Gender Learning Week

Women and ICT in Urban Operations

Recap Session

GPURL as part of the Gender Learning Week organized by the Gender Group, led a Webinar session to unpack some of the barriers that women face in accessing, and benefiting from digital interventions and potential opportunities to empower them in WBG urban operations. Maria Beatriz Orlando (Lead Social Development Specialist) moderated the session.

Access to the internet is power, yet more than two billion women and girls are silenced, unable to access key resources, information, and opportunities that come with an internet connection. Urban environments offer opportunities for connectivity and knowledge about the digital world, but for women and girls to reap those benefits more needs to be done. With this focus, a panel of the Bank’s Digital Development, Urban, and Social experts came together to discuss lessons from two World Bank publications, Engendering ICT Toolkit and Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design and draw lessons from two urban operations, one in Bangladesh one in Pakistan. They discussed constraints such as lack of finance, limited digital skills, and social and cultural barriers and highlighted the innovations and solutions that urban operations bring.

In her opening remarks Maria Beatriz Orlando (Lead Social Development Specialist) discussed the evolution of digital and ICT in offering great opportunities for inclusion and improvements in the design of urban spaces. She emphasized the fact that these opportunities also come with risks like cyber bulling and others.

Samia Melhem (Global Lead for Digital Capabilities) explained the relevance and importance of ICT in engendering urban operations by bringing specific examples from the ICT toolkit. She highlighted that urban operations provide an opportunity to address the gender digital divide that we face. Samia also touched upon the fact that in some countries there are negative biases associated with girls pursuing STEM education and/or ICT careers. Girls themselves may see technology as a male domain and need to be encouraged to enter STEM/ICT fields. She concluded by mentioning practical efforts at targeting women and young girls that will help reduce gender gaps in ICT adoption down the road. Samia called for designing our projects in a way that would revert the status quo.

Carina Lakovits (E T Consultant, GPURL) highlighted practical methodologies for incorporating and elevating the voices of women and girls in participatory planning and design processes. More specifically she focused on how to use technology for planning. Carina concluded by discussing examples from countries that have experimented with digital apps for women to know where they are safe in a city or where they are not safe and what transport options they can use.

David Mason (Urban Development Specialist) discussed the various apps that the team is using to undertake safety audits of public spaces in the Bangladesh-Dhaka North Neighborhood Upgrading Project (P173022) with the purpose of using the data to inform decisions about how public spaces are managed and what type of security responses can be provided. Safetipin is an app that focuses on women and women’s perceptions about safety. He also explained that the E-services that the project includes aim to improve the coverage and efficiency of existing citizen services (such as paying taxes, obtaining official documents and certificates) by developing an online portal and service applications. David mentioned that
under COVID-19, the team had to rely more on remote consultations using surveys, conference calls and other techniques. He concluded his remarks by pointing to the growing interest in the Safetipin app from the urban teams specially those who are focused on the architecture, those who have urban design backgrounds such Urbanscapes KSB, and colleagues in transport as well.

**Shan Rehman (Senior Social Development Specialist)** focused on the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Cities and Digital Transformation project (P165684). He explained what the team has done to create safer digital and physical spaces for young women. To respond to youth unemployment and risk of exclusion in the KP province of Pakistan, the team has been working with the provincial Government to connect youth to opportunities in the digital economy. Through policy dialogue, on-the-ground engagement with youth, and close collaboration with the technology sector, the World Bank assisted the government to create Pakistan’s first ever provincial digital strategy. Shan explained several strategies that the team has used to attract and retain female beneficiaries, including creating *gender inclusive work spaces* (Durshal) for young women to access computers and the internet. The project is also leveraging the Durshal network to incentivize young women technologists and tech entrepreneurs to receive customized trainings, mentorship, and networks to find and retain jobs, as well as launch viable startups. Mobility, connectivity/device access, online harassment, are all issues the team has tried to address in some way.

**Maria Beatriz Orlando-the moderator** concluded the session by mentioning the new Karachi and Chennai government urban platforms which include a gender lab to monitor safety. Maria Beatriz pointed out the fact that this approach has been taken onboard by the urban teams and urban transport teams. She touched upon the importance of gathering data on men’s perception about safety because a lot of urban mobility decisions are not made by women alone, they are made at the household level and men have a huge role to play.

*Note: For more details on the materials discussed during the session please see links below and click [here](#) for the Zoom recording.*

- **Gender and Digital Development- GPURL Gender Note**
- **Engendering ICT Toolkit**
- **Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design (worldbank.org)**
- **Leveraging ICT Technologies in Closing the Gender Gap**
- **Jobs Interventions for Young Women in the Digital Economy**
- **Global Tech Challenge: Solutions for Women**