

Public transport for everyone!

Why transportation should work for women in Africa

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Bonn, 6 March 2024. The ability to travel and improvements in transport services facilitate access to education, health care, employment opportunities and leisure that ensure human well-being and economic growth. Yet, transport is not gender-neutral particularly in Africa, where women are less likely to own motorised transport than men because of their lower access to paid jobs and hence lower financial capacity. As a result, more women and girls walk or use public transport whenever available.

Moreover, most women feel unsafe in public transport, but there are no long-term plans to address the gender gap. However, men dominate public transport work. This situation has to change as it limits women's access to economic and social activities and health care services. Policymakers, funding institu-

tions and researchers interested in reforming the current public transport services must address the inequalities women face in addition to their focus on efficiency and environmental goals. Development partners like Germany can contribute towards supporting and facilitating gender responsive transport policies in Africa through the flagship feminist development policy.

Why are there fewer women in public transport?

The primary means of public transport services in Africa are trains, buses, mini-buses, taxis, auto-rickshaws and motorcycles. The service can be broadly grouped into regulated and less regulated by public institutions. Low government investments and weak institutional capacity of public transportation have resulted in the emergence of the less regulated, often called paratransit, informal or popular transit dominating in Africa. Whereas only few women work in the regulated sector, even fewer do so in the less regulated public transport.

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Although women generally dominate the informal service sector because of the associated flexibility, informal transport is clearly a male-dominated service sector. This is because informal transport is self-regulated by the operators and associated with reckless and competitive driving, long working hours, high risk and unpredictability. Such a high-risk environment with little regulation makes working in the service dangerous and difficult.

It is also less convenient for women to travel on public transport because of the real and perceived safety and security concerns. Furthermore, women's travel patterns differ from men's due to their disproportionate share of childcare and domestic responsibilities. This means they make additional transfers, making travel relatively expensive.

This is a two-fold problem, as the precarious nature of the current transportation sector could further rein-

force women's limited access to public transport, cutting them off from other income-earning opportunities and employment in the transport sector. This further contributes to an unequal society where half the population, by virtue of their gender, are restricted in their job opportunities and freedom of movement because they most often do not own private vehicles and feel unsafe in public transport.

A change that should work for everyone

The availability of safe public transport is one of the necessities for a thriving human society. It is liberating and empowering to have the freedom to move. The current precariousness of work in this sector not only excludes women but also endangers the lives of the men who have to work in public transport.

Recently, some African governments have started to regulate and invest in public transportation through rail and bus rapid transit (BRT). Cities such as Lagos, Dar es Salaam, Cape Town, and Johannesburg have implemented BRTs to regulate and provide efficient public transportation. Accra, Abidjan, and Nairobi are at different stages of implementing BRT. In Accra, the government and funding agencies opted to change the narrative by training sixty women as drivers for the BRT. Ladybird, a private logistics firm in Ghana, has been using only female drivers. This demonstrates that women can enter such male-dominated services when given the appropriate support.

It is pertinent for African governments to have gender-sensitive public transport policies, including employment opportunities for women. At the continent level, implementation of the African Continental Free Trade and the Agenda 2063 of the African Union should reflect this. Additionally, it is imperative to ensure that women are involved in planning and discussions on public transport services that account for fares, safety and security. Addressing women's safety and security concerns to ease their mobility and inclusion in public transport work will empower and ensure that they have access to education, remote jobs and recreational facilities. This will further enable more women to contribute to the economic and social well-being of African societies. Policy makers and transportation funding institutions should support such efforts.