



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF:

Freedom to Move

Women's experience of urban public transport in Bangladesh, Brazil and Nigeria, and how lost tax revenues can pay to improve it

ACTIONAID - 2016



Freedom to Move

“It would be wonderful if I could feel safe on the bus and could go to school or any other place without a single hint of fear of anything in my eyes. But that’s not what life here is like.”¹

15-year-old girl, Brazil



Cover photo: Women from Maré de Sabores come together on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women at the Maré Complex, in Rio de Janeiro 2014.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID

In Dhaka, Bangladesh, women often struggle to use public transport for fear of sexual assault. Many of these problems can be solved with public investment, but millions in tax funds are being lost in loopholes.

PHOTO: AMIRUZZAMAN/ACTIONAID

Introduction

Millions of people use public transport every day; it is the lifeblood of cities and the most efficient way to move people. Over half the population, however, are marginalised in these systems as the specific needs of women and girls are not catered for; leaving them vulnerable to violence and less able to fully access their rights. For women and girls worldwide, the freedom to move safely around cities is greatly restricted, whether by gender-blind planning and design of transport infrastructure or by social and cultural norms that tolerate violence towards women.

Poor street lighting, a lack of buses and stops, all-male transport staff, lack of public toilets and inadequate policing has created an environment where sexual violence against women in the city can thrive. Women and girls living in poverty are

even more affected and exposed to this violence. It is reported that in São Paulo, Brazil, a woman is assaulted in a public space every 15 seconds, whereas 84% of Bangladeshi women surveyed said they have experienced insults or sexual comments whilst travelling.

This report looks at the quality of public transport provision for women and girls across three major cities: Dhaka (Bangladesh), Abuja (Nigeria) and São Paulo (Brazil). Bus services were examined as they were the most readily comparable component of public transport. This report analyses the issue of women's security on public transportation and offers solutions for bus systems which facilitate women's freedom to move. Currently, the Governments of Bangladesh, Nigeria and Brazil are failing to provide safe, secure and reliable services for women and girls. Safe public transportation systems are a necessary prerequisite for women and girls to be able to exercise their right to freedom of movement and their right to enjoy and use their cities' services without the threat of sexual violence or harassment.



In Abuja, Nigeria, public transport from the outskirts can be expensive, busy and without shelter or lighting, dangerous.

PHOTO: WALE ELEKOLUSI/ACTIONAID

Women Need More

It is hard to imagine any major city without a public transportation network. Millions of people utilise public transport to get to work every day, visit friends and relatives, move goods and access key services like education and healthcare.

Women and men's mobility patterns typically differ, and consequently, so does their use of public transport systems. As women do the majority of unpaid work; caring for children, the elderly and the sick and often combine these unpaid caring responsibilities with paid work, their travel patterns are often more frequent and complex than those of men.

As part of their unpaid care work, women often escort vulnerable people around the public transportation network, such as taking children to school or the elderly to medical services. Women are likely to be under pressure to speedily negotiate transport systems when, for instance, they are rushing home from work to pick up children. Gender responsive public transport systems that are safe, reliable and affordable are essential in ensuring education and economic security for women, access to basic rights like childcare and health facilities, and in tackling gender inequality.

We found through interviews with women and girls, and reviewing government and urban transport documents that women's perspectives have not been considered in urban transport planning and design. As a result, women are more likely than men to: walk or use alternative modes of transport, use off-peak and peripheral public transport routes (out of the city centre), feel unsafe and be at increased risk of violence while using urban public transport. When women and girls cannot access public transport, or cannot access it safely, their rights to education, health, mobility, and employment are both impeded and violated. This invisible institutional sexism increases women's inequality.

“After completing overtime at the factory we were going home in a local minibus and as there was no space in the back one of us had to sit with the driver...after a few minutes the driver started groping the girl sitting in the front...she got nervous and did not utter a word... when the minibus came to a halt she immediately got out of the bus and slapped the driver with her shoes in front of everyone...”
Female factory worker, Bangladesh.

United Nations Obligations

Leaders from around the world adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015. This new agenda includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030.

SDG 11, on sustainable cities and communities, places responsibility on UN member states to make cities and urban areas inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. In particular, subsection 11.2 emphasises the mandate of states to provide safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all. This includes expanding public transport systems while paying special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, which includes women, children, people with disabilities and older people.²

At the UN Habitat III Conference in October 2016, governments established a new urban agenda highlighting new challenges that will be tackled over the next 20 years. Right to the city was included for the first time in a UN declaration (an important paradigm that strengthens the fight for gender responsive public services). Urban mobility and public transportation is one of the key issues on this new urban agenda.³



An activist shares her message of solidarity at the launch of the Safe Cities for Women campaign in Cambodia, 2014.

PHOTO: SAVANN OEURM/ACTIONAID

Five Key Barriers to Gender Responsive Transport

1

Inappropriate design of urban public transport

This may include: inadequate lighting in streets and at bus and train stations; routes that don't link up and badly placed bus stops with long walking times; lack of separate toilets and rest areas within bus and railway stations; lack of priority seating and lack of rails or ramps to help boarding for the elderly, people with disabilities, pregnant women and children.



In Heliópolis, São Paulo, street lighting is a major concern for women away from the main highways.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID

2

Unsafe urban public transport leading to sexual violence

Women feel unsafe on public transport and justifiably so: recent research showed that 35% of women in São Paulo have experienced violence and harassment on public transport.⁴ The state bus company SPTrans registered 36 cases of sexual harassment from January to October 2015; undoubtedly many more go unreported.⁵ Women avoid travelling at night when the threat of danger and violence is more likely, but this restricts their freedom of movement and affects a range of choices including the types of work and leisure activities they participate in.



In Freetown, Sierra Leone, a solidarity march in 2015 calls for justice after several cases of extreme violence against women.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID

3

Unaffordable and multiple tickets

Women do the majority of unpaid care work and often combine it with activities to earn money. Unpaid care work involves using transport to: take children to school, take children and the elderly to medical appointments, carry out household shopping as well as visiting friends and relations who may be unwell. As a result, women will need to make shorter and more frequent journeys with multiple stops at different services and locations, often while carrying children and goods. In most transport systems, fares are charged on a per person basis, with travellers frequently paying multiple fares as they transfer from bus to bus or to different modes of transport. Given that women generally have lower cash incomes than men and may be travelling with children or elderly relatives, this places an unequal cost burden on them.

In Dhaka, 80% of low-income female factory workers (formal and informal) cannot afford public transport and have to walk to work, against 61% of low-income male production workers.⁶ In São Paulo, it costs approximately US\$3 for a return journey to the city centre, and yet the minimum wage in Brazil is around US\$200 per month. For those travelling daily to the city centre, public transport costs could amount to almost half their monthly wage.



Girls make their way from outside the city centre to school in Abuja on foot.

PHOTO: WALE ELEKOLUSI/ACTIONAID

4

Unreliable, inadequate and poor quality transport vehicles

In each of the cities examined, the number of buses was inadequate for the number of women using them. Consequent overcrowding means women and girls struggle to board and disembark which leads to more incidences of sexual harassment against them. The favela of Heliópolis in São Paulo is severely under-served by buses, which leads to women and girls having to wait at bus stops for long periods of time. Given their time pressures to combine commuting to work with unpaid care responsibilities, when journey times get longer and more unpredictable, women are forced into choosing income-earning activities that are closer to home regardless of other factors such as skills, safety, pay level, availability of markets, etc.



Around Abuja, buses often pick up from areas without shelter or protection.

PHOTO: WALE ELEKOLUSI/ACTIONAID

5

Weak or absent legal and policy frameworks

Bangladesh, Brazil and Nigeria are all signatories to international and regional commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment. When it comes to delivering the rights of women and girls in the area of public transport, however, there is a clear absence of any legal or policy frameworks at the national and local levels that ensure women's safety and equal access. Such a framework may include providing an adequate number of seats for women on buses and/or better judicial response and legal processes for reporting violence. Since there are few women within decision making bodies for public transport planning and provision, women's perspectives are not heard and their safety is often overlooked.

Country contexts

Dhaka, Bangladesh



In Lalbagh, Dhaka, 10 year old Salma (left) walks to school.
PHOTO: NICOLAS AXELROD/ACTIONAID

“It was unpleasant weather, and the poor drainage systems had created water logs even on the main roads of Dhaka city. I reached the crowded bus stop. The rain had made my clothes cling to my body. The men were staring at parts of my body and that hurt me. I looked around to find a

washroom or toilet in the bus stop so that I could change into the dry clothes I was carrying. There was not a washroom I could use. The bus arrived. Everyone rushed towards the gate. They will use all the physical strength in their body from pushing, pulling and elbowing, in the process I felt a pinch on my bottom, I turned around to scream but there were so many people behind me that I couldn't say anything. The bus conductor pushed me aside and was shouting that the nine seats allocated for women are taken. I was screaming that the other seats are general seats for both men and women, but he wouldn't let me enter the bus and men behind pushed me away from the gate and boarded. I saw the bus leaving the stop and I stayed with a lot of anger and pain.”

Hawanur Khantun, Dhaka resident.



What would gender responsive transport cost in Dhaka?

In Dhaka, there are currently 9,311 registered buses and 8,459 registered minibuses.⁷ It is estimated that an additional 3,000 buses are needed to meet current demand.⁸ The cost of purchasing these 3,000 needed extra buses would equate to approximately US\$207 million, with each bus costing on average US\$69,000 (not including operational costs).⁹ These cost calculations are for buses with priority seats for women but without ramps for people with disabilities.

Installation of security cameras on state funded buses would cost an estimated additional US\$500 for two cameras per bus.¹⁰ It would cost approximately US\$ 1.5 million to fit every bus in the city with two security cameras.¹¹

In Bangladesh around US\$85 million is lost every year from just one tax that it's lowering for companies from richer countries - enough to buy a thousand new buses!

Recent research carried out by ActionAid shows that Bangladesh is losing approximately US\$85 million a year from just one clause in its tax treaties that severely restricts the rights of Bangladesh to tax dividends of overseas companies.¹² With a change in just one clause in its tax treaties, Bangladesh could take an important step towards meeting the huge demand for better, more available public transport. US\$85 million a year could go a long way to improving the availability of buses thereby improving the lives of millions of women and girls commuting on a daily basis.

Abuja, Nigeria



Farida shows that the public transport she relies upon is both overcrowded and unaffordable.

PHOTO: WALE ELEKOLUSI/ACTIONAID

Farida was pregnant and a mother of two living in Nyanya, a satellite town outside of the Nigerian capital Abuja. She commuted daily to Abuja for work rising at 4am to get to work by 7am as she had to bathe and prepare food for her family. She joined long queues of passengers waiting to board a city bus service run by public company, El Rufai buses. These buses charge 100 naira (US\$0.3) per passenger, per trip. It is the cheapest transport service within Abuja, however, fares over a month add up to a quarter of the average

minimum wage and are thus unaffordable for many. Women, who more commonly either work in the informal sector or do not receive an income, find fares a more significant challenge.¹³

The routes have neither designated waiting areas nor shelter spaces for commuters, and are very overcrowded. Farida, like other women, the elderly and physically challenged persons, had no choice but to stand in queues with her toddler, for over 30 minutes daily, amidst the shoving and cursing from desperate co-passengers. Due to the limited number of buses plying Farida's route in comparison to the number of users and the traffic gridlock, going home was always a challenge. She had to leave work early to be able to catch the last bus. On occasions when Farida runs late, she walked down the unlit parking lot for these buses with her toddler close to her bosom. Without any visible security, she feared rape or assault dwelling in the shadows.



What would gender responsive transport cost in Abuja?

To reduce over-crowding ActionAid Nigeria estimates there would need to be an additional 600 buses based on routes in Abuja. The costs of purchasing these additional 600 buses is US\$54 million, based on the cost of one 53 seat bus at approximately US\$90,000 (not including operational costs).¹⁴ According to a staff member from the FCT Transport Secretariat, to improve the bus terminal in Nyanya and make it a permanent structure it would cost US\$15 million.¹⁵

Nigeria's government forfeits US\$3.3 billion of revenue every year by giving out tax incentives to foreign companies. 600 more buses are needed to meet demand in Lagos, which would cost a fraction of the amount, at US\$54 million.

In one case in Nigeria, because of an extraordinary 10-year tax break granted by the government to some of the world's biggest oil and gas companies, including Shell, Total and ENI, Nigeria lost out on approximately US\$3.3 billion in tax revenue.¹⁶ Nigeria is Africa's largest economy, the continent's largest oil producer, and has the continent's largest reserves of natural gas. It is also Africa's most populous country and is marked by big inequalities, with more than 60% of the population living on less than one dollar a day.¹⁷ The US\$3.3 billion lost to this tax break would have many times over enabled the state to pay for the additional 600 buses (US\$54 million) needed to meet current demand in Abuja, allowing women and girls much greater freedom to move and obtain their rights to employment, education and health.

São Paulo, Brazil

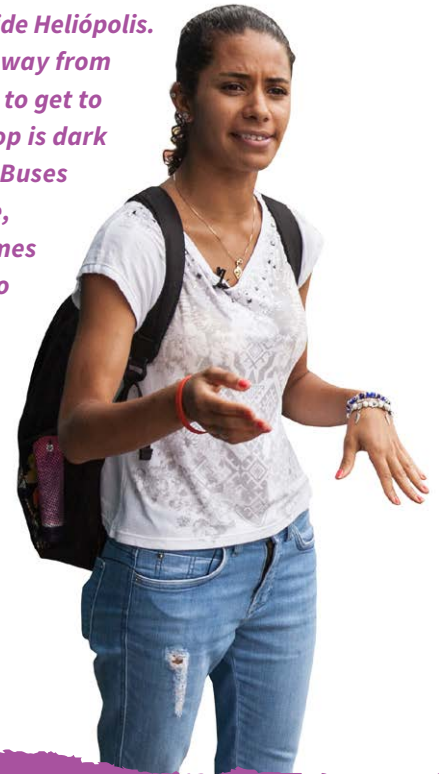


Ninive explains that her daily commutes through São Paulo are frequently difficult and dangerous.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID

Ninive Nascimento, 26 lives in the favela of Heliópolis in São Paulo. She is studying at a university in the centre of São Paulo, almost 20 kilometres away. She also runs a project funded by Facebook in the favela from 9am to 5pm teaching the local street vendors and small businesses to use social media to improve their marketing. At 6pm she heads to university. She is often tired, but what really upsets her is the feeling of being unsafe on this journey and on her return at 11pm to reach her home.

“There is no bus stop inside Heliópolis. So I have to walk all my way from home to the main street to get to the bus stop. The bus stop is dark and with no protection. Buses are crowded all the time, but in rush hour it becomes impossible. Workers who live here must wake up much earlier or leave work later to avoid extremely crowded buses at rush hour.”



What would gender responsive transport cost in São Paulo?

In Heliópolis, a poor area of the city of São Paulo, it is estimated that 1,300 LED light lamps are needed to cover 24 kilometres of streets found within the community. With each streetlight costing USD \$670, it would cost around US\$870,000 to provide street lighting for 200,000 people living in Heliópolis, equal to the government spending USD \$4 per person.¹⁸

The Brazilian government has taken a positive step forward with the introduction of a progressive new law that could help fund their public transport needs. The Urban Mobility law 12.587/2012 sets the guidelines for a National Policy on Urban Mobility, and earmarks major funds for public transport. It establishes that 100% of the tax collected by fuel bought in Brazil (CIDE combustível) must be invested in public sector spending on public transport.¹⁹ Some estimates based on the national consumption of gas, oil, diesel and ethanol estimate that this could bring in US\$ 3 billion each year in additional tax revenue, with an addition of US\$0.03 for every litre consumed. The amount would roughly correspond to 40% of the annual operation cost of public transport – and is expected to provide a huge boost to public transport in the coming years. In order to ensure this money is well-spent to meet women's needs, however, women in Brazil must be better included in decision-making about public transport planning and design.

The Solution

Four Keys to Gender Responsive Transport

To make the significant improvements required in public transport systems across the three cities studied firstly requires better funding. Southern countries must: retain more of their taxing rights over the profits of foreign companies; resist from giving away so much in tax incentives to foreign investors and ensure multinational companies pay their fair share of taxes by closing tax loopholes.

In response to the issues identified around public transport in the cities of Dhaka, Abuja and Sao Paulo, ActionAid believes that to make public transport work for women and girls it must be:

Publicly delivered:

It is clear that the state should play a bigger role in regulating, subsidising and even providing public services in order to make it available, accessible and safe for women and girls, addressing their strategic needs and reducing gender inequalities.

Participatory:

Governments must include women in the physical planning and design of cities and public transport systems, ensuring gender-responsive safety designs, ticketing systems or route selection and the implementation of specific gender policies for urban public transport.

Accountable:

Governments should make public transport providers and their staff live up to agreed standards, and give sanctions resulting from their performance.

Effectively managed:

Governments should develop a multi sectoral approach to ensure women's right to freedom of

movement within the city. This approach must be grounded in efforts that prevent violence against women and girls, including: challenging patriarchal norms and gender-based discrimination through the education system; ensuring equal educational and employment opportunities for women and girls; and increasing women's political participation and decision-making power.

Tax pays for Gender Responsive Transport

When examining the tax-foregone figures it is clear, when even looking at a very limited number of features, that closing tax loopholes can lead to substantial increases in revenue for governments. Corporate tax dodging clearly undermines the efforts of governments to secure resources to cover the costs of gender responsive public services. Governments must ensure that the additional revenue from closing tax loopholes prioritises women's unique needs and goes towards the provision of quality public services that uphold and protect women's rights.



Activists reach out to sellers and the public at a market in Abuja, 2013, as part of the Tax Justice campaign.

PHOTO: KATE HOLT/ACTIONAID

Recommendations for Governments and Companies

Ensure public transport is Publicly Delivered

- Regulate, subsidise or provide public services
- Ensure schedules, routes and pricing systems respond to the needs of women and girls
- Ensure the physical design of public transportation systems reduces the risk of sexual violence against women and girls
- Ensure information about where to report gender violence and harassment is easily available and that there are specific services to respond to violence when it occurs
- Ensure an appropriate quantity of public transport is available to meet the needs of its population
- Ensure availability in areas at the margins of cities in which women live and require public transport services

Ensure public transport is Participatory, Accountable and Effectively Managed

- Ensure women understand their rights to gender responsive public transport and can meaningfully participate in the design of cities, including the physical planning of cities and public transport.
- Ensure women's involvement in drafting and reviewing overall legislation and national budgeting regarding city planning and public transport.
- Ensure public transport providers and their staff live up to agreed standards and assign penalties resulting from their performance.
- Carry out public awareness campaigns to counter patriarchal notions and sexism entrenched in

society and reproduced in the education system, in the workplace, in the police service and the judiciary.

- Ensure integrated systems between different public services, financial management, proper procurement, results-based management and gender responsive human resource management that is truly public- and consumer-oriented.
- Encourage more training and hiring of women in the transport sector, using affirmative action policies, since public transport systems are highly male dominated.
- Ensure training on women's rights for all levels of staff at transport authorities and public transport providers.

Ensure public transport is Publicly Funded through Progressive Taxation and Progressive Spending:

- Review and revise tax rules and treaties for a more progressive tax system - ensuring the revenue is progressively spent to meet women and girls' rights to safe cities.
- Develop a public policy framework for granting corporate tax incentives to ensure corporate transparency and accountability
- Remove tax incentives to investors whose costs in foregone revenue are not clearly shown to be outweighed by their benefits to the economy and society
- Stop trying to undercut other countries' tax revenues by lowering effective tax rates for multinationals, through whatever means.
- Support the creation of an international body for tax cooperation at the United Nations, with a broad mandate and sufficient resources.

Endnotes

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