

Keynote speech- Resilient, Inclusive, Smart and Safe (RISS) Caribbean SIDS Launch

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Members of the UN Women MCO, panellists and other invited guests, it is my pleasure to give the keynote address at today's UN Women launch of the Caribbean Model for Resilient, Inclusive, SMART and Safe (RISS) Cities.

At a time when the UN is tracking where countries and regions are in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals as part of its preparation of the GSDR (2023), we in the Caribbean are at the frontlines doing battle with global crises such as climate change, the economic fallout from COVID-19 that pundits forecast could lead to worldwide economic recession, and the threat to international peace and security arising from global conflicts, which could be catastrophic for the planet's 8 billion people. At the centre of such existing and predicted crises are women, men, children, the elderly, LGBTQ+ people, persons with disabilities, youth, Indigenous people, and all other marginalized groups. While these are global crises over which we in the Caribbean have little or no control, it remains imperative that locally, we renew our commitment and engage in action to "leave no one behind". This entails embracing a pluralistic perspective to ensure the human rights of all persons are respected and that all individuals are given every opportunity to flourish. A central question is what will it take to translate policies into action to guarantee equality for all?

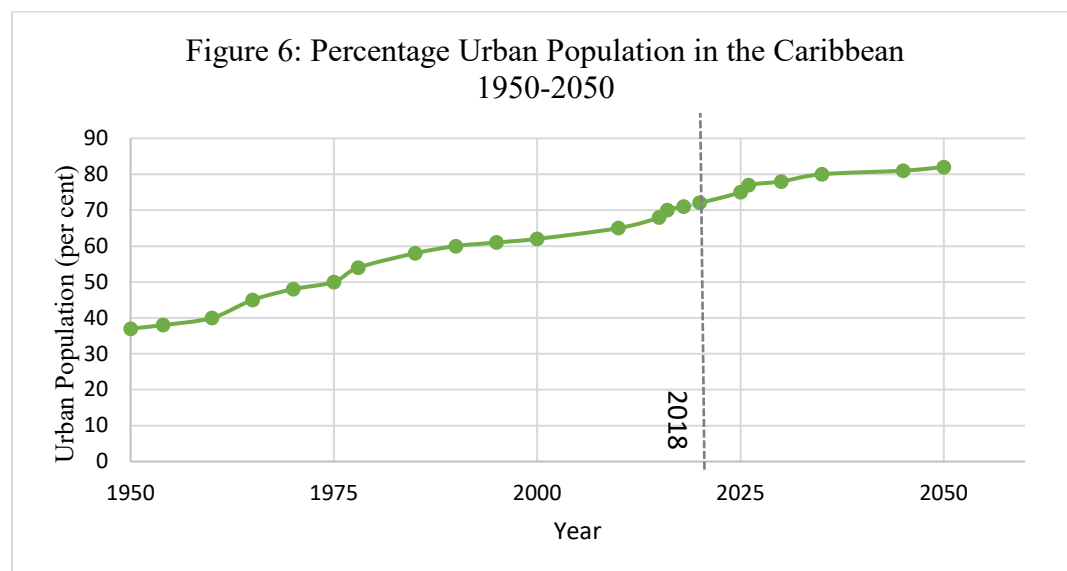
My address throws the spotlight on a theme of concern to a wide spectrum of stakeholders, namely how can Caribbean countries fulfil the goal of inclusive, resilient, smart, safe and sustainable urban, peri-urban and rural spaces (SDG 11). It is obvious that SDG 11 cannot be tackled in isolation, since there is a strong nexus with goals that tackle climate change, disaster risk resilience, reduce gender-based violence and enhance economic empowerment of women and disadvantaged members of society. Simply put "One goal is unattainable without the fulfillment of other related goals".

In framing the challenges of planning for RISS in urban, peri-urban and rural areas, it is important that we recognize the pandemic and climate change aggravated pre-existing inequalities in our societies. My task today is to articulate the role of urban and regional planning in finding transformative pathways to achieve SDG 11 and other intersectional goals. Urban and regional planning has always had a strong concern for human welfare. This a watershed moment in the development of Caribbean societies for urban and regional planning to create integrated and

innovative solutions that address the needs and aspirations of the indigent and discriminated members of our populace.

Urbanisation in the Caribbean

Let me first layout for you observed Caribbean urbanization patterns since they have some bearing on how socio-economic inequalities have emerged. Unlike some parts of the Global South, the level of urbanization in the Caribbean is high with approximately 72% of its population living in urban areas in 2020. Urbanization is occurring at a rapid rate and projections up to 2050 indicate that will be the trend over the next three decades (See Figure 4). This forecasted trend is based on projections that as much as 80% of the Caribbean's population will live in cities by 2050 (Donovan and Turner-Jones, 2017).



Urbanisation patterns in the Caribbean have far-reaching implications for access to housing, land and urban infrastructure. I turn my attention to these fundamental aspects to the right of all human beings to shelter and basic services.

Housing

The formal housing sector in the Caribbean cannot meet housing demand and fewer affordable houses are being built for low-income households (McHardy and Donovan, 2016). Moreover, access to housing is harder for women than for men because women have less access than men to housing tenure, housing credit and housing located in areas with urban services. They are therefore disproportionately affected by housing deficits and inflationary trends in the housing market.

Informal Urbanism

In many Caribbean countries inflated urban land values and high engineering costs of serviced land have made it impossible for economically disadvantaged households and women to own land. Many poor urban households have resorted to the illegal occupation of mainly state land and some have encroached on private lands. Approximately 20% of the population of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago live in squatter settlements. The proliferation of squatter settlements is likely to continue with rapid urbanization rates and slow economic recovery projected for the Caribbean.

Informal settlements have no formal planning approval and therefore do not benefit from site development standards, building codes, engineering standards and settlement planning guidelines, which serve to protect public health and safety. State provision of lifeline infrastructure is often inadequate in these settlements because of their illegal status. In Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad, thousands of urban squatters are living without lifeline infrastructure such as water, electricity, roads and sewerage facilities. When cities expand without adequate planning, poor households headed by women are the most disadvantaged, as they tend to be in precarious neighborhoods that face flood risks and landslides. They live in areas with limited access to efficient means of public transportation and face long commutes. In addition, these women usually make long journeys at early or late hours, when the frequency of public transportation is very low, increasing their exposure to violence in their daily commute.

Urban Infrastructure Deficits

Limited city government spending targeted at clearing a pre-existing backlog of facilities, repairing old infrastructure and providing new infrastructure has resulted in infrastructural deficits affecting large segments of the urban and peri-urban population which have limited access to a reliable water supply, sewerage disposal facilities, adequate drainage and transportation services. Unreliable and inadequate infrastructural services endanger public health and safety, but especially low-income households that have fewer options to gain access to these services. For example, women are significantly disadvantaged by the lack of a reliable water supply in that they are the ones who perform domestic chores such as cleaning and cooking. Often they must collect water by rising early or staying awake at night when water is being distributed.

Urban unemployment, Poverty and Crime

Urban under-employment and unemployment in the Caribbean is highest among the poor, youth, women and the unskilled. Crime and violence rates in urban and peri-urban areas is a growing problem which is undermining safety and economic progress. Crime and violence in urban areas are highly correlated with urban poverty which is linked to other socio-political dynamics. In reality, informal settlements are the incubators of crime in many urban areas (IADB, 2015). Economic indebtedness has pushed many unemployed youth and school dropouts into a life of crime and violence associated with a lucrative narcotics trade. Despite informal settlement upgrading projects, households' escape from the poverty trap has not been as successful as anticipated because it requires long term, holistic social policies that move beyond capital investments targeted at urban and housing improvement.

OPTIONS FOR FOSTERING INCLUSIVE, RESILIENT, SMART, SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN, PERI-URBAN AND RURAL SPACES

Integrated Urban and Regional Planning and Management

Urban and regional development plans for Caribbean cities and metropolitan regions should continue to support a holistic planning and management approach. The Caribbean region has examples of good practice in this regard. Examples of attempts at integrated spatial planning include Spatial Development Plans for 15 municipalities in Trinidad and a National Spatial Development Strategy completed between 2010 and 2012; the Barbados Physical Development Plan (2017); and Jamaica's Vision 2030 which addresses urban sprawl and the Montego Bay Emerging and Sustainable Cities Action Plan. A key feature of these plans is that they all engaged stakeholder participation in identifying urban and regional problems, defining the goals of communities, and prioritising projects as well as programmes which facilitate the translation of ideas into action.

Although, participatory planning is being practiced, to encourage higher levels of participation by women and other marginalized persons in national consultations, it is important that these events be held during hours and on days when they are best able to attend. Transportation to and from the venue for women should be arranged. Further, to encourage women to let their voices be heard, specialists with knowledge and experience in engaging women and other marginalized groups in participatory planning should be retained.

Informal Urbanism and Poverty Reduction

Attempts have been made by Caribbean governments to address the issue of burgeoning informal urbanism fully recognizing that housing production cannot keep pace with the demand for low-cost housing by the poor and marginalized groups.

Jamaica has developed a National Squatter Management Policy and Implementation Programme to ameliorate impacts resulting from a proliferation of informal urban settlements. Coupled with

this is an inner-city basic services project, which uses an integrated approach to providing infrastructure, public space and improvements in environmental quality. The value added of these projects relies on their transformative capacity, from a singular experience to a broader vision for the whole city which incorporates the needs of marginalized community members (Mullings et al., 2018).

In Trinidad and Tobago, the IADB between 2011 and 2018, supported the Neighborhood Upgrading Programme, which provided improved access to basic infrastructure, housing subsidies and helped regularized tenure for 3,300 households, of which more than half the recipients were female-headed households.

A comprehensive approach to upgrading by undertaking city-wide planning is central to integrating informal settlements into the larger urban context. This approach is fundamental in dismantling barriers which limit entry of marginalized groups into urban and regional economies. The IADB last week published a report that smaller and women-led firms face greater barriers to finance their businesses than other types of firms in the Caribbean. **Urban and regional planning is instrumental in creating opportunities for small and women-led firms to prosper as start-ups.** These policies should include identifying economic zones which accommodate small-scale enterprises, policy shifts in the change of use of land and buildings that facilitate cottage industries and other home-based micro-enterprises which women, youth and low-income households tend to operate. However, more emphasis is needed in capturing data on the size of the informal sector to better plan for space allocation to meet the diverse requirements of food vendors, hair salons, automobile repair operations, and cottage industries. Informal sector policy delivery need not be formidable if the informal sector is engaged in urban planning that is geared to ensuring inclusivity and resilience among the urban poor.

Safe, Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Urban Spaces

Many initiatives are on-going to make urban spaces safe, inclusive, sustainable and resilient in keeping with SDG 11. Apart from urban planning policies and guidelines for the planning of spaces and buildings, increasingly there has been a focus on putting citizens at the centre of urban planning and management.

Barbados and Trinidad for example have consulted their population on plans for Bridgetown in 2017 and Port of Spain in 2020-2021. Community participation has been encouraged to address gender relations and conflict management in inner-city communities in Jamaica (Bailey et al., 2018). Citizen's activism is key in promoting the sustainability of a positive change in a city. Increased stakeholder participation can be ensured through greater connectivity with various groups, which will permit the integration of society in the planning and management of city affairs. Such participation can improve the quality of urban policy and projects and provide support for those shared visions; it is also a central element in monitoring the implementation of strategies, as it can ensure more sensitivity not just to the previously defined targets, but also to the evolution of what citizens expect from their shared space.

Gender-sensitive urban and regional planning

The way cities are designed, built, and managed plays a significant role in preventing violence against women. The urban dimensions **to reduce violence levels include improved adequate access to urban housing, urban transportation planning with a gender perspective, and the design of public space to improve safety for women.** Women generally rely more than men on public transportation. In LAC, on average, over 50% of public transportation users are women. This means that women are also twice more likely than men to be [victims of gender-based violence on public transportation, which prevents them from enjoying equal access to mobility](#) (IDB 2015). Likewise, [most of the existing public bus routes and sidewalks in the region are not designed with the needs of women in mind.](#) **Unsafe public spaces such as parks and recreational facilities impose a heavy burden on women's health as they are unable to exercise due to the fear of crime. The pandemic brought stark awareness that the Caribbean's population is suffering from obesity and** chronic illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes.

Gender-based planning needs to receive far greater attention than it has in the past if equity in decision-making is to improve. Giving women a stronger voice will help improve their safety in the use of public space as the level of gender-based violence remains high in the Caribbean and has been exacerbated by rising male unemployment as well as overcrowded living quarters.

Violence and discrimination against members of the LGBTQ+ community continues to rise. This crime against humanity can only be curtailed or eliminated through new lens that consider among other solutions, the creation of safe spaces in urban and peri-urban areas. As a vulnerable community there is need for a platform to elevate their voices in the design of urban parks and other public spaces (lighting etc.) and to raise public awareness that love is not a crime. The Caribbean LGBTQ+ community is becoming well organized and better at articulating their need for safe spaces and should be an integral part of consultations hosted by urban planning agencies.

Local government

Caribbean urban authorities often lack fiscal independence to implement projects that are central to improving the quality of life of urban residents. Oftentimes, taxes collected from municipal governments, including property taxes, are transferred to central government funds. Urban development corporations and local planning authorities require fiscal autonomy to undertake mid and long-term planning targeted at fulfilling strategic goals of improved access to a better quality of urban services as well as implementation of gender sensitive projects. Local governments must work closer with marginalized communities in planning and maintaining public spaces. The increase in female mayors and councilors in the Caribbean is a good sign that women's issues are being reflected in city policies and projects.

Integrating Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation into Urban Planning

Despite widespread international evidence that the impacts of climate change and disaster events often negatively affect women (and gender minorities) more than men, attention to gender equality as a concept is still only ‘embryonic in climate change adaptation and although recognised in some policies and project designs, it is not well supported by on-the-ground actions or well monitored (Aipira et al., 2017, p. 237).

Women will experience lower resilience after disasters given weaker socio-economic and lower asset holdings; men are seen as being better able “to come back to their income streams after a disaster”.

Women’s groups should not be excluded from climate grants. They will require education and training to allow them to develop strategic action plans, mission statements, learn financial reporting requirements as well as general leadership and institutional training (McLeod et al., 2018).

Some countries are taking steps to address gender inequalities that arise from climate change. Despite significantly higher female educational attainment in **Dominica**, the structure of decision-making in the society is still male dominated. From a governance point of view, considering the needs at operational, technical and the governance levels derived from the gender analysis, an action plan concerning inclusion of gender issues in Dominica’s country programme is being developed over the period 2020 to 2027. **Jamaica** is implementing the EnGenDER project which is facilitating a gender-responsive approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation. The project seeks to mainstream climate and gender considerations in all their policies and programmes.

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

ICT implementation, along with effective transparency methods, provide better management quality, and enhance citizen participation in urban planning and management. Technology can also provide a consistent framework to improve the delivery of municipal services, integrating a vision of a Smart City that combines transparency, good management, participation and sustainable infrastructures and services (IADB, 2015).

The advent of a miniaturization of technologies and the proliferation of new mobile sensor platforms and lower cost sensors can result in dramatic increases in data collection and quality, and the ability to tailor sensors to specific data collection needs. Among the new apps that may be adopted by planning agencies in the Region is one that allows residents to alert planning agencies of city issues and to upload complaints to local government via their smartphone, which can ultimately enhance planning.

GIS technology, smart maps, Google Earth and drones can be put to effective use in spatial analysis, synthesis, and visualization not only in spatial planning, but transportation planning, natural hazard risk management, and building climate change resilience. Participatory mapping can also facilitate community engagement in environmental risk assessment, vulnerability assessments, and climate change adaptation.

CONCLUSION

Many possibilities exist to harness innovative ideas among the urban planning community of practitioners in partnership with key stakeholders. New and affordable technologies provide tools to enhance urban planning and management which fulfils RISS city goals. An integrated approach to urban development which facilitates citizen activism holds promise for achieving safer cities that fulfil the needs of all. A blue-print for success does not exist for all Caribbean countries as urban planning solutions are place-specific, but better urban governance is of paramount importance in achieving transformative urbanization in the Caribbean. In this regard, **meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups in decision-making processes should be increased in all levels of government** while establishing effective, accountable, and transparent governance mechanisms and data information systems to ensure that cities are built to provide opportunities for all.

It is bright sunlight when I walk the city streets, when I park my car, when I use public transport. It is nightfall, the streets are dark or poorly lit. I say a pray for my safety day and night. Yet each day I rise.... This narrative applies to any one of us. It is imperative that we in the urban planning profession draw on the collective ideas generated by women, youth, the poor and the LGBTQ+ community by creating spaces for collaboration. WE HAVE THE TOOLS, ACTION is NEEDED NOW!