

MSF Panel 3

Sustainable infrastructure for gender equality

What is sustainable infrastructure and why does it matter for gender equality?

It is important to link our understanding of sustainable infrastructure with the 2030 Agenda's view of sustainable development.

- One of the great strengths of the 2030 Agenda is the way in which weaves the three dimensions of sustainability—environmental, economic and social sustainability—together into an integrated vision of development.
- It makes clear that for sustainable *development* to become a reality, one dimension cannot come at the expense of another, but that there needs to be balance and coherence.

Now, the issue of sustainable *infrastructure* has traditionally been approached from the perspective environmental sustainability.

- Clean energy, sustainable transport, safe water, sanitation and waste management are among the most commonly discussed sectors for environmental sustainability in that they hold the largest potential to reduce emissions and preserve scarce natural resources.
- The 2030 Agenda and the priority theme of this CSW urges us to think about the social dimensions of investments in these sectors and about gender-responsive approaches to the design and implementation of sustainable infrastructure projects.
- This, in turn, is very much in line with the 2030 Agenda's cross-cutting commitment to gender equality and leaving no one behind.

Indeed, as the Secretary General's report on the priority theme shows, the potential to promote gender equality through access to sustainable infrastructure is enormous. It is critical to

- Viable rural road networks and urban transport systems, for example, can enhance the mobility of women and girls, enabling their access to markets, schools, health centers and other public services.
- Access to clean energy promises to improve the health of women and girls, who currently account for 6 of 10 premature deaths through household air pollution caused by unclean fuels

So where do we stand with regards to sustainable, gender-responsive infrastructure?

Over the past two decades, there has been remarkable progress in terms of expanding access to basic infrastructure.

- Globally, the percentage of households with piped water on premises increased from 44 to 58 per cent between 1990 and 2015
- Over roughly the same period, global electrification rates rose from 78 percent to 86 per cent.

Yet, progress has been uneven across regions and huge disparities remain in terms of access to basic infrastructure both between countries and within countries—with important implications for women and girls.

- 29 per cent of the world's population still lacks access to safely managed water. Women and girls are responsible for water collection in 80% of households without access to water on premises. This work is arduous; it exacts a toll on women's health and takes up time that could otherwise be spent on paid work, education or leisure.
- Similarly, 23 per cent of the world's schools were lacking sanitation services in 2016, disproportionately affecting adolescent girls who often struggle to manage their menstrual hygiene in school.

Beyond sheer access, it is important for infrastructure planning and implementation to take gender equality considerations into account more seriously and from the get-go.

Let me give you two brief examples: renewable energy and urban transport:

- Investments in renewable energy can help accelerate rural electrification through the expansion of decentralized systems, such as mini-grids. Well designed and implemented, such systems can also create jobs for women, for example, by training and employing women as researchers, retailers, installers, maintenance workers and entrepreneurs.
- With estimates of only 20 to 24 per cent of renewable energy jobs being occupied by women, greater efforts are needed to address the social and institutional barriers to women's entry into these "non-traditional" forms of employment
- Urban space and transport systems need to take greater consideration of women's mobility. Evidence shows that compared to men, women rely much more on walking and public transport. It shows that fear of sexual harassment and personal security play an important role in negotiating daily mobilities. And it shows that, partly because of their unpaid care responsibilities, women's commuting patterns differ from men's. Women are more likely to engage in multi-purpose trips where they combine income earning with unpaid care and domestic tasks, such as dropping children off at school, shopping groceries, stopping by to see an older relative.
- There is a real need for better assessing and catering to these different forms of mobility.

Thank you.