

Exploring the Intersection of Gender Equality, Urban Planning, and Sustainability: A Systematic Review

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1 ABSTRACT

Gender equality is a critical yet often overlooked aspect of urban planning and sustainability. Urban environments significantly shape social, economic, and environmental dynamics but frequently fail to account for the distinct needs, experiences, and challenges faced by women. This systematic review examines the intersection of gender equality, urban planning, and sustainability, highlighting how traditional urban planning practices, when developed without a gendered perspective, perpetuate existing inequalities, particularly in areas such as access to public spaces, safety, and essential services. The study aims to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the integration of gender-sensitive approaches into urban sustainability practices. Bibliometric analysis will be conducted using VOSviewer to map and analyse research trends in gender equality, urbanism, and sustainability. The PRISMA protocol for systematic reviews will be followed to ensure a rigorous and transparent methodology in selecting and analysing relevant publications. This review provides an overview of the current state of research and offers insights for future studies and policy development aimed at integrating gender-sensitive approaches into urban planning to promote sustainability and social equity.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Urban Planning, Sustainability, Gender-Transformative Urbanism, Bibliometric Analysis

2 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Cities are not neutral spaces – they reflect and reproduce social hierarchies, including gender inequalities. Despite growing global commitments to gender equality, urban environments often remain designed for an assumed universal user who is typically male, able-bodied, and economically mobile (Jabeen, 2020). This oversight in urban planning has far-reaching implications, particularly for women, who face challenges related to safety, mobility, and access to public spaces. Sustainable cities cannot be achieved without addressing these disparities and ensuring that urban environments are inclusive and equitable for all. This study is significant because it highlights the critical intersection of gender equality, urban planning, and sustainability, offering a systematic review of how gender-sensitive approaches can transform urban environments. While research on gender and urbanism has expanded in recent years, much of it remains fragmented, and the implementation of gender-inclusive planning remains inconsistent (Rampaul & Magidimisha-Chipungu, 2022). This study conducts a bibliometric analysis to identify key research trends, gaps, and thematic developments in the field. The literature provides a background for the study, highlights perspectives on gender equality, and points out the significance of this research. It emphasises the underrepresentation of gender considerations in urban planning practices and examines global and regional frameworks related to gender equality. The study also reflects on key theoretical frameworks, particularly feminist urbanism, gender mainstreaming, and sustainable urban development informing the research. Furthermore, it discusses the challenges and opportunities associated with gender-inclusive urban planning, aiming to contribute to a clearer and more structured understanding of gender-responsive urban planning.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender equality is a critical yet often overlooked aspect of urban planning and sustainability. Urban environments significantly shape social, economic, and environmental dynamics but frequently fail to account for the different needs, experiences, and challenges faced by women (UN-Habitat, 2022). Traditional urban planning practices, when developed without a gendered perspective, perpetuate existing inequalities, particularly in areas such as access to public spaces, safety, and essential services (Westendorp, 2021). In many African cities, deeply entrenched patriarchal systems and the lasting socio-economic and spatial impacts of colonialism further marginalise women in urban spaces (Parnell & Pieterse, 2019). Addressing these challenges requires alignment with international frameworks such as Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goals 5 and 17, which advocate for gender equality and collaborative implementation strategies (United Nations, 2023). This study reviews existing literature at the intersection of gender equality, urban planning, and sustainability, specifically focusing on women's experiences and needs. The review synthesises key insights and identifies research gaps that hinder the development of truly inclusive urban environments.

3.1 Underrepresentation in Urban Planning

While gender-based marginalisation in urban planning is a key focus, the paper argues the broader issue of underrepresentation extends to other marginalised groups, including low-income communities, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals (Fainstein & Servon, 2005; Sandercock, 1998). Urban planning literature increasingly highlights how exclusionary policies and planning frameworks have reinforced social hierarchies and spatial inequalities (Soja, 2010). Historically, city development has prioritised economic growth over inclusivity, often neglecting the voices of those who are most affected by inadequate infrastructure, housing insecurity, and unsafe public spaces (Miraftab, 2009). Examining gender alongside these intersecting forms of marginalisation, this review contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of urban inequities and the necessity of inclusive planning approaches.

3.2 Global and Regional Frameworks on Gender Equality in Urban Planning

Moreover, the global significance of gender equality, urban planning, and sustainability is firmly embedded within international development frameworks such as the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda (United Nations, 2016). SDG 5 emphasises achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, recognising that sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing women's needs and rights (United Nations, 2015). Research has demonstrated a positive correlation between gender equality and improvements across various sectors, including economic growth, public health, and social cohesion (Duflo, 2012). Simultaneously, SDGs 11 and 17, as outlined in Agenda 2063, emphasise the need for urban planning to create inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities through collaborative implementation strategies (United Nations, 2015). The African Union's Agenda 2063 calls for gender-sensitive urban policies that rectify historical injustices and ensure equal access to urban resources, services, and decision-making structures (African Union, 2015).

3.3 Theoretical Frameworks and Key Debates in Gender and Urban Planning

The interdisciplinary nature of this research is rooted in three core theoretical frameworks: feminist urbanism, gender mainstreaming, and sustainable urban development. Feminist urbanism critically examines why gender-sensitive planning is necessary, challenging traditional male-centric urban design (Kern, 2020). Gender mainstreaming provides a structured approach to institutionalising these changes by ensuring gender perspectives are integrated into urban policy and decision-making (UN-Habitat, 2022). Additionally, sustainable urban development places gender equity within the broader goal of long-term urban resilience and sustainability, ensuring that cities address the needs of all citizens, particularly women and other marginalised groups (Campbell, 2016).

3.4 Challenges and Opportunities in Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning

Historically, urban planning has overlooked women's unique experiences, often reinforcing societal biases (Spain, 2016). This has resulted in urban spaces designed primarily for men, neglecting the realities faced by women in terms of mobility, safety, and access to essential services (Kern, 2019). Feminist urbanism serves as a key theoretical lens in this study, critiquing traditional urban planning and advocating for gender-sensitive design approaches that enhance inclusivity. Research increasingly highlights the benefits of incorporating gender considerations into urban planning, leading to safer, more accessible, and equitable cities (UN-Habitat, 2016). Inclusive urban design that considers women's needs – such as well-lit streets, safe public transport, and accessible childcare facilities – can enhance social cohesion and create vibrant, livable communities (Sandilands, 2020).

Beyond gender, urban planning scholarship highlights the need for an intersectional approach that considers race, class, disability, and other factors in city design (Crenshaw, 1989; Parnell, 2020). Cities that fail to consider these factors risk perpetuating inequality through exclusionary infrastructure and policy decisions (Robinson, 2016). Gender mainstreaming ensures that women's perspectives are embedded in all levels of

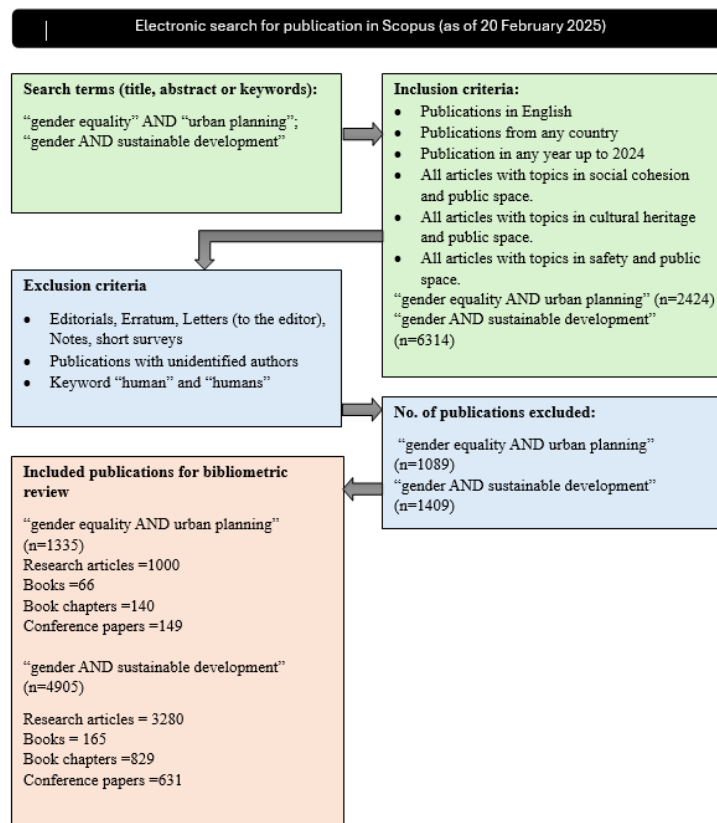
urban planning and decision-making (UN-Habitat, 2022). However, research also highlights the challenges of implementing gender-inclusive strategies, emphasizing the necessity of institutional support and policy integration. Furthermore, gender-inclusive policies can enhance sustainability outcomes by addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by women, leading to more effective and equitable urban solutions (UN Women, 2016). As African cities plan for future development, sustainability becomes a key priority, necessitating gender equality within broader urban sustainability goals, such as those outlined in Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. This perspective aligns with social, economic, and environmental sustainability, advocating for cities that are inclusive, resilient, and equitable (Campbell, 2016).

4 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a bibliometric review methodology to explore the intersection of gender equality, urban planning, and sustainability, with a particular focus on integrating gender-sensitive approaches into urban development practices. Intersectionality recognises that women’s experiences are shaped by multiple social categories such as race, class, and geographic location, creating unique challenges of marginalisation and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). The Scopus database was selected as the primary source for this study due to its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature across various disciplines, including urban planning, architecture, sociology, and cultural studies (Bass et al.,2020). The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol was used to ensure a rigorous and transparent process for selecting and analysing relevant publications. These findings provide valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and urban planners, ensuring that gender-sensitive urban planning is a core component of sustainable development. This is particularly crucial in African contexts, where historical and socio-cultural dynamics have shaped spatial inequalities that disproportionately affect women and other marginalised groups.

4.1 Selection criteria

On 20 February 2025, a Scopus database search was conducted to access and evaluate the body of research on gender equality, urban planning, and sustainability.



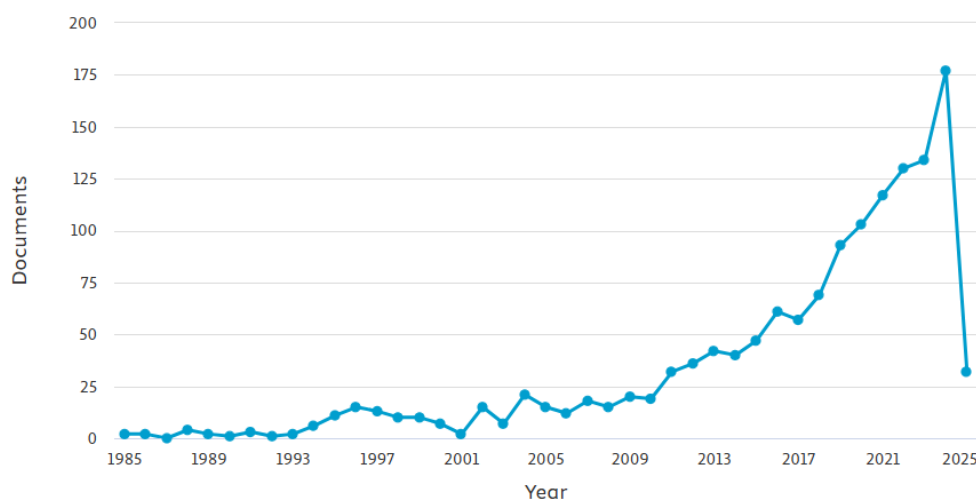
To ensure a comprehensive review, no specific time frame was imposed. The search terms included "gender equality AND urban planning" and "gender AND sustainable development". The inclusion criteria focused on English-language publications from any country and any year up to 2025. Exclusion criteria eliminated

editorials, errata, letters, notes, short surveys, publications with unidentified authors and books, book chapters, reviews, and conference papers not published in English. To ensure rigorous selection, titles and abstracts were screened to confirm eligibility, guided by the PRISMA protocols, which provide a robust and systematic framework for literature reviews, minimising bias, increasing the reliability of results, and ensuring clear and organized presentation (Selcuk, 2019; Page et al., 2021). The analysis includes network maps, graphs, and tables to demonstrate key trends, influential authors, and emerging themes in gender equality and urban sustainability. This approach will allow for the identification of research gaps and key scholarly trajectories in the intersection of these fields (Jia and Mustafa, 2022). Furthermore, the review will synthesise the findings, highlighting the contributions of leading scholars and tracking the evolution of research topics. By addressing these disparities, this study contributes to the discourse on fostering truly inclusive and sustainable urban futures that prioritise women’s needs and create equitable urban environments for all.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF THE BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

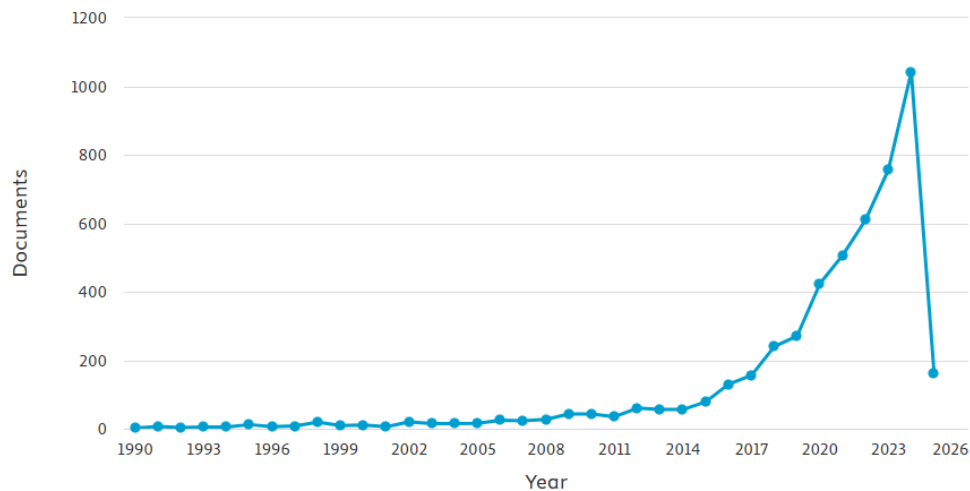
5.1 Publication trends

The analysis of the publication trends at the intersection of “gender equality” and “urban planning” reveal a significant increase in scholarly interest, particularly from 2010 onwards. This surge aligns with global initiatives emphasizing gender equality and sustainable urban development, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015. Specifically, SDG 5 aims to achieve gender equality, while SDG 11 focuses on making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. The heightened research activity post-2015 suggests that these international frameworks have catalyzed academic exploration into how urban planning can address gender-specific needs (Rampaul and Magidimisha-Chipungu, 2022; Yu-an Chung and Grichting Solder, 2024).



Graph 1: Publication trends for research on gender and urban planning (Authors, 2025)

The peak in publications observed in 2024, exceeding 175 documents, indicates that gender-sensitive urban planning has become a well-established research area. This trend may be attributed to increased policy shifts, funding opportunities, and a heightened academic focus on integrating gender perspectives into urban studies (Melin and Levonen, 2024). However, the sharp decline in 2025 could be due to incomplete data for that year, as academic databases often experience delays in indexing newly published articles. Alternatively, it might reflect a saturation point in the literature or a shift towards emerging themes within the field. These findings underscore the evolving recognition of the importance of incorporating gender-sensitive approaches in urban planning to promote sustainable and equitable cities. The growing body of research highlights the necessity for urban policies that consider the unique experiences and challenges faced by different genders, aiming to create inclusive public spaces and infrastructure that cater to all community members (Barker, et al. 2024).



Graph 2: Publication trends for research on gender and sustainable development (Authors, 2025)

The graph depicts a significant upward trend in publications related to gender and sustainable development over the past three decades, indicative of a growing scholarly interest in the intersection of these two critical areas. The steady increase from 1990 to the mid-2010s suggests a gradual recognition of the importance of gender considerations in sustainability discourses. However, the dramatic surge in publications from 2017 onwards points to a more recent and pronounced emphasis on this nexus. This escalation likely reflects the increasing awareness of gender's pivotal role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 on Gender Equality, and its interconnectedness with other goals. The spike could also be attributed to increased funding opportunities, progressive policy frameworks, and a broader societal push for inclusivity and equity in sustainable development initiatives. While the graph illustrates a positive trajectory in research output, it also underscores the need for continued scholarly engagement to translate research into tangible impacts on policy and practice, ensuring that gender perspectives are effectively integrated into sustainable development agendas globally (UN Women, 2018). Furthermore, future research should focus on addressing existing knowledge gaps, exploring the nuances of gender dynamics across diverse cultural contexts, and promoting intersectional approaches that consider the interplay of gender with other social categories in shaping sustainable development outcomes (Broome and Ranford, 2021).

5.2 Keyword Analysis

The keyword analysis of “gender” AND “urban planning” using VOSviewer reveals three major thematic clusters shaping scholarly discourse in this field. The first cluster (red) focuses on the direct relationship between gender and urban planning, emphasizing key topics such as urban areas, perception, surveys, women’s status, and greenspace, highlighting how women experience and interact with urban spaces in terms of access, safety, and mental well-being. The second cluster (green) centers on transportation planning, urban transport, roads, streets, and micromobility, indicating that gender-sensitive urban planning research heavily intersects with mobility and accessibility concerns, particularly in regions like the United Kingdom and Catalonia, where progressive transport policies may influence research. The third cluster (blue) addresses socioeconomic and policy dimensions, linking public policy, economic factors, employment, and urbanization in developing countries, with strong geographic connections to Africa, Bangladesh, and Southern Asia.

The presence of terms related to health, psychology, and marital status suggests an intersectional approach, linking gender disparities in urban planning to broader sociopolitical and behavioral factors. These findings underscore that traditional urban planning has largely overlooked gender-specific needs, leading to inequities in mobility, accessibility, and economic opportunities (Harrison et al., 2022). The transport and mobility cluster reinforces existing research indicating that women face greater transport insecurity, limited mobility options, and gendered constraints in urban transport systems, necessitating more inclusive policies (Ng et al., 2020). The prominence of policy and economy-related keywords suggests that gender disparities in urban planning are not just about infrastructure but are deeply tied to broader governance and development structures, particularly in the Global South (Kabeer, 2021). As global urbanization accelerates, integrating

governance and urban resource distribution (Asteria, 2022). While Asteria's citation count is lower, her contributions are still valuable in promoting gender equity through urban policy reform. Socrates Basbas, from Greece, has published research on gendered mobility in transportation systems, and his latest article, "Does Gender Matter in Daily Urban Mobility? Exploring Travel Perceptions, Attitudes, and Behaviours," advocates for transportation policies that address the needs of women and marginalized groups. Giovanni Tesoriere, an Italian researcher, focuses on public space design and social inclusion with his recent research on designing gender-inclusive public spaces. Tesoriere's work stresses the role of public spaces in promoting gender equality. Dyah Utari, from Indonesia, has written extensively on gender issues in informal settlements, with her latest work exploring urban informality and gender in Southeast Asia. Jo Beal and Alison Todes are both South African scholars whose work primarily addresses the intersection of gender, race, and transformation in urban planning. Collectively, these authors highlight the crucial need for gender-responsive urban planning practices that empower women, address gender inequalities in urban spaces, and ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities.

Author	Documents	Citations	Total Link Strength
Tiziana Campisi	9	317	8
Donna Asteria	6	19	5
Socrates Basbas	4	222	5
Giovanni Tesoriere	4	279	5
Dyah Utari	5	18	5
Jo Beal	6	137	2
Alison Todes	4	93	2
Doris Damyanovic	5	24	1
Ines Sanchez De Madariaga	4	55	1
Liisa Horelli	4	54	1

Table 2: Top ten authors publishing on urban planning, gender and sustainability

One interesting takeaway from this analysis is the geographic diversity of scholars contributing to gender and urban planning research. While European researchers like Tiziana Campisi (Italy), Giovanni Tesoriere (Italy), and Socrates Basbas (Greece) dominate in terms of citations and international influence, scholars from the Global South, such as Donna Asteria (Brazil), Dyah Utari (Indonesia), and Jo Beal (South Africa), bring critical perspectives on gender and urban equity in developing contexts. This suggests a growing recognition of gender disparities in urban planning across different socioeconomic and cultural landscapes. Another key takeaway is the focus of their research. While European scholars tend to emphasize gender-sensitive urban design, public space accessibility, and transportation equity, those from the Global South highlight informal settlements, urban governance, and the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in urban development. This highlights how gender-related urban issues are not universal but rather shaped by local contexts, governance structures, and socioeconomic conditions.

Moreover, the varying total link strength among these researchers suggests differing levels of international collaboration. Highly cited authors like Campisi and Basbas likely engage in global research networks, while others with lower citations and link strength may have regional or localized impacts. This underscores the need for more cross-regional collaboration to bridge knowledge gaps and create inclusive urban policies that are globally informed but locally relevant. Finally, a common thread among these scholars is the call for participatory urban planning that includes women and marginalized groups in decision-making. Whether addressing transportation, public space, or informal settlements, their work reinforces the argument that gender-responsive planning is not just about inclusion but about fundamentally reshaping cities to be more equitable, safe, and accessible for all.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION: TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON GENDER-RESPONSIVE URBAN PLANNING

In conclusion, the analysis of research trends in gender equality and urban planning highlights the growing scholarly focus on integrating gender-sensitive perspectives into urban development. The increase in publications post-2010 aligns with global initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). The peak in publications in 2024 indicates that gender-sensitive urban planning has become a well-established research

area, largely influenced by international policy shifts and funding opportunities. However, variations in research output across countries and the diverse thematic focus among scholars suggest that gender disparities in urban planning are shaped by local governance structures, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural contexts (Yu-an Chung and Grichting Solder, 2024). The dominance of the United States and the United Kingdom in publication output and citations reflects their well-established research networks, while emerging contributions from China, India, and South Africa highlight increasing scholarly engagement from the Global South. Despite the significant progress in gender-focused urban planning research, critical gaps remain. The keyword analysis reveals strong research clusters around urban accessibility, transportation equity, and policy frameworks, yet more attention is needed on the intersectionality of gender with race, class, and disability in urban environments (Ng et al., 2020; Kabeer, 2021). Additionally, the lower total link strength of many Global South researchers suggests limited international collaboration, which may hinder knowledge exchange and policy translation.

There lies an opportunity, therefore, to develop a conceptual framework that incorporates the works of the top scholars and key gaps identified and discussed in the findings section of this paper. This framework serves as a key recommendation and unique contribution to policy in ensuring that cities adopt gender-responsive urban governance and urbanism. The Gender-Responsive Urban Planning Framework (GRUPF) is structured around four key dimensions: policy and governance, participatory and inclusive planning, gender-sensitive urban design, and data-driven decision-making.



Figure 2: Gender-Responsive Urban Planning Conceptual Framework (GRUPF) (Authors, 2025).

The policy and governance dimension emphasizes institutionalizing gender-sensitive policies, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and legal reforms to ensure gender equity in urban planning. By embedding gender considerations into planning regulations, decision-making processes become more inclusive and accountable. The participatory and inclusive planning dimension highlights the need for co-creation with communities, grassroots empowerment, and gender-responsive governance structures. Women and marginalized groups must actively shape urban policies and infrastructure through participatory budgeting, design workshops, and policy dialogues. The gender-sensitive urban design dimension focuses on integrating gender-responsive mobility planning, safe and inclusive public spaces, and mixed-use zoning. This involves designing cities that accommodate the unique mobility patterns of women, ensuring adequate lighting, safe sidewalks, and accessible transportation systems that enhance safety and convenience. Lastly, the data-driven decision-making dimension underscores the importance of gender-disaggregated data collection, urban equity audits, and the use of digital tools such as GIS and smart city technologies. This ensures that planning interventions are based on evidence, enabling continuous assessment and improvement of gender equity in urban development. Collectively, these dimensions offer a comprehensive and systematic approach to embedding gender equity in urban planning, fostering more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable cities.

The Gender-Responsive Urban Planning Framework (GRUPF) offers a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality and inclusivity in urban development. By embedding gender-sensitive policies,

fostering participatory planning, and integrating gender-responsive urban design, it ensures that cities are safer, more accessible, and equitable for all residents, especially women and marginalized groups. The framework's focus on data-driven decision-making and institutional accountability enhances the effectiveness of urban policies while encouraging global collaboration, particularly from the Global South. Ultimately, GRUPF supports sustainable, resilient, and inclusive urban environments, contributing to the broader goals of gender equality and sustainable development.

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