations between women and men (Bradshaw, 2013). For urban women, paid work implies not only income, but also independence from men and the opportunity for self-development. Paid work in this case should then allow a woman to improve her bargaining positions, but perhaps more importantly it means she starts to "see herself differently" (Bradshaw, 2013, pg. 92). The findings of Bradshaw's (2013) in-depth study of two Nicaraguan communities, one urban and one rural, however suggest the value of income and work are more complex. Although women recognise their contribution to the household to include non-monetary activities, men may see women as contributing only when they do so in monetary terms. This difference was more prevalent among rural women, where women are less likely to make a monetary contribution

and more likely to value their non-monetary contribution. Bradshaw (2013) found greater similarities to exist in decision-making between views of urban women and men (than rural), e.g. the way men and women value work and determine their contribution coincides more.

The actual earnings of men may not be as important as the percentage of the earnings that the man contributes to the household, according to Bradshaw (2013). Where the man is perceived by women as giving all of his income to the household, women are more likely to claim he alone makes the most important contribution to the household, whether they themselves are income earners or not. In rural areas, more women named the man alone as head of household, as opposed to being joint heads. And while men explained their headship in monetary contributions, women explained headship in terms of social norms – ‘because he is a man’ (Bradshaw, 2013, pg. 90). In sum, urban women’s lower perception of male partners as sole head of household may be the product of changing social norms as much as their income generation.

Domestic work

Domestic work is a common paid work option for women and a major employment sector for women in urban areas of low- and middle-income countries (Tacoli, 2012). Domestic service employs between 4 and 10 per cent of the workforce of developing economies, and women comprise up to 74 to 94 per cent of domestic service workers worldwide (Reichlin & Shaw, 2015; Chopra, 2015; Chant & McIlwaine, 2016). In South Africa, domestic service was as much as 35 per cent of all urban informal employment, and the second-largest employment sector for black women in 2004 (employing 755,000 women). In Brazil, domestic work is reported at 9 per cent, while in India, it is at 4 per cent (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016).

Domestic work is often underpaid, unstable and devalued, as it is seen as traditionally female work. Domestic service can be classified as vulnerable, the rights and protection of workers are easily ignored by employers and difficult to regulate, there are long working hours, potential abuse from employers, and typically social isolation. Workers’ vulnerability is high. Despite that, women are increasingly joining the economic workforce, it does not necessarily translate into improved jobs or working conditions.

Women are commonly paid less than men who may also be working in domestic jobs (e.g. gardening, security). Women are reported to earn from 10 to 30 per cent less than men in comparable work (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016). Tacoli (2012) in a global review finds an increase in paid domestic work due to women’s increased labour-force participation in middle-income households.

Despite that, men may work in domestic positions, Bartolomei’s (2010) ethnographic study covering four-country cases studies indicate that male domestic workers see themselves foremost as responsible husbands and fathers in charge of maintaining their family and of assuring a positive developmental impact on their children – traditional male roles. They do not therefore think of themselves as deviating or challenging patriarchal norms. Rather, by working outside the home, despite that it is in a domestic role, they are reaffirming their masculinity and the patriarchal status quo. In this way, they are able to retain their position as heads of households and preserve the hegemonic patriarchal system. Further, Bartolomei (2010) finds that the division of gender roles and norms remain generally unchallenged by the work of men as domestics. However, doing “feminine” household and caring tasks within the domestic sphere is largely seen by male domestic workers as a loss of their manhood. Interestingly, the problem is not always so much in doing feminine tasks, Bartolomei (2010) reports, but in being at the service of a woman. In the past, male servants had male masters, today interviewees in Bartolomei’s (2010) study had more female employers and reported feeling uneasy about that.

Informal sector work

Increasing numbers of women in the labour force has accompanied an informalisation of labour. Reichlin and Shaw's (2015) report indicates that in South Asia, 83 per cent of employed women work in the informal economy, which it is 74 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, and 54 per cent in Latin American and Caribbean (pg. 11). Overall, informal sector activities (such as street vending) are mostly unregistered, poorly paid, typically lacking forms of contract and lacking any type of social protection (Tacoli, 2012). Women's high numbers in the informal economy are characterised by women typically based from home. Women needing to work in proximity to the household is due to several factors, e.g. phase in their life cycle (child bearing age), wealth/income levels (inability to pay for hired child care and house-help), women's restricted use of space, lower levels of education skills and work experience, limited access to start-up capital, holding secondary (or unpaid) roles in family businesses, and constraints on spatial mobility (Chant, 2013; Chopra, 2015). This situation limits accessing wider, more lucrative market opportunities, and may also create higher competition (e.g. among slum dwellers) and generate longer hours, possibly provoking discouragement and eventually workforce dropout (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016). During periods of economic downturn, informal-sector workers particularly suffer from declining demand, while competition increases as more workers laid off from formal-sector employment enter the informal. During economic austerity, even more jobs tend to be informalised (Tacoli, 2012).

Women who must assume multiple responsibilities and activities while working in the informal sector face various demands. Chant (2013) describes women as "patching together" activities that are commonly separate in urban space, e.g. shopping, child care and employment. Access to capital or microfinance resources to expand businesses activities remains a barrier for most, lacking collateral to access loans. Although microloans have shown some success for women, they are typically small-scale, supporting small micro-enterprise activities with limited impact (Reichlin & Shaw, 2015). Own-account businesses for women are viewed positively, but ventures with more than one employee is found to be minimal compared to men, with only 1 to 3 percent of women in developing regions being employers, men having double this rate and even more in certain regions (e.g. North Africa) (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016).

Related to the above is the issue of women's access to space and mobility. In a city this is more limited for women than men, not only due to reproductive caring responsibilities, but also because of cultural normative dimensions surrounding the ideas of permitted use of space, and patriarchal norms which may require certain modes of dress, behaviour etc. limiting social interaction. Limited mobility can jeopardize women benefiting from urban prosperity, restricting labour force participation. Gender-blind transport planning exacerbates these challenges, resulting in women required to make multiple stops for a range of different reasons across many diverse non-centralized zones, what Chant (2013) describes as 'trip chaining,' which places heavy costs and time burdens on women.

One emerging area of the informal sector with potentially viable and promising opportunities for women is the improved sanitation and environmental conservation 'green economy' efforts ongoing in urban areas. Chant and McIlwaine (2016) present examples of where women have engaged in environmental-friendly activities, whether informal or organised, such as the Burkina Faso "Green Brigade" of women's street cleaners, where women have opportunities to engage in paid work. However this work and income may be uncertain, and could crowd out other organised waste collectors and waster pickers and solid waste management contracts, resulting in loss of livelihoods for many.

A number of cases in the literature (e.g. Chant & McIlwaine, 2016; Roever, 2016; Moser 2016) discuss collective action through trade associations or other forms of union (varying degrees of formality)

comprising urban women working in the informal economy. Examples show positive processes from the grassroots that have potential impacts for furthering women's empowerment and transformation at scale. The associations may have a multiplicity of objectives and provide a range of direct and indirect benefits for their members. Roever's (2016) study of market vendors, mostly women, is a quantitative and qualitative analysis drawn from 2012 data from the Informal Economy Monitoring Study (IEMS), which is based on a ten-city, three-sector study of key drivers that affect working conditions among home-based workers, street vendors, and waste pickers. Data shows how vendors lack legal and social protection and face multiple constraints and injustices in accessing capital, resulting in dependent relationships and vulnerability. The data shows how membership-based organisations (small and large) served as a collective asset (based on social capital) that prevented erosion of stock (from government confiscation) and public space, and enabled asset accumulation – this shows capacity for transformation. A similar example of collective action is from India where waste pickers formed an association which has enabled fewer hours work, higher quality waste collection, increased social interaction, and for some, scholarships for children's higher education accessed from the union.

Another relatively well-known example of women's collective action in India is the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a trade union comprised of and in support of poor self-employed women, with a membership of over a million across nine states. The aim of SEWA is to promote self-reliance in women's economic activities and decision-making. SEWA provides a range of services to its members, covering sectors including credit, healthcare, childcare, insurance, education/vocational training, legal support, support to housing, and also mass mobilisation. Smaller member-based organisations have also formed with support from SEWA, which have advocated successfully for their rights and entitlements, such as raising salaries (Chant & McIlwaine, 2016). In addition to the non-government arena, Chant and McIlwaine (2016) also describe positive government initiatives that have potential to transform gender disparities in employment. In Senegal, the government supported an all-women taxi fleet, in Vietnam, 20 per cent of construction jobs in the mass rapid transit programme is earmarked for women, in Brazil, domestic workers must be registered and compliance with worker rights must be respected (wage, rest periods etc.), and in many countries, informal work remuneration has been legislated. These examples of collective action, like trade unions, have potential to contribute to increasing women's economic empowerment. Moser (2016) suggests that women's economic empowerment and transformation of gender roles is inherently a political process based on questions of agency (ability to make decision and control one's assets) and power. It will necessarily entail organisations, collective action and interaction with wider institutions and policies.

Care work

The potential for urbanisation to deliver better quality of life and development for all urban residents depends on the recognition of the important role of unpaid care work, typically but not always nor only performed by women (Tacoli, 2012). Women are usually the primary care-givers, and when compounded with their need to earn incomes, which for poor women is typically through low-paid positions with demanding hours, time poverty results. Chant's (2013) analytical literature review of gender differences in the division of labour in the paid and unpaid care economy underlines that men's labour is typically in "productive"/income-generating work, while women typically fulfil the major role in "reproductive", unpaid labour (e.g. routine domestic chores, specialised care work).

The literature suggests that although women in the global South are increasingly engaged in paid and unpaid work, this does not always seem to be complemented by male participation in care work (Chant, 2013; Evans, 2015b). Evans (2015b) argues that flexibility in gender divisions of labour will

increase only when there are shifts in both interest and exposure to changes that have occurred in paid work. In fact, decline in men's incomes and job security in urban areas has transformed ideas about women working, resulting in changed perceptions of women's employment, now viewed as beneficial. The fact that women are performing socially valued, masculine roles seems to have undermined beliefs about gender roles, in turn creating positive feedback. Evans (2014; 2015a) reports in her research in Zambia that in rural areas, traditional roles prevail and men are less willing to accept changing roles of women, but in urban areas, caring responsibilities are shifting and men are sharing more care responsibilities. However, overall, Evans (2015b) suggests there is less exposure to men undertaking housework, largely because it is performed in private rather than public spaces. Men's lack of exposure of men completing house and care work leads to the assumption that such practices are not the norm and liable to social ridicule. These cultural beliefs around gender expectations and practice give men (with self-interested reasons) grounds to avoid domestic work, perpetuating traditional gender divisions of labour.

This double-burden workload is a tax on women, which, combined with other discriminations (intra-household and in the labour market) restrains the type of income-generating activities available to them and can lower the value of their work contributions in the labour market. Tacoli (2012) states that prevailing social norms and values tend to assign primary responsibility for domestic and care activities to women, therefore increasing their workload and limiting their access to other types of employment that are more formal and better paid, albeit also less flexible and requiring better qualifications. Women's unpaid work in rural areas often goes unrecognised and unappreciated – they are viewed as only “sitting,” but in urban areas money has more value, women are earning incomes, and this challenges existing beliefs. In rural areas, even if women do earn money, husbands typically control it, in urban areas, however, women are three times more likely to control their own earnings than in rural areas (Evans 2015a).

Urban settings often create unique household composition dynamics largely due to the lack of access to adequate shelter, a common problem for the poor. This leads to the expansion of households, commonly with grown-up children (with their partners and children coming into the family). In many cases, these extended multi-generation households include ‘embedded’ women-headed households, for example, daughters with children but without a partner who benefit from emotional support and, crucially, support in childcare by relatives, enabling them to work. This built-in child-care in these contexts is essential for engaging in paid work, important for the urban poor where public childcare provision is non-existent (Tacoli, 2012).

Time spent in unpaid care work, combined with limited access to essential infrastructure, e.g. water and sanitation, poor shelter and restricted mobility, contribute to the challenges face to enter into the labour market. Yet time poverty, rather than income poverty, is typically overlooked by policy-makers, despite that it is key to understanding and improving upon multi-dimensional poverty reduction. Care work is rooted in persistent sociocultural norms, when women who access paid labour in urban areas lack domestic support, care work is commonly transferred to daughters, which impacts on their schooling and contributes to the intergenerational transmission of traditional gender roles and inequalities. A multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral lens is thus important to understanding poverty, as it reveals that women do not necessarily benefit from urban prosperity, and are disadvantaged in not only income poverty, but asset poverty, time and power (Chant, 2013; Chant & McIlwaine, 2016).

Violence against women

Urban violence against women limits women's movement and their use of public space, particularly among the most poor and marginalised (Taylor, 2011; Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2015). Violence in urban contexts is typically generated from urban poverty, political motives, targeted violence against women (sexual-based violence) or a combination of these factors. In South Africa for example, violence against women is driven by patriarchal social norms and complex and intersectional power inequalities, including gender, race, class and sexuality (Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2015). These motives may result in harassment and sexual violence against women, restricting women's movement, potentially curtailing women's economic, educational and social opportunities, exposing women to health and stress risks and creating severe infringements on women's rights to the city (Taylor, 2011).

Within the household, women in urban environments also experience gender-based violence, sometimes due to shifts in gender labour conditions. Women can potentially move from violent households as they take on paid employment that can enable them to access sufficient economic resources to be independent. This should be the case as participation rates in employment are higher in cities than in rural areas. However, access to income also can lead to a backlash of violence (Tacoli, 2012). Tacoli (2012) reports that in the Philippines, when women earn more than 50 per cent of household income, more domestic violence is reported (than those who earn less). Their economic power appears to be a threat. Tacoli (2012) also reports that the relationship between women's paid employment and domestic abuse often depends on the types of work women and men may be involved in. Women working in irregular, low-paid and casual jobs are more likely to face domestic violence than those in better-paid, higher-quality jobs, because they have more resources and choices to resist. Violence against women is also found to be more likely when male partners are unemployed or have irregular work, and when the household bears financial difficulties.

3. Case examples and lessons

Informal economy: street vendors in less developed countries

This example presented by Tacoli (2012) was based on research by the Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) organisation, showing impacts of the 2009 economic crisis among home workers, street vendors and waste pickers in 14 urban centres in ten countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. In the study, 54 per cent of women employed as street vendors, home-based workers and waste pickers were the main breadwinners for their households.

Increases in costs of raw materials, gas, electricity and transport have a strong impact when profit margins are slim. To compensate, home workers increased their work rates when possible, but this did not always result in higher incomes and was made even more difficult by competition from new entrants. Street vendors (selling cooked food) were affected by higher market fees and retrenchments of factory workers, the majority of their clients. Waste pickers were affected by a decline in recyclable waste, as people consume less and small businesses close down, and by reduced demand in international markets. Strategies devised to overcome these constraints were only short-term and can increase risk and uncertainty, for example traders can change stock, street vendors and waste pickers can travel to new and more distant locations, and home workers can increase their working hours, expanding their already limited time. The findings of this study show characteristics of the informal sector and dispel common myths, far from enabling flexibility and ease of entry to low-skilled workers and workers pressed for time,

informal work often entails very long hours, stiff competition, continuously decreasing wages, and there is limited mobility or opportunities to engage in alternative or additional activities (Tacoli, 2012).

Gender empowerment and reproductive health in urban Nigeria

This research conducted by Corroon *et al* (2014) analyses the association between urban women's empowerment and reproductive health outcomes. The objective of the research was to examine whether women's empowerment in urban Nigeria is associated with improved family planning use and maternal health behaviours, a critical service provision accessible to women, which has important effects on women's right and ability to conduct family planning and on their own personal health. The study draws from a baseline household survey data from the Measurement, Learning and Evaluation Project for the Nigerian Urban Reproductive Health Initiative implemented in six major cities comprising both south and the Muslim-dominated north.

The study queries whether different effects of empowerment exist by region of residence using four dimensions of empowerment: economic; attitudes towards domestic violence; partner prohibitions; and decision-making. The aim of the study is to understand if dimensions of empowerment have effects on reproductive health outcomes, and if so, if this is determined by region of residence. Overall, findings indicated that empowered women are more likely to use modern contraception and deliver in a health facilities with attendants and that women's empowerment within the context of her household and daily life and relations with her partner can play a powerful role in the likelihood that she will use a modern contraceptive method or give birth in a health facility. Large differences were found between northern and southern cities, likely attributed to the Muslim religion, which showed more prohibitions on women and less empowered decision-making by women.

The study concludes that in certain urban centres, programmes may be needed and tailored to specifically address cultural barriers to women accessing reproductive health services. Further, the study suggests that these programmes should work with women, men, and households to increase women's decision-making involvement in the household and to identify barriers to women accessing these services. The study shows how context matters and that important distinctions exist regionally.

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Key websites

- UN- HABITAT website: <http://unhabitat.org/>
- UNWOMEN website: <http://www.unwomen.org/en>
- Women in the in Cities International (WICI) website: <http://www.femmesetvilles.org/index.php/en/>
- Women and Habitat Network of Latin America website: <http://www.redmujer.org.ar/eng/publications.html>
- Action Aid website: <http://www.actionaid.org/>

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