A stylized, layered illustration of a cityscape. The buildings are rendered in various shades of grey, brown, and blue, with some appearing as silhouettes against a dark background. A woman in a pink dress and black bag is walking in the foreground, and a man is visible in the background. The overall aesthetic is gritty and urban.

# Women AND THE City:

**EXAMINING THE GENDER  
IMPACT OF VIOLENCE AND URBANISATION**

A comparative study of Brazil, Cambodia,  
Ethiopia, Liberia and Nepal



## **ACRONYMS**

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**CP:** (ActionAid) Country Programme

**GBV:** Gender-Based Violence

**FGD:** Focus Group Discussion(S)

**RSA:** Rapid Situation Analysis

**VAW:** Violence Against Women

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“When I have to work overtime at night, I often feel afraid of robbery, rape and harassment because it’s very dark on the way back home.”

**WOMAN GARMENT FACTORY WORKER NEAR PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA**

“I try to share the incidents of when I am harassed [on public transport] with my friends and my husband. But sometimes I cannot even share them with my husband for fear of being ridiculed and scolded in return. I cannot talk about it in front of my family and society for fear of being scolded in return.”

**WOMAN WITH SEVERAL CHILDREN IN KATHMANDU, NEPAL**

“...At class one night I saw a girl entering a place that is noted to be a camp for bad boys. I had seen her earlier in a short jeans skirt and she was drinking alcohol. Later the boys gave her soup that was drugged. When I came back I saw her on the floor lying with only her blouse on with burst condoms around her; she seemed unconscious. I assumed that she had been raped. This happened right around the bathroom.”

**WOMAN IN HER EARLY THIRTIES STUDYING BUSINESS IN A LIBERIAN UNIVERSITY**

“We always live in a constant condition of fear. We are worried about not having a place to vend. We fear robberies when we go out early in the morning and return late night. Most of us do not have a house of our own. We are mistreated by many—from the home to society—because we are poor.”

**WOMAN FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSANT IN ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

“...the worst thing is that the blame goes to the women, as if they were attracting the violence themselves because they wear short skirts or because they walk on the streets alone... This is part of individual freedoms, of the choices one has, and sometimes of the necessities one has because she studies at night...”

**POLICE DEPUTY, BRAZIL**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**A**cross the world, women experience violence or the fear of violence on a daily basis. International human rights treaties affirm that violence against women violates women's human rights and fundamental freedoms, and that this violence **occurs in both private and public spaces.**

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The global **safe cities for women movement** began to emerge in the 1970s, with groups of women in diverse countries worldwide organising protest marches to “take back the night”. Over time, several organisations began conducting work on women's urban safety. These organisations included Women in Cities International (WICI), the Huairou Commission, Jagori, UN-HABITAT, and UN Women (formerly UNIFEM). Although the initiatives have varied in their geographic scope and focus, they have highlighted the importance of city planning, and encouraged practical initiatives that involve women themselves in creating safer cities.

**“The right to the city”** is the right of all city inhabitants, especially the poor, to have equitable access to all that a city has to offer and also to have the right to change their city in the ways that they see fit (see Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 1967). Although this right has given birth to a worldwide social movement, analyses frequently fail to take into account the diversity, inequalities, and power structures that determine which urban inhabitants enjoy the most access and influence in shaping their cities.

Gender is a key dimension of diversity, inequality and power structures in the city and analysing gender impacts is central to informing programmes and policies that reflect women's realities and to promoting women's right to the city. *A woman can enjoy her right to the city, when she lives free from violence and the fear of violence, and free from rights violations that arise in the spaces where she lives and works.*

**Urban men and women experience violence differently.** They also experience and perceive protection and safety differently. By analysing these differences, we can begin to address women's safety in urban areas.

In most countries, men are more likely than women to be killed by urban violence, especially by people unknown to them. Women are more likely to suffer violence at the hands of people they know, but also experience violence committed by strangers. Women report being more afraid than men, and are socialised from an early age not to go out alone into public spaces (Women and Habitat Network of Latin America, in Rivas, 2010). Women's fear of violence restricts their movement, limiting their use of public spaces and movement from their homes to public or other private spaces.

Violence against women in public spaces particularly affects the most marginalised. Women's roles and the differences between women by race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital and parenthood status and socioeconomic status directly influence how women experience cities on a daily basis.

## **The ActionAid approach: Women and the city, violence, and urbanisation**

Building on the work of other organisations in the safe cities movement, in 2011 ActionAid piloted work to **investigate women's safety in cities and urban spaces** in several countries where it works. This project sought to build upon previous

work and to develop new tools and approaches, foster public awareness, and develop practical strategies to enhance women's urban safety.

The vision that organised the research is the right of women to freedom from violence and the risks to their safety posed by inadequate infrastructure, services and poorly planned or managed urban spaces. The research explores the ways violence and insecurity limit poor women's mobility and their participation in society. ActionAid's approach is participatory and human rights-based. Capturing and prioritising women's experiences offers new information that can be used to strengthen decisions made about safety and mobility.

Women fear and experience violence that falls in two main dimensions: **violence against women** and violence arising from **urban insecurities**, particularly as related to urbanisation and poverty. Women may experience these two types of violence simultaneously. For example, a woman may experience rape by someone she knows (gender-based violence), have it discounted or rationalised (another form of gender-based violence), and then struggle with inadequate services as she seeks legal recourse and access to a health service (urban insecurities).

The ActionAid research offers a look into the lives of groups of women whose knowledge and views of their urban realities have previously not been drawn upon to create safer cities. These include women garment workers from urban factory areas in Cambodia, women attending universities in Liberia, and women informal vendors in Ethiopia, to name a few. This report presents findings about women's safety and mobility in five countries:

- **Brazil** – women living in poor neighbourhoods in three cities of the state of Pernambuco: Recife, Cabo de Santo Agostinho, and Mirandiba
- **Cambodia** – women garment factory workers in the outskirts of the capital, Phnom Penh
- **Ethiopia** – women engaged in informal vending in Addis Ababa
- **Liberia** – women university students from

three campuses in Monrovia and Gbarnga

- **Nepal** – women using public transport in Kathmandu Valley.

In each of the five countries, ActionAid country teams and local partners identified a target group of women and/or focus area. The teams were provided with a Toolkit from which they selected approaches and tools to capture women's safety experiences. Country teams were encouraged to adapt tools so as to capture the information they sought in ways that were culturally and contextually appropriate.

## Highlights from country findings

### Brazil

The research in **Brazil** explores some of the more systemic and societal issues surrounding women's urban safety in the three cities of Pernambuco, one of the country's most violent states. The research focused on women in some of the poorest and most insecure neighbourhoods within these cities.

The presence of trafficking aggravated the perpetual fear and insecurity among women in the communities studied. Women's experiences of trafficking included restricted movement and gendered forms of intimidation and control, mistrust of police, and mothers' worries about the urban environment in which their children were growing up. Inadequate infrastructure and services made it difficult to reach the necessary services when women were victims of violence. Partner women's organisations were inspired by the research to plan municipal and state-level dialogues, in which women from the communities will voice their concerns to public officials.

### Cambodia

The research in **Cambodia** examined a very gender-imbalanced urban space in that up to 90% of

garment factory workers are women, while the vast majority of perpetrators of violence as well as factory owners and individuals responsible for factors affecting women's safety are men. The research moved beyond the factory floor to include the risks workers face in the vicinity of the factories. Women experienced rape and other forms of violence, in addition to a range of infrastructural and service deficits such as extremely poor hygiene, inadequate lighting and policing, and overcrowding in rental areas.

The forms of violence women were exposed to posed health risks, including sexual and reproductive health problems, undernutrition, and fainting. Services to ensure women's sexual and reproductive health and other health needs, as well as services to address rape were identified as priorities for change. Key duty bearers who must be held accountable for women's safety include police and factory owners at the local level, national ministries of labour and gender, and factory owners at the international level.

## **Ethiopia**

Like Cambodia, **Ethiopia** focused on a common form of women's employment, namely informal small-scale vending in urban areas in and around the capital, Addis Ababa. Major findings included the lack of a safe marketplace; robbery, theft and homicide; housing problems; and transport. The research reveals that perpetrators saw women vendors as "easy targets" for robbery, bribes, sexual favours, violence and harassment.

The resultant insecurity restricted women's earnings, the sustainability of their small businesses, and thus their empowerment. The research report recommended that, in addition to organising, training and providing loans to Ethiopian women, cooperatives should work with other organisations to prioritise women's safety concerns in respect of their movement between private and public spaces. Efforts should be made to secure a proper marketplace with appropriate infrastructure, and to ensure safer housing and surrounding areas.

The team called, in particular, for exploration of community policing.

## **Liberia**

The research in **Liberia** focused on female university students (and thus younger women) across three university settings. Women receiving higher education are a minority in Liberia, but the students studied came from diverse backgrounds, including from poor and more rural areas. Trends in violence and discrimination suffered by women across Liberian society were reflected at the university level in widespread sexual violence, including rape that persists following a legacy of civil war; blaming women for bringing violence upon themselves, such as by their dress; and impunity of men in power in respect of the common practices of transactional sex, or "sex for grades." Required changes identified at the university level included sexual and reproductive health services, counselling, improved campus security, and student organisations and peer groups that raise awareness about violence and advocate for its elimination. University authorities and national and local governments must be held accountable to prevent violence against women and guarantee the safety of female students.

## **Nepal**

In **Nepal**, the research aimed to understand the experiences of women who use public transport in Kathmandu Valley. Nepal chose to focus on a specific form of violence, namely harassment, as the most common form of violence that women experience on public transport. Crowdedness, time of day, and even seasons affect women's experiences. However, cultural norms encourage women to remain silent, protect family prestige, and not to report incidents. Women in Nepal sometimes preferred or were told to travel with elders, husbands or companions, regardless of how urgently they needed to travel. The research revealed a range of strategies used by women to protect themselves, including poking aggressors with pins and carrying bags in front of their chests.

## Major themes across the five countries

**Women experience major rights violations as a consequence of urban insecurity.** A primary finding of this pilot research was that women's fear and insecurity sharply reduces their **mobility**. Women adjust their travel based on their own experiences and those of other women, avoiding certain modes, times and routes of transportation.

**When women experience violence or lack of safety, sometimes on a daily basis, it limits their:**

- Rights and freedoms as equal citizens to access and enjoy their **neighbourhoods and cities**.
- **Mobility and freedom of movement**, as they avoid certain places, routes and modes of public transportation.
- Full **participation in public life**, including **political and community life**.
- **Psychological and psychosocial health and well-being**, including their confidence and sense of self-worth. These factors then discourage women from reporting their experiences to authorities, and from seeking support from family members, friends and service providers.
- Pursuit of **economic and labour** opportunities. Two countries featured women's safety specifically as it related to work (Ethiopia, Cambodia).
- **Educational attainment**, and reduces their participation in student organisations outside of class (Liberia in particular).
- **Sexual and reproductive health**, including choices and services related to HIV and AIDS and sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy (Liberia, Cambodia), and infections due to poor hygiene (Cambodia).
- Access to **essential services** such as health, water and sanitation (Cambodia, Ethiopia).
- Spaces and time in which to enjoy **culture, arts, social life and leisure** (Brazil).

When women are not able to enjoy these freedoms, it restricts their right to the city as inhabitants, deepens or maintains urban poverty, and limits the achievement of gender equality.

**Major themes that arose across the five countries were as follows:**

- Historical discriminatory and violent treatment of women, particularly during internal conflict, affects women's urban safety today.
- Few policies, laws and programmes exist to protect women in urban spaces.
- Generally categorised as a "woman's issue," women's safety has often been excluded from key urban safety, planning and policy agendas.
- The dangers that women experience in public and private spaces are closely linked. For example, male control in the domestic arena can restrict women's mobility in public spaces.
- Violence against women and women's urban safety risks are normalised through social norms and attitudes that permit – and even justify – disrespectful, discriminatory, and violent treatment toward women. Normalisation is reinforced through impunity of perpetrators and lack of accountability of those who should provide protection.
- Women are blamed and held responsible for the violence and insecurity they experience.
- Incidents of violence are inconsistently reported and monitored and quality data do not exist to inform policies and programmes.
- Across the five countries, poor urban areas were characterised by inadequate services and infrastructure. Services are not equipped to handle violence against women. Infrastructural deficits include poor lighting, inadequate signage, and poor quality of roads and housing. Public transport creates multiple forms of insecurity for women. Police offer inadequate protection for women.
- Men play key roles in women's urban safety. Men were identified as perpetrators, but also as potential allies and decision-makers.
- Rural-to-urban migration and rural characteristics have implications for women's poverty and insecurity in cities.



## Recommendations

### The recommendations emerging from this pilot cluster into six broad categories:

1. Raise awareness of the problem, for example by addressing societal perceptions of women and of violence against women through the media and other forms of advocacy.
2. Increase national and local (municipal) governments' commitments to women's urban safety.
  - **Prioritise establishing services for women that mitigate the impact of violence**, particularly in sexual and reproductive health, and rape and violence counselling and services.
  - **Target improvements to specific policies and laws.** Determine whether to modify existing policies or create new ones, and assess the level of government to be targeted, namely (university campuses, factory area), city (transport service), national (justice system), or a combination.
  - **Improve policing for women's safety.** This includes not only increasing police or security presence, but also providing training for responding to violence committed against women, addressing women's perceptions and mistrust of police, and providing incentives to reduce corruption.
  - **Insert women's security and safety agendas across agencies** responsible for safety, infrastructure, transport, health and women's affairs or gender equality at all levels of government. Women's urban safety priorities must not be placed in a tokenistic way within policies deemed of greater relevance.
  - **Align local policies and initiatives with national ones and "connect the dots" between women's safety and other urban agendas and interests.**
3. Change social norms for prevention
  - **Address prevention at the community level.** Globally, many programmes have been developed to challenge harmful gender norms and engage men and communities to support women and bring about change.
4. Build institutional capacity to address the problem
  - **Involving men** is crucial to addressing what have long been seen as a "woman's issues" (Greene and Levack, 2010). Find ways of engaging men that do not undermine, but instead strengthen safety efforts that focus on women.
  - **Provide training** for relevant institutional players on women's urban safety and violence against women.
  - **Provide opportunities** for women to serve as experts on the safety issues in their lives.
  - **Strengthen research capacity in the field of women's urban safety.**
5. Strengthen networks for advocacy
  - **Support civil society advocacy and social movements.** Identify existing local agents of change, build local capacity and find local solutions.
  - **Construct networks and coalitions** that connect sectors and generate accountability.
6. Conduct research for evidence-based programmes and policies. Women's urban safety practitioners and researchers should:
  - Develop ethical standards for women's urban safety work, including **conflict-sensitive and "do no harm" approaches.**
  - Invest in **monitoring and evaluation** in order to measure progress toward women's safety in urban areas.
  - **Capture diverse and marginalised women's urban safety experiences** in order to make services and policies relevant to them.



Discussion taking place concerning localised violence against women. © ActionAid International

# INTRODUCTION

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**A**cross the world, women experience violence or the fear of violence on a daily basis. International human rights treaties affirm that violence against women violates women's human rights and fundamental freedoms, and that this violence occurs in both private and public spaces. Male violence against women reflects historically unequal power relations between men and women and is a mechanism by which men subordinate women in various spheres of life.

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For a long period of time, research on violence against women focused on domestic violence and intimate partner violence, drawing much-needed attention to the fact that "private" violence in the home needs to be understood as a public problem. Across the globe, however, we are increasingly seeing recognition of the intersections between violence against women, urban planning and safety, particularly in poor communities. Identifying the intersections of the women's rights agenda with the urban agenda entails connecting three dimensions: public space, citizen safety and gender. Public and private space must be understood as spaces of political action, social life, economic development and shared culture (Vargas, 2008).

## **Whose cities? Women's right to the city**

"The right to the city" is the right of all city inhabitants, especially the poor, to have equitable access to all that a city has to offer and also to have the right to change their city in the ways that they see fit (Boer and de Vries, 2009). However, analyses of this right frequently fail to take into account the diversity, inequalities, and power structures that determine which urban inhabitants enjoy the most access and influence in shaping their cities. Widening gaps between the rich and poor make enjoyment of the city and what it has to offer the privilege of some and only a distant dream for others whose rights, dignity, legitimacy and inclusion are not ensured.

Gender is a key dimension of diversity, inequality and power structures in the city. Programmes and policies therefore need to reflect women's realities and promote women's right to the city. *A woman can enjoy her right to the city, when she lives free from violence and the fear of violence, and free from rights violations that arise in the spaces where women live and work.*

## **Urbanisation, poverty and inequality**

In 2007, 50% of the world's population was living in urban areas, and it is estimated that by 2030, 61% of the world's population will be in cities (UN-HABITAT, 2007 in WICI et al, 2008). The most rapid urbanisation is taking place in developing countries. The countries in this report all have predominately rural populations, with the exception of Brazil. In 2010, 87% of Brazil's population was urban, as against 48% in Liberia, 20% in Cambodia, 19% in Nepal, and 17% in Ethiopia. By 2045, the share of the populations of Cambodia and Ethiopia living in urban spaces are expected to double. By 2050, Nepal's urban population is expected to account for 48% of its total population, a considerable increase compared to the 2010 proportion of 19%. In Liberia and Brazil the urban share of the population is expected to reach 69% and 94% respectively by 2050 (UN Population Division, 2009).

Urbanisation can bring new opportunities, particularly in relation to employment and participation in organised groups. However, it also brings many challenges. Cities struggle to maintain services and infrastructure that adequately meets the needs and are within reach of their growing populations. Specific barriers are experienced by the poor and by women. In this research, the challenges faced by women often reflected the safety and health consequences of rural to urban migration, marketplace and factory labour opportunities, poor access to services, and inadequate transportation. However, only too often the challenges faced by women in cities are interpreted or excused as women's fault, rather than the result of structure or design that does not take into account gendered impacts. Further, women do not necessarily feel safer in formally planned public spaces or those with a formal police presence.

**What** is considered violence or insecurity in urban spaces? **Who** has the power to make decisions about safety and security, and whose safety do those in power take into consideration?

Women and men migrate to urban areas for reasons varying from the search for better work to forced migration due to internal conflicts and climate change (WICI, 2010b). Upon arriving in cities, they are vulnerable to risks such as forced eviction, livelihood insecurity, pollution and related illnesses, environmental disasters, racism, xenophobia, weak infrastructure and the absence of basic amenities and services. In developing countries and in poor communities in particular, rapid growth often occurs without formal planning.

### **Experiences of violence and safety in urban areas are gendered**

Urban men and women experience violence differently. They also experience and perceive protection and safety differently.

In most countries, men are more likely than women to be killed by urban violence, especially by people unknown to them. Women are more likely to suffer violence at the hands of people they know, but also experience violence committed by strangers. Women report being more afraid than men, and are socialised from an early age not to go out alone into public spaces (Women and Habitat Network of Latin America, in Rivas, 2010). Women's fear of violence restricts their movement, limiting their use of public spaces and movement from their homes to public or other private spaces.

Around the world, violence is often normalised and women are blamed for their negative experiences. Government failure to provide protection and prevention services that address women's safety is consistent with societal tendencies to overlook or rationalise incidents of violence and harassment (Bowman, 1993).

Because they account for the majority of police, bus drivers, urban planners, factory owners and key decision-makers, as well as perpetrators of violence, men are disproportionately in positions of physical, political and economic power and can dismiss, rationalise or take action to address women's experiences of violence.

Violence against women in public spaces particularly affects the most marginalised, because they have fewer choices about the spaces they frequent. Women's roles and the differences among women by race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital and parenthood status and socioeconomic status directly influence how women traverse cities on a daily basis. They may walk or they may take public transport in their travel for work, study, or family and domestic responsibilities.

The **global safe cities for women movement** began to emerge in the 1970s, with groups of women in diverse countries worldwide organising protest marches to "take back the night." Inspired by this movement, several organisations began conducting work on women's urban safety.

The organisations that took up these initiatives included Women in Cities International (WICI), the Huairou Commission, Jagori, UN-HABITAT, and UN Women (formerly UNIFEM).

These organisations' initiatives have varied in their geographic scope and focus. Their work has spanned women's freedom from violence and the fear of violence; the design and use of safe spaces; financial autonomy and security (since income plays a powerful role in reducing domestic violence and offering choices); infrastructure; access to services; social norms regarding women's presence in public spaces; participation in public life; and women's sense of self-worth (WICI et al, 2008). Women have been supported in their engagement with different sets of stakeholders including governments, non-profit organisations, citizen groups, and the community in general. The various actors have endeavoured to design and implement strategies that can bring about measureable change in women's safety and security.

UN Women, for instance, has implemented programmes in Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Peru, El Salvador, Guatemala and Brazil in Latin America. This work has included education and training for governments, civil society, women, youth, police officers and urban planners on how to make cities safer for women. UN Women's Global Programme, Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women, was launched in November 2010 in Quito (Ecuador), Cairo (Egypt), New Delhi (India), Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea) and Kigali (Rwanda). One of the key remaining challenges for all organisations in this field is evaluating the changes brought about to women's lives from this safe cities work.

### **The ActionAid approach: Women and the city, violence, and urbanisation**

Building on the work of other organisations in the safe cities movement, in 2011 ActionAid engaged in pilot investigations of women's safety in cities and urban spaces in several countries where it works. ActionAid had been working for many years to address violence against women and

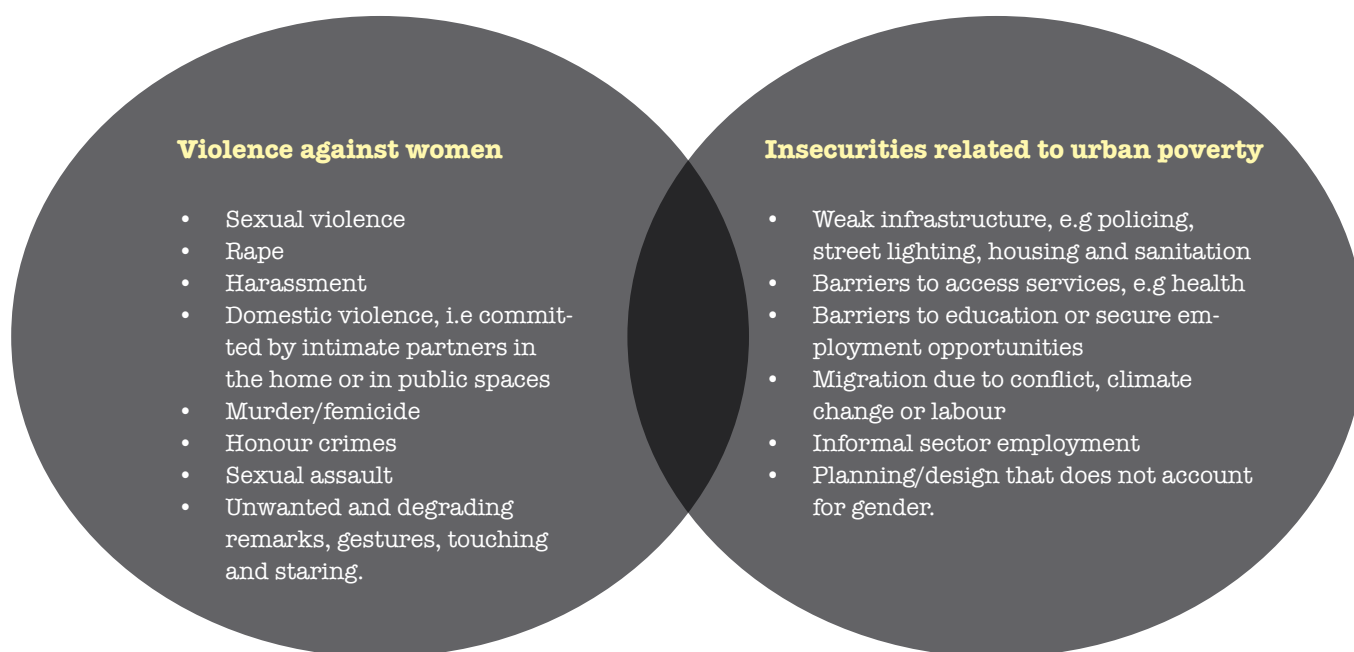
girls in areas such as domestic violence, HIV and AIDS, sexual harassment and girls in schools. This project sought to build upon previous work and to develop new tools and approaches, foster public awareness and develop practical strategies to enhance women's urban safety.

The vision that organised the research is the right of women to freedom from violence and the risks to their safety posed by inadequate infrastructure, services and poorly planned or managed urban spaces. The research explored the ways violence and insecurity limit poor women's mobility and their participation in society.

### **Women's urban safety entails addressing two overlapping dimensions**

The research was informed by the understanding that women fear and experience violence in two main dimensions: **violence against women** and violence arising from **urban insecurities**, particularly as related to urbanisation and poverty. Women often experience these two types of violence simultaneously, as suggested by the intersecting spheres in the diagram below, which provides examples drawn from the research. For example, a woman may experience rape from someone she knows (gender-based violence), have it discounted or rationalised (another form of gender-based violence), and then struggle with inadequate policing and lighting as she seeks legal recourse and access to a health service (urban insecurities).

Two factors are worth noting about women's experiences of violence documented in this research. First, women in the research did not always name their experiences as violence. This can, at least in part, be explained by the factors that serve to normalise violence and make it invisible, as well as factors that discourage women from naming and reporting violence. Second, women experienced structural forms of violence, including those that come with urbanisation. For example, a woman might have migrated to a city where, because she lived in a poor community, she did not enjoy the amenities her city had to offer.

**Figure 1: The overlapping dimensions of women's insecurity.** -----

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ActionAid's approach – its vision, design and realisation – is human rights-based and participatory. Participatory approaches are common to development and humanitarian work and discourses, and thus it is important to be clear about what is meant in the context of this project. "Safer cities" work calls for a **transformative** type of participation. By co-creating or leading the design and implementation of data collection and other activities using the tools offered, women as **agents build their capacity, critical consciousness and confidence, and ability to demand rights and enhance accountability** for their urban spaces.

Capturing and prioritising women's experiences then offers new information that can be used to strengthen decisions made about safety and mobility. Participatory processes are especially relevant to addressing women's safety because of the need to change social norms and patterns of interaction, values, customs and institutions that affect everyone (WICI et al, 2008).

The ActionAid research was conducted from May to September 2011 in five countries, with each country choosing a different focus:

- **Brazil** – women living in poor neighbourhoods in three cities in the state of Pernambuco: Recife; Cabo de Santo Agostinho; and Mirandiba
- **Cambodia** – women garment factory workers in the outskirts of the capital, Phnom Penh
- **Ethiopia** – women engaged in informal vending in Addis Ababa
- **Liberia** – women university students in three campuses in Monrovia and Gbarnga
- **Nepal** – women using public transport in Kathmandu Valley

This report first briefly describes the methodology used in the countries. This is followed by a chapter that presents the findings from each country. A comparative, overview analysis is followed by recommendations on policy and programming.

## A note on methodology

In each of the five countries, ActionAid country teams and local partners identified a target group of women and/or focus area. The countries were provided with a Toolkit from which they selected approaches and tools to capture women's experiences of safety. Country teams were encouraged to adapt tools in ways that were culturally and contextually appropriate.

All countries conducted key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). Most conducted a safety audit walk, in which women walk through public spaces to identify the physical or social characteristics that make these spaces feel safe or unsafe. Mapping exercises were also conducted, and proved to be among the most effective, empowering, and popular tools for urban women participants. All the countries privileged gathering women's experiences but also collected data from duty bearers, allies, and perpetrators, whom women identified as directly or indirectly responsible for influencing decisions affecting women's safety.

### Main phases of pilot work

1. Countries select target groups and focus areas
2. Rapid situation analysis in each country
3. Development of safety audit Toolkit using findings from the rapid situation analyses
4. Data collection featuring a safety audit that included safety walks, mapping exercises, interviews, etc.
5. Data analysis and write-up of country level findings
6. Report and reflection on countries' pilot experiences to inform next steps

After initial analysis by the research teams at the country level the findings were further developed through interactions between ActionAid staff and the consultant who prepared this report.

Country teams were advised to obtain consent from participants, including for the use of tape recording and photographs. The teams were also advised to take steps to minimise unintended risks or harm in their research.

The methodology is described in greater detail in the annex, which includes further information on approaches and tools, key examples of country team adaptations, and a discussion of ethics and "do no harm" approaches as well as limitations. Given the diversity of approaches used, those who wish to undertake similar studies must not assume findings or the use of tools can be generalised to other cities, countries, or groups of women.

**“No one can find what will work for our cities by looking at ... suburban garden cities, manipulating scale models, or inventing dream cities. You've got to get out and walk.”**

- Jane Jacobs, 1958.

## COUNTRY FINDINGS

The table below identifies the target areas or groups of women and domains of focus for each of the five countries.

**Table 1: Target areas and domains of focus for the five countries**

	Brazil	Cambodia	Ethiopia	Liberia	Nepal
Domain 1	Women's safety broadly conceived – sought to include all domains from home to and from, and within public spaces in three cities	Traversing from boarding rooms to bathrooms and factories for work	Travelling from Addis to rural areas to source products to sell	On public transport to and from university campuses	Using public transport to get to work, place of study or home
Domain 2		In the factories	In the market-place	On campuses	Waiting to use public transport
Domain 3		In rental rooms	In the home/ community which affect women's ability to conduct business	In boarding rooms	

The Brazil case allowed for comparison across three cities of different sizes, focusing on women in the poorest and most insecure neighbourhoods within each city. Nepal sought to capture women's experiences in public transport across many parts of the city, including what happens when women wait for transport. Nepal was the only country that chose to focus on a specific form of violence, in this case *harassment*, as the most common form of violence women experience on public transport.

Liberia targeted female university students (and thus younger women), and explored their experiences across three university settings. Liberia involved men in the research to a greater extent than the other countries, conducting several mixed-sex focus groups on violence that allowed for dialogue where none had previously existed. Cambodia, in analysing women garment factory workers, surveyed the areas surrounding factories, including women's movement between factories, rental rooms and toilets. This case study served to highlight the situation of women as rural migrants to poor urban areas.

Cambodia, Ethiopia and Liberia included in their safety audits a "private" (non-public) space: women's homes. In the case of Liberia and Cambodia, these homes included shared boarding/ rental rooms. These case studies highlighted that poor women tend to live in shared spaces, blurring boundaries between what is a public and private space. In Liberia and Cambodia, sexual violence, including rape, emerged as a dominant risk to a greater degree than in the other countries. Finally, in targeting women vendors, Ethiopia, like Cambodia, took as a focus a particular type of women's employment – and the multiple risks women face in the areas in which they carry out their work in urban spaces.



## Brazil Women in three cities of different sizes

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### Background

The anticipation of the World Cup and the Olympics in 2014 and 2016 respectively resulted in major new urban initiatives in Brazil, including some that aim to address long-standing urban violence.<sup>1</sup> Of concern is the impact these initiatives might have on the lives of the poorest city inhabitants through forced evictions, sharp rises in housing prices, and new forms of violence and protection.

Brazil's population is overwhelmingly urban. The country has experienced rapid economic growth (to a far greater extent than other countries featured in this report), yet stark socioeconomic, racial, and gender inequalities exist within and between urban communities. Growth and urban interventions have the potential to improve security for all, or bring about greater exclusion if changes do not explicitly address the situation of the poorest Brazilian women, men, girls and boys.

This pilot study took place in three cities in Pernambuco, historically one of Brazil's poorest and most violent states. Throughout the 2000s, levels of many forms of violence have risen in Pernambuco. Trafficking of drugs and arms has continued, and there is a relative absence of prevention and protection policies (Amnesty International, 2008). The capital, Recife, has one of the highest murder rates per capita in the country (Souza and Lima, 2007; Nóbrega, 2008).

The vast majority of people killed in Pernambuco are men, but more women are killed than in any other state in Brazil, with about 300 murders of

women reported annually. According to the feminist non-governmental organisation (NGO) SOS Corpo, from 2002 to 2004, 55% of these murders occurred in public places. More generally, the levels of urban and gender-based violence are higher in Pernambuco than in neighbouring states in the northeastern region of Brazil. Further, between 2005 and 2008, the number of reported acts of aggression against women increased (SOS Corpo, 2008). The *Fórum das Mulheres de Pernambuco* has held monthly vigils to bring attention to the growing numbers of women being killed.

In the northeast region where Pernambuco is located, both women and men reported feeling more insecure than in any other region in the country. In a survey conducted in Pernambuco, 78% added that they thought sexual violence was increasing (IPEA, 2010; Nóbrega, 2008). More generally, women were more likely to feel insecure than men, whether at home or in public spaces.

Brazil has no specific policies or laws dedicated to protecting women in public, urban spaces. Legally, cases are judged according to the penal code, without regard to gender. The Maria da Penha Law (2006) represents a significant advance in respect of domestic violence, but far less is understood about women's insecurity in public and urban spaces. There is also a deficit in terms of services for women victims of urban violence. UNIFEM (now part of UN Women) has, however, supported work on this issue in Pernambuco. In 2007, plans were drawn up to combat violence against women, and Pact for Life and Women's Peace Programmes were established in Pernambuco.

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1. Major initiatives include the urban "Pacifying Police Units" (UPP by its Portuguese acronym), which seeks to remove drug trafficking leaders and install specially trained pacifying police units in urban informal settlements. The accompanying UPP "social" initiative aims to improve infrastructure and ongoing safety beyond the initial pacification. The Plan for Acceleration of Cities is a federal government project that operates in all states. The major urban construction project that women discussed in this research was the revitalisation of the port of Suape in Cabo de Santo Agostinho. An influx of primarily male migrants from poor rural areas have been contracted for the construction, and women reported incidents in which the migrant workers harassed them in public urban spaces.

This research involved a survey of three cities of different sizes in the state of Pernambuco: Mirandiba with 14,308 inhabitants; Cabo de Santo Agostinho (referred to as Cabo in the remainder of this chapter), with 185,025 inhabitants; and Recife, with a population over 1.5 million. Unlike the other countries featured in this report, the Brazil research did not focus only on the national capital. As a city, Mirandiba is extremely poor, with 76% of its inhabitants living below the poverty line, and almost 57% considered to be living in absolute poverty. Cabo is a medium-sized city and located on the coast. In the capital Recife, the income distribution is highly unequal in that 10% of the wealthiest inhabitants account for 55% of all income (IBGE 2010 Census).

The partner organisations in Brazil included feminist organisations (*Casa da Mulher do Nordeste* in Recife and *Centro das Mulheres do Cabo*) and women's rights groups and other community organisations (*ETAPAS in Recife and Conviver/*

*Fórum de Mulheres de Mirandiba*). The organisations facilitated participation of diverse women from these communities. Most of the participants were between 30 to 50 years of age, but some much younger (a few below 18), and a few were older women. Their households were low to lower-middle income. The northeast of Brazil's population is predominately of African, mixed Afro-Brazilian and indigenous mixed origins, which was reflected in the racial and ethnic diversity among women participants in each of the communities.

## Findings

The ActionAid Brazil team began by asking women participants in the four communities, "What should a city have, in order to be safe for women?" The responses are reflected in table 2.



**Table 2: What should a city have, in order to be considered safe for women?**

Community 1 (Cabo):	Community 2 (Recife):	Community 3 (Recife):	Community 4 (Mirandiba):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not being afraid to leave home</li> <li>• Freedom to come and go, without fear of being mugged, or morally or physically assaulted</li> <li>• Critical points of concern to women are forwarded to public authorities</li> <li>• Mutual responsibility</li> <li>• City without violence</li> <li>• Social inclusion: women able to claim their rights</li> <li>• Freedom to leave home, wearing whatever one wants to wear</li> <li>• Right to date and show affection in public plazas</li> <li>• Right to go to parties</li> <li>• Right to practice physical activities unaccompanied</li> <li>• [Responses to the] arrival of migrant men due to the Suape port construction, with a rise in sex work and sexual harassment/ exploitation in public spaces.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on violence against women</li> <li>• Women do not suffer from more violence than men</li> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Places in which to walk peacefully</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Young, black and poor women do not have less security</li> <li>• Freedom to work, to come and go</li> <li>• Equality: women can do the same things that men can do</li> <li>• Life without prejudice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Building spaces that work for women</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Unity because without it no one gets anywhere, that is how one fights for one's rights</li> <li>• Equality</li> <li>• Partnership to take the fight forward</li> <li>• Transport so that women are able to participate in meetings/ work</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Government commitment</li> <li>• Accessible and flexible</li> <li>• Participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Freedom to come and go</li> <li>• A city without violence</li> <li>• Public lighting</li> <li>• Control of the use of drugs</li> <li>• Better forms of transportation, reduced street traffic</li> <li>• More (well-trained) police</li> </ul>

Throughout the research, women highlighted that they feel unsafe in urban spaces. In general, while men are afraid of being killed or robbed in the streets, women have similar fears but also fear rape, sometimes more than death.

Through mapping exercises and other tools, women identified a variety of safety issues beyond sexual violence. The most commonly cited problems

across the three cities were: drugs/trafficking, and violence and fear of violence associated with it; lack of reliable policing; rape, or fear of rape; poor infrastructure including poor lighting, street maintenance, and transport; robbery; and inadequate access to government services. These and several related themes emerged from FGD, the safety walk and other activities with women, and through interviews with key stakeholders.

**Violence against women in public urban spaces has received limited attention.** While there has not been a complete lack of recognition that women suffer violence in urban spaces/outside the home, the Brazilian women's movement has prioritised domestic violence. As such, more "gains"—at least in terms of legislation—can be seen in responses to domestic violence. Domestic violence was also raised repeatedly in discussions with women and in the public sector interviews conducted for this research. Women often recounted stories of someone they knew who suffered violence in their home. In one of the Recife communities and in Mirandiba, women highlighted fears of their children becoming involved in violence and trafficking, in addition to insecurity the women themselves encountered.

When asked in the FGD about places in which they felt safe, women always identified the domestic environment, but added that forms of violence that occur on the streets can also enter their homes, for example through burglary. Women said they would reach out to family and friends if something were to happen on the street, rather than rely on the police whom they felt would not respond or would take too long to respond. Both women and public sector representatives from all the communities expressed strong societal expectations that women should not go out alone, especially at night.

**Women highlighted the prevalence of drugs and trafficking, and how it generates fear of violence.<sup>2</sup>** Women in all four communities underscored trafficking as a primary concern, and described ways in which they believed it increases violence and insecurity, especially for women and youth. For instance, women said that drugs contribute to more violence (including sexual violence and theft), and entice young men into roles that provide money and status. As one woman said, "they're boys, not men. They're 16 and 17-year-old boys, armed, with drugs." In contrast to the women

participants' frequent discussion of drugs and trafficking, these issues were almost never raised as important aspects of women's urban safety by public sector representatives interviewed.

In one Recife community in particular, women described a generalised climate of fear around trafficking. Women in this community were reluctant to discuss issues of trafficking, spoke in softer voices (some avoided talking at all) during the safety walk, closed the door during the mapping exercise, and questioned how the research information would be used and whether their names would be identified. During a mapping exercise in this Recife community, a woman noted that "there are more problems, but we're afraid to talk about them." In the other Recife communities and in the other two cities, women also had fears associated with trafficking, but were less reluctant to talk about them. In these other areas women discussed avoiding specific points where drug trading took place rather than describing a wider-ranging insecurity.

A FGD in Cabo highlighted both the protection and the gendered intimidation and threats related to trafficking:

*A woman I know felt safe in this community because of the [gangsters/traffickers] who took care of the community, who watched over everything that happened. But that only gives you security when they don't have their eye on you [i.e., want to date you]...the man who watched over the entrance to the community one day decided He wanted to go out with her, and he told her to go get dressed up to go out the next day at 7 p.m. If she didn't go out with him, he was going to kill her children and husband. She didn't have a choice.*

A second woman from Cabo painted a similar picture of a combination of protection and threat:

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2. Numerous studies have examined the well-known intersections of drugs, trafficking and crime in Brazil. It is worth noting that findings from this research are consistent with an earlier study conducted by Amnesty International in 2008 in six Brazilian states, including Pernambuco. This Amnesty International study focused on women living in communities dominated by gangs and/or drug trafficking. The findings have important implications for the control of women's spaces and mobility. Absence of the State in poor communities allows drug traffickers to maintain power, for example by establishing curfews, administering the transport system and imposing punishments (i.e., acting as an informal form of policing). Residents are affected by territorial disputes between opposing gangs, by police violence and stigma. The Amnesty report also described how women sometimes get involved in criminal activities in order to take upon or continue activities developed by their husbands, sons and brothers.

*I used to work at a place, and I'd get home late because there were always those people hanging around the bar near the bus stop. [At that bar], were also the guys who watched over the streets [referring to traffickers]. When I'd pass by there, they'd say, 'you can go ahead, go ahead.' I mean...it's [a kind of] security, but it's a false security. Because you have two choices with them: do what they want, or die. And they'll kill you and all your family.*

One woman from Cabo felt that there was previously more protection within communities from local traffickers, but this protection was now gone:

*Today, [the traffickers] don't have any more respect for people in the neighbourhood, for older people...everything's about drug money. If someone rapes someone or robs their house, who is in their [the traffickers'] own group, it stays within there. Even the police are afraid of them.*

An elderly woman noted how her fear of walking from her home to the more central part of Mirandiba had increased over time:

*Before I used to walk to come to mass and pray with a girl I used to take care of, but now I am afraid of walking the route from my house to the city...The route is very isolated and dark and people are bad today. Only God knows what could happen.*

In Mirandiba, in addition to regular buying and selling of drugs that took place in all the cities, there was wholesale selling of marijuana due to the presence of the largest marijuana production sites nearby. Cocaine and crack are also central to trafficking in these cities, and affect the levels of insecurity women face. Women in Cabo associated alcohol with greater incidences of harassment in public spaces and violence in domestic spheres. Alcohol was also mentioned as a problem in Mirandiba, where there are the most limited options for leisure. In addition to concerns about traffickers and dealers, women described fears around drug users. They said that men would be more likely to rob or rape them when in a drugged state.

**Women generally mistrusted police.** As suggested above, in all the communities, and particularly one of the Recife communities, traffickers exercised considerable local control. In contrast, police rarely enter the poorest and most insecure communities. Throughout this research, women reported that police did not patrol enough or stay for long enough. Each city has fewer police stations than national requirements based on city populations: Mirandiba and Cabo each have one police station, and Recife has 18. (Cabo and Recife each have at least one DEAM, *delegacias da mulher*, or police stations dedicated exclusively to crimes against women). Generally, women described police as unprepared to respond adequately to violence against women, in part due to the lack of seriousness given to the issue and *machista* attitudes in society.

Apart from their relative absence and failure to respond, women emphasised that they did not feel that reporting to the police was an option for them. They explained that in their cities, as in many cities across Brazil, police often have relationships with traffickers. Therefore, reporting to the police can result in no response or a severely delayed one, as well as repercussions from traffickers. One woman from a Recife community felt that the problem with police did not have to do with their relative absence, but with corruption:

*Lack of policing isn't the problem, police here is constant...they pass every 20 minutes. On the street where I live, there are always police. The issue is corruption: the police come in, but everything's corrupt.*

Policing featured as one of the main concerns of women in several data collection exercises, such as the mapping, and ranking of problems. During the behaviour change exercise, women suggested several solutions for policing. These included greater police presence by having male and female officers who are well-trained in responding to women's safety and violence issues, patrol regularly, are accountable and trustworthy, and who bring perpetrators to justice; dissemination of information about services available to women victims of violence so that women and police know where women can go; and involving women's organisa-

tions in improving policing. Given the reluctance of women to report incidents and frequent withdrawals of file reports, women emphasised needing support from society and law enforcement in order to feel confident in reporting.

Police held two different positions about their limited ability to respond to women's urban safety. The first was that the problem lies in society, which is not committed to eliminating violence against women, or in women themselves, who do not report or who withdraw complaints. Second, some police said that a lack of resources (no training and insufficient officers and cars) limits their ability to respond adequately to women's violence and safety issues. One police chief in particular recognised the lack of training. However, other police personnel defended their reliability and capacity in this regard, and added that they treated women victims of violence with respect. When the research team asked a more senior police officer if there were challenges with capacity, he said (referring to police who complain there are no resources or capacity): "that kind of talk comes from whoever does not want to do their job, and gives excuses."

### **Motherhood and being accompanied by a man influenced women's safety experiences.**

Women in Mirandiba emphasised their concerns as mothers. They worried about the insecure environment in which their daughters were growing up, in which they increasingly had to travel in groups with other friends if not accompanied by an adult (usually the mother). They also expressed particular concern about their sons becoming involved in trafficking or drugs, and the lack of opportunities in education and employment in their poor communities. Furthermore, they said that adult women were most vulnerable in public, urban spaces when they were alone. They felt safer when with a group of other women, or when accompanied by a man — which was not always possible given daily activities they had to fulfil by travelling alone.

*I always try to leave the university with a group of friends because I study at night, and it's very dangerous and isolated in that area after a certain hour.*

**– Female university student from Cabo**

**Women living in the poorest communities in all three cities faced insecurities, but the smallest city posed unique risks, including lack of access to services.** Mirandiba was the smallest and by far the poorest of the three cities with the least access to services, including health-care services. While Recife had more than one women's police delegation (DEAM), Mirandiba had none, and Cabo had some services to attend to women such as a referral centre for women victims of violence. In addition, services such as domestic violence shelters, sexual and reproductive health and other health services, and especially services related to rape – did not exist or were extremely scarce in Mirandiba. As a result, it was not uncommon that a woman living in Mirandiba would have to travel at least one hour to the nearest larger city of Salgueiro for basic services, and up to six hours (almost 500 km) by bus to Recife in order to receive a fuller range of services or specialists. Women living in the other two cities, which had more services, did not always have access to those services due to transport costs or services being located far from their communities.

For poor women in Mirandiba distance results in higher transport costs, risks along the way, and navigating larger unfamiliar cities. Given the lack of services in Mirandiba, especially for domestic violence, some women sought redress from the city's Guardianship Council, which is meant to focus on cases of children and youth rather than cases of violence against women.

**Women commonly pointed to weak forms of infrastructure in the three cities.** Infrastructure was found to be inadequate in all four of the poor communities. In the ranking and mapping activities, several of the most commonly cited problems were infrastructure-related: poor lighting, pavement, trash collection, street cleaning, and transportation. Lack of street lighting was the infrastructure problem women most often raised, particularly during safety walks:

*(...) look at this place, there is no lighting. Everything happens over here, people come here to use drugs, there were cases of rape, bodies of dead people were thrown here. I don't like to ever come here.*

**– Woman during the safety walk in Cabo**

Inadequate transportation was indicated as a problem affecting poor women and men. In the poorest communities, there are restricted bus routes and schedules, and poor quality of buses and other forms of transport. Other reported problems included dangerously fast driving, and poor treatment from bus personnel. Irregular pavements, lack of sidewalk space, and narrow roads were also discussed as posing safety risks. Mothers pushing strollers or walking with several children, and elderly women and men especially feel the effects of such infrastructure deficits.

**Poor infrastructure and constant fear limited women's mobility.** In Cabo, women described incidents of harassment from male migrant workers which caused them to change their patterns of walking on the street. Across the cities, women said that they knew at which points traffickers and drug buyers and sellers positioned themselves, and avoided walking by those spaces.

More than in any other country, Brazilian women highlighted the effect of limited mobility on their

ability to enjoy leisure in their cities. For instance, they noted that they could not enjoy walking around plazas and leisure spaces, even with their families, because those spaces were often populated by drug users and dealers. As one woman said,

*Many times I don't go to a party because it takes too long for the bus to come. When I am accompanied by a man I wait, but I am afraid to wait alone. Aside from the fear of waiting at the bus stop, I am afraid of being robbed and arriving too late to the place where I am going; the idea of having to walk alone worries me a lot. But I know this is different for men.*

**– Young woman in the community of Passarinho, Recife**

When asked, “What changed in your life due to violence or fear of violence?” several women spoke about leisure time, particularly because leisure time often means travelling in urban spaces at night and traversing through areas dominated by traffickers.

Women participate in a FGD in Recife, Brazil.  
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Fear is central to their responses given by women from across all three cities in a behaviour change exercise:

*We have no more freedom to go out at night; the streets are too dark*

**- Woman in Ibura, Recife**

*I go to the bar afraid; the violence has no time or day*

**- Woman in Mirandiba**

*We stop having leisure time, we stop going out at night and we stop denouncing things out of fear*

**- Anon.**

*I can't go out to have fun, dance and have a beer anymore because I'm afraid of the violence out in the street and also of getting back to the community late; we [also] don't have protection in our homes*

**- Woman in Passarinho, Recife**

**Harassment and violence are normalised, and women are blamed.** Because they are so normalised, women did not always consider staring or sexual remarks, even if unwanted, to constitute harassment. Raising the issue of harassment was thus a challenge. Public sector interviewees recognised harassment as a serious problem, but attributed a large part of the problem to women's tendency not to report it. This reflects a pattern of blaming women and placing responsibility on them for the insecurities they face. The exception was the case of a police deputy who stated,

*...the worst thing is that the blame goes to the women, as if they were attracting the violence themselves because they wear short skirts or because they walk on the streets alone... This is part of individual freedoms, of the choices one has, and sometimes of the necessities one has because she studies at night.*

**- Police deputy in Pernambuco, Brazil**

When asked about possible measures to combat harassment and sexual violence in public, urban spaces, women and public officials recommended that women avoid leaving their homes after a certain hour, walking alone or walking in certain areas, and wearing certain types of clothing. These recommendations entail measures of prevention, but fundamentally focus on avoidance, in ways that limit women's mobility in the cities in which they live. Questions were also raised about how to reduce harassment and reverse society's tolerance of it, in addition to addressing the most harmful forms of sexual violence that women report and that require more immediate redress.

In addition to harassment, women raised some examples of sexual violence and other forms of violence. For instance, one woman from Cabo described how she was almost raped, but escaped as others heard her shouting and the perpetrator ran off.

**Public sector officials assumed limited responsibility for women's urban safety.** A key finding from interviews with the public sector was that in general, *they do not feel they are the main actors responsible for enforcing measures related to women's safety in public spaces.* Rather, they believe this responsibility lies with the Women's Secretary. On many occasions, the team heard sexist or patriarchal remarks even from people occupying positions responsible for women's rights, again relating to the tendency to blame women:

*The main obstacles [in solving the problem of women's safety] are women themselves. Many of them do not file a complaint of aggression, or when they do, they get home, they get some kisses on the neck from their husbands, and then withdraw the complaint.*

**- Police chief in Pernambuco, Brazil**

Public authorities also tended to blame civil society for being disinterested. There was a common attitude that society must mobilise, organise, and want to change first, if the public sector is to act and develop legislation.



Secretariats such as those for urban planning do not see their role in eliminating violence against women in public spaces. In many cases, when questioned about the issue, public officials' recommendation was to "go ask the Women's Secretariat." As the Municipal Secretary of Urban Planning said, "I deal with the urban as a whole, I do not focus on one group."

In 2007, the government of Pernambuco created the Special Secretariat of Policies for Women. Its mission was to develop and coordinate public policies focused on women, as well as to implement educational campaigns that put gender issues into the state government's activities and promote programmes for public-private cooperation in implementing policies benefiting women. However,

the Secretariat has had limited influence, in part because of restricted resources.

In a discussion about participatory budgeting, a staff member from the Secretary of Women described the challenges in respect of policies that take gender into account or target women. According to her, the problem began with low representation of women and gender-sensitive men in participatory budgeting meetings, and continued through the policy-making process. She said:

*...there is no mechanism to transfer resources from the federal union to states and municipalities, and from states to municipalities in a way that guarantees that [policies dedicated towards women] survive.*

## Conclusion

In Brazil, the presence of trafficking generated fear and insecurity among women in the communities of focus. Women's experiences of trafficking encompassed a range of insecurities, including severely restricted movement and gendered forms of intimidation and control, mistrust of police, and mothers' worries about the urban environment in which their children were growing up. All inhabitants of the most poor and marginalised communities in these cities suffer from inadequate infrastructure and services, but this research showed some of the particular effects women face, such as the challenge of reaching the necessary services, especially in the smallest city, when women are victims of violence.

Brazilian women participants posed several solutions to urban insecurity, including training police to address violence against women; strengthening infrastructure (especially lighting and accessible transport) and services such as healthcare services; awareness-raising given strong societal norms that permit violence; and promoting opportunities and education for youth, particularly as alternatives for male youth involved in trafficking and violence.

Partner women's organisations that were inspired to do women's urban safety work as a result of this pilot have developed plans for several municipal and state level dialogue events, in which women from the communities will voice their concerns to public officials. Future steps in Brazil entail ensuring women's experiences and priorities remain central to the response and emphasising the responsibility of the public sector and society with regard to urban safety.

## **Cambodia** Women garment factory workers

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### **Background**

Nearly 300,000 workers are employed in 300 export garment factories in Cambodia, making them one of the principal contributors to the Cambodian economy. The country's factories are situated predominantly in urban areas (Poutiainen, 2011). Most are located in the outskirts of the capital, Phnom Penh. One of the highest concentrations of factories is in Dangkor, the area that served as the focus of this research.

Women constitute 80-90% of the workers, most of whom have migrated from rural provinces to work in the capital city, Phnom Penh (Womyn's Agenda for Change, 2004). The vast majority originate in poor, rural families with low rice production. Rural poverty pushes women to migrate to Phnom Penh and other urban areas to earn money to support themselves and their families. Garment workers' remittances support 1.7 million Cambodians (Poutiainen, 2011). Once in cities, low literacy rates contribute to fewer employment options, and women workers consequently remain highly dependent on employment within the garment sector. They earn low wages and have short-term and fixed duration contracts, resulting in high levels of job insecurity.

Women garment workers live and work in unsafe conditions. Cambodian factories made headlines with news of over 2,300 workers fainting in the first half of the year 2011 alone, due to poor circulation and overtime hours (Nimol and Maclsaac, 2011; Keo, 2011). Workers at several factories went on strike, but conditions have largely remained the same. An International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Better Factories Cambodia report released in August 2011 noted continuing problems in the areas of overtime and safety and health (Poutiainen, 2011). National labour laws and ILO prescribe rights relating to a minimum wage, voluntary overtime and other benefits. However, the implementation of these provisions is weak, inconsistent and, in particular, overlooks the safety and security conditions of women garment workers.

ActionAid Cambodia initiated research on the safety of women garment workers at three factories within Dangkor. The safety audit—featuring a safety walk and mapping with women workers and interviews and focus groups with several stakeholders—was conducted in partnership with a local labour rights NGO, the Worker's Information Centre (WIC).

The research conducted by ActionAid Cambodia and its partners encompassed a broader area than is usually included in research on the situation of garment workers, moving beyond the factory floor to include the risks workers face in the vicinity of these factories. The garment workers in this research, but also more broadly in Cambodia, are predominately young (90% are aged between 18 to 25 years), single, and migrant women from rural agricultural provinces.

### **Findings**

The research conducted in Cambodia examined a particularly gender-imbalanced urban space: women make up over 80% of garment factory workers, yet the vast majority of factory owners and individuals responsible for factors affecting women's safety are men. Perpetrators were identified as unknown men on the street, gangsters, male co-workers, construction workers and motor taxi drivers. Duty bearers included local authorities such as the commune council, village chiefs, police, and factory owners; trade unions and the Garment Association Manufacturing in Cambodia; and various labour entities and workers' rights organisations.

Findings included weaknesses in governance such as a lack of transparency and accountability and weaknesses in policing; poor housing conditions; issues within the factories such as poor hygiene in bathrooms and hazardous work environments; lack of safety in women's routes between the bath-

rooms, factories, and rental rooms, including poor lighting; violence, including rape, verbal abuse, and sexual harassment; robbery and theft by gangs; poor physical infrastructure such as poor roads; and poor health, including sexual and reproductive health problems for which there were inadequate services. Three factors heightened women workers' vulnerability to risks: they are poor, illiterate and from rural areas and thus at risk of exploitation by others because they have limited access to information and forms of protection.

**Women faced violence and insecurities around the factory areas.** Poor layout, design and infrastructure jeopardise women's mobility around the factory area. Rape is a major safety issue along the roads entering and leaving the factories, and on the pathways and roads immediately surrounding them and the boarding rooms. Women reported sexual harassment as one of the most common forms of insecurity reported from "gangsters", and from managers, co-workers and men along the roads. The term "gangster" was used to refer to men who hang around the factories, many of whom are addicted to drugs or consume alcohol, but are not necessarily involved in organised crime. Some are male garment workers or construction workers.

Women garment workers who work night shifts face heightened risks. Electricity is shut off at 9 p.m., so there is no lighting, making it easy for gangsters and other perpetrators to rape, harass, or rob workers, especially when they work overtime. Male motor taxi drivers and construction workers in a FGD confirmed that women were most at risk at night. The streets and pathways are isolated, meaning there are no witnesses to help in dangerous situations. One woman noted: "When I have to work overtime at night, I often feel afraid of robbery, rape, and harassment because it's very dark on the way back home." Labour unions and NGOs working on factory issues also highlighted the insecurity issues outside the factories: streets are narrow and crowded during the day and poorly lit at night; night shift workers face greater risks of harassment and rape from gangs; and response

from local authorities and police is slow, in part due to a lack of police patrolling.

As one young woman garment worker said, "When we [are] leaving factory, there are crowd[s] and gangsters often come to touch women's bottoms and they laugh and feel it's normal." There have also been instances where workers were sexually assaulted by gangsters during daylight hours.



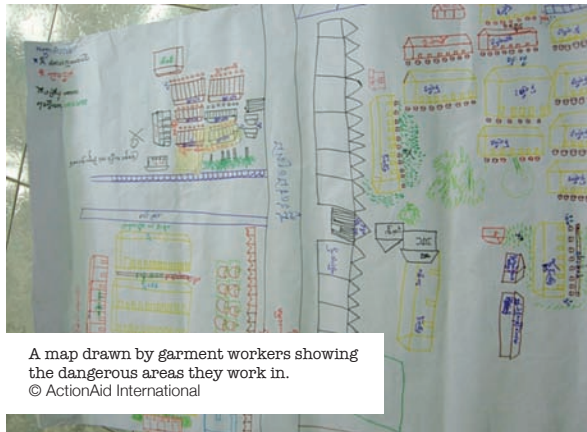
Cambodian women garment factory workers map their rental rooms and the surrounding areas of factories  
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Women reported verbal harassment as one of the most common form of harassment. This included discriminatory and insulting language, and shouting at women. Women also referred to the effects of negative perceptions about them of their elders and family members in their rural places of origin. For example, they shared that older family members or neighbours looked down upon women who migrated to the city to work in factories. The women were accused of being easily convinced into engaging in prostitution or sleeping with men. Two women workers described the negative attitudes as follows:

*Old people often look down to women garment worker and think that the workers have to sell sex to have money to send to their families.*

*I feel very hurt when I head men said women garment workers are not good women. My former fiancé said that I liked to 'go for a walk at night,' but I was working overtime.*

The distance from rental rooms to toilets is between 30 to 100 metres and there are no lights along the way to toilets. Women were therefore afraid to use the toilets at night because they feared rape and other forms of violence. As one woman said, "The lights are always turned off at 9:00 pm and I am afraid to go to toilet at night time because there are some men who are not good hanging around near the toilet." Moreover, since most bathrooms are located outside of rental rooms, women reported that they do not have privacy or safety to bathe at night.



A map drawn by garment workers showing the dangerous areas they work in.  
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Garment workers usually spend 5 to 10 minutes to reach their rental area. There are no lights on the route from the factory to the rental areas and the roads and pathways are very quiet and isolated. The main lights are located in front of the factories, with smaller lights near each rental space. During the safety walk, women identified specific spaces and distances, highlighting areas that were espe-

cially unsafe, dark, and poorly lit. Pregnant women were described as most affected by the distances to the toilets and bathroom facilities.

**Violence and safety risks persist due to weak law enforcement.** Local authorities including police and commune chiefs recognised the security problems in the Dangkor area, particularly the presence of gangs, pickpocketing, robbery, rape, and harassment. The authorities claimed that they were only able to manage half of the issues in Dangkor. Some areas are not safe because the roads are dark, quiet, and have a gang presence.

The local authorities have reported a decrease in the number of gangs present in the area due to the implementation of a village safety programme. During interviews conducted by the research team, however, police officers at 24-hour post stations recognised a lack of capacity to arrest perpetrators. When interviewed, police reported that they faced difficulties investigating cases of rape, claiming that the women garment workers were in relationships with the accused perpetrators. Similar to the other countries, authorities also demonstrated a tendency to blame women for the violence they faced, such as by claiming women were "raped" by their boyfriends.

Women workers are subject to verbal harassment, such as abusive language and shouting along the road from men, gangsters, managers, and co-workers. During excessive traffic jams, particularly at the end of the workday when streets are crowded, women garment workers face assault, such as unwanted touching.

**Conditions in factories presented multiple safety and health risks to women.** Discussions with unions and NGOs that had access to the inside of factories added to our understanding of conditions in which women worked. The factories are characterised by high temperatures (up to 40 degrees Celsius), strong chemical smells, dust, lack of air, poor quality and insufficient drinking water, and limited entry and exit gates. In some cases, there is only one gate.

The heat and lack of air in factories has led to over 2,000 incidents of fainting in Cambodia in the first half of 2011 alone (Nimol and Maclsaac 2011, Keo 2011). Workers cite fainting and dizziness as the second most common cause of sick leave, while managers cite these as the third most common cause. In addition, some workers complained of accidents of needles breaking in their hands. Workers felt especially unsafe when fires occurred due to a shortage of entry and exit ways.

### **Inadequate services in respect of health risks.**

Reports of rape and sexual violence were met with inadequate counselling and sexual and reproductive health services, including services to prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections. The need for sexual and reproductive health services was underscored by reporting of infections such as candida and trichomoniasis resulting from the unhygienic conditions in toilets and boarding rooms. All women workers in a FGD agreed that after the first year of factory work, they experienced “changes in their bodies,” including problems with menstruation and discharge. Some workers do not menstruate for three to five months. The sexual and reproductive problems were said to be related to sitting for long hours while sewing at the factories, and unsanitary toilet facilities. However, women in Cambodia, as in many countries, are not socialised or encouraged to talk about their reproductive health and sexuality. As a result, openly seeking care for these health concerns as well as sexual violence, are challenges for many women garment workers.

Women workers are generally undernourished, which is problematic given their 10 to 12-hour work days. To save money and time during lunch hours and after work, women workers often buy food from street vendors. Street food, which is often exposed to flies carrying viruses and dust from passing vehicles, and the lack of nutrition, contributes to low energy throughout the day, anaemia, and general poor health. Women are either dehydrated or drink unpurified water, which can cause diarrhoea and typhoid. One report noted that workers in factories with canteens took 10% less sick leave (Poutiainen, 2011).

Women’s access to healthcare is limited by high cost and distance. For example, it takes half an hour or more by motorcycle taxi to reach services. The long hours women work also make it nearly impossible to find the time to seek care as women typically only have free time on Sundays. Low literacy makes it more challenging to navigate health and urban transport systems. As a result of these challenges, women generally rely on a small NGO-run clinic with basic services that is located in the Dangkor area. Spending money on healthcare because of lack of access to more affordable options at public hospitals pushes women into further debt and poverty because of the high interest rates charged on loans. Healthcare staff at the clinic are also only available at limited times and are not equipped to respond to all the types of violence women face, and their sexual and reproductive health needs. In some factories, available medicine is placed in the administrative office to which the workers do not have access.



Women in a boarding room in the Dangkor factory area near Phenom Penh.  
© ActionAid International

**Poor infrastructure results in poor hygiene and flooding.** Unions and NGOs said that the number of clean toilets within the factories was inadequate, and that there was a lack of clean water and soap. Moreover, some toilets lacked lighting and had broken doors, denying women privacy. Women reported long waiting lines. “I don’t want to go to the toilet as I have to spend a lot of time wait[ing for] other people. Sometimes I have to wait [up to] half an hour”, stated one woman worker. In the rental rooms, there are frequent sewage blockages. During the FGD, women reported that there are many people using the toilets and that they are not cleaned. A house owner implied that women workers were at fault, commenting that the women did not clean the toilets properly. Water drainage and sewage are also poor, which is particularly problematic for women who live in rooms near toilets that are not maintained. During the rainy season, sewage pipelines became blocked, and can flood rental rooms for periods of three to four hours. In some areas, flooding during the rainy season has lasted from 8 to 12 hours, requiring water to be pumped out.

**Women experience limited security in their rental areas and have little space and time to themselves.** The size of each rental room (as shown in the photograph) is approximately 2 by 2 metres and generally two or three workers share a single room. At times, there are up to five women per bed. Rooms are built of wood or concrete, and roofs made of zinc cause inside temperatures to rise. The lack of air, extreme heat, and overcrowding cause exhaustion and perpetuate unsanitary living conditions. House owners provide free electricity in the room from 6-9 pm only, and only one lamp is allowed. Property owners reported problems such as beating and robbery in the boarding rooms. Women renters reported that the routes to and from the rooms were particularly unsafe.

Increasing the insecurity is the fact that property owners set prices and have the authority to ask renters to leave immediately. Rental prices generally represent about a third of women’s wages. Another third is usually sent back in the form of remittances to families, often leaving less than a third for food and other expenses.

## Conclusion

Cambodian women garment workers face violence and insecurity in nearly every sphere of their lives. Women garment workers are young, poor, largely illiterate migrants who send remittances to their families in rural areas. They have limited power to change their realities in the face of the overwhelmingly male perpetrators and authorities who contribute to their insecurity.

Inadequate policing, overcrowding in rental areas, poor hygiene and sanitation, poor lighting and distance between rental rooms and toilets increase women’s risks of violence, including rape. Key responsible entities include police and factory owners at the local level, national ministries of labour and gender, and unions. At the international level, factories must be held accountable to Cambodian and international labour standards. Accessible and affordable health services are an urgent priority, particularly in relation to sexual violence, sexual and reproductive health, malnutrition and fainting. Many improvements in infrastructure are needed, particularly in terms of improved living conditions, lighting, accessible and clean toilet facilities and policing.

## Ethiopia Women informal vendors

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### Background

The city of Addis Ababa is sprawled, and administratively organised into sub-cities, districts (*woreda*), and *kebeles* (the smallest administrative unit). Addis is situated in highlands with rugged topography that affects movement. The capital, Addis Ababa, was founded 130 years ago as a royal protection town. The city was not originally built with a planned layout, in part due to colonisers not planning the city from which they extracted resources as they did in many other countries. Through time, master plans were instituted and revised many times, affecting road connections and the layout today, including locations of housing, services, and employment opportunities for the poorest residents.

In Ethiopia, a minority of the population currently lives in urban areas (17%). With a 3.76% annual urban growth rate, the percentage of the population living in urban areas is expected to reach 37.5% by 2050 (UN Population Division 2009). Rapid urbanisation is taking place across Ethiopia, with particular increases in rural-urban migration to Addis. Both men and women migrate, often frustrated with challenges to sustaining agricultural livelihoods. Ethiopia has long depended on its agricultural sector, making it highly vulnerable to external shocks such as climate change, drought, and price fluctuations. Most men seek jobs in construction given opportunities related to increasing development in Addis. Women migrate for labour opportunities as well and also to avoid early marriage practices in rural areas.

The country is characterised by a long history of poor macroeconomic policies, economic mismanagement, protracted war, internal instability and recurrent drought. It is among the least developed

countries in the world. The socialist regime that ruled the country from 1974 to 1991 introduced a centrally planned economic system that, among many regulations, included extensive administrative and legal requirements to obtain trading licenses. This discouraged citizen participation in the formal sector, and increased the appeal of informal labour, which by nature entails fewer regulations.

In an effort to respond to economic crises in Addis, residents created various self-support schemes to survive, which particularly involved trade in the informal labour sector.<sup>1</sup> The urban informal sector has gained importance for two main reasons. Opportunities within the formal sector are limited, especially in urban areas due to population growth. Higher education and capital are also often required in the formal sector. Moreover, most Addis residents earn an income that barely enables them to survive. The high cost of living has increasingly made residents resort to informal sources in order to supplement their income.

In Ethiopia today, close to one million people (60% of whom are women) work as operators or employees within Ethiopia's informal sector. In Addis, 128,598 people of a population of nearly 3.5 million are active in the informal sector. Similar to the national proportion, more than half of informal sector workers are women (over 64,000) (Ethiopian Central Statistics Authority, 2004). Informal women workers in Addis face numerous obstacles. Though there are a significant number of women informally employed in Addis, there is a scarcity of information regarding the types of insecurities they face. Likewise, there is a lack of information to indicate how these dangers may restrict them economically or prevent them from exercising their rights to the city.

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1. The informal sector is defined as 'household type establishments/ activities which are mainly engaged in market production; not registered companies or cooperatives; have not full written book of accounts; which have less than 10 persons engaged in the activity and have no license.'<sup>1</sup> (Ethiopian Central Statistics Authority 2004)

Since the regime change in 1991, the Ethiopian government has issued a number of laws that both promote the rights of informal sector workers, and the rights of women. Policies and institutional developments were adopted to provide minimum protections and also to stimulate initiatives to support the informal sector. It was understood that the informal sector avails better employment opportunities than the formal sector could absorb. Current policies and programs, however, do not address the safety risks women informal vendors face. While some NGOs work more generally on women's empowerment, ending violence against women, or harmful traditional practices, very few have programs addressing women's safety and security in urban spaces, and none address the safety issues specific to women informal vendors.

Women in Ethiopia have been historically marginalised from social, economic, and political spheres of life. On-going dominant social and cultural norms contribute to further subjugating women to inferior positions within society. There is a great discrepancy between sexes in terms of literacy rates. Nationally, among the population above 15 years of age, 42% of men in Ethiopia are literate, while 18% of women are literate (UN Statistics Division, 2005). In Addis Ababa (including the capital and surrounding areas), literacy rates increase, and the discrepancy between sexes is lower. Women's illiteracy contributes to their disadvantage in formal labour market opportunities, making them rely on informal income generating activities. Their continuous movement between public and private spheres can provoke both insecurity and vulnerability, affecting their engagement in education, health, and economic activities.

Ethiopian women experience varied forms of violence both in and around their centres of employment, and this research found that women often felt they had to choose between prioritising their economic assets with survival and safety. With some government and women's right movement efforts to challenge the patriarchal system, there have been some attitudinal changes, but violence against women persists and is believed to be

increasing. Media have recently reported extreme forms of violence against women in Addis Ababa. Levels of violence are also thought to be higher among women who are economically empowered and in leadership roles. One hypothesis for the increase in violence among women is that women are seen as a threat to the patriarchal hegemony when they assume better social, political, and economic positions in Ethiopia. The national constitution, the family law and criminal codes all contain articles that protect women from various forms of violence. Women's vulnerability and risks in urban spaces are not sufficiently addressed, and women informal workers face specific forms of violence and insecurities that require attention.

ActionAid Ethiopia thus sought to explore safety and security concerns among women engaged in informal small-scale vending in urban areas in and around Addis, examining who is affected and why, where, when, and how these manifestations of violence or insecurity might occur. The work was conducted in partnership with the Organization for Women in Self Employment (WISE), which beyond working with women informal vendors aspires more broadly to empower poor, self-employed women and girls in achieving self-reliance and improving the quality of their lives. The team conducted FGD and a survey with women vendors in addition to interviews with representatives of government and NGOs, members of women cooperatives and cooperative unions.

## Findings

A survey conducted with 51 informal vendors offered a profile of the women. Over 70% of the women are aged from 30 to 49 years, and 25% are above 50. They sell a variety of goods and services at the marketplace including clothes, cereals, household utensils, pottery products, handicrafts, spices and food. Some vendors also provide catering services. Thirty-one percent of the women completed basic education, 33% primary education, 31% secondary education, and 5% are college educated. Over 80% of the women have been vending for more than five years in the marketplace



and all but one have market stalls. More than 15% of the women reported to have had their safety threatened over five times in the past year: 43% reported that threats/incidents mostly happen at night, while 15% reported a higher incidence during the day (the remainder believed safety threats occur both during the day and at night).



A woman engaged in small-scale informal vending in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
© ActionAid International

Several major findings emerged from a ranking exercise conducted with women informal vendors: lack of a secure and safe marketplace; robbery, theft and homicide in urban spaces; housing problems; transportation; and theft in the marketplace. These and related findings are presented according to three domains identified as posing the greatest safety risks to Ethiopian women vendors: (1) within the marketplace; (2) when women travel to rural areas to source products to sell; and (3) in the home and community.

## **Safety issues surrounding the marketplace**

**Women reported harassment from some government officials.** Harassment from government

officials extorting bribes from women vendors does not prevail on the scale that was anticipated at the start of the research, but it nonetheless occurs.<sup>2</sup> Experiences vary among vendors, but most do not report such incidents. Others however have reported that officials extorted money or sexual favours when they sought to renew licenses or negotiate taxes.<sup>3</sup> Because of prevailing social and cultural norms, most women (especially women with less education or no employment) are seen as passive, submissive, and easy to manipulate, positioning them as targets for harassment, discrimination, and in this case, extortion. During the FGD, a woman who sells cereals in the marketplace said:

*A friend of ours went to a local government office to complain [about] the taxes imposed against her that did not match her income. The officer told her to come another day. When she went the other day, he did the same thing. He had in mind... that the woman [would] come with some money for him to facilitate the process. Then she went to the ombudsman to complain, and that same guy was the ombudsman of the office. He told her in black and white she has nowhere to go and she better negotiate with him [to] pay part of the money she was requested to pay in taxes to him, and he made the reduction.*

The women are afraid to go to government officials for solutions to their problems, and they feel unable to challenge them due to their positions of power. Women who go alone to the offices are often targets, and it was therefore found to be beneficial for women to go in groups.

2. There is a lack of understanding among government officials about women vendors' activities. For instance, the woreda police confiscated an office in the marketplace that the women's cooperative was using, not realising it was being used by the women. The women vendors are currently negotiating with the woreda administration and the police in order to reclaim their office.

3. During the discussion, women participants mentioned differences in the way they were treated based on what type of cooperative they belonged to: either a cooperative of NGO origin (such as those organised by WISE), or government-organised. They reported that women belonging to NGO-organised cooperatives did not receive the same calibre of services as their government-organised counterparts.

**Women are robbed in the marketplace.** Only 2% of the vendors faced sexual harassment from young men, but there were more cases of young men or women who loiter in the marketplaces verbally assaulting and/or stealing from the women. Incidences of theft by organised groups or individuals are common during the day when the markets are open. During a FGD, a middle-aged woman selling clothes in the market reported:

*I was preparing to go to Merkato (a central marketplace in the city) to buy some clothes for my shop when two boys came into my stall. One of them asked me to show him trousers. I searched for [them] and showed them to him. Then the other one asked me the price. I told him, but he said the price is quite expensive and is cheaper in another marketplace. Then he asked me to show him a shirt hanging on the roof. I brought it down to show him. He looked at it and said he did not like it. Then they left. A moment later when I was searching for my purse to go to the market, I could not find it. I learned that the boys had stolen [it from] me. I looked for them all around but could not find. I realised I lost two thousand birr.*

**In Ethiopia,** this research showed that women vendors are often seen as “easy targets” for robbery, bribes, sexual favours and violence/ harassment by perpetrators. This attitude can be largely attributed to the low social status granted toward women in most of Ethiopian society.

Among the women surveyed, 17% have experienced theft from both men and women. This may be attributed to the earlier explanation of women consistently viewed as easy targets due to social norms that position them as easy to manipulate

and distract. Such incidences take a financial toll on the women, as they lose money and/or products. In some instances, women vendors have stolen from each other. The vendors have a support system by belonging to the same cooperative, and when this happens they attempt to identify the perpetrator, confiscate the stolen goods, and often pass the perpetrators to the police. By doing so, there was a prevailing tendency of women having to “take matters into their own hands,” because they often could not count on protection from local authorities or security.

**Ethiopian women informal vendors are in constant fear of eviction and demolition of their marketplace.** The most important safety issue in the marketplace is the lack of a formal vending location. 61% of the respondents said their main safety concern is lack of a secure marketplace. The current marketplace is not recognised by city administration as a legal entity, but rather utilised by vendors because of convenience and tradition. Women pressured to leave the marketplace by police, and are also sometimes harassed by them. Additionally, as police do not patrol informal marketplaces as regularly as formal ones, women vendors are also vulnerable to harassment and/or theft. The responsibility for awarding marketplaces official recognition falls on the city administration. Women often apply for this recognition but are usually rejected because the place is not recognised as market place in the master plan of the city. Recognised market centres are unaffordable to poor women vendors.

The area surrounding the market has been transferred to private investors and developers, thus leaving the existence of the marketplace to be negotiated. The city administration frequently insist that women move to formal marketplaces. As a result, the women are in a constant fear of eviction and demolition of the marketplace, provoking insecurities regarding future economic activity. Importantly, women consider a secure place to sell their goods and services, and their economic security—as matters of their overall security and safety as urban women.



Housing development around the marketplace in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
© ActionAid International

**Weak infrastructure, risks of flooding and fire, and health hazards heighten women's insecurity.** Women indicated infrastructure problems such as inadequate roads, fencing and waste management systems surrounding the marketplace, and risks of flooding and fire. There are no official owners of the market with whom complaints can be directed, and people living around the marketplace use it as a waste dumpsite. When combined with the waste generated by the market itself, women begin to experience health problems. Some of the health problems mentioned include influenza, typhoid, and typhus. Local authorities do not pay sufficient attention to these problems, and since the health of local residents is also implicated, they have called for the market's demolition. This

has posed a serious threat to the informal small-scale vendors. Stalls are overcrowded, made of tin/containers, and offer little protection in the event of a flood or fire.

**Women lose customers due to the presence of other 'informal'<sup>4</sup> competitors without permanent stalls.** Another important concern among the women is the presence of 'other vendors,' whom they call 'informal' competitors in the area. 'Informal' traders without a fixed vending location come to the market on market days and sell their items. The items are similar to those sold by the women with small-scale business stalls, but are sold at lower prices. Half of the survey respondents therefore reported that their businesses and

4. The term 'informal' is used here to indicate vendors selling items at different markets or on the street without a shop or stall. They are not registered, their identification number is unknown, and they generally sell items at a discounted price compared to vendors with stalls.

livelihoods have been threatened by the presence of informal competitors. There were repeated incidents of fighting between these groups. Informal competitors also feel threatened by the formal vendors, reporting that they often cannot sell their goods in public markets, are harassed or beaten by formal vendors, and chased away by security guards. Informal vendors are then forced either to sell in markets without any protection, thereby becoming more vulnerable to theft, or sell it on the street where they may be further extorted or harassed by the police.

### **Risks when travelling to rural areas to purchase materials:**

**Women are robbed, overcharged, and harassed when travelling to rural areas on public transport.** For instance, women travel to buy goods from farmers that they then resell or use to make products, such as *injera* bread. Some women have been robbed on the way to and from rural areas and others have reported problems they face while staying overnight in rural areas. Eighteen percent of the women reported being robbed while travelling especially when alone late at night. They are generally seen as easy targets. Most women reported that they are subjected to theft while travelling by bus. Women lose money and goods in buses and as a result some become fearful of using public transport. Some women report such incidents to the police. Others confront the thieves individually or in groups, again taking matters into their hands, which expose women to further risk.

Women vendors travelling from Addis to rural areas (and also within Addis) are harassed as well as charged extra fees by bus drivers, loaders, and un-loaders for handling their goods on vehicles. Among women surveyed, 58% reported that they were charged extra and harassed. Again, the research team associated these experiences with societal perceptions of women as easy targets. Women described experiencing psychological

impacts such as feeling attacked, mistreated and abused. Some women report incidents to police while others confront their abusers.

### **Women face additional forms of insecurity when they travel and stay overnight in rural areas, suffering the effects of poor infrastructure and accidents.**

Women travelling alone are seen as easy targets particularly late at night. Women feel particularly unsafe when they are alone and not familiar with the area. Poor roads, prohibitive transportation costs, and limited schedules (buses stop running after a certain hour), mechanical difficulties (many of the vehicles travelling to rural areas are old and significantly damaged)—all can curtail women's access to transport and their safety. Some women lost their goods during accidents, while others described serious accidents other women vendors experienced. The risk of an accident, injury, and the associated medical costs, also present economic burdens. The women do not have health insurance as informal vendors, and in many cases must either borrow money for medication or treatment or seek traditional medical care. Accidents were mainly attributed to reckless driving, and some drivers operate vehicles without a license. Women also described fears of attacks from wild animals like hyenas, adding to their apprehension during travels to rural areas.

### **Violence and insecurities in women's homes and community:**

#### **Ethiopian women face domestic pressures about travel for work and earnings and some suffer from domestic violence.**

Women reported that their husbands often disapprove of them staying overnight as they may be targeted for robbery or sexual harassment. During one FGD, a woman told the story of another woman who had been raped while spending the night in a rural area. Women explained that their husbands sometimes pressure them to abandon their work, claiming it is unsafe for them to travel, that they are needed at home for childcare, and that economic activities

### Domestic violence and women's livelihood rights in Ethiopia

At the time data was being collected, a woman beaten and bruised came into the cooperative organising unit at WISE. She had taken a loan for a small-scale business. Upon arriving at the unit, she reported that her husband always takes the money she collects during the day and that she was not able to pay back the loan. On that day, she refused to give him the money because she wanted to buy books for her children who were about to start classes. The woman reported that she was then beaten by her husband.

generated by staying overnight do not constitute a worthwhile contribution to household income. Domestic violence was identified as one of the main obstacles for women's economic empowerment and women's health problems. Both domestic violence and negative attitudes by husbands and male family members were described as deeply rooted in social and cultural norms. Several experiences of domestic violence were mentioned during FGD, though patterns of violence varied among the women. Women sometimes had very little control over their own income, namely when husbands would take portions of their wives' earnings for their own use. Women reported cases of husbands beating their wives for underreporting income, causing physical and psychological harm. In this research, domestic violence and forms of control are critical illustrations of how violence (this time associated with the home)— inhibit women's economic potential and enjoyment of their right to the city. Other women participants explained that they have supportive husbands and children who assist them in their businesses.

**Women fear robbery, beatings, rape and killings.** Incidents of robbery, beatings, rape and

killings in some villages were cited as threats to women's economic wellbeing and survival. Twelve percent of survey respondents reported to have been robbed, and 2% have been raped while moving among their kebeles in Addis. Isolated streets increase a sense of insecurity among the women, as again, they are viewed as easy targets, particularly late at night and early in the morning when women travel alone to and from marketplaces. Women added that lack of police patrolling and no street lighting are also risk factors. Fears of robbery, beatings, rape and killings curtail women's confidence to move freely, threatening their autonomy and right to the city, and forcing women make difficult choices about earning a living and risking danger. In kebeles where women feel the most insecure (and as described across the countries), women thus avoid going out early in the morning and late night, or have a family member (usually a husband or grown son) accompany them. They also sometimes travel in groups with other women vendors. During some FGD, women reported that they had implored other community members to set up community policing programs to improve their safety, and that in some cases these programs have been successful.

**Roles and responsibilities as women contributed to their depletion of resources.** Women said that social gatherings such as 'mahiber' and wedding ceremonies strained their resources, exhausting finances that could otherwise have gone into their business, housing, or their children's education. On the other hand, paying for rent also strained women's earnings, as most women vendors rent their homes and housing costs are increasing in Addis. As a result of their inability to bear these costs, some women have no choice but to move out to the periphery of the city (far from the markets), which presented additional insecurities and transport costs. In some situations, the best-case scenario was public housing. One woman organised to request access to public housing from city administrators, though as an

informal worker, she did not have enough capital to afford a unit.

*I am a widow. I am raising six children. All of them are students. We used to live in a rented house in Akaki (a sub-city area) before. I lived there with my children for five years. The owners told me a year ago that I should pay double the cost of the rent. I used to pay or otherwise was able to get out [of paying more]. I did not have the money, hence I moved out and rented another house in the Lafto sub-city area. After living [there] for three months, the owners told me that because of the rise in cost of living, I would have to pay 300 more birr. Since I could not [afford the increase], I moved with my children to a cheaper area in the same sub-city. We are still living there. Every day when I go to and come back to market, I have to go through a forest area. Three months ago, a woman doctor was robbed and killed there when she was coming back from work. I always fear when I pass through that place, that the same could happen to me.*

**– A 50 year-old woman selling pottery in the market.**

**Women's trust in police and security guards varied.** The women were asked to what extent they trusted woreda level police in addressing their safety concerns. Some reported to have received strong support from the police in investigating their cases and taking appropriate steps, while others stated that they did not want to go to the police because they are not properly served. A number of women feared reporting to the police in fear of revenge from perpetrators. Of the respondents, only

15% reported incidents of robbery to the police. Six percent said the police trivialised their cases, while 12% reported that the police do nothing, even after incidents like robbery and harassment are reported. Lacking trust in the police, many women took personal measures to promote their safety: 19% avoided going out alone, 12% avoided going to isolated locations, 2% avoided public transportation, and 6% avoided going out alone at all times.



Women running small-scale vending stalls in an Addis Ababa marketplace.  
© ActionAid International

Security guards exist in the marketplaces, but women said that they are lax in performing their duties because of low salaries. They acknowledged, however, that the security guards may intervene in the event of harassment. With little confidence in the guards, women often fear theft at night when returning to their homes. Despite the mechanisms in place to protect women from violence and harassment, cultural norms that inhibit women's safety in public and private spaces and fear of revenge from perpetrators prevent women from reporting to relevant authorities.

## Conclusion

Identifying risks and underlying factors that make urban spaces unsafe for Ethiopian women informal vendors is the first step toward guaranteeing their safety. Among many concerns, five major risks emerged. These include: lack of a secure and safe marketplace; robbery, theft and homicide while moving within the city and periphery; housing costs; transportation difficulties; and theft within the marketplace. Generally, there is inadequate attention by the state and other development actors in addressing the safety concerns of women vendors. Greater accountability and commitment from them is needed in order to guarantee women vendors' security. Relevant ministries must commit to providing legal and political protection to address these concerns and mechanisms must be developed to translate legislation into practise.

In addition to organising, training and providing loans to Ethiopian women, cooperatives should work with other organisations to prioritise women's safety concerns in their continuous movement between private and public spaces. Unless the safety and security of the women is assured, women's earnings, the sustainability of their small businesses and their empowerment will continue to be restricted. Efforts should aim to secure a proper marketplace with appropriate infrastructure and to ensure the safer conditions in terms of housing and the surrounding area of the site. This includes in particular exploring and leveraging the role of community policing.

NGOs must work together with community-based organisations in engaging the Ethiopian government in dialogue regarding the safety and security concerns of women vendors. Greater awareness should be generated reflecting the importance and contributions of informal small-scale businesses to the public, local economy, and women's empowerment. The public should be sensitised to the challenges women vendors face, and to eliminate forms of violence and insecurities. This involves engaging youth, especially young men, and the household members of women vendors.

## **Liberia** Women attending three major universities

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### **Background**

Liberia is a post-conflict, transitional society recovering from a 15-year civil war. Long-term conflict has affected livelihoods, degraded the environment, and left a legacy of human insecurity. The conflict was characterised by unprecedented levels of sexual violence, forceful conscription of child and adult soldiers, and massacres, among other atrocities. Today, reintegration activities at the community level have not been comprehensive and sustainable for all members of society, including in terms of lasting psychosocial effects. Levels of violence and other forms of violence continue to be prevalent issues within private as well as in public and urban spaces. In addition to lingering effects of the war, factors that influence the levels of violence include social and cultural norms of gender inequality, poverty and shortcomings in social, health and law enforcement institutions—which were devastated during the conflict (National Gender-based Violence (GBV) Action Plan 2006-2011).

Violence against women cuts across every sector of Liberian society, but it affects groups of women in different ways. For instance, being among the most mobile of young women, university students are vulnerable to risks in terms of the many routes they traverse on campus and on transportation in the surrounding urban areas. Patterns of committing and normalising widespread violence have had a history at university campuses in Monrovia or in Liberia. Several documented raids took place on Liberian university campuses featured in this research, such as the 1984 raid of the University of Liberia (Republic of Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report 2009), among others.<sup>5</sup> Cuttington University is also located in Gbarnga, one of Liberia's largest cities in addition to Monrovia,

and a strategic military point during the Charles Taylor regime. Charles Taylor also used the Cuttington campus as a military base in 1990 and 1991. Today, peacekeeping forces are positioned around the campuses as they are throughout Liberia.

At a national level, urban areas in Liberia include the capitals of the 15 counties and Monrovia, the national capital. Much of the country can be considered peri-urban. Seventy percent of the Liberian population is agrarian, living on subsistence farming. Nearly 64% of Liberians live below the poverty line. Schools, hospitals, clinics, and government buildings were badly damaged by the war. Today, there are only 51 Liberian physicians to cover the nation's public health needs, about one for every 70,000 Liberians. About 70% of school buildings are partially or wholly destroyed, and over half of Liberian children and youth are estimated to be out of school. A generation of Liberians has spent more time at war than in the classroom, and many educated elite left the country during the war (Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2008). The population is also very young: 47% are below the age of 15 (UN Statistics Division, 2005).

Liberian women have had lesser opportunities for educational attainment than men. The illiteracy rate for women is 41% compared to 70% for men, though the discrepancy is reduced among younger generations. Five percent of females and 13% of males have completed secondary or higher education. The government has adopted a free primary education policy in all government schools, and in addition, a special program to promote female education. Improvements in educational attainment, including a reduction in the gap between

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5. As described in the findings, this research gathered testimonies from former students who witnessed mass rapes during this raid and two others (another raid at the University of Liberia in 2001, and one at Cuttington University in 1980).



male and female educational attainment are expected, according to the Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (2007). Women also tend to be under-represented in higher education, including in the universities of focus in this pilot. Only 24% of students at University of Liberia, the major public university in the country, are women. Women comprise 40% of students at African Methodist University, while a greater proportion (60%) attends Cuttington University (one reason is thought to be that CU offers a nursing degree, which has been more popular among women students). To date, no specific policies or measures relating to the safety of university students have been put in place at the university or national level.

At the national level, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Gender and Development, and National Legislature are the core bodies with designated responsibility in this area. The Ministry of Gender and Development coordinates a gender-based violence action plan with an important emphasis on reducing sexual violence. However, it has not focused on violence in the context of educational institutions, nor the particular types of violence and safety issues women face in urban spaces.<sup>6</sup>

Notably in Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became the country's first post conflict democratically elected president, and Africa's first female democratically elected president (Republic of Liberia TRC Report, 2009). The government has made some advances in terms of women's rights. However, legal responses to violence against women remain insufficient given the gravity of the problem. Liberia ranks 87 of 102 in terms of gender discrimination (OECD

Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), 2009). Liberian women have very limited access to justice in particular, and the justice system is met with weak national<sup>7</sup> and campus level security. There is a dual legal system that recognises both statutory and customary laws, but statutory legal facilities are often inadequate or absent. There is a lack of training on and awareness of women's rights and violence against women, and there is resistance among male-dominated legal and government practitioners to enforce laws that protect women and prosecute offenders.

Despite new laws in relation to inheritance rights and to prevent and prosecute rape in 2003 and 2005 respectively, significant challenges exist with respect to enforcement of these laws. In most cases, evidence of rape is accepted at the court level only for girls who are not sexually active. The gravity of rape of women and sexually active girls is thus diminished, and often there is no redress. Rape victims also endure severe social stigma.

The government created a Sexual Offenses Court in 2008 to fast track cases of rape, sexual assault, intimidation, and exploitation. The Court only covers Monrovia, and one news source reported that only five rapists have been convicted so far (Clarke and Schmall, 2011). During a 2009 interview, an international NGO estimated that about 70 new cases of rape occurred each month in Monrovia during that year. Current numbers of cases reviewed and convictions could not be found at the time this research was conducted. In addition to lack of prosecution, there are major gaps in documentation and evidence concerning incidences of violence against women in Liberia. For instance,

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6. The National Gender-based Violence (GBV) Action Plan (2006-2011) called for: a) developing a system of outreach for psycho-social support, including safe homes and economic empowerment for survivors of GBV; b) strengthening the health sector for effective and efficient response to GBV case management, diagnostics, documentation, and reporting on clinical evidence; c) strengthening the criminal justice system so that cases of GBV are judiciously adjudicated without delay, and where due process is given to survivors and perpetrators of GBV; d) developing and integrating a national protection system with the capacity for effective and efficient prevention and response to GBV; e) strengthening the institutional framework for the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the Plan of Action for the prevention and case management of GBV.

7. Nationally, Liberia has one of the lowest scores of rule of law in sub-Saharan Africa. There are an estimated 4,000 police officers, approximately one per 850 inhabitants (Search for Common Ground, 2011). These officers are not armed and cover a limited jurisdiction. The police force is male-dominant, but is aiming to reach a quota of 20% of female officers.

the ActionAid team reported there are no forensic facilities in the country, making it difficult to prosecute cases of sexual violence.

Through this research, ActionAid Liberia sought to understand the specific experience of women students in relation to their safety and the violence they face within and travelling in the surrounding areas of university campuses and to and from home. It selected the three largest universities (referred to by their acronyms in the remainder of this chapter): the University of Liberia-UL (25,000 students); African Methodist University-AMEU (3,000 students); and Cuttington University-CU (1,900 students). Women university students traverse within and between campuses and urban and peri-urban spaces on a frequent basis. As a group that is receptive to learning, eager to share, and catalytic (i.e. able to influence change), research of this nature hopes to empower young women to advocate for the types of changes they hope to see in their cities and within their university community. Several of the findings pertain specifically to university women and their campus-related experiences. However, numerous findings reflect on broader gaps in Liberian society, including the government's response to violence against women and ensuring that women's mobility in public and urban spaces, uninhibited by violence or the threat of violence, is guaranteed.

## Findings

Research in Liberia focuses on women attending universities, and accordingly, most participants were women in their late-twenties (i.e., the average age in most FGD, including mixed groups, was 27). Their status as youth is a factor that directly influences their experiences of violence and the levels of safety they face when travelling on and travelling to and from campus. The women students came from rural, peri-urban and urban areas. Most live off campus and commute to class, while about 40% board at CU. They also come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. As a state university, UL has a higher proportion of students from poor backgrounds, with parents who are unemployed,

farmers or petty traders living in villages. Many students access university through missionary, UN or government scholarships. The demographic at CU differed: most students come from middle - or higher income families (it is a private institution).

Having set out the profile of the women who are the centre of this research, the remainder of this section presents major trends that emerged from the findings across the three universities. Young women attending universities in urban areas in Liberia face numerous safety risks, particularly related to sexual violence. The majority of acts of violence that women reported were committed by men that women knew, consistent with violence against women trends worldwide. Across the universities, perpetrators were most commonly former lovers, boyfriends or partners, professors, and fellow male classmates. Impacts on women included psychological effects such as fear, anxiety, shame or humiliation, reduced self-esteem and confidence; avoidance of certain areas of campus (loss of mobility); unplanned pregnancies; and loss of focus in school and school activities, including reduced performance or dropping out of school.

### **The violence university women face on university campuses today, including rape, follow a history of violence occurring on campuses during the war.**

The ActionAid Liberia team spoke to several former students of UL and CU who attended those universities at the time of raids that took place in 1984 and 2001 (UL) and 1980 (CU). These former students provided testimony that mass rapes took place during those raids, and their testimonies were crucial given that these events are not well documented. The rapes were believed to have been committed by government military personnel authorised to raid the campuses.

First, a member of the project's steering group reported during an interview that female students were raped during the 1984 raid at University of Liberia. She described that the morning after, she and other students walked out and saw women's underclothes scattered around the campus. In another interview, a former UL student activist stated that female students were raped in their dormitories during the same 1984 raid. This activist was jailed by the government after the raid, and he remembers imprisoned soldiers making open statements that they were the ones who raped girls at the university (the soldiers were not in jail for this reason). A former TRC commissioner also described witness accounts confirming sexual violence during the 1984 raid of UL. According to this commissioner, the TRC developed a catalogue of abuses. However, due to limited funding, they were not able to publish all of the information. It is believed that women were also raped during a March 2001 military raid at UL, though no rape was formally reported. A former CU student, now a doctor working in Uganda, confirmed incidents of rape during the 1980 raid at CU after the military coup. Female students related to members of the government were targets. This history of sexual violence, including the rapes that took place during these raids, are still felt today.

### **Rape and fear of were commonly reported experiences among female students today.**

One female student in her early thirties and studying business described witnessing date rape:

...[At] class night, [an event for graduating students], I saw a girl entering a place that is noted to be a camp for bad boys. I had seen

her earlier in a short jeans skirt and she was drinking alcohol. Later the boys gave her soup that was drugged. When I came back I saw her on the floor lying with only her blouse on with burst condoms around her; she seemed unconscious. I assumed that she had been raped. This happened right around the bathroom.

Rape was highlighted as a particularly major concern at UL as compared to the other two universities; some students considered it to be the most likely form of violence that could take place on campus. UL is the only state owned university among the three, and was described as having the most limited security. It also had the least percentage of women of all the universities (only one quarter women). Women said they feel insecure walking alone or travelling to certain parts of the campus because they feared they could be raped.

There is a major deficit of services across the universities: currently, none of the campuses have sexual and reproductive health and counselling services that are equipped to address rape and other forms of violence (UL has counselling services, but they are considered to be focused on academic and career issues). CU created a program to designate some female staff members to serve as monitors on campus at night. Through the program, female students are meant to report incidents of harassment or violence to these monitors. During the FGD, however, female students said that the monitors lack confidentiality and tend to blame women for acts they experience. Therefore, students no longer trust the monitors and do not report to them. The research team added that the weakness of these staff monitors reflect both a lack of political will from the university administration to address issues of sexual violence, as well as the lack of authority of the monitors to influence the administration if an incident were to occur. As one research team member remarked, "it is like giving information to someone who is not listening." The Liberia team thus gathered from its research that there is much room for improvement for campus security mechanisms that are taken seriously and given power by the administration.

**Transactional sex, or “sex for grades,” and sexual intimidation from teachers and faculty was a major theme across all the universities.**

On all of the campuses, women described this as intimidation and harassment in the classroom for sex coming from male teachers. Transactional sex was also described as rape, but not always named as “rape” by participants in the study. Participants sometimes said that female students welcomed transactional sex in order to improve their grades. Furthermore, both women and men described bribing teachers for grades. One female student described how her dean threatened not to sign the document she required for registration (a control sheet); he held it for 30 to 45 minutes, asking her to give him “what he wanted.”

Pressure for transactional sex generated shame for the women involved. As a student at UL described, “I had an interaction with a teacher over the issue of grades, and when I tried to confront him, he was aggressive and disgraced me in front of the other students, who did not hesitate but laughed at me.” One female student at AMEU stated that she was harassed in the office of one of her instructors: “He touched my breast and asked me to follow him to his house later.” Other women in the same FGD said they had heard of or experienced similar situations. During a UL FGD, a woman, “I was asked to go and see my instructor at his house one night. I refused to do so and I’m now repeating a course because he did not give me a grade at the end of the semester.”

Intimidation from teachers thus severely restricts women’s education in Liberia, to a degree that is not felt in the same way by male students. It was mentioned at all of the universities, and as a phenomenon across lower grades in Liberian schools. In a few cases where male instructors were dismissed, they were able to find jobs in other universities.

**Sexual harassment and assault were reported unanimously across the three universities.**

Female students experienced sexual harassment

from male teachers, faculty and students, including whistling, catcalling, and unwanted gestures, language and touching. As in the case of intimidation from teachers, women experienced sexual harassment and assault in both public and private spaces, and in isolation and in front of their peers. One woman described waiting in the registration line as a male student rubbed up against her; he had an erection and her friends started laughing, causing her to feel embarrassed. In FGD, most female students stated that they do not report sexual harassment or other forms of violence, mostly because they feel that nothing will be done in response – particularly when a male faculty member in a position of power is involved.

**Women are commonly blamed for violence committed against them, including rape, because of their dress and lifestyle choices.**

As one male UL student said, “our females are harassed on a daily basis but they are the cause of some of this harassment because they entertain it.” Another male student at AMEU said, “The way the students dress causes the instructors or even male students to harass them.” Women are frequently blamed, based on their choice of dress, for unwanted sexual advances and even rape from male teachers and fellow students. AMEU and CU had dress codes. For instance, female students at AMEU are not allowed to wear sleeveless blouses and short pants. Referring to the CU code restricting indecent dress, a CU security officer said, “[we] advise female students not to wear short skirts that will expose their bodies, to avoid being raped on campus.”

A female student in her late thirties added, “The dress code of girls on this campus is bad. Men cannot control themselves and pressure these girls for sexual activities.” Throughout the research, women and men alike expressed the belief that male violence is excused based on the clothing worn by women. This was also true in the case of transactional sex. Another woman reported that “female students deliberately dress in a way that encourages sexual advances from teachers; they

agree to these advances based on their poor performance in school.” The team stated that younger female students’ vulnerability is increased due to consumption of drugs and alcohol. This situation heightens their risk of date rape.



Students, security guards and staff conduct a safety walk at Cuttington University in Liberia  
© ActionAid International

### **Security was limited in all three universities.**

However, there was an evident discrepancy among the three universities. UL, as a publicly funded university, was described as the least secure of the three. UL was not only described as having the most limited security and the highest proportion of poor students receiving scholarships, but also the highest reports of rape. AMEU and CU have 24-hour security guards, while UL does not (security guards reportedly focus more on vehicles and movement entering and leaving the campus). At CU, boarding students were expected to return to campus before midnight.

Across the universities, the majority of security guards are male. There are few female guards at CU, but they are on patrol most often during the day. Again, this research found that students did not widely report to female staff monitors that had been designated at CU. UL has one or two female guards. The research team felt that it increased security was less of a question of having a greater number of female security guards, but rather ensuring that all male and female guards are well trained on women’s rights and violence against women.

### **Having options of safe spaces in which women can study and socialise increases women’s safety and mobility.**

With limited options available, women rely on routes and buildings they consider to be unsafe. During the FGD at CU for instance, certain dormitories, a specific hall, classrooms, entertainment centres, and the streets surrounding the campus were considered to be the most unsafe. CU was also described as having more spaces to choose from for studying, recreation and socialising. It also has dormitories separated by sex, though women sometimes felt unsafe at night with male visitors and in the toilets. At UL, the presence of some shared bathrooms was identified as unsafe. UL has several campuses, as well as classrooms in other public schools facilities that are known to have high crime and theft rates. Female students were described as more likely to experience attacks or theft in a district in the surrounding area of Fendell, one of the most expansive UL campuses.

### **Student groups on campus do not address women’s safety, and women’s participation is limited.**

Various student bodies are active, but most are male-dominated and do not address issues of concern to women. None were involved in women’s safety issues. Only one woman-led organisation was identified at AMEU: Paramount Young Women Initiative (PYOWI), founded in 2005. PYOWI originally focused on securing scholarships for female students at a time when many women students were dropping out of school, and it continues to raise awareness of women’s rights. PAYOWI members are trying to establish branches on other campuses, but have not been met with strong support (i.e., the team noted a prevailing attitude that women’s rights did not require special attention). A woman-led group was also established at CU, but no longer exists due to lack of support. Importantly, lack of safety limits women’s participation in any types of groups, for instance when meetings are held during hours that increase women’s risks of travelling alone at night.

**Women experience gendered forms of exclusion and intimidation when participating in political groups.** Political groups, like other student groups, offer female students opportunities to develop experience for their future political, professional and social lives. It is not uncommon to align to political groups for social status or financial reasons. FGD participants at UL said that a few women have succeeded in university politics and serve as role models to other students, but it was very difficult for them to win office; men have largely been at the forefront of political gathering and rallies. The Liberia team explained that society commonly views women as sexual objects. These views were replicated in student group environment. Importantly, women were excluded from leadership positions. They were more often placed in more administrative functions to support politically active men, such as in the areas of fundraising and catering. Both sexes experienced political intimidation related to political group affiliation, but in different ways. Men are more likely to be physically attacked or abused, while women may be verbally abused (i.e., “put in their place” if they act out or try to assert power), or become targets for sexual harassment or violence.

**Beyond facing risks on their campuses, students fear and experience insecurities when travelling to and from campus, especially at night.** The majority of students live off campus in surrounding villages and towns, sometimes up to ten to twelve miles from women’s homes. Distances were farthest at CU, the most rural campus, when travelling either to the centre of Gbarnga or Monrovia. Most female students hire motorbikes in order to get on campus faster or from far distances. In Gbarnga, there are a few taxis, but they refuse to travel on the bad roads that students need to frequently use to reach their neighbourhoods. Female students experienced physical assault and theft of their bags when boarding taxis and buses during

peak hours (UL, on the other hand, reportedly had orderly bus boarding). At AMEU and CU, there are no bus services. Women reported some incidents of sexual harassment on public transport, such as being pushed, hit and touched on various parts of their bodies, and men requesting women to sit on their laps.

Students worried about travelling after dark, boarding cars driven by criminals, as well as about kidnappings and rapes that are known to take place along certain roads. For instance, the route to Monrovia was characterised as having poor lighting and signage, with cars frequently breaking down, reckless driving, and car jacking. As one female student described,<sup>8</sup>

*...When I arrived on the road, there were no cars...at about 6:30 p.m. a car showed up. It was a pick-up headed to Monrovia. I boarded the car and we drove off. Somewhere around Gbartala, the car pulled over, and I was ordered to get out, ruffled and my hand-bag was taken from me. I could have been raped but other cars were coming, so I was thrown out, and the car pull away. I have never been so frightened in my life, and I did not report the matter to the police because I knew nothing would happen. I only told my family. One month or so afterwards, I was in another car that was going to Monrovia, and it broke down. The driver disappeared and left us in the middle of nowhere...I was without money, as the driver had already taken our fare; worse, there was no cell phone signal. I felt falsely imprisoned.*

**Local level duty bearers, including university authorities, expressed limited recognition and responsibility for many safety risks women faced.** University women recognised a wide range of potential and lived experiences as acts of

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8. Quotes have been edited where noted for length.

violence. Male duty bearers in particular tended not to identify many acts beyond physical violence; for instance, many did not classify male instructors' exploitation of power to demand sex in exchange for grades as violence. It was noted that although some administrators admitted to hearing about issues of violence against female students they were not sure if anything had been done in response. Furthermore, some instructors were not open to giving information to the research team. Some requested to take the questionnaire home but did not return it. Additionally, the safety of students outside campuses did not seem to be a concern of the school administration.

University administrations do not address women's rights or the violence and insecurity that female students face in policies or student handbooks. There is also a lack of connection with national

level policy. The Gender-based Violence Action Plan does not specifically address universities, nor has it become well known or applied in university contexts. For example, the UL Student Affairs Unit, which generally provides guidance on academic and student life issues, does not explicitly work with the Gender-Based Violence Plan. During an interview, a member of the Student Affairs Unit stated that she had heard of the document, but had never seen it and does not consider it to apply to her work with students. Further, the Plan was described as not having been translated into an operational framework to address sexual violence in many communities, especially outside Monrovia. Given the Plan covered the period from 2006-2011, there are important opportunities to strengthen provisions to address gender-based violence, including sexual violence that women face in university and other urban settings.

## Conclusion

Through this research, it became evident that the trends in violence and discrimination suffered by women across Liberian society were also felt at the university level: widespread sexual violence, including rape that persists following a legacy of civil war; blaming women; lack of reporting and impunity of men in power. University policies and national laws inadequately protect female students, thus demonstrating the need to target both national and local government, and particularly university authorities. At the national level, the most relevant ministries (i.e. of gender, justice and education) must work in coordination, and prioritise gender-sensitive policies and programs, including access to justice and training on women's safety and violence against women in private and public spaces, as well as among those in power in the justice system and law enforcement. This violence not only constitutes a violation of women's rights, but limits their potential in many areas including their security and mobility, sexual and reproductive health, and education.

Several recommendations emerged at the university level from male and female students in FGD. These included improving the monitoring of incidents (such as by security guards or staff trained in violence against women issues); encouraging women to report incidents; increasing the responsibility of the administration to prioritise security; and providing counselling. Counselling services must be gender-sensitive, particularly if peer groups are formed, and promote student dialogue about self-esteem and healthy

decision-making in terms of relationships and drug and alcohol use. There were also several recommendations related to teachers, including increasing penalties for teachers who engage in transactional sex, or otherwise sexually harass or intimidate female students; reviewing teachers' backgrounds before hiring them; and increasing teachers' pay. FGD revealed high interest in both male and female students in receiving more information on women's urban safety.

The Liberia pilot also led to additional recommendations at the university level, beginning with conducting risk assessments and again, promoting monitoring and reporting of incidents. University policies should also be designed and enforced around women's safety, including the frequent exemption from punishment of male faculty. It was evident that security needed to be improved at all the universities, including to link campus security with that of the surrounding area since women were mobile (and sometimes avoided being mobile because of fear). In particular, gender-sensitive training to campus security guards and local police is needed in order to increase their capacity to address violence against women.

Quality, accessible, and confidential SRH services should also be provided, and they should be equipped to handle rape. Support should be given to student organisations, including encouraging women's participation and to address issues of women's safety and violence. For instance, given the dangers of travelling at night, these organisations could consider holding daytime meetings to encourage women's participation. Ultimately, insecurity and violence have implications far beyond women's safety while attending universities: the ways women are treated and protected affects them throughout their lives, including allowing them to reach their fullest potential as the minority of women receiving higher education in Liberia.



## Nepal Women, harassment, and public transport

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### Background

Beginning in 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) launched a “people’s war” against the constitutional monarchy to promote socio-economic equality. The conflict took place mostly in rural areas, and generated a strong trend of migration from rural villages to the capital, Kathmandu, as individuals searched for better opportunities and security. Some migrants stayed temporarily, while other migrated with their families to establish themselves permanently in the capital. The internal conflict subsided by 2006, at which point an interim constitution was introduced.

Today, Nepal is the most rapidly urbanising country included in this report. The urban population is expected to multiply by a factor of more than 2.5 by 2050 (UN Population Division, 2009). Kathmandu Valley, where the ActionAid research was conducted, consists of three districts and four metropolitan divisions – Kathmandu City, the sub-metropolitan city of Lalitpur and the municipalities of Bhaktapur, Kirtipur and Madhyapur Thimi. While the research covered Kathmandu Valley as a whole, the majority of the population, opportunities and thus women’s central routes were concentrated in the more central metropolitan area of Kathmandu.

Kathmandu Valley is very densely populated and contains major government offices and education and health services. Urbanisation has taken a toll on physical infrastructure, including the transport system, which is insufficient to meet the demands of the rapidly growing population. In some areas, routes are limited, while in others the main problem is overcrowding. Transport system rules and regulations exist, but they are often not implemented properly. In addition, public transport regulations focus on road accidents, overlooking violence and safety issues affecting women while accessing public transport. Street and other signage is often inadequate, which means that navigating in

Kathmandu Valley presents particular challenges to illiterate women and men, and rural migrants who are unaccustomed to navigating a major city transport system.

During the post-conflict transition, Nepali women have gained power, particularly in the area of political representation. The interim constitution granted women one-third of the seats in state agencies, including the public transport agency, where women have three seats. In the 2008 elections representation of women increased fivefold to almost 33%, compared to 6% in the 1999 election, placing Nepal above the Asian average of 17% (Isis International, 2010). The government also established institutions such as the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare and the National Women’s Commission, and placed Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Units in the ministries of health, agriculture, education and local development.

Despite the political advances, women in Nepal are often still expected to perform roles and occupy spaces determined by traditional norms and cultural and religious values, such as not leaving the house without a family member such as their husband or an elder. There is a firm gender division of roles, prescribing that women should remain within the house and take care of their families and men are the bread winners. Yet these traditional roles are juxtaposed with new (mostly labour) responsibilities that urban women have taken on as they have migrated to cities and adjusted to post-conflict transition changes. The new roles and responsibilities require women to be more mobile and to access public transport alone.

The NGO SAATHI conducted a survey in Kathmandu Valley in 1994 in order to explore the issue of women’s safety. The survey covered 349 male and female respondents. It revealed high levels of harassment of women of all income levels. The types of violence and harassment identified included verbal

abuse, purposefully brushing against women/ girls, groping, and indecent exposure (flashing). Respondents said that harassment in public spaces was most likely to take place in temples, on public transport, and in market areas. Consistent with findings presented in this chapter, based on research 17 years later, victims rarely reported incidents. Most female respondents believed that ignoring harassment was the best option, and that reacting would only lead to further violence and harassment (Thapa and Deuba, 1994).

In order to contribute to improved and evidence-based policies and programming, ActionAid Nepal's pilot research focused on harassment women encounter while using and waiting for public transport in the crowded urban spaces of Kathmandu Valley. ActionAid Nepal partnered with Homenet Nepal and Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj, organisations that promote labour and housing rights, particularly of squatter women and women working in the informal sector.

## Findings

The women covered in the research included squatters, women working in the informal sector, rural migrants and college students from poor to middle-income households. The women travelled for various purposes, including formal and informal sector work. Even the home-based workers (who in Kathmandu are mostly women) had to travel to buy raw materials, and to markets to sell their finished products. The team found that women of all ages experience harassment, but that school and college students are most vulnerable, particularly on buses. The women were both single and married, and the research revealed that being accompanied by a man could affect experiences of harassment and security on public transport.

Women in Kathmandu Valley generally use micro buses, buses, taxis, rickshaws, scooters and tempos (three wheelers) for their transport needs.



Drivers are mostly men, though an increasing number of women have begun driving tempos. Some women reported feeling safer riding on tempos driven by women. Some also reported a preference for tempos because of their cheaper fare and in order to avoid crowded or jerky buses.

Most people must commute into the central part of Kathmandu for work. The public transport system is, however, not designed in a way that addresses women's fears of harassment. One bus route experimented with single-sex buses at peak times, but was discontinued. Women from peripheral areas of Kathmandu Valley, which are generally poorer, are at greater risk of violence on public transport because of limited number of vehicles on these often isolated routes.

During FGD and interviews, respondents acknowledged that women and girls face sexual harassment and violence while waiting for and using public transport. Although both women and men use public transport, it is primarily women who are the victims of sexual harassment and violence, although there were some reports of abuses against men and boys. Harassment was said to increase during the summer or rainy season when more people use transport and also during peak hours, festive seasons, the evening, and when women wear particular types of clothing such as lighter clothes in hot weather. The research team observed that women wearing western (and often more revealing) clothing were more subject to harassment, but women wearing traditional kurtha *suruwal* clothing were also harassed.

The men most often harassing women in Nepal were other passengers, drivers, conductors (fare collectors), traffic police and army officers during security checks. Security checks were more common at the time of the conflict, during which time officers allegedly sexually harassed women as they inspected vehicles. Traffic police and ordinary police continue to check vehicles, especially in the

early morning and at night in Kathmandu Valley, but not as frequently as before.

**Translations** and understanding of the term **harassment** differed from country to country. In **Nepal**, there is no specific or widely used term, but harassment is understood as a form of violence, or *hinsa*. The Nepal research team elaborated on *hinsa* when asking Nepali women about harassment, providing examples such as groping, teasing, staring, whistling, and vulgar comments. While the focus of the research was on harassment, it also included (and women raised) other forms of *hinsa* such as rape.

Conductors are typically young men (from 13 to 19 years of age), who often became drivers after working several years as a conductor. They were the group that women reported most often harassed them, in large part because they interact more closely with passengers than drivers. Many women also said that men over 40 were more likely to harass women because they thought they could get away with it, or were given the benefit of the doubt. In Nepal, older people are accorded great respect.

**Women experience harassment and other forms of violence while travelling on or waiting for public transport.** Informants, including 50 women interviewed by the Nepal research team, raised various types of harassment and "risks":

- Sexual harassment and assault, such as staring or standing unnecessarily close to women; groping, touching and feeling women's body parts, including pinching women's breasts; conductors touching women when women pay their fares; public masturbation

- Teasing and verbal humiliation or abuse, such as making comments about a woman's body, whistling and singing offensive songs; use of vulgar language and intimidation
- Sexual violence, such as rape<sup>1</sup>
- The dress code of conductors, such as wearing pants low enough to reveal their body parts, which some women found provocative or humiliating
- A female student in a FGD said that bus conductors would memorise the student's phone numbers while examining their student ID card for the discount and later harass them with phone calls.

Crowded and chaotic buses increase women's vulnerability. Subways, though limited in Kathmandu Valley, are crowded and dimly lit, posing further risks of sexual harassment and violence. When vehicles are crowded, women have to stand, exposing their bodies to pushing and forms of harassment. One woman described her experience when travelling on public transport with her child:

*Whenever we have to stand inside a vehicle, we get harassed physically by the men [who are] standing too. It happens most of the time when I am standing carrying my child. The men tend to push their body forward to me even though the bus has not jerked. And when the bus actually does use the brakes, it gives men the benefit of doubt to do the same. This makes me feel angry and vulnerable.*

Another woman described harassment while she was sitting on a bus and her husband's intervention when they disembarked:

*I was in a bus when this happened. I was pregnant and I was sitting on a seat.*

*Although I had a seat I was not feeling comfortable because the bus was overcrowded and the people standing were towering and hovering over me. And a man occasionally put his hands in front of me, trying to touch my chest and managing to do so a couple of times. I felt so uncomfortable. I could not stand up and had difficulty sitting as well. My husband was with me and when it was time for us to leave, he scolded the man for his misbehaviour. And that was that.*

Women with children said that when they walked distances of between 5 and 15 minutes from the bus stop to their houses, they faced various forms of harassment. They also encountered drug users, whom the women felt were waiting for them to pass so that they could comment or stare. The women reported that none of the village areas are safe for women because they always face one type of harassment or another from men.

*I don't feel safe near the public tap... because I find many men taking their bath there when I go to fetch water. The men bathing increase my fear of being harassed so I choose a time when there will be no men in those areas. I don't even feel safe near the [school] because that place is isolated and there is not much mobility except at the start and end of school, and during breaks.*

**– A newly married woman who recently moved and is not familiar or comfortable in the area near her home and school.**

In a mixed-sex FGD, four-fifths of the women reported experiencing sexual harassment while two-fifths of the men admitted to harassing women.

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1. No women interviewed by the Nepali research team openly said that they themselves had been raped. However participants told anecdotal stories of other women being raped. One rape that took place on a bus was widely covered in the news. A bus driver, conductor, and three passengers gang raped a 21-year-old Buddhist nun, who was left unconscious after the rape (República (online) June 2011).

During the safety walk and in street surveys, an opinion poll revealed that about three-quarters of women fear walking alone in their neighbourhood at night as opposed to only a third of men. A FGD with police, traffic police, and other government representatives revealed that of the total reports of sexual violence (including rape) and crimes related to honour, 83% of the victims were women.

**Cultural norms around violence and harassment encourage women to remain silent, protect family prestige, and not report incidents.** In Nepal, most women and girls tend to stay silent to protect their own prestige or that of their parents or relatives. The prestige and honour (usually of others, not of the women themselves) takes precedence over women's own lived experiences of harassment, minimising their suffering or trauma, and forcing women to internalise what has happened. Women also do not report harassment to their families for fear of being scolded or shamed:

*I try to share the incidents of when I am harassed to my friends and my husband. But sometimes I cannot even share it with my husband for fear of being ridiculed and scolded in return. I cannot talk about it in front of my family and society in fear of being scolded in return.*

**– A married woman with children**

In contrast with the experience of the woman described above where the husband only scolded the driver when they got off the bus, some women said that they feel safer in public spaces and on transport when accompanied by their husbands. One woman described the situation as follows:

*I feel most safe when I am with my husband. When I have to travel in the afternoon I do it alone but at night or evening or early morning, I do that only with my husband.*

A 28 year-old unmarried woman reported that her 12-year old brother accompanied her to ensure her safety.

Many of the women said that although they had suffered violence on public transportation, they did not report it to the police because they believed police also perpetuate violence and harassment.

*Once, I tried to report my harassment to a police officer standing nearby but instead of taking action on the perpetrator he told me to come in his vehicle. So after that I stopped reporting complaints. If we (women) had been united to fight against it then this would not have happened.*

**– A female college student who also works.**

**Women reported feeling ridiculed or blamed when speaking out against harassment.** Culturally, Nepali women are expected to be quiet and demure, and women who speak up for themselves are viewed as recalcitrant. Some women indicated that they shouted when they were harassed on buses, but said that this rarely improved the situation. During a FGD, drivers reported that when women defend themselves against harassment, the perpetrator usually retorts by insulting her, telling her to get off the bus or to find a private vehicle if she cannot bear a crowded vehicle.

Thus, instead of perpetrators being questioned, women risk being blamed. If women refute such statements, they can be subjected to additional teasing or even violence. One partner organisation gave the example of a woman still in treatment at the hospital after being brutally kicked and beaten on public transport. The team spoke with another woman whose married status was evident in her dress in that she had red lines (sindoor) on her forehead and wore a mangalsutra, a necklace worn by married women.

*To go to work every day, I have to use public buses and micros [small buses]. When I pay, instead of just taking my money, the driver feels on my hand and takes it. Once I revolted and shouted at him. Rather than recognising it and being apologetic, he*

*gave the excuse that the bus was moving and smiled, and so did the [other] passengers. And then I was embarrassed.*

### **Cultural acceptance is an underlying cause of harassment and violence against women.**

Transport employees referred to sayings and “truck songs” or sayari that describe stories of love and eloping and are sometimes degrading to women. For instance, the lyrics of one song say, “a driver’s life is beautiful life, [around every] corner is another wife.” During an interview, a bus driver from Gangabu bus park said smiling, “all my friends whistle and sing songs at women and so do I... [it] is fun for the time being.”

The team described the general public as unaware of laws concerning violence against women. They noted an overall lack of public awareness regarding transport rules and regulations—including regarding acceptable behaviour, or etiquette towards women. There were some exceptions. A FGD revealed that some male bus drivers and conductors have tried to act against harassment and violence. One bus conductor described scolding and refusing to stop for an elderly male passenger who had repeatedly stared at, and sat uncomfortably close to, women.

### **Weak infrastructure including poor signage and roads heighten women’s insecurities.**

Inadequate signage generated feelings of insecurity, especially among illiterate and rural migrant women. Women felt afraid along the most isolated and poorly maintained roads that lacked lighting. Further insecurities emerged in areas close by alcohol shops where groups of men were known to gather and, it was felt, stare at women. Roads are narrow, and buses and other public transport vehicles drive fast and recklessly. This, when combined with a crowded space, can make sexual assault even more uncomfortable:

*...The bus was [driving] full speed on a narrow road while travelling from Ratnapark to Pulchowk and I could feel a middle-aged man unnecessarily close to me. He pushed*

*his part on me, and more while the bus jerked. When I got off the bus at my stop, I could feel his sperm on my white, new skirt. I felt like crying, was angry, irritated, and I also felt anger [toward] my uncle and aunt who were travelling with me [...] They couldn’t figure out the situation I was going through on the bus. It took too long to forget it and feel clean...*

**– Thirty year old woman, describing an experience that happened when she was 14. The woman worried whether her daughter would ever face the same situation.**

### **The government gives limited attention to violence against women and harassment.**

According to the organisations the team interviewed, the government is in an unstable position and, because of other political priorities, focuses less attention on social issues such as violence against women and sexual harassment. A further challenge, according to these organisations, is lack of coordination and mechanisms to monitor and implement policies.

The authorities who were interviewed, which included the police, felt that the major obstacle was a lack of proper laws and policies. They recommended that this research be used to “do something about it.” However, the research team noted that there is a tendency in Nepal for government officials to show interest in learning about issues, but to not follow through when the moment comes for implementation and enforcement.

The Nepal team found that key government informants as well as others, including in the NGO sector, tended to be unaware of issues of women’s urban safety. As in Brazil, they sometimes related examples of domestic violence instead.

### Nepali women developed novel protection strategies

Protection strategies most often entailed avoidance: women stopped using certain vehicles and avoided the places where they were harassed. They sometimes preferred to wait to travel with elders, husbands or companions, regardless of how urgently they needed to travel. Other protection strategies named included poking aggressors with pins, carrying bags in front of their chests, walking quickly and “making their bodies stiff”:

- One of my friends always **uses her elbow** to push away anyone who comes near her in the crowded stations or vehicles. According to her, it makes her feel safe. – Single female student
- I **carry safety pins** with me while travelling. Whenever I feel that I am being harassed by someone around me, I poke him with my safety pin. It alerts the person who is conducting such violence on me. I was taught to do it by seniors in my college. I was hesitant to do it at first, but I found that when my friends did it, the person who harasses tends to back off. So that gave me confidence to use it by myself as well. I study in an all-girls college. On my way to college from the bus station... a 5-minute walk, I have to hear so many disrespectful remarks that I hate that 5 minutes just getting to my college. I wish I could use my safety pins on them! [laughs] – Female college student
- I, and many of my friends ... whether while walking, waiting, or travelling

on a public vehicle, people tend to stare at our bosoms. That makes me feel really unsafe and uncomfortable. They not only stare, but when in a crowd, they also try to touch, pinch, grab or pull. So my friends and I have come up with an idea of **carrying our bags in front of us** while covering our bosom to avoid any such [staring].  
– Young female college student

- I have encountered so many types of violence and harassment that I’ve started **avoiding walking in crowds** and places where I have suffered such violence. I don’t even travel in vehicles that are already crowded. I wait for another vehicle, which is really time consuming because in our route only a few vehicles run from here to the marketplace where I go to sell my vegetables. I usually have to travel early in the morning or in the evening. Waiting for a vehicle that’s not crowded costs me my time and my profit. – Woman vegetable vendor from the squatter community
- While walking on the street or going to the station from my home or another place, **I always walk fast** in order to avoid any kind of harassment. I walk faster when I feel that I am being followed to outrun that person. While in a vehicle, when I feel vulnerable to being harassed, **I make my body stiff** so that it will be uncomfortable for men to harass me. It helps sometimes but when I leave the bus my body feels tense and tired. – Woman who works and goes to college.

**Nepali women experienced several consequences from harassment.** The research found that women experience negative psychological impacts, including lowered confidence and self-esteem, feelings of blame, frustration and mistrust or hate of men. Women lost concentration and productivity in the workplace and in serious cases, have lost their jobs as a result. A 22-year-old woman recalled her experience going to her university one early morning:

*I was waiting for tempo to go to college, when... my attention was diverted to a sound... When I looked there, a man showed all his genital parts and that was the first time I saw it. I could do nothing, and so I acted as if I didn't see anything... but then the image stayed in my mind throughout the next day or two; I didn't feel like eating and felt helpless.*

## Conclusion

Harassment, the reactions of others to harassment and how women deal with these experiences, reflect collective attitudes governing acceptable behaviour and roles of women. Women often remain silent and internalise their experiences. Societal norms and culture in Nepal thus played a major role in permitting harassment to prevail to the extent that it does.

The Nepal team emphasised the need for gender-sensitive design, planning and implementation of policies for safer public transport for women. This includes proper signage and lighting. It does not necessarily entail implementing separate-sex vehicles as the team felt that doing so does not address societal attitudes and norms that permit harassment. Actions should emphasise awareness-raising, including for drivers, conductors and passengers. Messaging should emphasise that violence is not tolerated and is punishable and address societal perceptions of women as subordinate. The research team emphasised the need for government commitment and enforcement of penalties.

Creative solutions could build on what women are already doing, for example by promoting “passenger solidarity” campaigns. Additional possible strategies include training drivers and relevant policymakers, such as in a workshop where women present their experiences and priorities. Longer-term changes include development of a strategic plan and effective implementation mechanisms as well as a monitoring system that involves traffic police, drivers and women.



# WOMEN AND THE CITY: ANALYSING THE FIVE COUNTRIES TOGETHER

**A**cross the five countries — Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Liberia and Nepal — common themes and differences have much to teach us.

**Women experience major rights violations as a consequence of urban insecurity.** They describe themselves as fearful, as well as angry, sad, shocked, ashamed, uncomfortable, tense and insecure. A primary finding of this pilot research was that women's fear and insecurity sharply reduces their **mobility**. Women adjust their travel based on

their own experiences and those of other women, avoiding certain modes, times and routes. Yet their roles as workers, students, or family caregivers require women to move around the city. Reduced mobility diminishes women's ability to do what they need to, often contributing to their poverty.

## Key impacts of insecurity and violence against women in urban spaces

**When women experience violence or lack of safety it limits their:**

- Rights and freedoms as equal citizens to access and enjoy their neighbourhoods and cities.
- **Mobility and freedom of movement**, as they avoid certain places, routes and modes of public transportation.
- Full **participation in public life**, including political and community life.
- **Psychological and psychosocial health and well-being**, including their confidence and sense of self-worth. This, in turn, discourages women from reporting their experiences to authorities, and from seeking support from family members, friends and service providers.
- Pursuit of **economic and labour** opportunities.
- **Educational attainment**, and participation in groups outside of class (Liberia in particular)

- **Sexual and reproductive health** (SRH), including choices and services related to HIV and AIDS and sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy (Liberia, Cambodia), and SHR-compromising infections due to poor hygiene (Cambodia).
- Access to **essential services** such as health, water and sanitation (Cambodia, Ethiopia).
- Spaces and time in which to enjoy **culture, arts, social life and leisure** (Brazil).

**Historical discriminatory and violent treatment of women, particularly during internal conflict, affects women's urban safety today.** Countries' colonial (Brazil, Cambodia) and conflict-affected (Liberia, Nepal) histories have shaped social attitudes and norms, as well as the response to violence against women, women's rights and women's urban safety. These histories sometimes permit and normalise violence against women.

**Few policies, laws and programmes exist to protect women in urban spaces.** Across the five countries, no policies or laws were found explicitly dedicated to protecting women from violence and insecurity in public urban spaces. Few measures exist to prevent and punish these types of violence, or to hold duty bearers accountable. The research also revealed problems in implementing existing policies and laws that do address certain forms of violence against women and safety risks women face in urban areas.

**Programming experience in women’s urban safety is recent.** Women’s urban safety is a new area for ActionAid, as well as for the research teams and partner organisations in the five countries. Some of these groups had done prior work in issues of women’s rights or violence against women. Most had broader missions, and were taking first steps to integrate women’s safety into their existing work on worker’s rights, small business development, etc. In Liberia, student groups include few women and rarely address women’s safety. In Cambodia, the only groups representing female factory workers are unions dominated by men whose focus has been on increasing wages.

**Generally categorised as a “woman’s issue,” women’s safety has been excluded from key urban safety, planning and policy agendas.** Women’s safety is omitted from substantive legal frameworks, such as labour laws and education. This research suggests that women’s safety is relevant for entities focused on urban planning, urban crime and safety, labour, education and health, to name a few.

**The dangers that women experience in public and private spaces are closely linked.** Two countries included a private space in their safety audits. For university students in Liberia, and for factory workers in Cambodia, their “homes” were shared boarding rooms that did not represent safe spaces for women.

Currently far more policies and programmes address domestic violence than address women’s safety in public spaces. However, the divide between domestic violence and violence occurring

in public places is blurred by cases where expressions of control in the domestic arena can restrict women’s mobility in public spaces. In Ethiopia, for instance, women described domestic violence and negative attitudes towards women as preventing them from fulfilling their economic potential. Nepalese women did not seem to be spared from harassment whether accompanied by their husbands or when travelling alone while displaying traditional clothing indicating their married status. In Brazil and elsewhere, intimate partners from the “domestic realm” have abused or murdered their wives outside bars.

**Violence against women and women’s urban safety risks are normalised.** Across all five countries, social norms and attitudes permit – and even justify – disrespectful, discriminatory, and violent treatment toward women. Public transport drivers’ songs and sayings reflect teasing or derogatory attitudes towards women, as do men’s “flirtatious” comments to women in the streets of Pernambuco, Brazil. The Liberia study found that university policies and the justice system are blind to the problem, and health and counselling services for women are minimal or nonexistent. In so many places, women are discouraged from speaking up, and when they do, they are subject to further abuse, belittlement and harm to their reputations. Normalisation is reinforced through impunity and lack of accountability.

**Women are blamed and held responsible for the violence and insecurity they experience.** Blaming women for bringing violence upon themselves, such as by wearing provocative clothing, is a long-standing problem. The safety audit in Brazil revealed that women and duty bearers shared a prevailing view that women should prevent safety risks by avoiding wearing provocative clothing and going out at night. Similar views were conveyed in Nepal. In Liberia, enforcing a dress code “so that [women] will not be raped” (as a security guard said) and explaining that female students provoke their male teachers, constitute examples of ways in which women are held responsible for violence they experience. Discriminatory views of Cambodian garment workers as “easy women” similarly places blame on them.

**Incidents of violence are inconsistently reported and monitored and quality data do not exist to inform policies and programmes.**

Findings across countries pointed to the challenges of reporting violence. These included fear of reporting (Liberia, Ethiopia), the lack of avenues for reporting (Nepal), or the sense that it is pointless to report because nothing will be done (Ethiopia). In addition to highlighting the lack of data on women's urban safety and violence at neighbourhood, city and national levels, the research revealed a lack of clarity about how best to measure women's urban safety. In Brazil for example, although data existed at the state level, formal requests for access to reports often took several weeks. Further, the data did not show the relationships between different variables necessary for a good understanding of women's urban insecurity.

**Blaming women** is related to widespread cultural views of women. Researchers described perceptions of women as weak or passive; “easy targets” (Ethiopia); as “asking for it,” or bringing violence upon themselves, especially through their dress (Brazil, Liberia, Cambodia); as quiet and subservient (Nepal); and uneducated and therefore deserving of poor treatment (poor, illiterate migrants in Cambodia)

**Across the five countries, poor urban areas were characterised by inadequate services and infrastructure:**

**Services are not equipped to handle violence against women—particularly rape—and women's safety.** Severe service limitations were especially apparent in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and psychological services. Such services

were non-existent, or inadequate (especially in responding to rape), understaffed or under-resourced in Liberia, Cambodia and Brazil.

**Weak infrastructure included poor lighting, signage, roads and housing quality.**

Lighting emerged as a key infrastructure need across all the countries. It is a lower-cost change that could make a huge difference to women's safety. Lighting emerged as particularly crucial for safer campus routes in Liberia, and for safer passage between factories, bathrooms, and rental houses in Cambodia. Women also face risks when signs are inadequate and roads are poorly maintained. The risks associated with poor quality housing were emphasised in Ethiopia and Cambodia.

**Public transport poses multiple forms of insecurity for women.**

In Nepal, women's safety on transport was the main focus of the research, but the risks of public transport also featured in safety audits in Cambodia and Ethiopia (travel for work) and in Liberia (travel to and from universities and on campus). Often it is the most unsafe forms of transport (such as motor taxis in Liberia) that are most available for poor women as buses and taxis will often not travel on more poorly maintained roads, and do not reach the neighbourhoods in which the poorest women live. Police offer inadequate protection for women. In every country, police and security personnel were identified as having a potentially crucial—but currently severely inadequate—influence on women's safety. In Nepal, police were described as unable to cope with violence on public transport, and in Ethiopia and Cambodia, gaps in policing, including women's mistrust of police, were clearly evident.

### Men play key roles in women's urban safety.

The majority of perpetrators and duty bearers were identified as male, although in some cases male allies were discussed. In Cambodia, for example, 90% of garment factory workers are women, yet the vast majority of factory owners and decision-makers regarding women's safety, and perpetrators of violence are men.

Male-on-male violence also has important consequences for women. In many countries, young men are the primary perpetrators and victims of violence that occurs in public urban spaces. This violence affects women who are wives, family members, friends, and neighbours. In Brazil, if a husband or male household member is murdered as a result of drug trafficking, women must often assume new economic and social roles. In Liberia, women sometimes avoided buses to stay away from men fighting with each other.

Men in positions of authority can often act with impunity. In Liberia, women students reported that male professors go unpunished for having sex with female students. In Nepal, older men reportedly felt more entitled to "get away with" harassment, since age accords status.

Men do not form a homogeneous group. The main groups of perpetrators identified in each country – whether "unemployed youth", "gangsters," "passengers," "drunks," or "teachers" reflect varied social and economic status. Some men who threaten women's safety do so by exploiting positions of power. Others do so to counteract their own feelings of powerlessness and hostility resulting from conditions of poverty and unemployment. Underlying their response are the gender inequalities that give rise to and justify disrespectful, aggressive behaviour toward women. In addition, drugs and alcohol were said to contribute to violence in Brazil and Liberia.

Men living in women's homes can play important roles in supporting or limiting women's mobility. In Ethiopia, women identified husbands and male

family members as both perpetrators (i.e., taking from women's income, restricting travel, and committing domestic violence), and allies (supporting women vendors' work). Some Nepalese women said that they only felt safe travelling when accompanied by their husbands or other male family members.

**Rural-to-urban migration and rural characteristics have implications for women's poverty and insecurity in cities.** The Cambodian garment workers migrated for employment and in Nepal, women and men migrated for employment and greater security. In both cases, rural migrant women tended to be illiterate and poor, creating difficulties in navigating services and infrastructure that are challenging even for their urban-raised counterparts. Urban women vendors in Ethiopia travelled to rural areas to source products to sell and sometimes stayed overnight alone in unfamiliar and insecure places.



A male student discusses safety in a mixed-sex focus group discussion at African Methodist University in Monrovia, Liberia.  
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# RECOMMENDATIONS

The themes arising in the research yield suggestions for increasing women's security in urban areas. As the work continues, each country will continue to develop context-specific recommendations. The audience to which each recommendation is directed is indicated below in some cases, while in others, determining the target audience or responsible duty bearers will depend on a particular country's strategies.

**The recommendations emerging from this pilot experience cluster into six broad categories:**

1. Raise awareness of the problem
2. Build government commitment
3. Change social norms for prevention
4. Build institutional capacity to address the problem
5. Strengthen networks for advocacy
6. Conduct research for evidence-based programmes and policies.

## **1. Raise awareness of the problem of women's insecurity and violence in urban areas.**

**Promote public awareness by addressing societal perceptions of women and of violence against women.** Identify the forms of media or fora through which target women and men get their information and design ways to introduce non-violent and gender equal attitudes and behaviour change messages. Awareness-raising work must be culturally appropriate and appealing to the target audience. It should be linked to messages and issues of interest to them, rather than dogmatic. Training and press kits can also be provided to journalists. Radio or television entertainment-education programmes, public billboards near transport, and other advocacy campaigns are possibilities.

Social media should be explored if relevant to the target audience. For example, author and activist Holly Kearn has used blogging and twitter to document incidents of street harassment. ActionAid could capitalise on its youth advocacy work in order to raise awareness and engage young and diverse audiences.

## **2. Build government commitment to investing in urban safety.**

**Increase national and local (municipal) governments' commitments to women's urban safety.** In Cambodia, local authorities are a primary target because they regulate the rental areas where factory workers live and the dangerous spaces surrounding the factories. At the national level, Cambodia government policies concerning rural-to-urban labour migration, labour laws and potential government plans to move the factories even further out of the city, need specific attention. In Liberia, universities fall under a national education mandate, while local authorities are responsible for many areas in which students live and wait for transport. The case needs to be made to the national government that women's urban insecurity hinders their education potential. Urban security in general is of national concern in Brazil.

**Each country must assess which strategies work best to reach its government.** In each country the needed improvements in terms of quality or accessibility of infrastructure or services

at local or national levels must be clearly specified. Advocates must also determine the best means of reaching government, whether through advocacy, local-to-local dialogues or other means.

### Identifying policy shortcomings in order to target policy.

1. Are there **gaps** in policies and laws? For example, some policies focus on domestic violence in the home and neglect public spaces, while others focus on rape but fail to address other safety concerns such as harassment or structural forms of urban insecurity.
2. What is **invisible** in policy, especially related to the informal aspects of poor urban settings? Informal housing, transport and security systems are less documented and are thus far less likely to be covered by policy.
3. Are policies and laws that aim to protect particular rights **connected** to rights of women? Existing labour laws are highly relevant to women factory workers in Cambodia, as is the education mandate for university students in Liberia, but these laws do not cover women's safety.
4. Are policies and laws that relate to women's safety issues **specific** about the meaning of safety, especially women's safety? Vagueness poses challenges to enforcing women's urban safety measures.

In each case, is it more effective to **modify existing policies, or create new ones?** Which **level of policy** should we target, i.e. local (university campuses, factory area), city (transport service) or national (justice system), or a combination?

Capacity building for women's groups and women leaders in negotiation and conducting effective advocacy might be needed if approaches to government are to be successful. Efforts should ensure that a range of women's voices, including those of women who are the most marginalised, are heard.

### Services must be equipped to handle rape.

The research revealed that rape is severely underreported, and women do not have recourse when they are raped. In Liberia, Cambodia and Brazil, in particular, it was difficult for women to seek services and information and discuss rape.

### Prioritise the establishment of services for women that mitigate the impact of violence, particularly sexual and reproductive health, rape and violence counselling and services.

Services should address prevention and treatment, be confidential, friendly to women, and culturally and age-appropriate. They must also be affordable and adequately resourced in terms of staff, infrastructure and equipment.

### Target changes or improvements to specific policies and laws.

Policies and laws, both at local and national levels, play a key role in raising the visibility of violence against women in public spaces and providing measures to prevent and punish it. If harassment is considered a legal violation of rights, it is easier for authorities to increase their commitment and act on it. The enforcement of legal mechanisms requires ensuring both access for the women who need protection and coordination across agencies and levels of government.

### Join women's security and safety agendas across agencies

responsible for safety, infrastructure, transport, health and women's affairs or gender equality at all levels of government. Women's urban safety priorities must not simply be

inserted in a tokenistic way within policies deemed of greater relevance. Violence against women, women's rights and safety must also not be placed under the mandate of an agency that does not have power or authority.

### **Improve policing for women's safety.**

- Identify types of police implicated. For example, they might include traffic police (Nepal), security guards (Cambodia and Liberia, Ethiopia), community or municipal level police (Brazil, Ethiopia).
- Understand women's experiences and perceptions of police, including their levels of trust in order to work towards appropriate changes.
- Specify roles and responsibilities of police for improvement, such as in responding to, monitoring and filing offences.
- Understand police presence: Is there an adequate number of officers and stations, including women's stations (as in the case of Brazil), and is patrolling by foot or car sufficient? Do police patrol marginal, informally planned and isolated areas where women may face the most danger?
- Institutionalise training on women's urban safety and gender standard, including ethical, fast, and quality responses to violence against women, ranging from domestic violence to other forms that take place in urban spaces
- Increase accountability and transparency of police forces, i.e., to reduce biased or corrupt practices such as accepting bribes and collaborating with drug traffickers
- Increase incentives for quality policing to prioritise women's safety (local police are often poorly paid).

**Align local policies and initiatives with national ones.** Local governments are responsible for many of the issues women identified. There are many reforms needed in improved infrastructure in particular: transport, lighting and sanitation, but also services such as social welfare and health services. Local governments are also implicated in policing, safety programmes and urban planning and social welfare.

**Connect the dots between women's safety and other urban agendas and interests.** Assess which stakeholders consider women's urban safety to be within their mandate. Once the interests of stakeholders are understood, they can be leveraged to promote women's urban safety.

### **3. Change social norms for prevention.**

**Address prevention at the community level.** Globally, many programs have been developed that challenge harmful gender norms and engage men and communities to support women and bring about change. These programmes can serve as models to be adapted for different contexts. In Liberia, for example, a recommendation is to promote well-facilitated peer groups that could be single-sex or mixed depending on interest and preferences of students. Another possible strategy is to promote responsible bystander behaviour so as to address incidents when they occur. For example, a "passenger solidarity campaign" could encourage public support of other passengers.

**Involve men in women's urban safety.** The research sometimes identified men as allies, but also identified them as the principal perpetrators and duty bearers. Engaging men is crucial to addressing what have long been seen as "women's issues" in programming and policy. Working with men in addition to women can also contribute toward changing social norms that were identified in this research as influencing attitudes and behaviours toward women.

#### 4. Build institutional capacity in all sectors to address women's urban safety.

**Provide training on women's urban safety and violence against women.** Training should provide targeted substantive knowledge on priority areas such as transport or policing and on issues such as harassment and violence. It should also provide skills such as in integrating gender perspectives into urban design and planning, in conducting safety audits, or in researching, monitoring and evaluating women's urban safety. Training should target those responsible for urban safety such as police and other officials, urban planners, factory owners, and health and education service providers.

#### Guidance for women's urban safety programming.

This pilot experience includes programme ideas and ways to expand existing work, such as by

enhancing the Safety Audit Toolkit used by participants in this pilot research.

**Provide opportunities for women to present, as experts on the safety in their lives, their ideas for safe urban spaces.** In Brazil, participants went beyond mapping problems, to brainstorming and mapping solutions.

**Emphasise mapping.** Mapping was popular, effective in facilitating discussion and gathering information from women, and experienced as empowering. In Cambodia, women garment workers felt proud of their representations of their environment. Mapping was seen as simpler than some other tools. In Cambodia and Brazil, mapping in more intimate settings allowed women to discuss sensitive topics they were reluctant to discuss during the safety walk. Mapping also holds promise as a visual tool that can be used in advocacy to key decision-makers.

Women in Nepal prepare for a safety walk by mapping out and discussing safe and insecure places in their community.  
© ActionAid International







**Strengthen research capacity in the field of women's urban safety.** This task will include training in gender-analytic approaches; making research choices that correspond to the questions to be answered, capacity and resources; data collection techniques, including for local women researchers and NGO practitioners; data management and analysis; and presentation of results to target audiences.

## 5. Strengthen networks to conduct advocacy.

**Support civil society advocacy and social movements.** Placing civil society and communities at the centre involves identifying existing local agents of change, building local capacity and finding local solutions. In Ethiopia, local cooperatives have the potential to lobby not only for promotion of women's economic empowerment, but also for safer conditions for informal vendors. The cooperatives can also encourage women to travel together to rural areas, and monitor incidents of violence. In Liberia, student organisations should be encouraged and supported in addressing women's safety.

Social movements and local organisations can be supported to include women's safety issues in their broader agendas. They can also play a role in awareness raising and efforts to address harmful societal attitudes and norms that put women at risk.



**Construct networks and coalitions that connect sectors and generate accountability.**

Collaborating across sectors entails partnering with donor organisations, international and local NGOs and government agencies in order to capitalise on expertise.

For instance, a UN agency could have experience in engaging with government, while ActionAid or other NGOs could provide expertise in advocacy or local level knowledge.

**6. Document and monitor the problem.**

The recommendations in this section are intended for women's urban safety researchers and practitioners in the NGO sector, as well as for planners and policymakers at local level.

**Monitor insecurity and violence against women in order to measure progress towards safer urban spaces and test programme models.**

Developing indicators, collecting data on an ongoing basis, and making these data accessible can help to bring about change if the data are used to inform programming. Data on violence should be disaggregated by sex, and examined from a gender perspective.

**Monitor incidence of violence and insecurity**

Establishing responsible bodies such as "Women's Urban Safety Committees" at the city or community level could institutionalise the practice of local safety monitoring. The committees should include representatives of the target areas and relevant authorities including police.

**Develop ethical standards for women's urban safety work, including conflict-sensitive and "do no harm" approaches.** Those who plan

to collect data on women's urban safety need to assess the potential, even if unintended, risks involved. Applying conflict-sensitive approaches, and approaches based on the principle of "do no harm" can mitigate unintended harm to women as well as others. A handbook could be developed to assist in ensuring that ethical standards are consistently applied and monitored. Ethical considerations would include avoiding identifying of research participants and informants and standards for the use of photography and tape recording. There could also be guidelines for safety walk planners, such as in assessing whether to invite government officials or police.

**Develop** and use a handbook on conflict-sensitivity and ethics for women's urban safety work, to ensure the safety of participants.

**Invest in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in order to measure progress toward achieving women's safety in urban areas.** Training in M&E specific to women's urban safety programming should be provided to country teams and others carrying out safer cities work. Resources related to indicators and M&E are provided in the references.

**Capture diverse and marginalised women's urban safety experiences in order to make services and policies relevant to them.**

Women's urban safety research should prioritise collection of socio-demographic data so as to understand the risks women face as related to their particular identity and circumstances. Characteristics that increase their vulnerability, such as not having a fixed market stand (Ethiopia) or their migrant status (Cambodia, Nepal, Liberia) should also be taken into account.

**Promote positive educational or awareness-raising opportunities.** In Brazil, after participation in the research activities, some women started

questioning their beliefs and perceiving harassment and sexual violence as a violation of their rights. Partner women's organisations have also planned state and municipal level dialogues as a result of this pilot. Mixed focus group discussions in Liberian universities at times served as spaces for dialogue between male and female students about their attitudes and behaviour toward each other, including with regard to violence. However, decisions in relation to conducting mixed-sex FGDs or peer discussions must consider participants' receptiveness and safety.



Women and men at the University of Liberia discuss the future of their campus and surrounding urban areas.  
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## CONCLUSION

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**M**any factors, including the layout, design, feel, and the people that occupy urban spaces, make women feel safe or unsafe. When we look, we see the spaces women are occupying and traversing, but it is much more difficult to see the spaces where they are not moving freely and fully enjoying their rights.

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Most of the types of violence and insecurity women face are not recognised: women do not report them, society upholds and reinforces the poor conditions and treatment of women in urban spaces, and governments do not respond adequately. There are many urban spaces in which services are located far from where poor women live, and services are substandard compared to those of their counterparts in wealthier parts of the cities. When street lighting is broken or non-existent, roofs are flimsy, toilets are unhygienic, and buses overcrowded, there are direct safety and health consequences. Telling women that harassment such as staring or remarks are “just flirting,” “the way things are,” or that they brought it on themselves denies women’s self-worth and dignity.

**Urban** spaces in which women feel safe are not a privilege for some women, but a right for all.

Urban spaces in which women feel safe should not be a privilege for some women. Women in Nepal should be free to ride buses as they please, rather than only when it is urgent. Women studying at universities in Liberia should be able to participate fully in student life, including student organisations and academia, without fear of being raped when walking at night. Brazilian women should not have to change their dress, avoid going out during certain times of day or accept sexual harassment when it is unwanted. Having private space should

not be seen as a privilege which poor urban women in Cambodia are denied. When a woman leaves her home to go to her place of work, school, or anywhere else, she should not have to avoid certain routes.

The right to the city for all means enjoying all spaces and mobility within and between them. It also means being able to change those spaces and the conditions within them. This begins with women defining what constitutes violence and lack of safety, and continues through to the moment when decisions are made and changes are put in place.

Several recommendations emerge from this report. Awareness-raising is key, as is seeking accountability from all levels of government. Such work must be coupled with changing the societal norms that perpetuate dress codes or that suggest that violence against women in public spaces is acceptable. Capacity-building is also essential. This includes for activists and researchers, leaders and decision-making and those who are accountable for ensuring that women are free to move about their societies free from violence or the fear of violence. Finally, evidence-based research is essential to enhancing our knowledge of the main concerns facing women’s rights holders as well as best practice in responding to violence and urban insecurities.

When women have the opportunities to map, walk, question and imagine better urban environments, new visions of safer cities for all emerge. When

women are engaged as co-planners, thinkers, and leaders in policies and programmes to improve urban infrastructure and services, cities will be safer.

By exploring new tools and approaches, the work conducted by ActionAid and its partners in each country sought to involve women as experts in collecting and documenting information about their urban realities. What we learn from Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Liberia and Nepal are women's experiences and priorities. These provide insights for improving the lives of women in cities.

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## ANNEX: METHODOLOGY

**T**he purpose of this pilot project was to test approaches and tools used in each country, and reflect on experiences in order to inform next steps.

In each of the five countries, ActionAid and its partners selected a target group of women and/or focus area. The partners had previously worked with the targeted women or in the focus areas. Together, they conducted a rapid situation analysis (RSA) in order to identify the key safety issues and stakeholders in the focus area of each city, including who is affected and why, and where and when any safety risks or violence may occur.

The RSA served as preparation to conduct a safety audit and directly informed the development of a Safety Audit Toolkit. Countries began the safety audit by holding capacity building workshops of 2-3 days. These were used to present tools to partner organisations and women participants and to plan locations and timelines for data collection.

Table 3 lists the tools that were offered to the countries in the Safety Audit Toolkit. The yellow

shaded areas represent tools that each country used. Countries also documented detailed information about their methodology, including sample sizes and frequency of use of each type of tool.

Criteria for selection of the tools included their simplicity, the extent to which they were likely to engage women participants, and whether the team felt the tools would capture the information they sought in ways that were culturally and contextually appropriate. All the countries privileged gathering women's experiences and also collected data from "duty bearers", "allies" and "perpetrators" whom women identified as directly or indirectly responsible for influencing decisions affecting women's safety.

All countries conducted focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews. In both Brazil and Ethiopia, some resistance was expressed by stakeholders who said either that they were not responsible for women's urban safety issues, or that they did not have time to be interviewed. In light of the Charities and Societies Proclamation that exists in Ethiopia, several respondents were reluctant to discuss human rights issues. In addition to serving as a method of data collection, key informant interviews served as a means to raise stakeholders' awareness about women's urban safety.

Safety Audit Walks were central tools in four of the five countries, although the details varied across countries. For example, Safety Audit Walks were conducted over three days (during the day and at night) in three areas around the factory areas of focus in Cambodia, while they were shorter and covered broader neighbourhoods in Brazil. In Nepal, the team conducted "safety journeys" which involved riding on public transport rather than walking.

### Main phases of pilot work on women's urban safety

1. Countries select target groups and focus areas
2. Rapid Situation Analysis (RSA) in each country
3. Development of Safety Audit Toolkit using findings from RSAs
4. Data collection featuring the Safety Audit (includes safety walks, mapping exercises, interviews, etc.)
5. Data analysis and write-up of country level findings
6. Report and reflection on countries' pilot experiences to inform next steps.

**Table 3: Tools offered to the countries in the safety audit toolkit.**

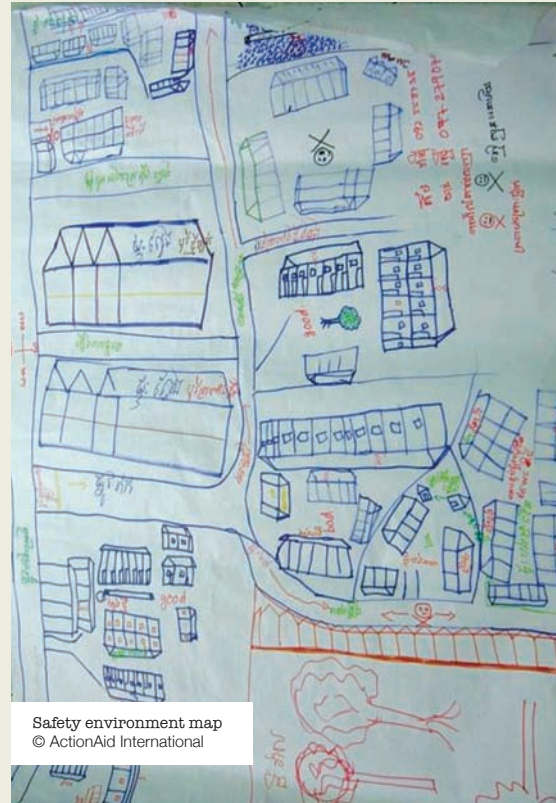
Safety Audit Tools	Brazil	Cambodia	Ethiopia	Liberia	Nepal
<b>Rapid situation analysis:</b> Identifying key issues, and stakeholder analysis templates					
<b>Key informant interviews</b> (sample questions provided)					
<b>Focus group discussions</b> (Sample questions/format provided)					
<b>Photos</b>					
<b>Safety audit walk:</b> Accompanying tools included a checklist, report card, and tips (Nepal created its own “safety kit”.)					
<b>Mapping exercise:</b> Drawing maps of areas of focus, identifying problems and solutions					
<b>Street surveys</b>					
<b>Ranking safety and security issues</b>					
<b>Behaviour change exercise:</b> How does the threat of violence affect women and girls?					
<b>Diaries</b>					
<b>Trust mapping</b> (distinct from the other mapping exercise)					
<b>Safety journey checklist</b> (The “journey” differs from the “walk” in that it is conducted on public transport across larger urban areas.)					
<b>Safety journey map</b>					

**Safety Audits** allow women to identify the factors within a given city or urban space that make them feel safe or unsafe. Safety Audits allow women to become directly involved in local and national decision-making processes. They have been used as a primary approach by Jagori (in New Delhi, India) and by other organisations that have focused on women’s urban safety to advocate for women’s input in urban planning, design and interventions (Jagori 2008).

The **Safety Audit Walk** consists of a group of women walking in public spaces in their neighbourhood or urban environment in order to identify the physical or social characteristics that make these spaces feel safe or unsafe. Such spaces can include streets, parks, and surrounding areas of urban places of education or work such as factories or market areas and open spaces. Each context requires development of its own safety walk, including the time, places, and participants involved. The safety of participants is a key consideration in making these decisions.

### Sample exercise using a tool: Cambodian women garment factory workers map their safety environment.

- **Identifying key safety issues:** Women participants were given two cards (yellow for security and orange for safety) and were asked to write on these the security and safety concerns that they face in their daily work and life inside and around the factories. After each participant presented their issues, the group selected the three issues of greatest concern to them.
- **Mapping areas:** The facilitator asked three participants to draw a map of Dangkor (factory area) where the safety walk would take place. Participants then labelled the areas according to descriptions such as “boarding rooms,” “dangerous, dark and quiet place,” “places where gangsters hang around,” and “unfriendly factory.”
- **Observations:** Participants said that they were impressed at how much information they could draw on the map. They commented that by studying the map, others could know which places are unsafe.



Safety environment map  
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The mapping exercise was found to be especially effective, empowering, and popular among urban women participants. In Nepal, Brazil and Cambodia (depicted below), women drew their communities or factory environments and engaged in lively discussions as they identified problems and solutions. Mapping was also a safe exercise because it could be done in more intimate settings where women felt comfortable to talk and illustrate their realities. In Cambodia and Nepal, women participating in the safety walk clearly had knowledge about their surrounding areas, but because they felt safer, women talked more about where they felt safe or unsafe during the mapping exercise.

The Safety Audit tools were presented as **guidelines and templates**. Countries were encouraged to adapt them to fit their cultural contexts. Country teams also determined their own sample sizes and

the number of tools they would use. For instance, Ethiopia had a more in-depth focus on a total of 59 women through surveys and interviews, with additional interviews with key stakeholders. Nepal used the widest variety of tools, while Liberia used fewer tools, focusing heavily on FGDs with a total of 20 FGDs. Nepal, Liberia and Brazil had the largest sample sizes, reaching over 100 women in each case. A feature of the Brazil data analysis was presenting preliminary findings to participants in order to discuss and modify findings. Tools were also used to complement each other. In Cambodia, FGDs informed key questions to ask key stakeholders. In Brazil, the ranking exercise was used with mapping, and to inform dialogues planned at city and state levels. Ethiopia presented RSA findings to women in an initial FGD in order to allow them reflect on safety and issues identified earlier, as well as to identify stakeholders to interview.

### Key Country Tool Adaptations

- Creating **local women expert/steering committees**, typically of 10-12 members, to promote participation of women from local organisations and communities in decision-making and in activities such as the safety walk (Ethiopia, Nepal, Liberia)
- **Gathering women's initial impressions** of what safe cities look like, before defining "safety" or introducing the project; opening with a local organisations' short film about urban women's safety (Brazil)
- **Modifying questionnaires** to reflect types of insecurity that women face in their local context, and to introduce topics in a way that generated trust rather than making women uneasy (Brazil); modifying sensitive questions for police and other stakeholders (Cambodia); developing questionnaires that build upon indicators used in previous relevant research (Nepal); and merging and reducing questionnaires to avoid repetition (Ethiopia)
- Creating a **"Safety Kit"** for women participating in the Safety Audit Walk; the kit included a torch, umbrella, water bottle, band-aids, a whistle, reflective jacket and a diary (Nepal)
- Expanding the mapping exercise to include discussions and **mapping of solutions** (Brazil, Cambodia)
- **Gender sensitive decision-making:**
  - This included remaining aware of the **sex of facilitators** for FGD and interviewers, and levels of trust felt by women and men participants. For example, in an all-male FGD with construction workers and motor-taxi drivers, a country team replaced a female facilitator with a male facilitator after finding that the male participants were reluctant to talk to a woman about violence issues (Cambodia).
  - Conducting **mixed-sex FGDs**.

### Data analysis and report writing

The findings were analysed and presented by staff in each country team, and then developed and further analysed through regular interactions and drafts between staff and the consultant who prepared this report. In addition to communication with the five countries, the consultant surveyed relevant literature. She also held conversations with ten women and men in urban planning, gender and women's rights fields, who offered government, NGO, UN, academic and civil society perspectives.

### Ethics, conflict sensitivity, and "do no harm"

Approaches that are **conflict-sensitive** and based on the principle of **"do no harm"** (see Anderson, 1999) aim to mitigate unintended harm to participants and others. They are especially salient

to women's urban safety work considering that the nature of the work involves engaging women participants in data collection and activities in areas that are suspected or known to be insecure to them.

The project addressed issues related to "do no harm" through several steps. First, in the RSA reports country teams were required to assess which ethical issues they should consider, and state how research teams would take precautions to minimise risks. Second, the Toolkit includes a section on "do no harm". Country teams were also advised to obtain consent from participants, including for the use of tape recording and photographs.

Some key considerations arose during the research that will be important to keep in mind as

women's urban safety work continues. Brazilian women in one community were reluctant to conduct a safety walk as they did not want to draw attention to themselves from traffickers. After some discussion, the women insisted it would be fine to proceed, but they were somewhat uncomfortable in responding to surveys. The surveys were then abandoned. In Cambodia, researchers decided not to interview gangsters in order to protect the safety of the (mostly women) partner staff. Liberia and Nepal exercised sensitivity in terms of speaking with mixed-gender groups about sexual violence. Partner organisations, because of their relationships with target groups of women, can assist in suggesting how to generate trust while minimising

risks, for example by suggesting appropriate times and locations.

### **A note on methodological choices and limitations.**

When reading the findings, it is important to recognise this project as a pilot, and to be aware of what the findings can and cannot show. The diversity of approaches represents the richness of this pilot, and offers guidance and learning for programmes and policies on women's safety. Findings and the use of tools cannot necessarily be generalised to other cities, countries, or groups of women.

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