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# Gender, difference and urban change: implications for promotion of well-being?

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## Submission for April 2013 issue on Gender and Urban Change

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# **Gender, difference and urban change: Implications for the promotion of well-being?**

## **Abstract**

This article examines the impacts of urban change on the well-being of women and men, and girls and boys, living in cities, and explores how gender intersects with other social relations to differentiate these impacts. It then considers the implications of intersectionality for organisations aiming to promote the interests of specific social groups (such as women, or people with disabilities) vis-a-vis urban change by looking at the experience of Leonard Cheshire's Asha project, working with girls and boys with disabilities in Mumbai. It concludes that organisations working to promote the interest of identity based constituents should (a) base their strategies around research that recognises the intersectional nature of social identities and (b) develop agendas for change that build agendas for social justice that unite, rather than fragment, identity based claims.

## **Introduction**

Currently, urban change is predominantly shaped by market enablement practices, which has resulted in fundamental spatial and social restructuring of cities of the global south. In this frame, urban development agendas have prioritized productivity and competitiveness over citizens' rights and equity<sup>1</sup>. As a result, there has been an increased tendency to unlock the economic potential of desirable land in inner city locations where low-income settlements are located, often in conditions of informality. This has resulted in evictions, resettlement or regularization programmes which have profound impacts on the well-being of low income urban dwellers. Such urban restructuring is

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<sup>1</sup> Zetter, R. and Hamza, M. (eds.) (2004) 'Market economy and urban change: Impacts in the developing world', London, Earthscan; Rov, A. and Ong, A., (eds.) (2011) *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell.

shaped by, and affects, women and men, the young and the elder, able people and people with disabilities, in different ways<sup>2</sup>.

Mumbai is one city which has been experiencing such trends, as its ambition to become a world class city has increased its insertion to a global economy. In combination with the lack of available well-connected land in the city, the result has been an intensification of contestations for inner city spaces. Slum dwellers, who represent almost 55% of the city's population<sup>3</sup> face growing threats of eviction and relocation as the price and desirability of the spaces in which they live increases<sup>4</sup>. As a result, governmental housing initiatives, such as the Slum Rehabilitation Scheme, have opted for high-rise solutions, delivered by the private sector, as a way of unlocking land and space in the inner-city to be absorbed by the formal market system.

The impacts of such social and spatial change on the well-being of urban dwellers, in all of their diversity, are still inconclusive. Furthermore, to understand and influence these processes, there is a need for analytical frameworks that can explore social complexities and the connections between spatial changes (in urban form and the built environment) and social relations (through which people interact in urban spaces, for example those relations structuring systems of entitlement, economic behaviour, social status or political influence).

With that in mind, this article aims to understand the implication of urban change processes on gender and other social relations. More specifically, it aims to understand how civil society organizations which set out to represent the needs of different categories of urban residents in the context of urban change engage with the intersecting identities of these residents. This will be explored through the case study of Leonard Cheshire's Asha Community Based Rehabilitation project in Mumbai.

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<sup>2</sup> Jarvis, H. with Kantor, P. and Cloke, J. (2009) *Cities and Gender*, Routledge, Abingdon.

<sup>3</sup> Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (2010) *Mumbai Human Development report 2009*, Oxford university Press, New Delhi

<sup>4</sup> Arputham J. and Patel S. (2010) 'Recent developments in plans for Dharavi and for the airport slums in Mumbai', in *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol 22(2): 501–504.

## Urban change and gender

Gender refers to a universally important set of social relations, which underpin context specific expectations about the social practices, and the relations between, and among, women and men, and girls and boys. Many frameworks have been developed to explore how gender relations structure the lived experiences, well-being and opportunities of different groups of women and men<sup>5</sup>. What these frameworks have in common is the understanding of gender as a primarily socially constructed set of relations, around which are built a set of cultural, and institutional, logics which influence expectations and norms about women and men's different social roles, their entitlements to access and control a range of resources, and thus their different 'gender needs'<sup>6</sup> or 'gender interests'.<sup>7</sup>

In this light, the urban context and gender relations interact as determinants of city dwellers' different abilities to achieve well-being. A number of conceptual models have been developed to understand well-being as an over-arching goal for development, including Sen's influential capability approach<sup>8</sup> but broadly it can be defined as "an interplay between the resources that a person is able to command; what they are able to achieve with those resources; and the meanings that frame these and that drive their aspirations and strategies"<sup>9</sup>. More specifically, a growing body of literature has explored the contribution of the capability approach to understanding gender inequalities<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Moser, C. (1993). *Gender, Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training*, London and New York: Routledge; Rao, Aruna, Mary B. Anderson, and Catherine Overholt (1991) *Gender Analysis in Development Planning: A Case Book*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press

<sup>6</sup> Moser, see reference 4

<sup>7</sup> Molyneux, M. (1995). "Mobilisation without emancipation? Women's interests, states and revolution in Nicaragua" *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 20, Summer, pp 227-254.

<sup>8</sup> Sen, Amartya, (1985), 'Well-being, agency and freedom: the Dewey Lectures', *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 82, No.4, pp.169-221.

<sup>9</sup> McGregor, J.A. (2006) "Researching well-being: From concepts to methodology", *WeD Working Paper 20*, ESRC Research Group on Well-Being in Developing Countries, p.2

<sup>10</sup> Chattier P. (2012). 'Exploring the Capability Approach to conceptualize gender inequality and poverty in Fiji'. *Journal of Poverty* 16 (1), pp. 72-95; Dejaeghere, J., Lee, S.K. (2011). 'What matters for marginalized girls and boys in Bangladesh: A capabilities approach for understanding educational well-being and empowerment', *Research in Comparative and International Education* 6 (1), pp. 27-42

A wealth of research shows how gender relations and urban change processes interact in ways which can create different opportunities for women and men to realize their aspirations for well-being. Such research shows how both urban form and urban relations are gendered. For example, in terms of urban form at the micro level, the evolution of different styles of housing respond (or fail to respond) to the needs of different household structures, as state and private sector housing is often designed according to principles based on gendered assumptions about these, with the belief that the ‘normal’ household type is the nuclear family, meaning that such housing provision often fails to cater for the needs of other household types, such as female headed households<sup>11</sup>.

The form of housing at this micro-level also influences the opportunities for women and men to carry out their gender roles in line with the customary gender division of labour. In many contexts low income women undertake productive activities in the home as a result of the need to balance care work, such as child care, with income generation<sup>12</sup>. In this case housing design and infrastructure can represent a critical asset, or constraint, for conducting such productive activities in the home. For example, Moser’s ethnography of low income communities in self built stilt-housing over lagoons in Guayaquil, Ecuador<sup>13</sup>, showed how the lack of water connections represented a critical constraint for women’s economic opportunities in undertaking laundry work (a typical home based productive activity for low income women in the city).

An associated point is that planning laws (an urban relation which determines the rights to produce particular urban housing forms) may often inhibit the developing of housing designs which allow women to work from their homes – for example, laws around operating shops from houses, or relating to food production in domestic premises. Furthermore, where housing policy focuses on slum upgrading from self built housing to apartment blocks, the new spaces provided in such housing

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<sup>11</sup> Larsson, A. (2002). “Gender perspectives in housing and planning”, *Building Issues*, Vol. 1, 2001, Lund University, Sweden.

<sup>12</sup> Kabeer, N. (2000). “Renegotiating purdah: Women workers and labour market decision-making in Dhaka” in *The Power To Change: Bangladeshi Women And Labour Market Decisions In London And Dhaka*, Verso, London and New York, Ch 4.

<sup>13</sup> Moser, C (2009) “*Ordinary Families, Extraordinary Lives: Assets and Poverty Reduction in Guayaquil, Ecuador, 1978-2004*” Brookings Press, Washington DC

upgrading schemes often are frequently less appropriate for use for home based economic production<sup>14</sup>, due to smaller floor spaces and lack of outdoor spaces or yards which again may inhibit low income women (and men) from home based economic activities.

At the city scale, urban forms which are based around a stricter segregation of land-uses, with distinct areas for housing, business, retail and public services, as typified by Burgess' study of Chicago in the 1920s<sup>15</sup> favour a similar division of the lives of women and men into different roles (and particularly a division of productive and reproductive activities). This kind of spatial segregation in planning is underpinned by a division of the domestic and public spheres, reinforcing gendered assumptions about women and men's roles which conform to a traditional male breadwinner/ female housewife pattern. However the reality of most people, and in particular low income women, is that they balance a number of different gender roles, including reproduction, production and community level engagement, which blur domestic/ public boundaries. In this case the spatial segregation of the urban sites in which these activities are carried out becomes problematic. This, in turn, has implications for transport planning and the extent to which transport infrastructure reflects the different mobility and accessibility needs of women and men in order to carry out their customary gender roles, as well as the different access they have to the modes of transport available (with women typically more reliant on public modes of transport, and more likely to make frequent, short trips for a mixed of activities such as shopping, schools trips, and paid work, as opposed to the typically 'male' daily commuting models)<sup>16</sup>.

In terms of urban relations, the different social and economic relationships which underpin entitlements to housing are also strongly gendered. Research shows clearly that in most context, the formal and informal systems of entitlement which determine tenure rights (such as titling rules that

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<sup>14</sup> Jiron, P, (2010), 'The evolution of informal settlements in Chile: Improving housing conditions in cities', in F. Hernandez, P. Kellet and L Allen (eds) *Rethinking the Informal City: Critical Perspective from Latin America*, Berghahn Books, Oxford, New York.

<sup>15</sup> Park R and E Burgess, (1925), *The City*, University of Chicago Press

<sup>16</sup> Levy, C (1992) 'Transport' in L. Ostergaard (ed) *Gender and Development: A Practical Guide*. London: Routledge, pp 94-109.

specify the ‘household head’ as the signatory as opposed to joint tenure systems, inheritance laws and practices which favour male heirs, divorce laws and practices that are disadvantageous to women’s tenure rights, or patrilocal residence patterns which mean that married women live with their in-laws) conspire with gendered economic inequality (which weakens women’s market access to housing) to result in lower security of tenure for many women, and female headed households, and frequent dependence on close relationships with male relatives or partners to ensure security of tenure<sup>17</sup>.

In this light, because urban form and urban relations are both demonstrably gendered, urban change will interact with gender norms and practices in ways which can be emancipatory, or which can consolidate existing gender inequalities. As a result, urban change has frequently been a catalyst for women’s political engagement<sup>18</sup>

### **Gender, diversity, and intersectionality**

However, while urban change undoubtedly has gendered impacts on well-being, and capabilities, one of the lessons that has been learnt by those working on gender equality as a development goal is the importance of not making generalisations about ‘women’ and ‘men’. This binary oversimplifies the diversity of lived experience, and interests, of women and men, and ignores the ways in which development processes such as urban change will also be influenced by other social relations built around factors such as class, ethnicity, age, sexuality and disability.

While popular ideology (such as communitarian ideology), some social theorists, and many organisational policies treat people as though they have what Sen describes as *singular affiliation* ‘which takes the form of assuming that any person pre-eminently belongs, for all practical purposes,

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<sup>17</sup> Varley (1993) ‘Gender and Housing: The Provision of Accommodation for Young Adults in Three Mexican Cities’, *Habitat International*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 13-30; Varley, A. (2007). “Gender and Property Formalization: conventional and alternative approaches” in *World Development*, Vol. 38(10), pp. 1739-1753.

<sup>18</sup> Patel, Sheela and Diana Mitlin (2004), “Grassroots driven development: the alliance of SPARC, the National Slum Dwellers Federation and Mahila Milan”, in Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite (editors), *Empowering Squatter Citizen; Local Government, Civil Society and Urban Poverty Reduction*, Earthscan Publications, London, pages 216-241.



to one collectivity only'<sup>19</sup> this does not reflect the reality of social identity. People have multiple, intersecting social identities which they may mobilise strategically and according to specific contexts and situations. In this light, understanding the overlapping nature and fluidity of social groups means recognising the importance of 'difference within difference'<sup>20</sup>. It is therefore crucial to understand gender as a social *relation* which creates discourses of masculinity and femininity that can create opportunities or problems for different groups of women and men, and girls and boys, (depending on how they fit, fail to fit, or actively contradict these norms) rather than as a set of social *categories* which can be used to demarcate 'women' and 'men' as distinctive interest groups<sup>21</sup>.

The recognition of people's multiple sources of identity has led to a growing field of study, stemming largely from feminist theory, about the nature and significance of 'intersectionality' as 'the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality'<sup>22</sup>.

Clearly, recognition of the intersectional nature of identity makes understanding the relationship between gender and urban change more complicated. Social research (including research into the impact of urban change on women and men's well-being) typically attempts to group people according to shared experiences or characteristics, such as their gender, but clearly an intersectional focus problematizes this approach.

Nonetheless a number of research strategies do attempt to incorporate an intersectional perspective<sup>23</sup>, and these approaches were the starting point for a pilot research initiative conducted by the authors of this paper, which attempted to explore how intersecting social relations, based around gender, class, age and disability, influenced the well-being of a children targeted by a project run by the NGO

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<sup>19</sup>Sen, Amartya, (2006), *Identity and Violence: The illusion of Destiny*, Penguin Books p.20

<sup>20</sup> Harrison, Malcolm and Cathy Davis, (2001), Chapter 2 - 'Difference within difference', in *Housing, Social Policy and Difference*, The Policy Press, Bristol, pp. 25-54

<sup>21</sup> Connell, R.W (2005) *Masculinities*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin

<sup>22</sup> Nash, Jennifer C., (2008), 'Re-Thinking Intersectionality', *Feminist Review*, No. 89, Palgrave, pp. 1-15

<sup>23</sup> McCall, Leslie, (2005), 'The complexity of intersectionality', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 1771-1800

Leonard Cheshire in Mumbai and the different impacts that these children faced in relation to the Slum Rehabilitation Scheme, a key ongoing urban change process in this city.

### **The Asha Project**

Andheri East is a district in Mumbai undergoing rapid urban change, constituting, as discussed above, intertwined transformation of both urban form and social relations in the area.

Central to these change processes is the Mumbai's Slum Rehabilitation Scheme (SRS), based on the Slum Rehabilitation Act of 1995, which allows private developers to replace slum communities with formal housing blocks, conditional on their offering replacement housing or compensation to slum residents who have been recognised as informal structure owners during census surveys.

Andheri East sits on the northern boundaries of the city centre, and the availability, in past decades, of vacant land and lower land values has meant that this has long been an area that attracts low income households, including migrants from other parts of India. The district is therefore characterised by a checkerboard of slums and informal settlements sitting between areas of formal housing. Since the construction of the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) in the district in the 1960s, Andheri has experienced rapid growth. Today it is the most populous district in Mumbai with more than 4 million inhabitants. Due to its relative proximity to the city centre and the opening of the new metro in 2011, the desirability of Andheri for residential purposes has increased considerably in recent years, affecting land prices and intensifying the process of construction of middle class residential housing. In this context, the SRS has become a desirable process for land speculators to replace slums with high-rise buildings, clearing out land for property development.

The SRS typically involves developers offering slum structure owners an apartment in newly constructed high rise buildings, to be established on the existing low level (1-3 storey) informal settlement sites, in exchange for tenure rights to their existing slum housing. If the new apartment

block is built on the original site of the old slum dwelling, the developers will pay a lump sum to cover rental accommodation for the period of construction. In other cases developers build a rolling stock of new housing and so households can move straight to new apartment buildings.

This implies two critical urban change processes. One is the spatial transformation of low rise, largely pedestrian neighbourhoods of informal housing, with limited sanitation and water infrastructure, into serviced high rise apartment blocks. The other change process is the transition from a context in which people's entitlement to tenure is based on a complex arrangement of informal home ownership (evidenced through ration card registration of structure owners during census surveys), informal rental arrangements, and the kin and social ties of migrant networks, to an increasingly market based set of entitlements to tenure which focuses on the formalisation and commodification of housing (and the associated exclusion of those who had been reliant on low cost rental tenure in informal settlements).

As discussed earlier, such changes are typically gendered. The fact that women are primarily responsible for reproductive (or care) work means that the opportunity to move to new apartments has attractions for them, with individual toilets and piped water in contrast to previous informal settlements in which water access was normally outside the home and households use public toilets, with associated implications for women's time spent not only on personal hygiene but also on the hygiene of dependents such as children or elderly and disabled household members. In addition, research shows that public toilets (or the lack of them) often present a personal security issue for women living in slum settlements in India<sup>24</sup> meaning again that the toilet provision in the new homes is particularly attractive for women and girls.

However, not all the spatial implications of the move are positive. One of the aspects of the SRS in Mumbai which has been widely criticised, and which has led to refusal of communities to participate,

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<sup>24</sup> UN-HABITAT (2004) *Unheard Voices* Water for Asian Cities Programme UN-HABITAT with Vikram Sarabhai Foundation, International Centre for Women and Child (ICWC), Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) Mahila Chetna Manch, Aga Khan Foundation, and SPARC.

is the small size of replacement apartments<sup>25</sup>. As noted earlier, this may be particularly problematic for women where they have primary responsibility for housework and care in the home, spend more time in the home, or conduct informal sector work (such as garment piece work or food production) from their homes.

In terms of urban relations, the SRS also constitutes a change in the system of entitlements through which women and men access housing in Andheri, with a move from de facto occupation and development of land, and a low cost private rental market, to more formal market based entitlements to housing. This transformation represents a hazard in general to low income households, as household with rental tenure in the original slum communities are not eligible for replacement housing through the SRS, and because poorer eligible households may struggle to pay costs such as services charges in the new apartments.

The formalization and increasing commodification of housing also has gendered implications. Globally research indicates that female headed households are more highly represented as rental tenants, due to inheritance norms, their exclusion from office housing programmes, lower incomes and the lack of skills and labour to build self help housing<sup>26</sup>. According to National Sample Survey data, urban female headed household in India are more likely to be in poverty<sup>27</sup>, and research shows that female headed household are likely to be overrepresented as rental tenants in Indian urban slums<sup>28</sup> although where there are high patterns of male in-migration this may not be the case. It would appear, in balance, that the tenure impacts of the scheme on poorer and rental households from the original slums are more likely to be felt by female headed households. Furthermore, as ownership is formalised in replacement apartments, women living with male partners also become

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Times of India, Anish Roy, 31/07/2012 “**Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) scraps many schemes**”

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), (2003) Rental Housing: An essential option for the urban poor in developing countries, UN-HABITAT, Nairobi

<sup>27</sup> Gangopadhyay G and W Wadhwa, (2004), *Are Indian female-headed households more vulnerable to poverty?*, India Development Foundation, <http://www.idfresearch.org/pdf/sw%20revised.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Baruah, Bipasha, (2010) *Women and Property in Urban India*, UBC Press, The University of British Columbia, Canada

increasingly dependent on their spouses for secure access to tenure, and the payments made for temporary accommodation costs are made to the (typically male) household heads with mechanisms to guarantee that this money will be spent on housing rather than other expenditures, again leading to tenure insecurity.

However trying to understand the urban change processes reflected in the SRS in terms of broad, gendered impacts, while in many ways valuable, can also mean that other, more specific, gendered experiences of urban change, are not revealed. Some insights into these were highlighted by pilot research conducted by the authors with the Leonard Cheshire International 'Asha' Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Project, in Mumbai.

This project, based from the Cheshire Home in Andheri East, is designed to support children with disabilities in their own homes and communities, rather than in specialist homes and centres, through approaches such as supporting access schools, health services, and forms of transport that support their mobility. CBR is an established approach for support to people with disabilities, based on their own participation as well as the participation of the community as a whole<sup>29</sup>. CBR has primarily been used in rural areas and smaller settlements, and the Asha project is one of the first of such schemes which operates in a large urban area such as Mumbai.

### **Methodology**

The research, which was undertaken in 2010, was intended to understand the extent to which particular components of the well-being of the children with whom the project works is influenced by their disabilities, or by factors relating to other aspects of their social identities (such as their gender, ethnicity, class, caste, religion, or age).

We worked closely with the Mumbai Cheshire Home staff, applying a series of qualitative methodologies which aimed at communicating directly with children, as much as possible, to understand how they see themselves and to identify the issues that influence their ability to pursue

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<sup>29</sup> Cornielje H. (2009). 'The role and position of disabled people's organisations in Community Based Rehabilitation: Balancing between dividing lines', *Asia Pacific Disability Rehabilitation Journal*, 20(1), 3-14.; Sharma, S., (2007), 'Community participation in community-based rehabilitation programmes', *Asia Pacific Disability Rehabilitation Journal*, 18(2), 146-157.

their aspirations. In doing so we were attempting to confront the issues of intersectional identity discussed above.

The research was based around in depth interviews, transect walks and shadowing of the ASHA project's five Community Based Rehabilitation staff (most of whom are also resident in the slum communities in which they work) during their daily community visits, as well as research activities with children that the ASHA project is working with (which involved around fifty children).

The methodologies developed and used were designed to respond to the particular methodological challenges related to working with children with disabilities. This required unpacking their values and aspirations in the context of ideas and practices which limit their autonomous agency (e.g. the tendency of parents, carers and project staff to act as gatekeepers or speak on behalf of children). The research tools included a game with picture cards, drawing exercises, and a photo-elicitation exercise (using disposable cameras given to children over a weekend), all of which were designed to give children the space to identify things in their lives that they liked/ disliked and the aspirations that they were, or were not, able to realize. The game, and the outputs of the drawings and photo exercises were then used a basis for discussion.

In many cases these research activities also involved the parents and carers of the children, both through semi-structured interviews about their experiences as carers, and through their involvement in the exercises with children. Their involvement in the activities with children was in part a response to the ethics of working with children and in part a pragmatic consideration, as the young age of many of the girls and boys interviewed, or the limitations that their impairment placed on their ability to communicate (for example, some children with limited speech or cognitive ability, where, in many cases the children had developed ways of communicating through their carers, by signs or movements) meant that communication was necessarily mediated through the carers.

On the one hand, this involvement of carers appeared to limit the research process to some extent. In some cases it was clear that the children involved in this research exercise would have been able to

communicate more of their ideas and opinions directly, but held back in the presence of their parents, project staff and foreign researchers. Some research exercises, however, (including drawing exercises and a photo elicitation exercise) appeared to be more successful in encouraging children to lead discussions.

On the other hand, while the involvement of carers in the research did appear to limit the agency of children in voicing their opinions and views to an extent, the research process also reinforced the importance of involving carers in the research process. This is because research working with children with disabilities needs to recognise both the impairments that could limit children's scope for communication, and the relationships of care that children with disabilities are in, and therefore not attempt to map out individuals' aspirations and values in isolation from the context of these relationships.

In this light, even where children were not able to communicate directly, but rather communicated through, or with, their parents and carers, this is not necessarily a problem for research into their well-being. Uyan Semerci has pointed out that many capabilities are 'relational' in that they are dependent on the achievements of others<sup>30</sup>. Given that, as Sarah White points out when discussing child rights<sup>31</sup>, that the nature of childhood means that it is more appropriate to approach children in terms of the relationships of care than as purely autonomous actors, then maybe it is important to understand relational capabilities or well-being not only in terms of the achievement *of* others (as per Uyan Semerci), but also in terms of achievements *with* others, in this case of children with disabilities, being realised in many ways through relationships with others. Therefore there is a legitimate space in research for discussions with and through carers, as long as these are not to the exclusion of the child's own views (though clearly this is a difficult balance to strike in practice).

### **Findings: Disability, gender and social participation**

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<sup>30</sup> Uyan-Semerci, P. (2007), 'A relational account of Nussbaum's list of Capabilities', *Journal of Human Development*, Vol 8, No 2, pp 203 – 221.

<sup>31</sup> White, Sarah, (2002), 'Being, becoming and relationship: Conceptual challenges of a Child Rights Approach in development', *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 14, pp. 1095-1104

The intersectional nature of children's experiences of living in the city, and of urban change can be well illustrated by the patterns that the researched revealed about their different opportunities for social engagement. During the research exercises, one of the important, valued, aspects of well-being that was consistently identified by children with who the project works was the opportunity for social engagement, which children with disabilities are often excluded from due to stigma and prejudice related to disabilities, and to the limitations related to their impairments (for example, in mobility and communication). Furthermore, social engagement was highly valued (by children as well as by carers) both in intrinsic terms, and in instrumental terms, as children and households who were more socially engaged in their neighbourhoods were more able to rely on non-household members for care and support. However the research found that, while disability, and the nature of specific disabilities, was an important factor in structuring children's opportunities for social engagement, other factors of identity, including gender, also had an important impact on the freedom of the children involved in the research to socialise.

Research with one 16 years old girl living in Subashnagar (an informal settlement close to the Leonard Cheshire Mumbai Home) illustrates this well. She is involved in the Asha project because she is unable to hear or speak. She lives with her parents, one brother and sister (of 6 and 8 years old, respectively) who are also deaf and were also involved in the research, and one other younger, hearing, sister. Until last year, when CBR team from the Asha project started working with them, none of the three deaf siblings went to school. Since they were reached by the project, the 6 year old boy and the 8 year old girl have been going to a special school for deaf children, but the 16 year old was told she is too old to enrol. Instead, she now attends sign language classes at the Cheshire Mumbai Home, where she is the only hearing impaired child and has individual session with the sign language teacher.

Like many of the children involved in the research, she identified socialising as very important to her. During the drawing and photo elicitation exercises, she produced many images related to her new ability to communicate and socialise, explaining that before she started working with the project she mainly stayed at home, was unable to communicate with others, and was lonely.



However, while her deafness has affected her scope to socialise, it also became clear that this is not the only aspects of her identity that limits her opportunities for sociability. For example, while they share the same impairment, her 6 year old brother has far more scope to socialise as he is allowed by their parents to play outside their house with other local boys, while she and her sisters are not because her parents do not consider the area safe for girls. In addition she has less free time for socialising than her brother, and younger sisters as, in addition to her sign language class, and a tailoring school where she is enrolled, as the oldest daughter in the family she is responsible for much of the family's housework and cooking. Thus, many of the limitations to her ability to socialise and play relate to her age, which has excluded her from a special school where she could meet other hearing impaired children, and also means that she has more responsibilities than her younger brother and sister and so less free time, and her gender, which means that she is expected to undertake time consuming housework duties, and that her mother is more concerned for her and her sisters' security in the immediate neighbourhood than for her brother's.

The research also highlighted how the impact of the SRS was simultaneously influenced by a the interaction of a complex web of social relations built around different children's multiple identities, including their disabilities, but also, importantly, their gender.

For example, the combined changes in urban form and urban relations resulting from the SRS appear to lead to particular problems for some children, which stem from combined social responses to their gender and their disability. As discussed earlier, sociability is a component of well-being which is prioritized by most of the children who were involved in the research. However, attitudes about some disabilities coincide with attitudes about gender in ways which affect the scope of children to socialise. This includes the belief that, in particular, girls with learning disabilities are especially vulnerable to being sexually attacked by strangers if they are left alone at home (which is something that many low income households of children with disabilities have to do in order to go out to work). In the original slum communities, where household were well established in their neighbourhood, these problems were dealt with due to close levels of engagement between neighbours, based on

relationships between households that had been built up through years of living in close proximity, and also the physical layout of the houses and communities (with open street level doors onto largely pedestrian streets). This meant that where girls with disabilities had to be left home alone when other household members went out to work they felt more confident leaving them alone, as they were often watched over by neighbours, and also because in close knit slum street the appearance of stranger would be noted and monitored by neighbours. In contrast, in households which had fewer relations with neighbours, including those that had already moved to the SRS replacement blocks, the presence of a disabled daughter was kept secret, and /or the girl was kept locked alone in the apartment while family members were out working, in the interests of the girls' security.

On the other hand, some of the changes that the SRS resulted in were experienced in common, by girls and boys with disability. For example, the availability of toilets in the new apartments was a particular advantage for those with mobility impairments, but, on the other hand the fact that apartments were allocated by lottery means that households with disabled members may be placed on higher floors, and typically elevators only work for a few hours a day, creating a real crisis for the accessibility of girls and boys with mobility impairments.

### **Institutional responses to gender, social identity and the city**

The research gave some insights into both how the experience of disability, and the way that the SRS affected children living with disabilities, was gendered, and at the same time that the gendered impact of the urban changes constituted by the SRS are experienced differently by those living with disabilities than by those without disabilities. But what implications does this have for organisations engaged in lobbying urban change processes on behalf of specific, identity based, interest groups, such as Leonard Cheshire?

Dealing with some of the non-disability related factors (such as gender norms) that affect the children that they work with poses particular challenges to the Asha CBR team. It requires creative thinking, as the limited numbers and resources of the team means that they have to spend the

majority of their time addressing basic issues that are critical for children with disabilities to access their legal rights and provisions. In practice most of their time has to be spent helping the children and their families with school enrolment, and to negotiate the complex bureaucracy around disability certification and health insurance, which require registration and also require that the child and their family have a 'ration card' proving their residency which, for a number of reasons, is nearly impossible to obtain for the poorest households, and for those households in rented accommodation (with the result that some of the most vulnerable children with disabilities are the least able to access state support mechanisms for disability). The disruption represented to this registration process by the SRS means that much of what the team has already achieved is under threat. Little time is left for the CBR team to attempt to address the interlocking factors of gender, age and class inequality which reinforce the problems faced by the girls and boys they work with (an indeed ethnicity, which is an important factor for many of the migrant households in the slum communities in which the project works). Furthermore, Leonard Cheshire is an NGO whose mission is to promote the rights of people with disabilities. Could they justify project interventions working on issues related to gender equality, or the exclusion of rental tenants from the SRS?

These sorts of challenge are not peculiar to this project. While research highlights the importance of intersecting social relations for well-being, most organisations working on behalf of city dwellers tend to advocate on behalf of target or constituent groups based around a common identity – for example, the urban poor, women, people with disabilities, or youth. This is because such organisations are rarely able to tailor their interventions to the specific needs of individuals, and the myriad of identity based interests that make up each individual's life experience. Rather, institutional prerogatives mean that they have a tendency to identify social groups, with presumed shared needs, as a target for their interventions.

Stewart notes that 'policy needs to aim at reducing group inequalities; and at the same time to generate tolerant societies in which multiple identities co-exist peacefully...'<sup>32</sup>. Clearly a first step must be to identify the relevant group identities along the lines of which inequalities are experienced.

Thus ‘target’ populations of development interventions are normally defined based on the identification of group identities that are associated with deprivation or unequal treatment (e.g. ‘women’ or ‘people with disabilities’). Working with specific identity based groups also offers the scopes to build that groups’ sense of collective interests, and indeed, one of the important contributions of feminism which may be threatened by a wider focus on ‘gender’ was to ‘mobilize the category ‘women’ as a politically salient interest group’<sup>33</sup>.

There are also institutional realities which increase the tendency to target specific social groups. Organisations attempt to structure themselves in ways that reduce complexity in terms of staffing, responsibility and organisational structure, which tends to lead to addressing social groups through separate policies, teams, or interventions. In this light, the experience of those engaged in gender mainstreaming actions across development institutions has been that organisational practice typically reverts to the simpler norm of targeting women through separate interventions and organisations<sup>34</sup>.

However, organisations which target one identity based group run a number of dangers. One is that the group identities (or ‘target groups’) seen as of primary importance for human well-being, or deprivation, by development organisations may not reflect the priorities or interpretations of people in the ‘target’ populations themselves. Thus, the practice of defining target groups by development organisations has been criticised as constituting a process of labelling and the imposition of social identities by outsiders<sup>35</sup>. It has also been argued that a targeted approach may lead to the solidification of identities that might otherwise not be prioritised in a given context. For example,

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<sup>32</sup> Stewart, Frances, (2005), ‘Groups and capabilities’, *The Journal of Human Development*, Vol 6, No 2. P. 201

<sup>33</sup> Cornwall, A., Harrison, E., and Whitehead, A. (2007). “Gender myths and feminist fables: The struggle for interpretive power in Gender and Development” in *Development and Change*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp 1-20. p.2

<sup>34</sup> Levy, C. ,(1998), “Institutionalisation of Gender Through Participatory Practice” in I. Guijt and M.K. Shah (eds) *The Myth Of Community: Gender Issues In Participatory Development* Intermediate Technology Publication pp 254-267; McGuire, A. (2009), “Gender Mainstreaming and the Public Policy Process: round pegs in square holes?” in *Policy and Politics*, Vol 37, No2, pp 215-33

<sup>35</sup> Eyben Rosalind, (2007), “Labelling People for Aid”, in Moncrieff and Eyben (eds) *The Power of Labelling: How People are Categorized and Why it Matters*, Earthscan UK and USA

White, in her analysis of the treatment of race in development argues that there is the danger that...  
'In making race an issue one actually reconfirms essentialist notions of racial difference'<sup>36</sup>.

Another critical danger of single identity based actions is what has been referred to as the 'intersectional invisibility'<sup>37</sup> of those with 'multiple subordinated identities' (in most contexts, identities such as female, disabled, homosexual, black). Thus, as the experience of Asha reveals, the understanding of, and research into the 'gendered' impacts of urban change processes such as the SRS is likely to reflect the experience of able bodied, adult women, rather than girls with disabilities.

It is therefore highly problematic to approaching social identities such as gender as though they are singular. However, it is important to stress that there is nonetheless a vital role to be played by organisations mobilising around specific aspects of identity, such as disability, or gender. The question is, how can such organisations can best work to promote the rights and well-being of all of their constituents, including those with multiple subordinated identities?

## **Conclusions and Implications**

We would argue that this has two implications for such organisations. Firstly, that they should ensure that their strategies are based on sound research which examines the intersection of the identity rights that they are supporting with other aspects of identity, and secondly that they seek to develop alliances with other (identity and issues based) organisations around common agendas for social justice.

In relation to the first point, a fundamental component of applied research by identity based organisations should be an effort to reveal the diversity of experiences found under the umbrella of a given identity, and to guard against the invisibility of multiple subordinated identities.

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<sup>36</sup> White, Sarah, (2002), 'Thinking Race, Thinking Development', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 407-419

<sup>37</sup> Purdie-Vaughns, Valerie and Richard P. Eibach, (2008), 'Intersectional Invisibility: The Distinctive Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple Subordinate-Group Identities', *Sex Roles*, Vol. 59, pp. 377-391

In relation to the second point, it is critical that different identity and issue based organisations, such as advocacy groups working on gender equality, disability rights, or housing rights, can find common ground which unites the different (identity based) interests that they are attempting to defend, rather than fragmenting, and creating competition between, the demands of different interest groups. As Levy points out, this requires “political alliance-building, on the basis of intersecting identities where common sources of exclusion, exploitation and oppression are acknowledged, and the interlinked agendas for recognition and redistribution are brought together”<sup>38</sup>.

Central to this effort, therefore, is identifying common ground in demands for social justice. In the case of the challenges that the constituents of the Asha project face in relation to the SRS, the common ground that exists between children with disabilities, women’s groups, and housing rights groups, would seem to be a critique of an increasingly market based system of housing and land allocation: the SRS comprises a move to an urban systems of entitlement increasingly based on commodification of housing entitlements, that does not take account of identity based inequalities in economic power, or differences in needs of households and individuals. This is likely to further entrench the inequalities face by people with disabilities, women and rental tenants, and as such represents a shared agenda of demands for social justice.

However, developing calls for social justice which unite rather than fragment identity based interests may require a specific set of strategies which address the deeper roots of inequality. Fraser argues that this would require employing ‘transformative’ strategies, which attempt to restructure the causal processes leading to inequality, rather than ‘affirmative’ strategies which try to correct unequal outcomes without changing the broader social arrangements that have caused them<sup>39</sup>. In this light, affirmative strategies normally divide identity based groups through special treatment of vulnerable target groups, where transformative strategies focus on developing universally inclusive systems of

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<sup>38</sup> Levy, Caren (2009) ‘Gender justice in a diversity approach to development? The challenges for Development Planning’ *International Development Planning Review*, 31 (4) p. viii

<sup>39</sup> Fraser, Nancy (1995) ‘From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist’ Age’, *New Left Review* p.82

entitlement. The importance of transformative strategies with such a universal focus is increasingly being called for as a means to address the roots of inequality in general<sup>40</sup>, but research has also demonstrated its relevance in the context of urban change.

In this light, therefore, attempts by civil society organisations to lobby for such transformative strategies must be based on research with people who experience marginalization based around identities such as gender, age or disability. Such research can act as a basis for understanding how intersecting social identities are affected by, and shape, socio-spatial urban changes and thereby for identifying the common roots of inequality, and shared claims for justice.

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<sup>40</sup> UNRISD, (2010), *Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics*, UNRISD, Geneva

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