

**Infrastructure
for gender
equality
and the
empowerment
of women**



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Foreword



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Around the world, too many women and girls miss out on opportunities to improve their lives for a simple reason: the infrastructure around them isn't built with their needs in mind.

Dark, unlit roads and inadequate sanitation facilities mean that women miss out on work or education. Unsafe public transport, where sexual harassment and violence can happen frequently, stops girls from achieving their dreams. Hospitals built without reliable electricity supply and unsafe maternity wards result in many tragic and preventable deaths.

When infrastructure sources are scarce, it hits marginalized groups such as women and girls much harder. They bear the burden of unpaid work, and inadequate infrastructure exacerbates their time poverty, leaving them with fewer opportunities to pursue jobs or education and improve their status.

This needs to change.

Our world's infrastructure needs are immense, and the impact of what we build now lasts for decades. If we build to discriminate, we perpetuate inequality for a long time to come. With an estimated \$97 trillion in global infrastructure investment required to meet sustainable development targets, we have a moral

as well as financial responsibility to ensure that this massive investment leaves no one behind. We simply cannot afford to turn a blind eye on gender-blind infrastructure.

To make infrastructure work for everyone, we need to fundamentally change the way it is planned, delivered and managed. That change begins with inclusive design that ensures our infrastructure works for everyone, including women, girls and other disadvantaged groups. The sheer volume of existing infrastructure that has been designed in a manner that fails to consider the specific needs of this group is alarming. This must stop, and it must stop now to make certain that women and girls are not left behind as the world develops.

This report forms part of a broader effort – by UNOPS and others – to shift the paradigm to ensure that gender is mainstreamed into all stages of the project life cycle, beginning with design.

In shedding light on the problem of gender-blind infrastructure, and developing tools and methodologies to help address the problem, the report hopes to be part of the solution to creating gender-responsive infrastructure that gets us all one step closer to realizing the 2030 Agenda.



Introduction

Women and girls experience numerous barriers when trying to access basic services – such as education and healthcare – or opportunities to improve their livelihoods. While gender equality implies equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women, men, boys and girls, women and girls are disproportionately affected by persistent gender inequalities when accessing infrastructure.¹ This is particularly apparent in times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, not all women and girls are equal or equally disadvantaged. The extent to which they are at risk of being excluded depends on where they lie at the intersection of different underserved, disadvantaged or marginalized groupsⁱⁱ in any given context. The implications of this intersectionality need to be understood and recognized. Inclusive infrastructure that addresses these barriers and accounts for diverse needs can enhance access to quality services and development opportunities for the broadest segments of society, especially the underserved, vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Underdeveloped and gender-blind infrastructure is one of the leading causes for the inability of women and girls to access the basic services to support their upward social mobility and reduce the gender gap. Gender-blind infrastructure fails to consider the different roles, responsibilities and particular needs of women, men, girls and boys in a specific context and how this affects their ability to use or access infrastructure. In times of crisis, this can have life-threatening consequences for women and girls. They are at risk not only from poor health infrastructure, but from inadequate infrastructure across all sectors, which can limit access to essential services and prevent them from maintaining security and self-sufficiency during social and economic upheaval. These considerations must guide future infrastructure development.

Approximately 2.1 billion people lack access to safe drinking water and 4.5 billion lack access

to sanitation,² while 975 million people do not have access to electricity and 1 billion lack access to all-weather roads globally.³ The burden of underdeveloped and non-inclusive infrastructure falls disproportionately on vulnerable and marginalized groups, especially women and girls. In this daunting context, inclusive infrastructure planning, delivery and management plays a key role in creating an enabling environment to empower women and girls to make effective choices and transform those choices into effective outcomes – including when it comes to their safety and wellbeing.

Infrastructure development and service delivery is a critical public policy and investment area in many developing countries. It is estimated that \$97 trillion in global infrastructure investment is required by 2040 to support sustainable development;⁴ two-thirds of which is required in developing countries.⁵ Considering the long operational life of infrastructure, not mainstreaming gender in the infrastructure life cycle can reinforce gender inequalities for decades, wasting limited financial resources and putting lives at risk. It is a moral and financial imperative to ensure that this massive investment includes a gender mainstreaming approach to infrastructure planning, delivery and management to achieve sustainability, equality, and economic and social benefits for all.⁶

There is a lot to be gained by ensuring equal access to infrastructure services for women and girls. Not only will it improve and protect the lives and livelihoods of women and girls, but will benefit the entire global economy as well. Numerous studies have demonstrated the social and financial advantages of improving gender equality and empowering women.^{7,8,9} In particular, it is estimated that approximately \$28 trillion could be added to the annual global GDP in 2025 by achieving the equal participation of women and men in the economy.¹⁰ Ensuring equal access to infrastructure services is a critical step to close the gender gap.

To make certain that infrastructure development supports equal access to infrastructure services, driving increased economic opportunities for women and girls, the global community needs to step up and change the way infrastructure is planned, delivered and managed. This requires cross-disciplinary cooperation that spans the entire infrastructure life



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influence the achievement of 92 per cent of targets across all 17 SDGs.¹¹ However, it is also true that poor infrastructure can negatively affect the achievement of all goals and lock in these negative impacts for decades. Furthermore, infrastructure influences the achievement of all of the targets within SDG 5, 'Gender Equality', and the 32 SDG targets across 11 of the 17 goals that include a direct reference to gender-related issues.¹²

Inclusive and gender-responsive infrastructure is central to achieving international commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. These international commitments include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women,¹³ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,¹⁴ the Commission on the Status of Women,¹⁵ the New Urban Agenda¹⁶ and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.¹⁷

Given their long lifespan and high cost, infrastructure systems should be planned, implemented and managed to be sustainable, resilient and inclusive in order to prevent negative impacts that could last decades. Only through sustainable, resilient and inclusive infrastructure can we effectively address the problems of a growing global population, resource scarcity and increasing risk from natural hazards caused by climate change and ensure gender equality and equal access to opportunities for all. Furthermore, given the enabling nature of infrastructure, inclusive infrastructure development in one sector can have a multiplier effect on the delivery of other infrastructure sectors (e.g., energy can improve the delivery of education and health services).¹⁸

Infrastructure systems are sustainable when they are able to limit the negative – and increase the positive – social, economic and environmental impacts on the communities and individuals they serve. For example, the planning and implementation of renewable energy infrastructure that contributes to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and pollution also has a positive impact on women's time poverty and health due to the advantages of electricity for domestic activities and replacing the use of biomass fuels for cooking.¹⁹

When infrastructure systems fail, women and girls are usually disproportionately affected by the loss of infrastructure services.

Infrastructure systems are resilient when they are able to withstand shocks and stresses from the environmental, economic and societal context. Infrastructure resilience is particularly critical for women because, when infrastructure systems fail, women and girls are usually disproportionately affected by the loss of infrastructure services. For instance, in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, female deaths outnumbered male deaths by a huge margin in India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Because women were the primary household caregivers, they stayed behind to care for children and other family members in houses that were not designed to withstand the shocks of the tsunami, resulting in greater female casualties.²⁰ In the 1991 cyclone and floods in Bangladesh, the death toll among women was five times higher than men. One of the leading causes of this disparity was that the design of the cyclone shelters was not gender-sensitive, discouraging women from seeking shelter during the cyclone. They lacked gender-sensitive sanitation facilities, ramps for heavily pregnant women and private spaces for lactating mothers.²¹

Infrastructure is inclusive when it is planned, designed, implemented and managed with a focus on the needs of all end users, especially vulnerable or marginalized groups such as women, youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities. One of the barriers to inclusive infrastructure is the predominance of men in infrastructure development-related professions. For example, in the European Union's urban public transport sector, women represent only 17.5 per cent of the workforce on average across countries.²² In the water, sanitation and hygiene sector, less than 16.7 per cent of the labour force in a study of 15 developing economies comprise female professionals.²³ The absence of female professionals, particularly in the planning and design of infrastructure, can contribute to the

Infrastructure sectoral issues and opportunities

In many parts of the world, women and girls encounter challenges when trying to access basic services. This may be due to gender-blind infrastructure design, limited control over resources, limited mobility and freedom of movement, personal safety issues, as well as traditional roles and responsibilities in both the public and private spheres. Therefore, it is necessary to plan, implement and manage gender-responsive infrastructure that can act as an enabler for sustainable development without compromising gender equality. This requires the identification of existing differences and inequalities in the local context and addressing the different needs, responsibilities and expectations of women, men, girls and boys. By doing this, infrastructure systems can eliminate barriers and support opportunities for women and girls – such as access to livelihoods, education and healthcare.

Different infrastructure systems such as energy, transportation, water and sanitation, waste and digital communications as well as building types including hospitals, schools, housing, commercial facilities and government buildings present a wide range of challenges and opportunities to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. This section looks at themes cutting across these systems as well as the challenges and opportunities that are specific to these infrastructure systems.

Cross-cutting themes

An important issue to consider when developing gender-responsive infrastructure is the relationship between infrastructure (or the lack thereof) and how women and girls use their time. Women and

girls spend a large amount of time on unpaid domestic activities due to traditional roles as primary caregivers. In rural and economically disadvantaged areas, inadequate infrastructure services disproportionately affect their time use because they bear the burden of household tasks, like collecting water and firewood, cooking, cleaning and providing childcare. This limits the time available for pursuing educational, economic or social activities – both inside and outside the household – to improve their overall well-being. This lack of discretionary time available is referred to as time poverty.²⁷

Women can play an active role as change-makers and educators for embedding sustainability within different infrastructure sectors. In this sense, gender equality represents both a necessary component and a final objective of sustainable development. Our world cannot achieve sustainable development without closing the gender gap. When women are more involved in public administration, there is a higher likelihood of utilizing public resources for human development priorities such as child health, nutrition and access to employment.²⁸ Therefore, increasing the employment opportunities for women in the infrastructure sector can support the development of gender-responsive infrastructure that meets the needs of all end users. In addition, due to their traditional role as educators in both the household and the community, women can act as change-makers by teaching new generations how to live more sustainably, for example, by recycling waste and adapting to climate change.²⁹

Energy

Energy infrastructure projects that incorporate a gender perspective will help to achieve the goals of universal energy access, environmental sustainability and gender equality, leading to positive developmental outcomes for all. The lack of access to electricity affects 1.1 billion people globally, while over 3 billion people still rely on combustible fuels for household energy needs such as cooking and lighting.³⁰ This affects women and girls disproportionately because nonexistent or irregular electricity supply can considerably increase their time poverty, reducing the number

of productive hours in a day and increasing the unpaid domestic work burden.³²

The responsibility for collecting biomass fuels for cooking – such as wood, dung and crop residues – falls on women and girls in low-income rural households. On average, they spend 18 hours per week on these activities due to the need to travel long distances in search of fuel.³³ Furthermore, women and girls disproportionately suffer from adverse health outcomes due to indoor air pollution caused by the use of unclean, combustible fuels for household energy, accounting for 6 out of 10 of the 4.3 million premature deaths globally in 2012.³⁴

Mainstreaming gender considerations in electrification and the transition to clean energy is critical to address these issues, and reduce gender inequalities. The provision of electric lighting helps to lengthen the day by one to two hours, allowing women to spend more time on productive, income-generating or leisure activities.³⁵ Rural electrification projects that enable the presence of time-saving devices, such as electric water pumps and rice mills, reduce the time spent on unpaid domestic work, freeing up time to spend on other activities.³⁶ Women can also play a role in improving electricity access in rural areas through the deployment of off-grid solar solutions and solar-powered appliances.³⁷ Recognizing the role of women as primary energy users and managers in the household, energy access programs can engage women in training and awareness-building activities to improve the adoption and use of clean energy technologies, such as energy-efficient cookstoves. The provision of clean and efficient energy for cooking can not only alleviate women's time poverty, but also improve their health and quality of life.³⁸

Transportation

Gender-responsive transport infrastructure that recognizes gender-differentiated travel patterns and needs can play a pivotal role in addressing gender inequalities and improving the safety

and security of women and girls when trying to access social and economic opportunities. Unsafe and gender-blind public transportation is a major obstacle to women's mobility. Incidents of gender-based violence are frequent in areas on and around public transportation and can inhibit their use by women and girls. In France, 39 per cent of sexual assaults against women were reported in transit and train stations,³⁹ and a multi-country study from the Middle East and North Africa region found that between 40 per cent to 60 per cent of women had experienced sexual harassment on the street.⁴⁰ Furthermore, a study in India showed that women are willing to attend lower-quality colleges, spend up to twice the cost of tuition and travel up to an additional 40 minutes every day, in order to use safer transport routes or safer modes of transport.⁴¹

Women access and use public transport differently than men. They tend to have trips with multiple stops and destinations and shorter trips to scattered locations during off-peak travel times to combine the completion of their domestic and economic activities.⁴² These additional responsibilities – such as picking up children or buying household goods – mean that women may have to pass through unsafe areas, or wait for public transport in isolated places where the chances of becoming targets of violence increase.⁴³

To address these issues and create transport systems that cater to the mobility needs of all users, some countries are adopting measures to increase the safety and security of women on access routes, at waiting points and while on board public transportation. Some of these gender-responsive measures include: the use of inclusive, mixed land use planning; ensuring clear lines of sight in public spaces; improving lighting on streets and walkways, while also making them wide enough to accommodate strollers and families; ensuring waiting areas are well-lit, comfortable and safe for women; the installation of CCTV surveillance systems; the designation of women-only buses and subway/train cars; and the creation and dissemination of digital mobility safety apps.^{44, 45}

Water and sanitation

Access to clean water and sanitation services is essential for the overall health and well-being of all.⁴⁷ It is particularly crucial during health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, when the primary method of avoiding infection is basic hand hygiene. However, in 2017, 27 per cent of the world's population lacked access to basic sanitation services,⁴⁸ which today would leave them more vulnerable to disease. Similarly, contaminated drinking water and open defecation practices considerably increase the chance of coming in contact with pollutants and pathogens in water and falling sick. Yet 785 million people still lacked access to basic drinking water services in 2017, while an estimated 701 million people still practiced open defecation.⁴⁹

Women and girls have specific needs and priorities for water and sanitation infrastructure, particularly in relation to menstrual hygiene management, pregnancy and birth. Poor quality and gender-blind water and sanitation infrastructure can have significant and lasting adverse impacts on the health and educational and economic opportunities for women and girls. For example, sanitation-related hookworm infections affect about 44 million pregnant women around the world annually.⁵⁰ Furthermore, inadequate water and sanitation facilities for menstrual hygiene management can increase the risk of urinary tract infection among women and contribute to the spread of disease.⁵¹

Moreover, as women often bear the burden of caring for family members falling sick due to unsafe drinking water and sanitation, their time poverty is exacerbated.⁵² In South-East Asia, on average women spend between three and four days of productivity per year for the care of adults and children with diarrheal diseases caused by low standards of sanitation services.⁵³

In 80 per cent of households without access to water on the premises, the daily burden of water collection falls disproportionately on women and girls, increasing their time poverty.⁵⁴ In 25 Sub-Saharan countries, it was found that while men cumulatively spend six million hours a day to collect water, women

spend nearly triple that time – equalling 16 million hours.⁵⁵ In Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, a round trip to collect water can take on average 20–30 minutes and can take more than one hour in some countries.⁵⁶ When women and girls have the primary responsibility for collecting, using and managing water in their households, they also have significant knowledge about where to find water resources, whether it is safe for use and how to store it.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, this knowledge does not translate into a role in decision-making regarding these resources and services.

Women and girls living in rural areas or informal settlements with the absence of household toilets or communal toilets are vulnerable to gender-based violence when walking to open defecation sites or using unsafe, dark and inappropriately located toilets. In the state of Bihar in India, around 40–45 per cent of the over 870 reported rape cases in 2012 occurred when women left their homes to defecate in the open.⁵⁸ Furthermore, women and girls also lose time when seeking privacy and security to defecate outdoors, and accompanying children to defecate in safe areas.⁵⁹

Additional challenges and constraints in relation to menstrual hygiene management, and the social stigma surrounding menstruation, can further marginalize the role of women and girls in society and inhibit their access to education, healthcare services and employment opportunities. For example, in the Philippines, 20 per cent of schools do not have access to water, making it impossible for girls to wash. In Malawi, only 23 per cent of primary schools have acceptable sanitation facilities, while 81 per cent lack washing facilities.⁶⁰

In agriculture production, women often have limited control over water resources in comparison to men due to their limited access to and ownership of land in many developing countries, resulting in negative impacts on their ability to generate income from their lands.⁶¹ Land tenure security can be influenced by different customary systems, social and inheritance practices, as well as lack of documentation.^{62, 63} When women do not have tenure security, they have less incentive to invest in the necessary

irrigation infrastructure even though their land is usually located further away from water sources than their male counterparts.⁶⁵ This limits the productivity of their land and makes them more vulnerable to periods of drought.

Mainstreaming gender-related actions for water and sanitation infrastructure identifies and responds to the needs of women and girls and increases education attainment rates and employment rates for all. Improving access to water and sanitation is critical to alleviate the time poverty of women and girls. Promoting the role of women in water governance and management, capacity building with women's involvement, and increasing women's participation in local institutions such as water users' organizations can also advance women's leadership and decision-making opportunities.⁶⁶ Gender-responsive toilets that are safe, clean, well located, well-lit and include private facilities for menstrual hygiene management with running water, soap, and disposal bins for used menstrual materials, are key to achieving improved health, education and employment outcomes for women and girls. To ensure the appropriate location and design of household and community toilets, consultation with the local community, including women and girls, helps to ensure their long-term use. Culturally appropriate design solutions for public buildings, such as schools, hospitals and offices, should include sex-segregated toilet facilities to offer privacy and personal safety.^{67, 68} Improving access to water infrastructure in the form of irrigation systems, together with increased land tenure's security for women, could increase their agricultural yields by 20–30 per cent.⁶⁹

Solid waste

Gender mainstreaming in the solid waste management sector can considerably improve women's well-being because of the associated impacts on health and time poverty. As in the case of the water and sanitation sector, solid waste management at the household level is a burden that often falls on women's shoulders. Furthermore, as primary caregivers, women are often responsible for family members who fall ill due to unsanitary

environmental conditions caused by inadequate waste management.⁷⁰

A focus on gender mainstreaming in solid waste management infrastructure and programmes can improve working conditions for the large number of women working in the informal waste picking and recycling sector, and protect them from increased exposure to health risks.⁷¹ For example, in cities across India, 80 per cent of waste pickers are women.⁷² Within this informal sector, women suffer different forms of discrimination, ranging from denied access to the recyclables with the highest value, to exclusion from positions of authority within working groups.⁷³ They often receive lower wages than their male counterparts,⁷⁴ work in precarious conditions and are more exposed to the risks of gender-based violence, occupational health hazards, illnesses and accidents.⁷⁵ A lack of protective equipment also puts these women's health at risk through exposure to hazardous waste, for instance, when handling healthcare waste during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sanitary landfill sites, collection stations and composting and recycling plants are among the solid waste management infrastructure that can improve the safety and working conditions of women waste pickers when technological solutions for sustainable waste management practices are accompanied by training for both communities and informal workers.⁷⁶ Studies show that women are more likely to work in landfill sites than on the streets as waste pickers, due to lower risks of violence and lower travel time to collection sites.⁷⁷ The provision of adequate tools and personal protective equipment to improve the working environment at landfill sites can also contribute to a reduction in the occupational health and safety risks for informal workers.⁷⁸ At the same time, working in cooperatives and recycling plants can empower women due to the presence of horizontal decision-making dynamics and the possibility of eliminating intermediaries in the selling of the recycled waste.⁷⁹ Due to the lack of economic resources, single waste pickers are often forced to sell collected waste for a low price to intermediaries who turn around and sell that waste in greater amounts to recycling companies at a higher price.⁸⁰

The planning and implementation of an efficient and sustainable waste management system, including collection and recycling facilities, can benefit the whole community, especially women who are involved in managing household and community waste. This is a particularly useful approach, as women often play the role of educators within their households and communities, and can effectively contribute to ongoing environmental sustainability efforts by teaching children how to minimize, recycle and reuse waste.⁸¹

Digital communications

In today's world, access and control over information increasingly symbolizes empowerment. Digital communications infrastructure plays an instrumental role in enabling the sharing of knowledge and consequently, the creation of more inclusive and empowered societies. Within what is called the digital divide – 52 per cent of the world's population is without access to the Internet⁸² – there is a wide gap between male and female digital communications users. There is an estimated Internet usage gap of 11 per cent globally,⁸³ which increases to 23 per cent in Africa and 31 per cent in the least developed countries.⁸⁴ The divide also extends to the use of mobile phones. In low- and middle-income countries, women are 10 per cent less likely to have a mobile phone and 26 per cent less likely to have a smartphone than men. The likelihood of having access to mobile Internet is 70 per cent lower in South Asia and 34 per cent lower in Sub-Saharan Africa.^{85, 86}

There are multiple causes that reinforce this gender divide. The cost of digital communications technology and the significant number of women living in poverty are considered the greatest barriers to accessing digital communications services and the Internet. Women are usually paid less than men for equal work and also have more difficulties in accessing financial assets, consequently limiting their ability to own or use any type of technology, including digital communications.⁸⁷ Furthermore,

illiteracy among women and girls, who make up nearly two-thirds of the world's illiterate, and the lack of knowledge of English in rural areas, which is the primary language of the Internet, are significant obstacles to closing the digital gender gap.⁸⁸ Another major constraint to improving the access of women and girls to digital communications technology is the prevalence of misogyny, gender-based cyber harassment, and online violence and crime on the Internet, which have emerged as global threats to the ability of women and girls to safely and securely access the Internet.⁸⁹ Cultural and social norms in many countries also lead men to control women's and girls' free access to and use of digital communications technology.⁹⁰

Increasing access to digital communications technology for women can have significant positive outcomes in multiple dimensions of development. First, it can increase access to education for women and girls, given the wide range of learning opportunities, content and tools available on the web.⁹¹ Second, it can trigger new economic and employment opportunities for women and women-owned businesses by increasing access to international markets⁹² and online service-based industries,⁹³ in which women are more likely to work.⁹⁴ From a social and political perspective, access to digital communications can strongly contribute to an increase in the participation of women in public forums and decision-making processes, due to the new tools available for online consultations.⁹⁵ Finally, digital communications infrastructure can also have a positive impact on the reduction of gender-based violence and insecurity through the development of mobile applications where women can report unsafe areas, quickly reach emergency services and share their position to ensure their personal safety.⁹⁶ Especially during times of crisis, digital communications can be a critical lifeline by providing access to emergency services. For example, instances of gender-based violence against women have increased around the world due to COVID-19.⁹⁷ Technology can facilitate reporting of incidents in cases like this.

Education infrastructure

Less than half of all countries globally provide boys and girls with equal access to education⁹⁹ and girls remain one and a half times more likely to be excluded from primary school education than boys.¹⁰⁰ For instance, in Sub-Saharan Africa, 9 million girls compared to 6 million boys are unlikely to attend school and in Southern Asia, 5 million girls are excluded from education compared to 2 million boys.¹⁰¹ Among the leading causes for this gender divide is the lack of gender-sensitive education infrastructure. Factors such as the location of schools and inadequate sanitation facilities can influence education attainment rates.

The location and distance of schools from home can be a crucial barrier for girls to access education, especially in rural areas.¹⁰² For instance, in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, for every 100 boys in school in rural areas there are only 57 and 76 girls respectively.¹⁰³ Schools that require girls to walk a long distance or along busy or dangerous roads can expose them to the risk of gender-based violence, resulting in the reluctance of parents to send their daughters to school.¹⁰⁴ In many societies, children, especially girls, are responsible for household activities and, if commuting to school consumes time meant for domestic or income generating activities, they may be prevented from attending school.

The lack of adequate toilet facilities with running water in schools can compromise the menstrual hygiene management of girls and hence their learning experience. For example, in Sierra Leone, 21.3 per cent of adolescent girls reported missing school when menstruating; in Nepal and Afghanistan, these numbers reached 30 per cent; in Pakistan, this included almost half of all menstruating school girls; and in Somalia, girls in grades 6 to 8 would miss up to 5 days of school per month.¹⁰⁵ The provision of menstrual hygiene management-friendly toilets, appropriate for the local cultural context, is necessary to support the attendance of girls and decrease the number of absent women teachers. In the absence of safe sanitation facilities within school grounds,

girls are forced to travel a distance to access a toilet facility, exposing them to the risk of sexual harassment and violence.

More inclusive education facilities, such as schools located in close proximity to communities and connected by safe public transportation can support education opportunities for girls and provide employment opportunities for women. Introducing culturally appropriate water and sanitation infrastructure in schools with safe, private, sex-segregated toilets, access to water and soap for washing as needed and facilities to change and wash or dispose of menstrual hygiene management materials, is necessary to support the attendance of girls and decrease the absenteeism of women teachers. One such intervention in schools in Nyanza Province, Kenya resulted in the share of girls' enrollment increasing by 4 per cent.¹⁰⁶ Providing facilities appropriate to the local context can only be accomplished through consultation with local users, as user needs will vary based on the local social and cultural practices and norms.

In addition, improved school education can greatly contribute to the elimination of child marriages and reduction in the risk of early childbearing by 75 per cent.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, it is estimated that any additional year of school education can increase an individual's earnings by up to 10 per cent.¹⁰⁸ Interventions in increasing education levels and participation in the labour force for women and girls could result in an increase of 3.6 per cent in the global GDP, and a reduction of 0.5 per cent of people living in extreme poverty globally by 2030.¹⁰⁹

Health infrastructure

The inability to access health services has a huge negative impact on the health and well-being of girls and women. Every day, 830 women die due to preventable childbirth and pregnancy-related causes, with 99 per cent of these deaths occurring in developing countries.¹¹⁰ Moreover, women are the highest proportion of people living with HIV and

dying due to cardiovascular and noncommunicable diseases.¹¹¹ The leading causes for poor access to health services for women and girls include the remoteness of health facilities and the lack of a safe and inclusive environment to meet their needs in the facilities. These obstacles can be particularly dangerous during a health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, which poses its own challenges to women's access to health services.¹¹² Therefore, the development of gender-responsive health infrastructure is critical, not only in increasing access to basic services and reducing the number of maternal deaths, but also in ensuring the safety and well-being of girls and women.

When the design of health facilities fails to address the specific needs of women, it may result in women not making use of the facility. For instance, maternity clinics which do not include separate sanitation facilities and designated delivery rooms located out of hearing from others may fail to attract expectant mothers due to fear for their safety or privacy. Women may then choose to give birth at home, which can increase the risk to their health as well as the health of their newborns.¹¹³

Healthcare infrastructure is gender-responsive if it addresses the needs related to privacy, hygiene and safety of various genders.¹¹⁴ The location of the health facilities should be accessible, with consideration for connectivity with public transport, pedestrian paths and cycling routes.¹¹⁵ The design of health facilities should include the separation of specific spaces to ensure the privacy needs of not just the patients, but also of visitors and staff.¹¹⁶ In some cultural contexts, separate buildings or entrances for men and women may be required for both patients and health workers. Segregated changing rooms and common rooms for men and women health professionals should also be incorporated into the facility design. Moreover, in some contexts, it may be necessary to separate facilities for in-patient care by gender and age, including toilet facilities. Private and sex-segregated bathrooms should be accessible without requiring patients or visitors to pass through other facilities, improving safety and privacy and reducing incidents of gender-based violence. Additionally, adequate waiting areas with childcare rooms should be provided as many women have dependent children accompanying them to healthcare facilities.¹¹⁷

Gender mainstreaming in the infrastructure life cycle

While the policies of many countries recognize and state that gender equality is critical to the sustainability of infrastructure, they face challenges translating their policy commitments into practice. In order to ensure that infrastructure positively addresses the needs of all end users, including women and vulnerable groups, there are multiple practical actions that can be embedded across the three stages of the infrastructure life cycle, i.e., planning, delivery and management stages. Some of the key gender mainstreaming actions that can be completed while implementing infrastructure projects are discussed here. A comprehensive list of actions can be found on the online *sustainABLE* tool¹¹⁸ and in the guides on integrating gender into infrastructure development in Asia and the Pacific developed by UNOPS in collaboration with UN Women.¹¹⁹

Cross-cutting actions

Certain actions are critical throughout the infrastructure life cycle to ensure gender-responsive infrastructure and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. These actions include mainstreaming gender considerations in stakeholder engagement activities, providing gender focused training and capacity building activities for project personnel and the local community, and engaging a social inclusion specialist to guide activities throughout the infrastructure life cycle.

It is important to create tailored approaches to ensure that women and other marginalized groups within communities can participate and provide

genuine inputs in stakeholder consultations. Stakeholder engagement practices should ensure that a representative group of end users is involved, with a specific focus on women's groups and associations. This is important as stakeholder participation is used to engage and inform the interested actors, understand the needs of different types of users, involve them in the decision-making processes, and receive feedback and evaluate project outputs, outcomes and performance. Furthermore, consultations with women's groups and gender specialists are particularly important to identify and address any barriers to participation faced by women and other traditionally marginalized groups and ensure that they are able to engage and participate effectively in consultations.¹²⁰

It is important to create tailored approaches to ensure that women and other marginalized groups within communities can participate and provide genuine inputs in stakeholder consultations.

Training and capacity building activities for project personnel and the local community on gender awareness and gender mainstreaming are also critical across all stages to ensure gender-responsive infrastructure and achieve the maximum impact of investments.¹²¹ Gender awareness training for all project personnel contributes to the prevention of gender-based violence and sexual harassment on project sites.¹²² It also enables project personnel to act in a gender-sensitive manner during other project activities, such as the collection of sex-disaggregated data for monitoring and evaluation.¹²³ Furthermore, incorporating training and capacity building activities for women on the construction and management of infrastructure can increase their capacity to gain employment during the project and improve livelihood opportunities in the long-term.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN ACTION: Planning Stage



The UNOPS housing reconstruction project carried out in Gaza is a good practice example of the benefits of carrying out a gender analysis. UNOPS managed the reconstruction of houses destroyed in the 2014 conflict in Gaza for the most vulnerable internally displaced persons, thereby providing relief to the ongoing humanitarian crisis. The project provided cash grants, legal aid, technical infrastructure, construction guidance and quality assurance to enable the most vulnerable or underserved families to reconstruct their houses safely, sustainably and efficiently.

During the planning stage, a gender analysis of the context and previous projects was carried out. This analysis highlighted the lack of gender focus in previous development activities in Gaza and overall in the construction sector. All project indicators and data collected and recorded were disaggregated based on sex, age and disability. This enabled the development of a gender action plan that embedded gender components from the earliest stages of the project. The reconstruction of houses was prioritized

based on the vulnerability of families. The criteria of vulnerability was enhanced to prioritize households headed by single women (widows or divorced women), elderly persons and people living with disabilities.

Through this gender mainstreaming approach, the project specifically addressed women's access to housing, land and property rights through two activities: 1) creating a grant contract that could be co-signed by both women and men heads of household; and 2) providing legal support to women-headed households, helping them to receive legal ownership. Of the 188 beneficiaries that participated in the process for cash grants, 13.1 per cent were women-headed households. The project led to 519 beneficiaries receiving legal assistance on housing, land and property issues, which resulted in 306 beneficiaries obtaining legal ownership of their new homes. The project provided legal ownership to 21 female-headed households in Gaza, where security of ownership is rare and security of ownership for women is even more rare.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN ACTION: Delivery Stage



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In an effort to help combat high maternal and child mortality rates, UNOPS built 82 health centres in Myanmar, using a gender-responsive design approach to ensure the accessibility of health services for vulnerable and marginalized groups in some of the hardest-to-reach areas. UNOPS completed the designs and managed the construction of the centres with financial support from 3MDG. The health clinic designs incorporated many gender-responsive aspects, including: sex-segregated toilets and other private spaces for female and male staff and patients; living accommodations on-site for female staff to prevent unsafe travelling to and from the health centres; and the location of delivery and recovery rooms in a separate area of the facility to respect the privacy of female patients. The designs were standardized (with four options for different geographies) and have been adopted by the Ministry of Health and Sports. Resilience and sustainability were also incorporated into the designs to resist natural hazards, such as earthquakes and wind loads, and to make use of renewable power sources and waste management technology. The project is helping improve livelihoods and local

economies by creating jobs for local workers. In 2017, approximately 48,000 labour days were created for local workers, of which more than 6,000 days were created for women.¹³⁰

A good practice example of gender mainstreaming in the infrastructure procurement process was carried out by UNOPS in the crossing points project in Kosovo*. UNOPS managed the construction of three common crossing points between Kosovo and Serbia, funded by the European Union. UNOPS added a gender evaluation criteria in the solicitation documents for construction works. Bidders were required to provide a summary of their gender mainstreaming approach for the required works and include a staff organogram with the ratio of women to men, as well as a disbursement mechanism for personnel who are in different districts of the country. This process ensured that all the submissions received had qualified female personnel included in engineering and management roles in the team composition.¹³¹

*All references to Kosovo are made in the context of UNSCR 1244.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN ACTION: Delivery Stage



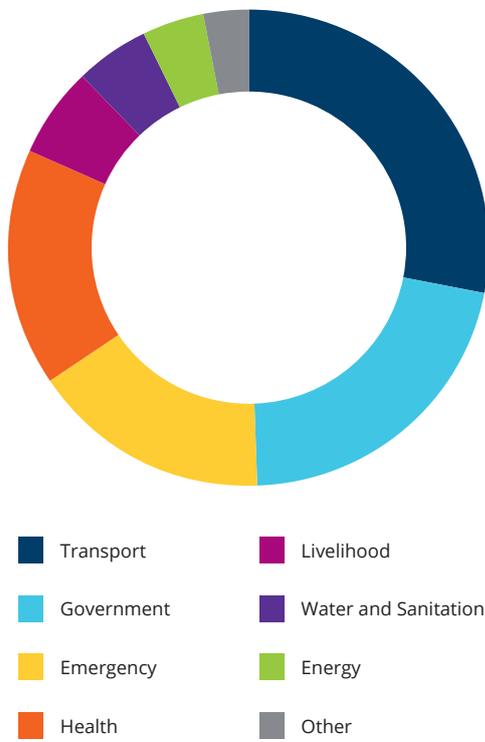
The 2010 earthquake in Haiti resulted in the destruction of several hundred thousand homes. UNOPS was tasked with the rehabilitation of more than 9,000 low-income housing and community infrastructure works in eight neighbourhoods. UNOPS adopted a labour-intensive, participatory approach during project implementation to ensure the generation of employment opportunities that included a strong gender component. Skills training was further provided to the local community. This resulted in 95 per cent of the workforce residing in the same neighbourhoods that were to be rehabilitated, of which more than 30 per cent of this total were women. Local women acquired

skills training to participate in the project, supporting their empowerment through employment in the construction sector. These women provided in-kind contributions, in the form of their labour, for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of their homes. The programme prioritized vulnerable households as beneficiaries, which resulted in a significant number of women-headed households and persons with disabilities as beneficiaries. Targeted consultations were conducted with local women to identify spaces that they considered dangerous in their neighbourhoods. Street lighting was then installed and reinforced in these areas, which reduced incidents of violence in these communities.



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Figure 1: UNOPS infrastructure expenditure by thematic sector in 2019*



*Thematic sectors based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) framework for classifying the specific area of the recipient's economic or social structure the activity is intended to foster.

practical guidance on gender-sensitive and socially inclusive infrastructure, describing the most important considerations for gender mainstreaming and social inclusion, and provide specific tools and checklists to implement best practices. This guidance is intended to help UNOPS personnel and others mainstream gender considerations into their projects.

UNOPS, in partnership with UN Women, also developed a training module on Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Infrastructure. This course is aimed at all UN personnel and others who are interested in learning about gender and infrastructure. It helps users to: 1) understand why and how gender mainstreaming is important to planning, building, operating and maintaining infrastructure; 2) recognize the importance of

human-centred infrastructure design and the purpose of infrastructure to provide services; 3) recall the fundamentals of how to mainstream gender equality in infrastructure project design and planning; and 4) understand and apply practical approaches and resources available on gender mainstreaming in specific infrastructure types.¹⁴⁴

In addition to guidance and training, UNOPS has developed an additional resource, *sustainABLE* (sustainable.unops.org), in collaboration with the University of Oxford-led Infrastructure Transition Research Consortium (ITRC) to help infrastructure and development practitioners identify practical and real world actions that will promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in their infrastructure projects. Furthermore, the *sustainABLE* tool identifies which actions will support the achievement of specific SDG targets.

The *sustainABLE* tool is a free resource for infrastructure development practitioners and has four main objectives:

- To explain the range and magnitude of influence that infrastructure projects can have on the different SDG targets;
- To provide a range of recommended actions throughout the infrastructure project life cycle to ensure that the project supports the achievement of all SDG targets related to a chosen theme;
- To inform the international community on the relationship that exists between critical development themes, such as women's empowerment, environmental protection, and disaster risk reduction, and the targets of the SDGs;
- To provide a platform for knowledge sharing with case studies and good practices to support the achievement of the SDGs as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



sustainable

Advisory services

As well as directly delivering a range of infrastructure to support governments, UNOPS can also support governments at all levels by providing advisory services on gender mainstreaming in the planning, delivery and management of their infrastructure systems and improve access to infrastructure services for all.

UNOPS has adopted an evidence-based infrastructure approach to support governments with the planning, delivery and management of national infrastructure systems. The approach is based on first understanding the needs of our partners by identifying key challenges and opportunities for action. These actions are then crafted into specific, tailored solutions for our partners.

To support this process, UNOPS has developed a series of tools and methodologies that are applicable to developing economies on their inclusive, sustainable and resilient development journey.

Capacity Assessment Tool for Infrastructure (CAT-I)

The Capacity Assessment Tool for Infrastructure (CAT-I) is a tool to assess and identify the gaps in government capacity (at national, regional

and municipal levels) to effectively plan, deliver and manage sustainable, resilient and inclusive infrastructure systems. CAT-I looks at all aspects of the institutions and knowledge components of an infrastructure system, namely, the policies, financial mechanisms, procurement procedures, regulation, enforcement mechanisms, and codes and standards which govern an infrastructure asset's life cycle.

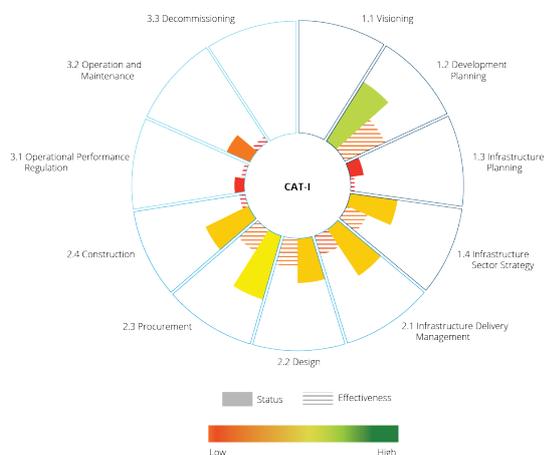
The specific objectives of CAT-I are to:

1. Create a common language and framework for infrastructure capacity development;
2. Identify capacity gaps in the planning, delivery and management of infrastructure systems;
3. Support the identification of potential solutions to build capacity;
4. Create a pipeline of programmes and projects to build capacity; and
5. Show progress against a measured baseline.

Recently, CAT-I has been used in collaboration with Mato Grosso State in Brazil. The results assisted the government in updating and improving legislation to support upstream planning and ensure that the right assets are selected and implemented to promote sustainable, resilient and inclusive development.

CAT-I was developed by the UNOPS Infrastructure and Project Management Group in close collaboration with partners in Mato Grosso (Brazil), Nepal, Serbia and with UNOPS infrastructure experts and practitioners from around the world.

Figure 2: CAT-I Visualization



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