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Title: Is urban planning gender inclusive? The case of sanitation and women’s safety in India

As the international system grapples to deal with transnational challenges such as sustainable growth and development, climate change, global economic stability, cities have reemerged as strategic sites of policy experiments and institutional innovations to fix these problems. However, many neoliberal approaches to urban renewal and governance end up exacerbating the very problems they sought to address such as uneven development, segmented socio-economic spatialities, inequitable access to goods and services, and political polarization. Using India as a case study, I evaluate policies such as the Smart Cities initiative and the Swachh Bharat (Clean India) Mission to illustrate this paradox by examining how women participate and are affected by these policies. Urban planning in Indian cities not only exhibits a class bias, it is also quite to the needs for creating gendered spaces. The oversights are particularly stark in spaces when these identities intersect, which means women in poor urban slum communities especially struggle to be represented as stakeholders in urban planning conversations. I draw upon ethnographic from New Delhi that consists of in-depth interviews with various stakeholders including bureaucrats and planners, grassroots NGOs, and community-based women’s groups, as well as participant observation urban policy meetings in formal and informal spaces to unravel these dynamics. I find that even when policies are expressly geared towards slum communities and women therein such as in the case of sanitation, the participation of women is affected not because of a lack of agency as is usually argued but rather due to structural and institutional biases. For instance, sanitation is understood simplistically as a tool to increase safety, thus creating a dissonance between the actual problems faced by women and the solutions proposed. Bureaucrats ask where to build new toilets instead of asking what prevents women from using existing toilets. Entrenched prejudices result in local community knowledge being ignored when it comes to planning decisions, thus creating policy failures. This study illustrates that while gender responsive urban planning solutions are a first step in creating an inclusive city, actual gender equity in terms of participatory input lags behind and needs to be addressed by policymakers.