LIBERIA: HOW WOMEN EXPERIENCE THE CITY

Gender Audit in Three Informal Communities

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CITIES FOR WOMEN

Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

HOSTED BY: UNOPS

"An enabling and transparent policy-making area, one that is inclusive of gender perspectives, is the necessary first step towards building an inclusive society where women can be empowered."

Cities Alliance, 2020

WOMEN, WATER AND PUBLIC SPACE: A PRIORITY IN LIBERIA

At the invitation of Greater Monrovia Local Government Authorities (LGAs), Cities Alliance supported the development of a Greater Monrovia City Development Strategy (CDS) as a coherent strategy to articulate an overarching vision of urban development. CDS strengthens the economy, builds infrastructures, improves service delivery and promotes equality. To promote equitable growth and quality of life for all citizens in Greater Monrovia and the surrounding communities, the CDS has identified a strong need to engage more women and girls in the process as this will harness the potential of urbanization.

Greater Monrovia City Development Strategy (CDS)

1	2	3	4	5
Stakeholders Engagement	Individual Survey on Women Experiences in the City of Monroviat	City for Women Laboratory to engage women in identifying priorities for the CDS	Gender Mapping in three informal communities	Construction of water kiosks managed by women of the informal communities

To strengthen women's voices and promote their participation in the city, Cities Alliance undertook a survey and Women Transforming Monrovia workshop where women were engaged to formulate inputs for the CDS. This process has identified water access and safety as priority intervention areas. Therefore, Cities Alliance is supporting the construction of water kiosks in three informal settlements (Clara Town, Doe Community and Pipeline Community) in Greater Monrovia, to ensure access to safe and reliable water supplies. Women will be engaged in the management and governance of the water kiosks that can ultimately result in greater water security. Recent studies have demonstrated that when men and women are equally involved in design and maintenance of water systems, the governance and sustainability of water supplies increase.[1]

Prior to the construction, Cities Alliance has commissioned to the Federation of Liberian Urban Poor Savers (FOLUPS) a gender audit in the three communities where the water kiosks will be built—Clara Town, Doe Community and Pipeline Community. This report presents the key findings of the gender analysis and proprieties for empowering women and girls living in informal settlements.
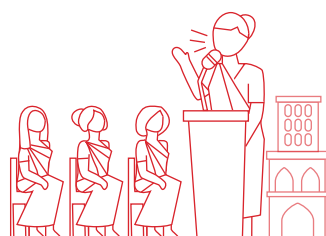
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1   UN Water. 2006. Gender, *Water, Sanitation: A Policy Brief*.
www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/un_water_policy_brief_2_gender.pdf.

The Cities for Women Programme

Cities Alliance envisions a world where all women and girls can live in inclusive and equitable cities and communities. The Cities for Women Global Programme works towards this goal, aiming to increase women's and girls' engagement in urban development and governance. Cities Alliance adopts a city-wide approach to women engagement and participation, focusing simultaneously on political participation, urban governance, spatial planning and public spaces, and economic equality. The Programme helps cities develop urban areas that are more gender-sensitive, inclusive, and responsive to everyone's needs, create frameworks of opportunities for the active participation of all, and include results frameworks and indicators to monitor gender equality. Cities Alliance aims to encourage a holistic, positive social transformation to improve the quality of life for marginalized and vulnerable populations in Greater Montserrado, Liberia, and to do this, it collaborated with Habitat for Humanity International, Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing, UN-Habitat and Shack/Slum Dweller International, and the Government of Liberia on incorporating women's needs within the new City Development Strategy (CDS).

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THE METHODOLOGY

Cities Alliance has developed a Cities for Women Framework[2] as a first step to help local stakeholders to gain an understanding of the current engagement of women in the various dimensions of their environments. The Framework includes existing and new tools to allow participatory processes whereby women can be active participants of the analysis and improvement of their cities. Among them, the Women Engagement in Cities (WEC) Survey identifies a set of specific questions related to the social, economic, political participation of women in cities. It is with this understanding that efforts can be made to formulate policy and engagement techniques to improve women's input in shaping their cities.

Based on the Cities for Women Framework, Cities Alliance undertook a gender assessment in the three informal communities of Clara Town, Doe Community and Pipeline Community, to identify issues related to public spaces safety, women's participation in community development and economic empowerment.

The Federation of Liberian Urban Poor Savers (FOLUPS), in partnership with Cities Alliance, gathered data and focused on discussions with selected participants in the three communities through the following means: an WEC Survey and gender-based community mapping for Clara Town; a community walk for Doe Community; and a safety audit for Pipeline Community—all done to collect the experiences, stories and needs of 60 women and girls of these communities.

2   See Cities Alliance. 2020. *Cities for Women: Urban Assessment Framework Through a Gender Lens.* https://www.citiesalliance.org/resources/knowledge/publications/cities-for-women-urban-assessment-framework-through-gender-lens.

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM GENDER ANALYSIS IN CLARA TOWN, DOE COMMUNITY AND PIPELINE COMMUNITY

Clara Town, A Growing Community

"This situation has placed women in a difficult position in terms of assuming the role as household heads and breadwinner for the family."

Survey respondent

WEC SURVEY FOR CLARA TOWN

In Clara Town FOLUPS conducted the survey focusing on assessing the level of engagement of women in the community development. The survey asked questions about: the physical safety of women, especially relating to sexual and gender-based violence, the access to land and property rights, the political tolerance and the cost of living and the housing conditions. Additionally, FOLUPS assessed the efficiency of city transport systems for women and the confidence in public authorities such as in government.

SUMMARY AND RESULTS OF THE WEC SURVEY

Participants emphasized that poverty is a key issue in Clara Town as many women are poor and are unable to provide their children with basic survival needs. The women stated that many men do not contribute financially and practically to the family care and management. This situation has placed women in a difficult position in terms of assuming the role as household heads

Gender Audit

1. **WEC Profile:** Participants are asked to evaluate women's participation in their cities, on a scale from 1 (critical) to 9 (full), by responding to as series of questions that look at social inclusion, the economic, political-institutional and human and social capital aspects of their lives.

2. **Gender-Based Community Mapping:** women are asked to draw the map of their communities identifying places in which they like to go, meet others, rest.

3. **Community Walk:** women are invited to walk together in their community, to observe and notice the issues and potentials of the areas.

4. **Safety-Audit:** women are asked to to identify safe and unsafe spaces and recommend how the unsafe spaces can be improved

and breadwinner for the family. The participants said not many women work or have lucrative jobs as housemaid and low-level government jobs do not pay well. The participants noted a lack of opportunities to start or expand small businesses. The occupation of women in domestic chores and petty trading to generate income has limited women's capacity to actively participate in community life and share issues affecting them. The participants added that the way women are treated has undermined their self-esteem.

When discussing the important changes needed to enhance the situation of women in Clara Town, the participants mentioned that women need channels to voice their concerns. Government structures are more open to men than women because most of the leadership positions are co-opted by men. Generally, the respondents mentioned that women do not have the required space to meet and engage effectively to discuss priorities for community development. **The discussants explained that there is some level of improvement during the last two years with more women paying a key role in community organisations; however, there is still a need for women to gain a central role in the community development.** The participants added that an increased women's participation in decision-making process can be achieved through proper education and awareness raising.

GENDER-BASED COMMUNITY MAPPING FOR CLARA TOWN[3]
FOLUPS did the exercise of gender-based community mapping to help local people understanding how women use urban spaces and infrastructures. The surveyors asked women to draw a map and identify their favorite places to rest or bring children, or the best streets to walk on.

SUMMARY AND RESULTS
Women have limited spaces to meet and this is because of male dominance and control of community assets and open spaces. Many of the Clara Town residents use the Clara Town Intellectual Center, Clara Town Public School, and the Clara Town Market areas as meeting places. The Clara Town Intellectual Center was specifically built for the whole community, but the women mentioned that, over the years, this space has become the domain of men. They said improved streets pavements foster social life and safety.

Key learning from the exercise is that there is a high crime rate in Clara Town; therefore, women must always be cautious about which street to take due to their greater physical vulnerability. Participants suggested that there needs to be community sensitization to ensure community takes actions for their own safety and protect women as much as they can from criminals. Women need to be educated to demand space and inclusion in decision-making processes at the community level.

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3   'Community Development Toolkit' <https://guidance.miningwithprinciples.com/community-development-toolkit/>

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Fearing for Women's Safety in Doe Community

FOLUPS conducted a community walk to assess the pedestrian safety, accessibility, and comfort of the Doe Community. Women living in the area have been invited to walk together, experience and react to the conditions directly. FOLUPS asked women to pay attention to how spaces are inclusive and accessible.

SUMMARY AND RESULTS OF THE COMMUNITY WALK
Participants of the exercise noted that Doe Community, a high-populated large slum, has four places that residents use the most: the Police Station, which is accessible at night time; the Doe Community's main paved street, which is a vibrant public space; the Community Market, a major meeting point; and the Hope Community School and Church, which offer religious and educational services.

Doe Community has its advantages, which include easy access to water, which is often not suitable for drinking. **There is also availability of the healthcare facility and schools; therefore, children can obtain some level of education and people can get healthcare services when needed. The community forums are helping to fight against the crime rate and address conflict issues amongst residents.**

Despite all these advantages, participants noted that many challenges encountered by the community pose high risks and are detrimental to the survival of women and children: increased crime rate; high incidence of drug and substance abuse; and bad governance with limited capacity to manage criminal acts of people. Participants also highlighted that moving to other areas of the city is unsafe and risky, as residents have to cross waterways using narrow bridges (known as "monkey bridges", less than one foot wide). This is dangerous for children who constantly fall into the swamps. Another concern is the high level of poverty rate amongst residents in the Doe Community, with women and children particularly vulnerable.

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Pipeline Community Focuses on Safety

FOLUPS conducted a community safety audit[4] in the Pipeline Community to bring attention to harassment and violence in public spaces. The safety audit aimed to identify why women residents may feel unsafe in the Pipeline Community and, if possible, to improve the environment to make it safer and more inclusive. Women participating in the safety audit came together to walk through the urban area, evaluate how safe it feels to them and identify characteristics that make the designated space feel unsafe. These characteristics might include poor lighting, lack of signs, objects blocking the view ahead, poorly maintained public spaces, and areas that lack proper exit routes.

SUMMARY AND RESULT OF SAFETY AUDIT IN PIPELINE COMMUNITY
Respondents to the safety audit explained that Pipeline Community is a growing community with a huge population, especially because of its proximity to the red-light commercial area. They further explained that the newly paved roads have attracted new residents and improved the life of existing residents as compared to the past when the roads were not paved.

According to the participants to the safety audit, there are limited walkway signs to show directions or emergency services. The entire Pipeline Community is dark at night, which makes most of the women and residents vulnerable to criminal acts. Moreover, in case of an emergency at night, **it is nearly impossible to get help, because vehicles and motorcyclists are also afraid to venture into the areas without lights.** Moreover, there are limited signs to show directions about how to get to emergency services. Sightlines are also challenging, as there are uncoordinated constructions of makeshift buildings.

Participants of the audit noted that the area is perceived less safe than Clara Town and Doe Community. Maintaining streetlights, signage and other basic social support services is a critical challenge. Good governance is also a critical issue of ensuring community safety and addressing the issue of the crime rate.

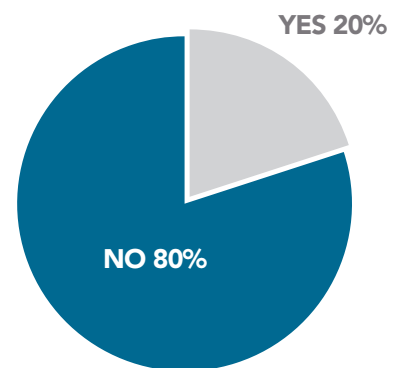4   Victoria Status of Women Action Group, Downtown Safety Audit, 1993.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE GENDER INCLUSION IN INFORMAL COMMUNITIES

Although the three communities, Clara Town, Doe Community and Pipeline, are in different locations, they share similarities in terms of limited access to basic social services and their capacity to manage infrastructure and facilities meant to ensure their improved livelihoods. There is also a similarity in terms of poor sanitary conditions and the existence of a crime rate. Doe Community and Clara Town have a good road passing through them, but limited access to a good road to get to their subcommunities and blocks. **Programmes to upgrade the knowledge on gender mainstreaming, leadership and good governance, and improved environmental sanitation will all help improve and upgrade these communities.**

The following are recommendations for the three communities and informal communities in general:

Have government increase security presence in the communities and bring perpetrators to justice.

Put in place a proper mechanism that will enable communities to take responsibility to build or improve the existing infrastructure they have for better environmental sanitation, safer drinking water and better maintenance of community toilets.

Work with communities in a way that makes them responsible to upgrade their community and collaborate better with political leaders and government, non-governmental organizations, and donors.

Educate women to demand space and inclusion in decision-making processes at the community level so as to reduce the use of male-dominant power over them that limits their spaces.

YES 20%

NO 80%

Safety Audit - Lighting
Is the lighting bright enough, even and in good repair?

The following are recommendations regarding training:

Conduct leadership training of trainers (TOT) for FOLUPS and support them to roll out the training in these communities. Cities Alliance and partners should conduct a leadership, policy advocacy and gender training, to support to roll them out to slum communities, and support community action for gender mainstreaming.

Conduct basic gender training for selected youth groups, community leaders, women group leaders, religious group leaders and school authorities on gender and youth mainstreaming.

Train community leaders on safety and safeguard procedures.

Promote training of women as most women in Clara Town have a small business and women need the training to improve their livelihood. They also need tool kits and grant support, because most of the small businesses have collapsed due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

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WOMEN ENGAGEMENT IN CITIES (WEC) PROFILE

SAFETY
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 3: HIGHLY UNSATISFACTORY)

1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How does one assess safety issues for women in this city?

LIVING CONDITIONS
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 4: UNSATISFACTORY)

1 2 3 **4** 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How does one assess the living conditions for women in this city?

MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBLITY
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 6: SATISFACTORY)

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9

Q: How do you assess the efficiency and accessibility of the city's transport system?

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 4: UNSATISFACTORY)

1 2 3 **4** 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How is the city as a place for women to have their own business assessed?

LAWS AND RIGHTS
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 3: HIGHLY UNSATISFACTORY)

1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How is the land rights security for women assessed?

CAREERS
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 3: HIGHLY UNSATISFACTORY)

1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How is the quality of the job market for women in this city assessed?

WOMEN'S RIGHTS NETWORKS
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 5: ALOMST SATISFACTORY)

1 2 3 4 **5** 6 7 8 9

Q: How does one assess opportunities for women in different age groups to get involved in informal or unstructured networks to influence political processes?

CULTURAL POLICIES
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 2: BAD)

1 **2** 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How are cultural policies directed towards women assessed?

PUBLIC SPACES
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 3: HIGHLY UNSATISFACTORY)

1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How are public spaces that can be used by women to meet and connect assessed?

EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE
(SCALE OF ENGAGEMENT 3: HIGHLY UNSATISFACTORY)

1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9

Q: How are current education opportunities for women in this city assessed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Critical	Bad	Highly Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Almost Satisfactory	Satisfactory	More Than Satisfactory	Highly Satisfactory	Full

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Cities Without Slums