

#UrbanGirlsMovement

“Plan and build the city for girls, and it will work for everyone”. This is the starting point for #UrbanGirlsMovement, an initiative by the independent Swedish think tank Global Utmaning. We are convinced that prioritising girls and young women in urban development is crucial to make cities and public spaces more inclusive and sustainable. In this sense, it can also function as an efficient tool to meet global sustainability agendas such as the 2030 Agenda global goals, the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda.

Background

As the world is predominantly urban, poverty is also becoming an increasingly urban phenomenon. More than 1 billion people live in low-income informal settlements, and inequalities are increasing the fastest in cities. But three quarters of the world’s poorest people today live in lower middle-income countries, often without social security or adequate living conditions. Poverty and vulnerability is increasing within many countries as a result of unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, oppression and social exclusion, which particularly affects girls and young women.

Meeting Global Goals

In order to fulfil the sustainable development goals (SDGs), the interlinkages and integrated nature of the goals and targets are crucial. Therefore, addressing specifically SDG3: Health and wellbeing, SDG5: Gender equality, SDG10: Reduced inequalities and SDG11: Sustainable cities simultaneously, is a most effective tool to reach the 2030 Agenda. #UrbanGirlsMovement started with a global mapping of local good examples and lessons learned from multi-stakeholders, and it continuously highlights ongoing initiatives implementing the SDGs at the local level.

Purpose

The long-term purpose of #UrbanGirlsMovement is to improve the living conditions for girls and young women in vulnerable urban areas by highlighting participatory design and public space planning; promoting public health, sanitation, access to education and employment, and security. The initiative also seeks to contribute to the development of new methods for local urban development and planning that promote safe and productive public spaces, and that can be applicable both in Northern low-income areas as well as informal urban settlements in the Global South, and divided cities globally.

Challenges

Girls and young women face specific challenges in urban settings and must become key stakeholders in urban development projects. Design and community workshoping is a way to establish and address the needs and priorities of different groups in society.

Some of the challenges consistently raised by young women in our collaborative partner projects are:

- Lack of safe places
- Reduced mobility
- Gender-based violence
- Access to education
- Adult interactions and role models
- Environmental risks

Opportunities

Despite the many challenges faced by girls and young women in slum and low-income environments, there are many positive stories that have large scale and long-term impacts on entire communities to build on. Women and young women are driving many entrepreneurial activities that are creating active, diverse and safe spaces. Women groups are central to production and sales of urban produce, that creates safe and active pockets in many settlements. Many initiatives do not initially particularly target girls and young women, but it has been noticed that they tend to, in a greater extent than men, take advantage of the opportunities provided. Women also often tend to carefully safeguard the longevity of the project or infrastructure put in place.

Solutions

So, how should a city be planned in order to benefit the most vulnerable populations? Finding solutions that have a positive impact on inclusion and equality in cities should be a top priority. To summarise, a city is sustainable and balanced when there is space for all people to live, work, and play in equal measure. Public space that do meet up to the needs of girls and young women are particularly characterised by:

- Good footpaths and public mobility
- Places for women, children, and elderly to loiter
- Good lighting
- Visibility and presence of authorities
- Open and free access
- Human scale design
- Flexibility in the built environment
- Well working water and sanitation



Botkyrka Municipality

The social challenges of urbanisation are not unique to low-income countries. Inequalities and segregation are on the rise in the North, with widening gaps between cities and their suburbs. In Sweden alone, 61 communities have been identified as vulnerable areas, 23 of these in the Stockholm region. Four areas in Botkyrka Municipality have been identified as particularly vulnerable. This entails higher levels of social exclusion which can lead to a lack of confidence in or pessimistic attitude towards the future. Risk factors include unemployment, bad health, and unsuccessful schooling. In light of these developments, one of the most vulnerable groups are young girls living in socio-economically disadvantaged urban areas. Given their gender, age, and living situation, they are deeply affected by unequal resource distribution and social exclusion.

Target Group

The primary target group for this project are girls and young women between 16 and 25 who live in Botkyrka Municipality. A secondary group consists of the remaining residents in the area and relevant decision-makers. The project is run together by the think tank Global Utmaning, the Municipality and a girls' focus group, but also entails close cooperation with architects, urban planners, university researchers doing work at the intersection of urban planning and gender equality, as well as representatives from relevant associations and agencies. Providing a platform where different sectors can come together is key as it increases the possibility for long-term sustainability of the interventions. Bridging the gap between researchers and practitioners as well as private and public sector representatives is crucial for the formulation of policy proposals that work long-term at the systemic level.

Outcomes

The project will contribute to multiple SDGs both at the local/municipal level, the national level, and on an international level by setting an example for other countries to learn from. The initiative is simultaneously building an interactive platform that other actors will be able to use to run similar initiatives in the future, in other global contexts different from the local settings in Sweden.

Innovation Labs

During a year, six innovation labs will take place in which girls and young women from Botkyrka will be developing sustainable solutions to commonly identified problems in the public space. By participating in these labs, young girls are given the opportunity to turn their visions of a more equal and inclusive urban environment into reality. It gives them an official voice in the planning of more inclusive cities, leading to a more sustainable environment.

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Working Model

1. The concept of feminist urban development is introduced. We examine how this fits into the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, some good examples of past initiatives and finally visit the space we will be working with for the duration of the project.
2. We consider concrete tools available within urban development, identify challenges, highlight needs, and brainstorm around the potential of the space.
3. We explore digital tools for urban development, with the goal of formulating a vision for the space, sketching concrete solutions and initiating the process of illustrating our ideas.
4. A presentation of results will take place with the aim of collecting more knowledge and information about what local needs need to be met and to get input from citizens and experts.
5. Based on the outcome of the three first labs and the external input, in the fourth lab we will focus on testing solutions and further developing details.
6. We continue working on the proposals and together with our collaborating architects start turning our work into architectural sketches and plans for the area.
7. We discuss what is required for the proposal to be implemented. The target group of young girls and experts work together to develop concrete policy recommendations for decision-makers at different levels as well as supporting guidelines for implementation.
8. The final outcome will be presented during an international conference on UN World Cities Day 31 October 2019. Swedish and other international actors are invited to discuss and take part in the lessons learned in order to maximise its reach and scaling.

