

## Sylvia Chant and Cathy McIlwaine

### *Gendered urban prosperity and women's empowerment in 21st century cities*

#### Abstract

While urban prosperity has been identified as a major issue in recent debates about cities, this paper argues that this must be conceptualised not only in terms of enhancing productivity and generating wealth, but also in addressing equity, equality and participation of which the gendered dimensions of cities are central. It outlines why it is important to take gender in account when trying to foster urban prosperity and why this must also entail consideration of women's empowerment in cities in social and political as well as economic terms. In reflecting these arguments, the paper provides a conceptual framework for understanding the intersections between the gendered nature of urban prosperity and women's empowerment. This is built on an empirical discussion of the core elements underpinning urban prosperity in relation to conceptualisations of empowerment as well as a discussion of importance of generating gender-equity through exercising formal and informal rights and an outline of the ways on which policies might address gender inequalities in cities. Ultimately, the paper argues that while prosperity measures are important in generating urban prosperity, these must address underlying unequal gendered power relations and issues of social justice that are necessary in order to bring about true empowerment for women in cities today and in the future.

Key-words: Gender, women, empowerment, cities, prosperity

#### Introduction

Urban prosperity has been identified as a major issue in recent debates about cities, especially from a policy perspective as evidenced in UN-HABITAT's (2012a) *State of the World's Cities 2012/13*. Here, the prosperity of cities is conceptualised not only in terms of enhancing productivity and generating income and wealth, but also in addressing equity, equality and participation of which the gendered dimensions of cities are central (p.14). This paper outlines the reasons why it is important to take gender in account when trying to foster urban prosperity and why this must also entail consideration of women's empowerment in cities. In turn, just as urban prosperity needs to acknowledge processes beyond wealth-creation so too does the notion of women's empowerment in relation to the economic growth of cities need to recognise the social and political dimensions. In reflecting these arguments, the paper provides a conceptual framework for understanding the intersections between the gendered nature of urban prosperity and women's empowerment. This is built on an empirical discussion of the core elements underpinning the gendered nature of urban prosperity in relation to conceptualisations of empowerment as well as a discussion of importance of generating gender-equity through exercising formal and informal rights and an outline of the ways on which policies might address gender inequalities in cities. The paper suggests that although women in 'prosperous' cities may well achieve more equality with men, and

the female (and male) working poor are likely to be able to pursue their livelihoods alongside more formal economic activities, paying specific attention to women's empowerment in a holistic manner underpinned by issues of social justice is essential in making cities sustainable and equitable in the longer term.

### *Why is it important to engender urban prosperity?*

There are four main reasons why it is essential to take gender, and especially the experiences of women into account in relation to the prosperity of cities. First, with just over half of the world's population living in cities today, nearly all future demographic growth will be urban and occur in the Global South and will comprise a majority female component. Cities of the future, especially in the developing world will be marked by feminised urban sex ratios and pronounced in 'older' cohorts, especially the 'older old' (over 80 years). There will also be growing numbers of households headed by women (Chant and McIlwaine, 2009: Chapter 3). For example, between the late 1980s and end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, female-headed households as a proportion of all urban households increased by a mean of 9.8 percentage points (Chant, 2007a; Momsen, 2010).

Second, there are many conditions in cities that exacerbate poverty and which have gendered implications. The urban poor face particular circumstances which can exacerbate poverty. For example, they spend a disproportionate amount on water, accommodation and transport and are especially affected by changes in food prices. The urban poor also face many practical and health problems due to lack of adequate sanitation and services. These conditions affect women disproportionately because they undertake unpaid caring and social reproductive activities, as well as building and consolidating housing and providing basic services and infrastructure. All these tasks allow the urban economy to function and prosper, even if this labour is not recognised or valued (Chant, 2011a, b; 2013a; Perrons, 2010; Tacoli, 2012).

Third, women make crucially important economic contributions to the 'prosperity of cities' through their paid work (Kabeer, 2008a, b). Indeed, the 'feminisation' of the global labour force tends to be associated with urbanisation linked with the concentration of women in export-manufacturing, the service sector and ICT (Standing, 1999). This can have other important ramifications for women such as declining fertility, increasing education levels and rising aspirations. It has been suggested that women are key drivers of economic growth and that wealth in the hands of women leads to much more equitable outcomes in terms of the quality of life of families and communities. As such, 'women are a city's greatest asset, and contribute heavily to sustainable urban development' (UN-HABITAT, 2012b: 2)

Finally, women are usually disadvantaged compared with men in cities in terms of equal access to working and living conditions, health and education, asset ownership, experiences of urban violence, and ability to exercise their rights (World Bank, 2012). These disadvantages are especially marked for poor urban women residing in slums settlements. In addition, women's contributions are often ignored, especially by city officials, urban planners and development practitioners (Beall, 2010; Moser, 2010).

The need to address urban prosperity from a gendered perspective also complements broader policy agendas for gender-equitable development which have been promoted by major organisations within the UN system, other multilateral and bilateral institutions, national governments, international and national NGOs, and grassroots women's movements since the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985), as well as aiming to progress the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (see Benavides Llerena et al, 2007; Patel and Mitlin, 2010).

Addressing the barriers to women's participation in cities creates a situation where women's potential is more fully realised and households, communities and governments also reap rewards. It is imperative that women and men should enjoy equal rights and opportunities in cities. There is thus a moral, economic, political and policy rationale to examine gender inequalities in urban settings and to explore how to effectively address them (Chant, 2011a). Addressing such inequalities is also essential in bringing about women's empowerment and especially their economic empowerment. This will not only engender women's well-being but it will increase their individual and collective prosperity as well as the prosperity of the cities where they reside. In order to consider these issues more systematically, the paper now outlines the conceptual framework proposed for understanding urban prosperity and gender in relation to economic empowerment.

### *Conceptual framing I: the gendering of urban prosperity*

There is clear evidence that prosperous cities are those linked with positive rates of economic growth and material wealth. This relates to the fact that almost three-quarters (70 per cent) of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) across the world is generated in cities and that cities are often the economic powerhouses of nations. Yet urbanisation and prosperity do not automatically go hand-in-hand as economic growth does not always 'trickle down' to guarantee equity in terms of well-being, especially in relation to access to basic services, employment and housing (Chant and Datu, 2011a, b; Satterthwaite, 2007). Indeed, urbanisation has created widespread poverty, inequality, poor living conditions and insecurity and violence for many people in cities (UNFPA, 2007; also Jones and Corbridge, 2008). This is especially the case for those residing in slum communities in the Global South.

Yet, it is now generally accepted that the spatial concentration and proximity characterising cities remain central in the creation of economic, social and cultural prosperity (Beall, 2010). Therefore, a prosperous city needs to foster economic growth, wealth and well-being of the people from a multidimensional perspective that extends beyond income (Chant, 2007a, 2008; Moser, 2006, 2009). As part of this, everyone should have 'rights' to the city (Lefebvre, 1986; Harvey, 2008). This shift towards greater social inclusivity and equality also means that a 'prosperous city' is a space where women and men should enjoy equal rights and opportunities (UN-HABITAT, 2010c: 7). Therefore, as more inclusive cities are good for growth, gender equality can make even cities 'smarter' with gender-aware and fair 'smart growth' also demanding 'smart management' (Tsenkova, 2007).

A 'holistic' concept of the prosperity of cities is thus especially appropriate in respect of gender. This is because of the importance of recognising the multidimensional inputs women invest in generating urban prosperity which is juxtaposed with the multidimensional privations they face. Recent analyses of 'gendered poverty', and more particularly the so-called 'feminisation of poverty' have illustrated that women's poverty cannot be encapsulated by income alone (Chant, Ed., 2010; Johnsson-Latham, 2004). Alternative formulations, such as the 'feminisation of responsibility and/or obligation' advanced by Chant (2007a, 2008) for example, have stressed the importance of labour, time and assets, and the fact that privation is by no means primarily or exclusively associated with female household headship (see also Moser, 2010). As further noted by UNRISD (2010:108):

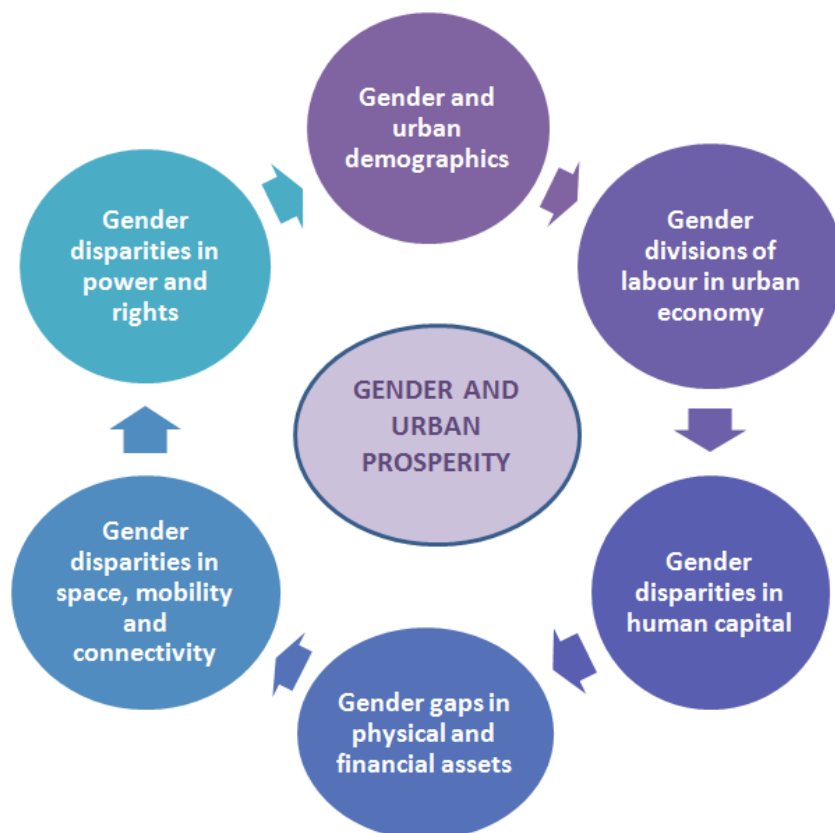
'The relationship between poverty and gender is complex because it is placed at the intersection of at least three sets of institutions: labour markets, which differentially structure and reward female labour;

households, where decisions are made about the allocation and distribution of resources, including labour and earnings, and where labour itself is (re)produced; and states, which through a constantly changing mix of regulatory and provisioning roles, change the broader policy environment within which the other two institutions operate'.

Despite considerable theoretical advances in understanding gendered poverty (see Chant, ed., 2010), and notwithstanding long-standing calls to 'en-gender' urban analysis and policy (e.g. Chant, 2007b), the field of conceptualising gender in relation to urban prosperity is much less established. This is possibly because women are more often the 'losers' rather than 'winners' in urban environments. However, thinking about gender in relation to prosperity arguably provides a sharper focus on the hiatus between women's inputs to and outcomes from the wealth-generating possibilities of cities.

Conceptualising the gendered nature of urban prosperity therefore involves interactions across a range of spheres and processes in cities. The framework outlined in Figure 1 analyses these issues through identifying the critical elements in conceptualising gender and the prosperity of cities (Chant, 2011a). Especially important in relation to the notion of gender disparities are the pervasive inequalities that exist between women and men in relation to their access to resources, power, opportunities and freedom of movement. These revolve around the following: gender and urban demographics, gender divisions of labour in the urban economy, gender disparities in human capital; gender gaps in physical and financial capital/assets, gender disparities in space, mobility and connectivity, and gender disparities in power and rights. As identified in Figure 1, all the elements intersect in complex ways.

**Figure 1: Core elements in conceptualising gender and urban prosperity**



Source: adapted from Chant (2011a)

*Core elements in conceptualising gender and urban prosperity*

It is worth briefly outlining these core elements in more depth as they underpin our understanding of how the gendering of nature of urban prosperity functions.

A range of demographic factors play an important part in contextualising women's lives within urban environments. A key process is the relationship between the demographic transition and urbanisation of which an important aspect is lower fertility levels in cities. The latter is generally regarded as a central dimension in women's empowerment (Dyson, 2010; UNFPA, 2007). However, despite lower Total Fertility Rates (TFRs) in urban rather than rural areas, access to adequate contraception is uneven with the result that fertility is higher among poorer groups in slums than in wealthier urban neighbourhoods. In Bangladesh, for example, where an estimated 27 per cent of the population is urban, the TFR in slums is 2.5 (just under the national rate of 2.6), compared with 1.9 in non-slum settlements (Chant, 2011a).

These disparities are rooted in a range of factors including lack of information on reproductive health, unmet needs for family planning and an above-average incidence of early pregnancy and marriage in slums. Similar patterns exist in a range of other countries for which data are available, and also show that this is often associated with early school drop-out among girls, which undoubtedly plays a part in perpetuating gender gaps in urban prosperity (Chant, 2011a). These gaps are also underpinned by social relations in that women may be denied rights to use birth control where paternity is socially important to men. The ability of young women to exert control over their fertility is particularly affected by disparities between their own age and economic status and those of male partners on whom they may rely for support. In addition, children are an important economic, social, and emotional resource for poor urban residents, as well as a means of women legitimising their 'female' identities, all of which have implications for women's empowerment (Chant and Touray, 2012).

As noted earlier, many cities in the developing world have a predominantly or growing population of women. Feminised urban sex ratios reflect the cumulative gender-selectivity of rural-urban migration, with Latin America standing out as a region in which more women than men have moved to towns and cities over the past several decades, along with some countries in Southeast Asia such as Thailand and Viet Nam (Chant, 1998; Chant and McIlwaine, 2009, p.86-7). Even in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia where female migration to cities has been less marked have witnessed recent upward trends (Tacoli and Mabala, 2010). This stems from rural women's cumulative disadvantage in land acquisition and inheritance coupled with economic deterioration in the countryside (Tacoli, 2010). Also important have been women who are HIV-positive moving to access medical treatment in urban areas, as well as to avoid stigmatisation, escape domestic violence and a range of other 'harmful traditional practices' such as Female Genital Cutting (FGC) (Chant and Touray, 2012 on The Gambia).

Partly linked with these migration patterns, and noted above, has been the increasing aging of urban populations driven by elderly women in particular, and dramatically so among the 'older old' (>80 years). In sub-Saharan African and Latin American countries, 'older old' women outnumber their male counterparts by nearly two to one, while in those in East Asia the ratio is nearly 150 to 100. Even in India, where the ratio is significantly lower, the older old cohort is still distinctly feminised. Given a common association between advanced age and poverty, especially among women, this phenomenon effectively undermines urban prosperity (Chant, 2011a).



Another important phenomenon is the prevalence of female-headed households in towns and cities especially in countries with 'feminised' urban sex ratios. In Latin America for example, there have been dramatic rises in urban female household headship over the past twenty years. Between the late 1980s and end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, female-headed households as a proportion of all urban households increased by a mean of 9.8 percentage points. For example, in Costa Rica, research has shown that female household headship in urban areas has reached 27% compared with 16% in rural areas (see Chant, 2007a). Similarly, in Ecuador, 28% of urban households are headed by women as against 21.5% in rural areas (Benavides Llerena et al, 2007: 1.2). The tendency for female headed households to be more prevalent in cities is not just a demographic phenomenon, but is linked with a wide range of economic and social factors associated with urban environments. These include greater access to employment and independent earnings, lessened entanglement in and control by patriarchal kinship systems, and higher levels of urban female land and property ownership (Bradshaw, 1995; Chant, 1998).

Again, as noted up front, the health of urban economies owes as much to the unpaid 'reproductive' labour such as childcare, caring for the sick, disabled and elderly, washing, cleaning and community organising that falls disproportionately on women's shoulders at household and community levels as to the more valued remunerated work where men's labour is concentrated and which is registered in GDP and in the System of National Accounts (SNA) (Perrons, 2010; Razavi, 2007: 4-5). Although women across the Global South are increasingly engaging in paid as well as unpaid activities, this has not been matched by an increase in domestic labour and unpaid care work among men (Chant, 2007a; ECLAC, 2004). These inequities are effectively a 'reproduction tax' (Palmer, 1992) on women which undermines their productivity gains and ability to benefit from and contribute to 'urban prosperity'.

A combination of gender discrimination and the persistent relationship between women and unpaid tasks means that women's labour in the marketplace is invariably accorded lower value regardless of the work itself (Perrons, 2010; Perrons and Plomien, 2010). In addition, women's paid work tends to be informal rather than formal and home-based. Their informal activities are also of a smaller, less capitalised scale than men's income-generating ventures and almost always with lower remuneration (Chant and Pedwell, 2008; Chen, 2010). There is also widespread 'segmentation by sex' within urban labour markets associated with wage gaps and other forms of inequality such as uneven access to health insurance and pensions between women and men which are determined by a combination of social and gender norms and market forces (Heintz, 2010).

These patterns and processes directly influence the extent to which paid employment empowers women. On one hand, are those who suggest that women are fairly uniformly exploited by their incorporation into labour markets. On the other hand, are those who have argued that women's paid employment is emancipatory and fairly uniformly positive. The reality is somewhere in between and it depends on the context, place, type of work, life course, and the interplay between working conditions and wider social relations (Chant and McIlwaine, 1995 on the Philippines). Of critical importance is whether work is 'alienating or fulfilling', at home or outside home. It is the type of work that is significant in terms of empowerment rather than labour force involvement in itself, as well as a commensurate redistribution of unpaid reproductive labour to men at the household level (Kabeer, 2008a, b) (see also below).

The other critical element in conceptualising gender and urban prosperity is human capital development. Gender disparities in human capital not only influence women's participation in labour markets but also economic growth overall (World Bank, 2012, p.

210). Human capital is also an integral aspect of ‘personhood’, affecting women’s general capacities, their self-esteem and their ability to exert agency. Educated women, on average, delay marriage and childbirth, are less vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, enjoy more power in their homes and in public arenas, and have fewer children who themselves also tend to be healthier and better educated (Lloyd, 2009). Therefore, women’s accumulation of human capital is integral in contributing to the wider prosperity of cities as well as their own well-being.

However, in terms of Millennium Development Goal 2, while improvements in primary school education have been substantial in many countries, they have not been sufficient to meet the goal of universal primary education by 2015. Empirical work from Delhi, for example, which harbours one of the largest disparities in urban India, shows that the gap is 19 per cent for children aged 6-17 years in general and in Nigeria, slum dwelling children are up to 35 per cent less likely to attend school than their non-slum counterparts. These disparities tend to grow up the educational hierarchy and again impede the prosperity of all in cities (Chant, 2011a).

In relation to gender gaps in physical and financial assets, land and property constitute another fundamental element in contributing to women’s unequal shares of urban prosperity. In most parts of the world women’s access to these major assets is compromised through male-biased inheritance, discriminatory titling procedures, female disenfranchisement on death or desertion by spouses, or separation and divorce, and male control of property (Chant, 2012a; Hughes and Wickeri, 2011; Moser, 2010). The location and quality of land and housing can have major effects on the lives of women given the disproportionate time they spend in the home in their roles as primary providers of domestic labour and unpaid care work, especially in slums. While property is a ‘private’ asset, access to public goods such as infrastructure and especially public transportation as well as various physical investments in urban environments such as street lighting, parks, community centres or meeting places all affect women’s safety, productivity and empowerment.

This leads directly to the ways in which women are often much more constrained than men in terms of their physical access to urban space. This is not only because of their association with reproductive labour in the home, but linked with strong symbolic dimensions surrounding the ‘forbidden’ and ‘permitted’ use of private and public spaces. The latter are governed by patriarchal power relations and norms of female propriety, which may require certain modes of dress, behaviour and limitations on social interaction to render women ‘invisible’ or unapproachable (Fenster, 2005; Jarvis et al., 2009; Vera-Sanso, 2006).

Part of this is linked with violence against women in cities. Evidence suggests that violence against women by male partners tends to be less prevalent in cities than rural areas but violence by non-partners tends to be higher in urban areas. In cities, it has also been shown that living in urban slums can lead to greater incidence of violence against women, especially that perpetrated by someone who is *not* a partner (McIlwaine, 2013 forthcoming). Although violence against women is extremely prevalent in the private spaces of the home (McIlwaine, 2008), it is more likely to occur in certain public spaces such as at and around toilets, at schools, in drinking bars, and in secluded areas such as narrow lanes and open fields (Tacoli, 2012). In terms of sanitary facilities, for example, where toilets are located far from people’s homes there is case study evidence from Mumbai and Pune that women and girls face risks of violence and attacks if they walk alone to use them, especially at night. In addition, women have much more restricted mobility at night linked with their safety and fear of violence. Issues of access to and provision of quality and affordable public transport are also crucial in determining women’s movement within cities (Khosla, 2009).

Despite the lack of physical limitations, women's connectivity in terms of access to the 'digital age' is also compromised (Perrons, 2004). However, while women's access to computing skills and equipment and to internet access is much more limited than men's, gender gaps are much less marked for more simple digital technology such as mobile phones. Indeed, mobile phones may be used to generate livelihoods and for families concerned for the safety of daughters working night shifts (Patel, 2010).

A final critical component of conceptualising the interrelationships between gender and urban prosperity relates to gender differences in power and rights. These differences exist across scales – from the personal, through household, community and city to the national level. They are also mediated by informal and formal mechanisms. Although there is evidence of increased mobilisation and organisation of women at the grassroots, not least in relation to the popular uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 and 2012, there remain major gender disparities in the more formal political realms of civic engagement and governance. Not only are women frequently under-represented in formal political structures, including trade unions, cooperative and workers' associations, which marginalise their economic roles, but where they do participate at the grassroots, they are often engaged in struggles for basic services (Beall, 2010; Lind, 2010).

However, the recent shift towards decentralised governance has the potential to bring development decisions closer to communities and to reach those most marginalised such as women. Work undertaken by a range of grassroots women's organisations under the auspices of the Huairou Commission has shown that for decentralisation to be meaningful to women, their capacities to access entitlements and participate effectively in local governance must be enhanced. Unless women become active partners with local government, they will continue to remain on the margins of governance processes (Huairou Commission, 2010a). In the case of Peru, decentralisation has led to increased women's engagement, organised around a series of laws that include citizen protection and mandates for participation. Women have engaged more in public affairs through Local Coordinating Councils (LCCs) and in vigilance and monitoring committees. Projects such as the *Casa de la Mujer* (Women's Home) have been central in addressing women's issues like domestic violence and the equitable allocation of resources to women. An integral aspect of these types of projects has been the training and organisation of grassroots women as leaders in their communities through 'local to local dialogues' which not only enhances women's decision-making power but also deepens democracy (Goldenberg, 2008).

### *Conceptual framing II: women's empowerment and urban prosperity nexus*

Building on Figure 1 that outlines the gendering of urban prosperity, it is also important to incorporate issues of women's empowerment. As already indicated in the discussion above, this highlights not only the range of gender disparities that need to be taken into account in order to generate prosperity, but also that reducing gender inequalities and inequities must be addressed in order to bring about women's empowerment in cities at individual and collective levels as well as through a range of formal and informal institutions (see Figure 2).

Underpinning the gender empowerment and urban prosperity nexus has been long-standing work on conceptualising empowerment. Although the notion of 'empowerment' is one of the most contested terms used today, it remains very important especially in relation to women and gender. Many draw implicitly and explicitly on the work of Michel Foucault in their thinking on empowerment highlighting it as a process rather than an end state. The work of Paulo Freire (1970) has



also been influential in relation to active empowerment processes through consciousness-raising. In essence, Rappaport's (1987: 122) often quoted definition states that empowerment is 'a process by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery over their affairs'. Yet, this can be expanded considerably. One helpful distinction advanced by Zimmerman (2000) differentiates between empowerment as a value orientation linked with creating concrete outcomes and a theoretical framework that assists us in understanding and analysing the empowering processes. Both these ways of considering empowerment operate at different scales that can include the individual, organisation and the community with different interpretations of empowerment at each scale and according to whether it is the process or the outcome. For example, psychological empowerment is important at the individual level, organisational empowerment relates to the ways in which agencies mobilise resources and people through participation, and community empowerment relates to changes in the socio-political change (see also Rappaport, 1987).

Part of the reason why empowerment has become popular within policy discourse, and especially in the Global South, is that it is action-oriented and focuses on removing barriers to positive change and on altering power relations between communities, institutions and government (Wallerstein, 2006). This needs to be done from a holistic perspective rather than being 'a stand-alone strategy, but is part of a comprehensive approach, engaging policy-makers to promote structural or legal changes to support community engagement' (ibid.: 18). Empowerment strategies are therefore focused on fostering social justice through allowing and encouraging people to challenge oppression and marginalisation.

While empowerment has been very important in research and interventions on community capacity and social capital in particular, especially from the perspective of community psychology (Zimmerman, 2000), it has perhaps received most attention in relation to women and gender, especially in the international development context. Discussions from this perspective also differentiate between process and outcomes especially in relation to debates about whether it is possible to measure empowerment (Kabeer, 1999). However, these debates also emphasise the ability to exercise choice as being particularly important for women as Kabeer (2005:13) notes:

'One way of thinking about power is in terms of the *ability to make choices*. To be disempowered means to be denied choice, while empowerment refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability'.

In turn, this ability to choose is also influenced by other factors relating specifically to access to and future claims on resources, agency to ensure decision-making and negotiation, as well as achievements in terms of well-being outcomes (Kabeer, 1999). A concise summary of this approach that focuses on poor women in the Global South is coined by Eyben (2011: 2) who states:

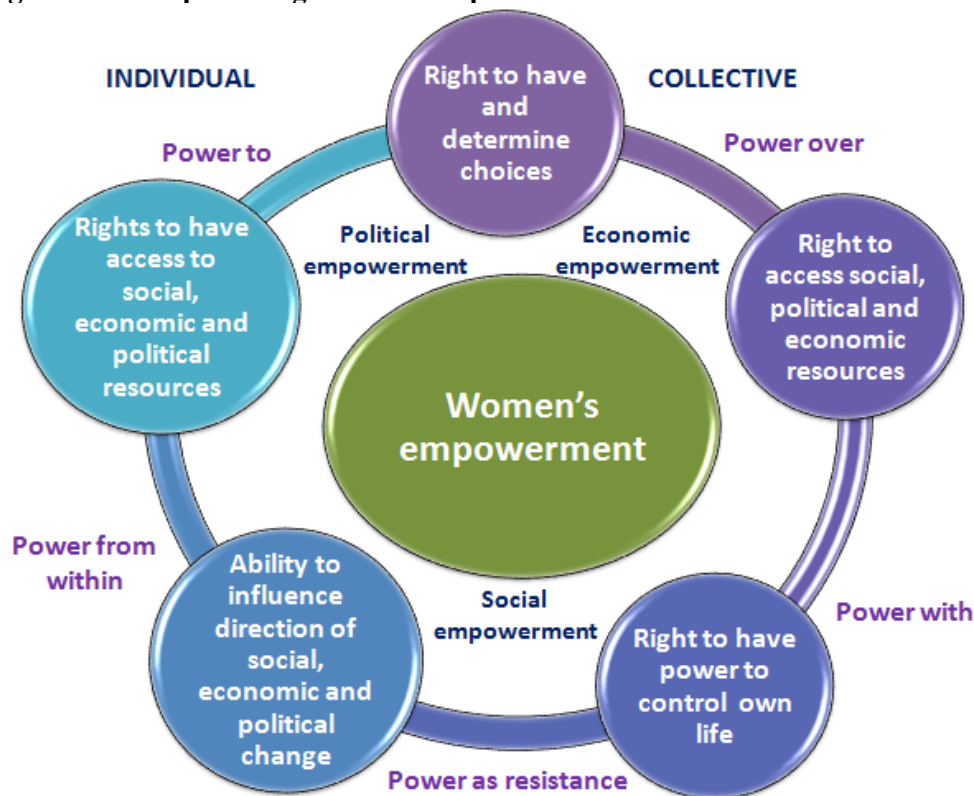
'Women's empowerment happens when individuals and organised groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realise that vision by changing the relations of power that have kept them in poverty, restricted their voice and deprived them of their autonomy'.

This also entails developing a sense of self-worth and the ability to renegotiate unequal relationships individually and collectively, especially in terms of being able to participate in the economy and society on an equal basis as men (Kabeer 2008a: 27).

In expanding this process and outcomes oriented definition, Rowlands has identified empowerment as a way of accessing decision-making as well as changing the ways in

which people think about themselves in relation to three core dimensions: the 'personal', 'close relationships' and the 'collective' (Rowlands, 1996; see Chant and McIlwaine 2009 for a summary). Rowlands (1996) developed a typology of different types of power, all of which interrelate and need to be combined. These include 'power over' which refers to domination and subordination and involves threats of violence, fear and intimidation by individual or group usually in overt ways; 'power from within' which denotes spiritual strength which is self-generated and incorporates self confidence, self awareness and assertiveness. Such changes from within are also about challenging power; 'power with' where people organise with common purpose or understanding to achieve collective goals. This refers to a sense of communion and solidarity as power; 'power to' is about gaining access to a full range of human abilities and potential which allow women to have decision-making authority; finally, 'power as resistance' is a compliment to power over and intersects closely with it. Resistance takes a multitude of different forms from subtle to overt and can also entail manipulation (see also Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Conceptualising women's empowerment**



Source: Adapted from McIlwaine (2012 compiled from Kabeer [2008a] and Rowlands [1996])

The notion of 'women's empowerment' has been widely used in development discourse since the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995, where the Platform for Action revolved around an 'agenda for women's empowerment' that focused on shared power and responsibility. Indeed, many consider Beijing to be the pinnacle of efforts to ensure that women's empowerment is incorporated into development discourse. However, since Beijing, empowerment has not only been renowned for its 'fuzziness' in meaning, but has also increasingly been used as a technical and technocratic fix generated through micro-credit programmes and political quotas for women (Eyben and Napier- Moore, 2009). Indeed, in the context of India,

Batliwala (2007) notes that over time, empowerment has changed its meaning from a tool of transforming and challenging social relations to one that serves neoliberal agendas as a ‘technical magic fix’. This has arguably occurred more widely in that conceptualisations of empowerment in the 1990s focused on social justice as a way of ensuring gender equality and women’s well-being have shifted towards instrumentalist approaches that suggest that empowerment is ‘good for’ economic growth (Eyben and Napier- Moore, 2009) as argued at various points in the recent World Bank’s (2012) *World Development Report*.

Linked with this, while women’s empowerment has been operationalised by different development agencies in different ways, there has been a tendency to focus on economic and to a lesser extent, political empowerment. For example, UN Women identify economic empowerment as one of their six focus areas. In addition, their Fund for Gender Equality supports projects that address women’s economic and political empowerment. The former refers to ‘increasing access to and control over decision-making, land, technology, credit, livelihoods and other means of production and social protection’, while the latter aims for women to adopt ‘leadership roles and participate more fully in political processes and in all spheres on public life, particularly formal institutions’<sup>1</sup> Although social empowerment is not completely absent from these definitions, it is certainly implicit rather than explicit. Yet, all three dimensions of empowerment are intertwined and mutually reinforcing (Kabeer et al., 2011). The ways in which women develop a sense of autonomy and self-respect socially is central to the economic and political choices they are able to make and to the ways in which they are able to work with others to bring about lasting change (Eyben, 2011). Part of this need to foreground the social aspects of empowerment is the importance of recognising that empowerment as process and outcome varies considerably according to context linked with historical changes in society, economy and cultural norms as well as the role of states and other institutions. Indeed, Cornwall and Edwards (2010: 2) point out that many of these aspects of women’s lives are ‘obscured by the materialism of development’ in terms of ‘the solace of belief and the sociality of religious practice, the pleasures of leisure, and the centrality to women’s lives of affective and supportive relationships’.

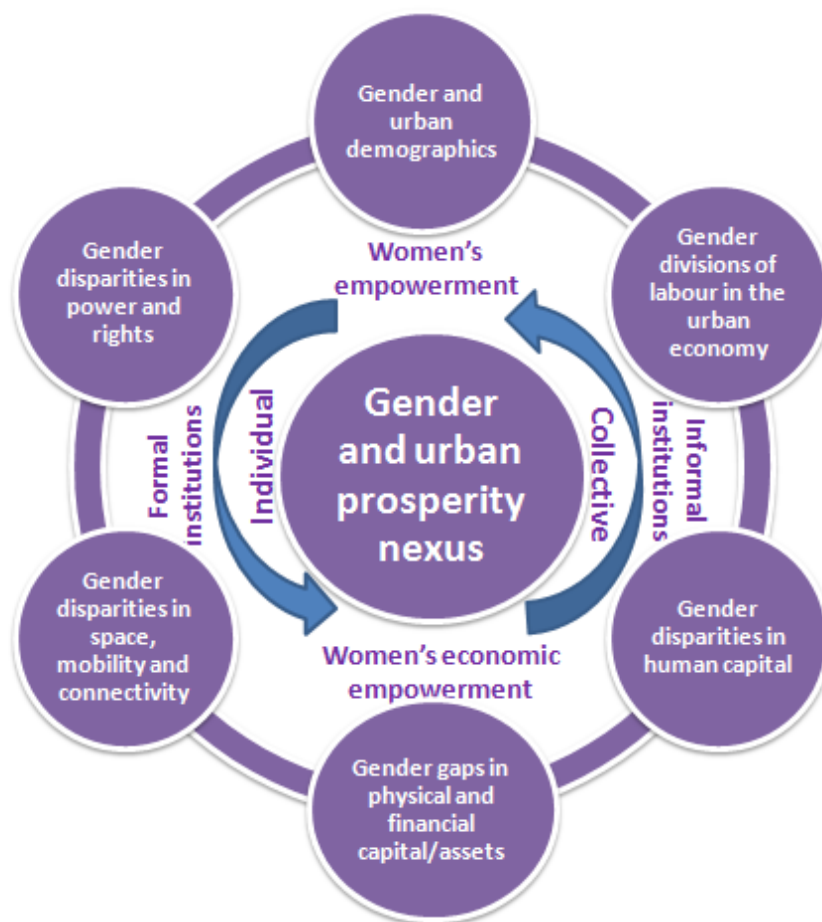
Another shortcoming of the ways in which ‘empowerment’ is used within the field of international development is that the term has become ‘softer’ and ‘more conciliatory’ since development agencies have adopted it. As such, it fails to address the underlying structural inequalities and pervasive discrimination that requires women to be empowered in the first place (Cornwall, 2007). In addition, as noted above, although many definitions of empowerment refer to ‘choice’, many poor women do not have the luxury of being able to make choices. It can be difficult to impose empowerment through interventions because it entails changing gender ideologies which can only be brought about by psycho-social and political transformation as well as those linked with the material conditions of life (Kabeer, 2008a). Thus, it is important to remember that it cannot be ‘handed-out’ by a government or multilateral organisation as another service (Wallerstein, 2006).

While bearing in mind these criticisms, when thinking about empowerment in relation to urban prosperity, it is useful to concentrate on women’s economic empowerment as long as it recognises that it extends beyond women’s economic position in terms of work, income, education and assets to encompass other social and political dimensions (Kabeer et al., 2011) (see Figure 3). More specifically, this requires skills and resources to compete in markets, fair and equal access to economic institutions, and the ability to make and act on decisions and control resources and profits in terms of exercising power and agency (Golla et al. 2011). This relates to the

more specific theoretical debate outlined above on the ways in which women's participation in the labour market and their access to economic resources can lead to empowerment. Echoing the points made above, Ruth Pearson (2004: 118) reinforces the point that economic empowerment requires the generation of power across different spheres and scales:

'Poor women need money but increases in wages will not on their own make women either less poor or more powerful. Improvements in the conditions and returns to work must be coupled with expectations that the state will ensure that they achieve a minimum income; that they have access to affordable and high quality education, health and transport services; and that their environment is healthy and their lives are not blighted by community and domestic violence'.

**Figure 3: Women's empowerment and gendered urban prosperity nexus**



Source: adapted from Chant and McIlwaine (2012)

Overall, then, there can be several pathways to empowerment that take time, effort and structural change in order to be realised (Eyben, 2011), especially when the social aspects are placed central-stage.

*Intersections between urbanisation, prosperity and gender empowerment*

The conceptual nexus outlined in Figure 2 is obviously a simplification of reality. However, it can assist in identifying the sectors and issues that need to be addressed if women are to take advantage of urban prosperity as a way of improving their life chances. Yet it is also essential to remember that the relationships between urbanisation and prosperity in different cities around the world will play out in a wide range of diverse ways, and there may be a ‘cut-off’ point when societies are more than 70 per cent urbanised (UN-HABITAT, 2010c: 5). In the case of the rapidly growing economies of the world, although urban per capita GDP is expected to rise by 9 per cent per year in India and 10 per cent in China and by 2025 China’s cities will generate 20 per cent of global GDP, evidence remains mixed as to how such phenomenal economic growth rates intersect with increases in national or urban prosperity (Dobbs et al. 2011: 30).

In terms of gender, there are some, but no definitive systematic links between levels of poverty, per capita GNI, urbanisation, equality and/or gender equality across developing regions. For example, while the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) correlates with GNI to some degree, the relationship appears to be driven primarily by Latin America which is marked by pervasive inequality that appears to be associated with a pronounced gender gap in income. In addition, the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) also exhibits a strong positive correlation with the UNDP’s Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). As a country decreases its share of multi-dimensional poor, the SIGI moves closer towards equality (Chant, 2011a).

Also important to highlight is that there are discrepancies in regional definitions among different organisations about gender and urban prosperity in terms of national, regional and global statistics, as well as deficits in sex-disaggregated data. A lack of comprehensive sex-disaggregated quantitative data, especially for poorer countries undermines the reliable geographical coverage of gender indicators such as the GGGI and the SIGI (Drechsler and Jütting, 2010).

The indicators for gender in the MDG 3, for instance, notably the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary education, women’s share of non-agricultural employment, and proportion of seats held by national parliaments, exclude important elements vital to women’s lives. These include a quantification of gender-differentiated domestic labour and care burdens, as well as registration of women’s paid work because of its concentration in the informal economy (Chant, 2006, 2007a; also Buvinic and King, 2007). Although major progress in improving the quality of sex-disaggregated statistics has been made, the lack of gender indicators in all MDGs, and the limited nature of MDG 3 targets for women compared with the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) of 1995 has provoked widespread debate and critique (Chant, 2007b; Johnsson-Latham, 2010; Saith, 2006).

Despite such data caveats, the gender empowerment and urban prosperity nexus can still provide an important conceptual building block for understanding women’s position in cities in relation to well-being and economic growth.

### **Equity-based development, urban prosperity and gender empowerment**

Linked with the importance of addressing gender disparities in power and rights identified in Figures 1 and 2, gender equity is central to ensuring the equal distribution of the benefits of prosperity in cities in general and women’s empowerment in particular. In particular it is essential in protecting the rights of women and ensuring that they have full access not only to material resources in cities, but also to civic participation in the social, political and cultural spheres. Engagement in urban politics and governance is not just a fundamental right, but an integral and potentially major route to gender equality in urban prosperity.



Some advances have occurred in women holding seats in national parliaments around the world in the past decade, even if under-representation remains persistent in developed and developing countries alike. In only 23 countries of the world, for example, do women comprise over 30 per cent of the lower or single house of the national parliament (Chant, 2011a). At ministerial levels, gender gaps increase dramatically. Taking into account local councillors as well as parliamentarians, only 1 in 5 are female in a diverse range of contexts (UN-HABITAT, 2008: 3). Increasingly, governments around the world are establishing quotas and other types of affirmative action that mandate representation of women in various levels of public office. By 2006, nearly 40 countries had introduced gender quotas in parliamentary elections (Huairou Commission, 2011). Such mandates are a step in the right direction, but it is equally important to bridge the gap between women elected to public office and grassroots women's groups. However, according to a grassroots leader from GROOTS Peru, 'Affirmative action does not necessarily change structures of power' (Huairou Commission, 2010b). Such mandates are a step in the right direction, but it is equally important to bridge the gap between women elected to public office and grassroots women's groups.

Building on a long legacy of women engaging in collective struggle in towns and cities around the world for basic services and infrastructure, housing, healthcare, and rights to use public urban space for informal economic activity, there is a mounting female presence in informal as well as formal structures of governance. Coupled with the general spread of 'rights-based' and 'multi-stakeholder' agendas in local-level governance, these tendencies have been central to opening up new political spaces for women. For example, in Brazil, women have been the majority of participants in budgetary assemblies in Porto Alegre, which has been a pioneer in inclusive urban governance. In India the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act introduced in 1992, required 30 per cent of seats on local councils 'panchayati raj' to be occupied by women (Jarvis et al., 2009: 240-1; Khosla, 2009).

This engagement is especially important at the grassroots level. As part of decentralisation efforts, there has been a shift towards community participation and the increased role of women in local governance. Grassroots organisations are distinguished in how they engage with government and others across through inclusive partnerships by providing practical and sustainable solutions to meet basic needs, as well as building capacity at the local level. For example, GROOTS Kenya acts a key information resource centre providing paralegal support to disinherited women and children to claim their rights. However, these groups are rarely equal partners and one of the key challenges is recognising, legitimising and formally resourcing women's work (Huairou Commission, 2010b).

There have also been problems in that women's engagement in movements and programmes around basic services and poverty reduction tend to feminise responsibility in ways that burden women even more, sideline men further, and neglect strategic gender interests in favour of practical gender needs (in terms of challenging gender ideologies and power relations) (Molyneux, 2001; Moser, 1993). In addition, it has been noted that a gender perspective is included on grounds of effectiveness and efficiency of projects. Criticisms of a utilitarian approach to gender, even where 'rights' and 'empowerment' might be professed aims, are found in a range of broader initiatives around poverty reduction. These may not be specifically urban, but by the very nature of rising urban populations affect legions of women in towns and cities in developing countries. Harnessing women's 'empowerment' to poverty reduction tends not only to blur the distinctions between poverty and gendered privation but also frequently

involves using women as a ‘conduit of policy’ (Molyneux, 2006). This capitalises on and often ‘re-traditionalises’ women’s altruistic and maternal roles (Chant, 2008).

This has been the case in the context of Poverty Reduction Strategy Policies (PRSPs) (Bradshaw and Linneker, 2010), in microfinance schemes (Maclean, 2010) and in conditional cash transfer programmes (CCTs) (Bradshaw, 2008) and appears to do little to effect change in the status quo. Although there may be some benefits for some women resulting from pan-national anti-poverty interventions, this may not only be dependent on the type of group and context, as revealed by contrasting outcomes for indigenous women in different parts of Mexico from the Oportunidades CCT (González de la Rocha, 2010).

Despite some important benefits for women from formal and informal modes of civic participation, if women’s engagement is prioritised only in the interests of creating wealth for all, then the question remains as to how other benefits come about. In the short-term, to entrap women in the largely unpaid, and fundamentally altruistic work of building better cities arguably goes against the grain of transforming gender relations or creating a more equal share of urban prosperity among women and men. However, without women’s engagement, especially in decision-making positions, there is little likelihood of granting gender issues a seat at the political and policy table.

### *Engendering empowerment and urban prosperity through gender policies*

The creation of gender-equitable cities that can generate prosperity for women and for cities requires policy interventions that aim to make women economically empowered and prosperous, but also provide them with greater access to social and political resources and opportunities as well as the freedom to make choices. It is essential that policies address the various dimensions of economic empowerment and prosperity simultaneously and in a multi-stakeholder manner.

Gender equity is based on gender sensitivity in that equity cannot be reached without recognition that women and men have different and invariably unequal experiences in cities. Only by addressing these disparities can economic empowerment and prosperity be achieved. Therefore, there is a major need to tackle gender imbalances in the contributions to, and benefits from, urban prosperity. This requires looking at inputs, as well as outcomes, in terms of housing, service and infrastructure provision, productivity and so on, at different scales (Chant, 2011a).

However, the instrumental use of women to make cities and urban policies more efficient is unlikely to change relational aspects of gender (Johnson, 2005: 57). It is clear that it is critical not only to address the ‘practical gender needs’ of women in urban environments but ‘strategic gender interests’ in terms of addressing deep-seated gender ideologies and power relations if a more equal distribution of urban prosperity is to come about (see above). In addressing the various components of the gender empowerment and urban poverty nexus it is also important to remember that some of these issues (for example, selected aspects of urban demographics such as migrant selectivity and ageing) are long-term and contextual in nature, whereas others are potentially more immediately responsive to policy.

One of the most fundamental issues to address in any gender policy is to address women’s unpaid reproductive work. This needs much greater valorisation and support given its critical role in ensuring the daily regeneration of the labour force, the functioning of cities, and contributions to the urban prosperity. This labour needs to be recognised not only in itself, but on grounds that it constrains women’s participation in paid employment, as well as in social, political and cultural realms. In particular, it inhibits the development of capabilities among younger generations of women who may

have to take on burdens of mothers and other female kin, and can also seriously disadvantage children of both sexes. These responsibilities are likely to be ever more burdensome in light of the recent global financial crisis (Pearson, 2010). Only when all people are recognised as those who need, give and receive care can gender equality be achieved.

Women's efforts can clearly be supported in a number of ways, and benefits may well ensue from a multi-pronged approach. Direct attention to the burdens of childcare and other types of unpaid care work typically performed by women, can include paid community-based options, workplace nurseries and care homes, state parental or carer support transfers, and dedicated private and/or public facilities. While women's care burdens might be alleviated in part through cash transfers (Razavi, 2007), the provision of public services for care-related needs is more favourable, mainly because it challenges the persistent identification of women with reproductive labour and its status as a 'private' responsibility.

Where such services exist they should be subsidised and affordable, and within easy reach of people's homes. One successful example that has been instituted throughout Latin American countries such as Costa Rica and Colombia is '*Hogares Comunitarios*' (Community Homes) programmes which provide subsidised childcare in poor neighbourhoods via the training of local women as 'community mothers' (Moser and McIlwaine, 2004). However, since it is women who are the paid carers of children, and mothers who deliver and collect their offspring, this type of programme still reinforces women's primary female identification with care.

One way of addressing this is to expand the types of services and activities available in childcare centres. One such successful example is the Mathare Mother's Development Centre organised by GROOTS Mathare in Nairobi, Kenya (which are also members of GROOTS International and the Huairou Commission). Although the centre began as a day care centre in 1999, it now provides capacity-building, training and income generation activities (micro-lending projects and savings projects), home-based care to HIV/AIDS patients in the community (through the Home-based Care Alliance), leadership training, and support for youth and youth organizing. This highlights the importance of addressing the responsibilities of women's lives in from a holistic perspective (Yonder and Tamaki for the Huairou Commission (2010).

An essential part of any multidimensional perspective is the valorisation of women's care roles through the promotion of greater public sensitisation to the societal value of care and the encouragement of more equal engagement by women and men in this unrecognised work (Chant, 2007a). One way of doing this is for policies to provide incentives for men to share in care work, such as through paternity leave, and changes in 'paid work cultures' such as shorter and more flexible working days. This might also include a possible requirement that to qualify for use of public care facilities men should play a part in delivery and collection of care-receivers. It is perhaps only when the 'private' work that women perform in their homes and communities is made public, and duly enforced as a collective social responsibility, that greater there will be greater realisation of gender inequities and their inefficiencies as well as injustices.

Another important issue is the remuneration of women for their caring jobs. One example of this has been the Huairou Commission's AIDS Campaign. This has shown that caregivers undertake a very wide range of tasks that include psychosocial counselling, education and awareness-raising as well as livelihood assistance even though much of their work has been unrecognised and unremunerated. However, members of the Home-based Care Alliance have moved towards accreditation through the development of identification cards recognised by community members, hospitals, clinics and decision-makers that show caregivers' special roles and skills. This will lead

to valuing the women who have been providing their time for free. In addition, a number of NGOs across Africa, with donor support, provide stipends for caregivers. In South Africa, the government provides a small stipend for some caregivers who are part of legally registered NGOs, yet, the vast majority of caregivers work with no stipends or salaries (Hayes for the Huairou Commission, 2010).

*Policies to address quality of life and infrastructure*

It should also be remembered that the unpaid work that women perform in their homes and neighbourhoods not only relates to care in terms of feeding children or attending to sick or elderly individuals, but to a more extended range of activities that affect quality of life. These include saving household resources by shopping around, preparing of nutritious meals on low incomes, conserving water and power for environmental as well as financial ends and so on. The ability to carry out these tasks is underpinned by access to adequate housing, health and basic urban services, as well as freedom from gender-based violence.

Access to and security in housing is one of the fundamentally important aspects of improving women's quality of life in cities. While urbanisation offers unprecedented potential to do away with deep-seated patriarchal power structures, as Hughes and Wickeri (2011, p.839) comment: '... urban growth must be managed in a way that ensures women's full realisation of their right to adequate housing'. This should extend to all women, including the particularly marginalised constituencies of elderly women, widows, sick and disabled women, and lesbians.

Closer compliance with the provisions of CEDAW (Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) and other relevant international human rights instruments can be approached in a plethora of ways, including through state, NGO and private sector support of the numerous initiatives generated by women themselves in the form of group savings and collective land acquisition and building schemes (D'Cruz and Satterthwaite, 2005). Partnerships can take the form of gender-responsive housing finance, assistance in obtaining tenure security, subsidised materials, and training in construction techniques (Chant, 2006; Patel and Mitlin, 2010).

Therefore, an integral role should be played by concerted efforts to increase pro-female housing rights initiatives, such as in statutory joint or individual titling, or mechanisms to ensure that women are fully represented on committees which decide on land rights in communities which observe customary law (Chant, 2007b). Support for paralegal services which assist women in their ability to realise their land and shelter entitlements is also crucial. This is evidenced in Nigeria where the Women's Aid Collective (WACOL) works to help widows defend their inheritance rights (COHRE, 2004: 77-8). Recalling the importance of rental accommodation for urban women, interventions to promote their access to, and security in, this sector should not be neglected.

For women in rental and owner- or quasi-owner-occupied housing alike, greater media exposure of abuses in respect of tenure security, shelter adequacy and personal safety could also raise visibility and public accountability. Although, women's lack of knowledge of their rights, and societal awareness of when those rights are violated, whether within or outside the justice system, are more compromised in rural than in urban areas, media dissemination and campaigns can undoubtedly be effective, and could be strengthened further by increasing poor women's access to ICT.

Policies for improving women's health are also crucially important and interrelate with those addressing other aspects of quality of life. For example, as noted above, the

Home-Based Care Alliances that have been established throughout Africa (via GROOTS International) not only provide care for those suffering from HIV/AIDS, but they have evolved into primary health care workers (Hayes for the Huairou Commission, 2010a). In Kenya, community watchdogs groups were also founded by home-based caregivers to prevent evictions of widows and children. GROOTS Kenya facilitated the training of community watchdogs to act as community paralegals and linked them to elders, chiefs and councillors to monitor and prevent land grabbing and asset stripping. The watchdog groups have been replicated in 16 communities across 4 regions of Kenya (Huairou Commission, 2010b).

Another core area affecting women's quality of life is the need to reduce violence against women in cities. UN-HABITAT (2007) usefully outlines a range of policy approaches at the local level in cities that address urban crime and violence, all of which are gendered in some way. Some of these types of interventions focus on gender-based violence in public spheres while others address domestic violence specifically. One example reflecting the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approach from Khayelitsha, Cape Town, South Africa illustrates how gender-based violence can be reduced in cities in relation to upgrading or changing the urban infrastructure and physical fabric of the city in some way. For example, if outside toilets are phased out then women are much less likely to put themselves in situations of risk. However, it is essential to combine these with other projects that also address deep-seated gender inequalities otherwise the long-term reduction in gender-based violence will not be ensured (McIlwaine, 2013 forthcoming).

This might also include strengthening formal criminal justice systems and policing from a gender perspective. Many of the early interventions to reduce gender-based violence in general focused on changing legislation, often prompted by the campaigning of women's movements. In the 1980s and 1990s, legal reforms were instituted in many countries focusing criminalization of perpetrators. However, there remain serious problems in terms of implementation. In the case of India, that there have been three decades of lobbying by the women's movement to address domestic violence with many legislative changes linked primarily with Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (Anti-Cruelty Act) and Section 304B (Dowry Death Act). However, despite legislation, the number of dowry crimes and domestic violence has increased from 6,208 in 2003 to 8,172 in 2008. Other judicial interventions have been women's police stations (McIlwaine, 2013 forthcoming).

Addressing violence against women is one area where working with men as well as women has become paramount. The well-known Stepping Stones programmes that focuses on sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention which began in Uganda in 1995 but which has been implemented in over 104 countries throughout the world works with women and men in trying to create better communication channels between women and men as well as more equal gender roles. In a study in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, it was found that the men who participated in the programme were less like to commit physical or sexual violence (ibid). Indeed, without major attempts to change men's patriarchally-influenced behaviour patterns gender-equitable law is likely to languish.

### *Policies to address productivity*

Ensuring women's rights to adequate housing, services and infrastructure, along with education, training and work also plays a major part in enhancing women's access to, and benefits from, productivity and to urban prosperity in gender-equitable ways. While various MDG targets have been important in enhancing women's access to education



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and employment, much more needs to be done to cater to the needs of women workers, along with increasing numbers of male workers, who are likely to remain disproportionately engaged in the informal urban economy. Further informalisation is likely as some cities de-industrialise or formal manufacturing plants are reduced in favour of offloading jobs into the home working sector, and public sector employment is scaled down in the interests of cost-cutting. As pointed out in the context of a recent workshop on 'Inclusive Cities' in New Delhi, since 80 per cent of urban workers in India are informally employed, and like many other developing nations India's economy is a 'hybrid' of 'modern-traditional' and 'formal-informal' activities, economic diversity and informal businesses should be promoted rather than penalised (Chen, 2010).

Urban policies concerning land and land-use are vital here, with restrictions on home-based enterprise, widespread slum clearance, the gating of middle-income and elite residential neighbourhoods, and constrained access by informal entrepreneurs to public spaces often exacting huge tolls on women's ability to avoid poverty, let alone to achieve any form of 'prosperity'. Aside from recognising the rights of informal workers in the city through land channels, and acknowledging that there is no single solution given the diversity of such work, a variety of mechanisms for supporting small businesses and the self-employed, at the same time as promoting 'decent work', might be considered.

These include better provision of vocational educational and training with a view to enhancing the diversification of often competitive informal activities, easier access to loans on favourable terms, assistance in promoting greater health and safety at work, and the reduction and/or phasing of costs of formalisation (Chant and McIlwaine, 2009: Chapter 6; see also Chant 2013b). Encouraging and supporting associations of female informal entrepreneurs is also important to strengthen their often marginalised position and activities. The power of organisation is not only indicated by the huge diversity of examples of women workers' organising across the world, but also features in Chen's (2010) '3V' framework for the working poor. Comprising the imperatives of 'voice', 'visibility' and 'validity', this serves as another potentially fruitful step towards greater gender equality in prosperity in urban environments.

It is essential to remember that access to decent opportunities to generate income can have important positive implications for women's economic empowerment. The extensive research on the role of micro-enterprises in women's lives has illustrated that, although they do not unequivocally empower women, access to loans to establish small businesses can significantly improve women's lives and give them more decision-making power across a range of domains.

It is also critical to remember that not all women are informally employed and that general questions pertaining to productivity need to be tackled (Perrons, 2010). In particular, the lower value accorded to women's labour needs to be addressed as well as overt and covert discrimination against women in recruitment. In addition, it is not just poor women who have been organising and for whom economic empowerment is also relevant, nor that organising has focused on the workplace. There are many examples whereby professional women have organised and/or where interventions have targeted women beyond the grassroots. For example, in Mexico, a federal programme called Generosidad awards a "Gender Equity Seal" to private firms. These are granted through an independent evaluation that assesses a company's achievement of specific standards related to gender equity, including recruitment, career advancement, training and reducing sexual harassment. By 2006, 117 companies had obtained the Seal (Chant, 2011a).

*Policies to address equity in power and rights*

Gender-equitable prosperous cities also need to promote women's and men's participation in civic engagement and urban governance and politics, while avoiding the situation whereby high levels of women's activism at the grassroots do not translate into high-profile representation in formal municipal or political arenas. Imperative in efforts to support such engagement should be the recognition of state-society synergies in that progressive national policy reform rarely happens through social mobilisation or state action alone but through collaborative efforts of civil society and governments and especially through partnerships with grassroots organisations (Khosla, 2009). Indeed, it is in the NGO sector where many important initiatives have been developed, especially through the UN-HABITAT-Huairou Commission partnership. Indeed, it is now accepted as essential to engage with grassroots organisations as an essential part of urban governance in mutually beneficial ways in order to bring about sustainable change in gender equity.

Underpinning these developments are mechanisms whereby grassroots organisations organise to prioritise their needs and then negotiate with local authorities to address these through systems. One such initiative is Local to Local Dialogue pioneered by the Huairou Commission in collaboration with UN-HABITAT and inspired by organisations such as SPARC (Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers) and Mahila Matila in India. This develops 'locally designed strategies whereby grassroots women's groups initiate and engage in ongoing dialogue with local authorities to negotiate a range of issues and priorities to influence policies, plans and programmes in ways that address women's priorities' (Huairou Commission, 2004: 12). This tool builds collective action, capacity building and alliances as well as information. Developing grassroots women as leaders and as active participants in local decision-making processes and structures is also fundamental. This can demonstrate that democratic and participatory governance can be built from the bottom up by supporting grassroots women's participation in local planning and budgeting (Huairou Commission, 2010a).

Also part of designing gender-responsive pro-prosperity measures is to correct the common dilemma posed for women by involving them predominantly or exclusively in anti-poverty programmes where they usually end up with more unpaid work on their shoulders (Molyneux, 2006) (see also above). In order to counter the 'feminisation of responsibility' (Chant, 2008) or adverse effects of the 'feminisation of policy' (Roy, 2010), it is vital for poverty reduction programmes to promote the greater engagement of men. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that although mobilising investments in women can have huge impacts on the generation of wealth, there is also a serious danger of instrumentalising gender (under the auspices of promoting 'gender equality') to meet these ends. This misses the vital point of evening-out women's and men's inputs and rewards in urban environments. It is therefore paramount that the principles of gender rights and justice remain uppermost in urban prosperity discourse and planning (Chant, 2012b, 2013a).

*Conclusion*

This paper has argued that the promotion of urban prosperity needs to take gender into account in order to ensure that cities function in order to safe-guard and encourage the well-being of their inhabitants economically and socially. A core process of this is the need to generate empowerment for women in ways that address economic, social

and political dimensions. In order to understand these processes more fully across a range of different contexts, the paper develops a conceptual framework for understanding the intersections between the gendered nature of urban prosperity and women's empowerment. This is complemented by an empirical discussion of the main processes underlying the gendered nature of urban prosperity in relation to empowerment and an outline of the types of policies that can be potentially implemented in order to generate prosperity in cities in gender equitable and sustainable ways. While the paper argues that pro-prosperity measures can be important in meeting this broad aim, it also warns against using women's contributions for generating wealth alone without addressing the underlying unequal gendered power relations and issues of social justice that are necessary in order to bring about true empowerment and long-term improvement in women's lives in cities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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*Sylvia Chant is Professor of Development Geography at the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK, where she is Director of the MSc in Urbanisation and Development. Sylvia has conducted research in Mexico, Costa Rica, Philippines and The Gambia, and has specialist interests in gender and poverty, female employment and urban labour markets, rural-migration, housing, and female-headed households.*

*Cathy McIlwaine is Professor of Geography at Queen Mary, University of London, UK. She has worked on development issues in Latin America (Costa Rica, Colombia, El Salvador and Guatemala), South East Asia (the Philippines) and southern Africa (Botswana). More recently her work focuses on international migration in relation to low-paid migrant workers and Latin American migrants in London, focusing on gender and transnational migration, irregular migrants and livelihood practices.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/how-we-work/fund-for-gender-equality/> (accessed 236 November 2012).