

Planning Workshop on Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan in Yaoundé

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A City for Women: Yaoundé post-COVID and Gender Sensitive Urban Planning

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As many countries around the world undertake the gargantuan task of mass vaccination programmes against the COVID-19 pandemic, its widespread social and economic impacts may be harder to reverse. This is the experience of millions of urban women who, as a result of this unprecedented health crisis, suddenly lost their jobs and livelihoods.[1] Yet it is also the lived reality of many women now seeking new opportunities in the Cameroonian capital Yaoundé and who will help transform it into a more resilient and prosperous area if the city works for them as it navigates this new normal.

How Yaoundé does this depends on how well women needs and voices are integrated in its recovery plan. Too little focus on gender sensitive urban planning will lead to the city, for example, not having enough public toilets or affordable child care facilities. Likewise, insufficient or unavailable gender sensitive budgeting might overlook the potential risks posed to its human development indices of gender wage gaps left unchecked in paid employment and self-employment which often underline deep-seated inequality [2] and therefore fail to recognise the

real socio-economic value of women. It might undermine the achievement of young women seeking to find a balance between their work and family lives. It risks confining women to certain industry sectors when their contributions, as much as that of men, could provide a boost to the local economy at large. Removing these different barriers should thus be the basis of priority policies designed from a more inclusive recovery perspective.

Having been a pioneer city for Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) as part of the framework for monitoring progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Yaoundé has a clear advantage in bringing such policies to the fore by localising the SDGs[3] and Agenda 2063 of the African Union through a gender sensitive approach. Indeed, for the City of Seven Hills to be a City for Women requires urban planning in Yaoundé to be shaped by all the SDGs together and draw from the experiences and expertise of women who are directly or indirectly advancing international and regional shared aims and objectives. This is all the more crucial as women in the health and social sector remain at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19.[4] We owe it to them to transform Yaoundé into a dynamic and thriving place still connected to its rich and unique history yet capitalising on the opportunities of the present and one looking ahead which supports women's well-being and their full participation in society.

In concrete terms, this means recognising and addressing lack of tools to effectively implement gender-inclusive strategies where it exists. These strategies, most notably, can deliver encouraging results by applying a gender lens to city management and they can be fulfilled by creating a Gender Steering Committee for the City of Yaoundé. The committee will essentially ask its seven municipalities what they are doing to improve the lives of women and men, of girls and boys. Its

work will, inevitably, focus on local gender statistics[5] and how this data becomes the strategic information that accompanies Yaoundé efforts at becoming a better City for Women, as urban development stakeholders in Cameroon overall take inspiration from good practice case studies in Africa and across the globe.[6]

The bottom line has to be that incorporating gender inclusion into urban planning and design does not just serve women, but everyone. In a nutshell, Yaoundé must be bold enough to ask itself if it is a city designed for men by men and whether in weathering the COVID storm it can really afford not to have a Gender Action Plan.

References

- [1] <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/feature-covid-19-economic-impacts-on-women>
- [2] <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/78092/> Investigating Gender Wage Gap in Employment: A Microeconomic Type-Analysis for Cameroon, Mbratana, Taoufiki and Kenne Fotié, Andrée (2017)
- [3] Sustainable Development Goals
- [4] <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/latest-on-coronavirus-outbreak/who-hails-womens-role-in-fighting-pandemic/2164870>
- [5] http://www.minproff.cm/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/COVID_final_ENG.pdf
- [6] <https://www.citiesalliance.org/how-we-work/global-programmes/cities-women/overview>