

# The Impact of Rapid Urbanization on Women in Mainland China

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Urban centers across the globe have become hubs of wealth creation and magnets for mass migration. Nowhere is this trend more pronounced than in the Global South where rapid urbanization is altering physical spaces, social values, and economic systems of entire peoples and nations. By 2050, the world's urban population is expected to grow by more than two thirds; with nearly 90 percent of this increase in cities across Asia and Africa (Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2014, p. 11). Today, China has the largest urban population in the world with 758 million people (Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2014, p. 12) living in 656 cities across the country (Johnson 2013). This unparalleled growth of China's cities has had a unique influence on the lives of women over the past three decades, yet very little research has been conducted to understand the correlation between rapid urbanization, social change, and the practical ministry needs that result. This paper provides an emic perspective on urbanization in China and its impact on social structures, personal values, and the ethnic identity of women in rapidly changing cities. It is informed by interviews conducted with sixty-two women from different socio-economic classes, age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and religious persuasions living in one of China's fastest growing provincial capitals—Hohhot, Inner Mongolia. This city has been transformed by a six-fold growth in GDP between 2001-2008 (Devonshire-Ellis 2010) and a population increase of 17.59 percent between 2000-2010 (Hohhot 2010 Sixth National Census). Insights and perspectives elucidated by these women should inform and shape ministry practice in rapidly growing cities throughout China.

## Historical Context

China's ascension to global prominence has been propelled by the growth of her cities. In 1978, when Deng Xiao Ping initiated unprecedented economic reforms, only 17.9 percent of the population lived in 193 cities (Gu 2014). Today, the nation is 53 percent urbanized, with six megacities of 10-20 plus million people and ten large cities of 5-10 million (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, p. 14 and Dongfeng 2013, p. 392). The urbanization rate continues to grow with an additional 292 million people expected to move into China's cities by 2050 (Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2014, p. 12). This population growth places an overwhelming stress on existing infrastructure and has led to China developing ten megaregions throughout the country to accommodate the growing need for housing, education, employment

and adequate transportation. The largest Megaregion, or megalopolis as it is sometimes known, combines Hong Kong, Macau, and nine other cities in the Pearl River Delta to form an area of over 21,000 square miles with a population upwards of 80 million people (Cooper 2014).

Chinese cities first attracted large scale foreign investment in the 1980s when Special Economic and Technological Zones were created in Southern China and in urban centers along the coast (Gu 2014, p. 3). These economic zones propelled the growth of nearby cities through innovation, commercial freedom, and a surge in capital from overseas. The three-tier urban system was also an important component in organizing initial urban growth by population, political importance, and geographic significance. First-tier cities were the initial areas to be developed after economic reforms and today are mega-cities of ten to twenty plus million; second-tier cities are generally provincial capitals of two million or more; and third-tier cities are smaller urban areas of under two million people with little to no foreign investment

After the Communist Revolution, socioeconomic classes were all but eliminated until the introduction of economic reforms in the late 20th century. In the first few decades following The Revolution, no one owned much of anything and there was little variation in socioeconomic status. Among the women interviewed, most who were alive during that era felt like the economic and social equality of that time created a close and interdependent community. After economic reforms, a “new rich” emerged in first-tier cities along the coast when well-educated and socially connected individuals started working for foreign owned companies and joint ventures (Gu 2014, p. 10). In 2000, the Central Government introduced the Western Development Strategy (西部大开发) which brought greater wealth to the 300 million people living in second and third-tier cities throughout China’s interior (McMillan 2011). Rapid social change ensued and many people became consumed with money because for the first time in modern history the common person could become upwardly mobile through financial gain. In the city of Hohhot, the average disposable income in 2011 was 28,877 RMB, which is higher than the average annual salary of an educated white-collar worker just ten years before (Echinacities 2011). The quick pace of economic growth has increasingly divided across China into two categories, the haves and have nots.

## Economic Challenges

Money has dramatically improved living conditions and contributed to the growth of China’s middle class who are predicted to number 280 million by 2025 (Sankhe, Vittal & Mohan, p. 11). Many women in this research recognized both the benefits and the challenges often associated with a higher income; side effects such as an increase in stress, health problems resulting from a rich diet, and often a more sedentary lifestyle. Well educated people are now working in office jobs and fewer individuals walk or ride bikes because they can afford personal vehicles. Improved socioeconomic status has ultimately led to an increase in traditionally first world health problems such as diabetes and heart disease.

Women also noted a dramatic increase in the stress they had to deal with on a daily basis; greater strain at home, more pressure at work, and anxiety associated with social change. Money issues connected to the rising cost of living and educational costs for their children were mentioned often, as well as growing job insecurity. Some women expressed anxiety in maintaining the

image of a middle class urbanite which requires a car, buying multiple apartments, and obtaining luxury goods. There were those who embraced this new way of life and others who were uncomfortable with this change because they felt people had become so consumed with the pursuit of wealth that they sacrificed relationships and other important priorities. One middle-aged woman described the growing economy as people having full pocketbooks in exchange for part of their soul. She said:

The economy grew, but mentally and spiritually we've descended into decadence. Saying that a country is developed should mean that mentally we are healthy, economically we are growing, and that our children are receiving a good education. And so we see the economy growing but society is becoming more corrupt. What can a person do? The chaos that we see in China's society today...it's getting out of hand.

Increased economic strain has also affected the willingness of many women to have children in today's society. In 1980, a population control policy restricted Han Chinese to one child and ethnic minorities could have two. In the initial decades following its introduction it was a difficult adjustment for most families because of the high value placed on children in traditional Chinese society. According to many women in this study, the financial strain of raising a child in recent years has influenced them toward having smaller families even when they are permitted to have more than one child. In larger cities there is a growing trend of couples known as DINK (double income no kids) who have chosen not to have children at all. One elderly woman said that "the expenditures of young people today are pretty high. If they have to further divide their income to meet their children's needs, [it] would mean that they have to cut back on what they can spend on themselves."

China's economic disparity between rural and urban centers is growing at an alarming rate with per capita earnings over 5 times higher in the city than in the countryside. This trend is only expected to grow in the years to come with an increase of over 7 percent per annum between 2005 and 2025 (Sankhe, Vittal & Mohan, p. 11). Economic inequality has contributed to growing social unrest throughout the country particularly among the poor and minorities with an estimated 180,000 demonstrations in 2010 (Fisher 2012). In Hohhot, one woman said "there are a lot of different people coming into this city... so many people coming here needing jobs. This city has experienced some unrest (混乱) [because of it]." This fear of social instability has led the government to forcibly move large numbers of farmers and semi-nomadic peoples to the city for higher paying jobs in hopes of reducing economic disparity and promoting social harmony.

## Women and Migration

Urban growth has been built on the backs of an estimated 260 million migrant workers (Song, 2013), 60 percent of whom are women seeking factory jobs in China's cities (Business for Social Responsibility 2013). In 1979 the migrant population was only 6 million people but by 2012 that had grown to an estimated 236 million or 17.9 percent of the population (Gu 2014, p. 12). Most migrants are underemployed and many are homeless, which was an anomaly for a Chinese citizen even twenty years ago under the communist state. Only 35 percent of urban residents

have an actual residency permit, or hukou (户口), which gives them access to local schools and medical programs (Johnson 2013). This has a tremendous impact on migrant families who came to the city to find work yet now find they lack the most essential of resources.

According to John Logan in his book, *Urban China in Transition*, visual distinctions between rural and urban spaces are also less defined than twenty years ago as cities have spilled over their traditional boundaries. Large transitional space that used to separate the two has become an area of extreme inequality where large gated communities of the rich are built in poor neighborhoods or in small villages. This is unlike many other countries where there is usually a greater spatial divide between the rich and poor (Logan 2008, p. 40). Shared spaces of inequality only highlight the extreme wealth and poverty in China which can build resentment among the financially disadvantaged.

## Social Structures

After the 1949 War of Liberation, Chinese citizens were assigned to government work units (单位) where they were provided job security throughout their lifetime. Employment status could not be terminated and work productivity was not mandated. These lifelong positions created what is known as the iron rice bowl. In the late 1990s the rice bowl effectively cracked when government work units began to downsize and lay off millions of people. This created a class of urban poor who were ill equipped to find jobs on their own. A few women felt that these factory layoffs disproportionately affected women in negative ways. As one woman said:

It was easier for the men to find employment again. First of all, men have a greater capacity for manual labor and they can endure hardship. Even if they don't have any other skills, they are able to do labor. Women can't do that! The women are already in their 40s and 50s. They didn't receive much training during the Cultural Revolution and so weren't left with any options. Those were hard times. Many of them committed suicide.

Government work units traditionally provided structure, a code of conduct and psychological security for their workers. People were born into their work units, inherited their parent's jobs, and died surrounded by the same people they had known all their lives. There was continuity and longevity of relationship based upon a mutual place of employment and the community that was formed around it. The dissolution of the government work unit broke down societal ties, traditions, and social norms.

Prior to the modern work unit, most people in Northern China lived in a courtyard home known as a Si He Yuan (四合院). After 1949, these families were generally forced to share their courtyard home with other families, each being given a building in the complex. A communal living space was created in the courtyard where people prepared meals, washed clothes, and talked about the day's events. Relationships were developed and sustained between families in this environment. These Courtyard homes, shops, and temples were all interconnected via a winding maze of alleys and streets that made up a traditional Northern Chinese city. With

increased wealth, modern urban planning, and a dissolution of traditional work units, people began to move out of these communities, breaking down many relational ties.

## Transitions and Loss

For many women, the rapid urbanization of their city has caused deep grief and feelings of loneliness. Familiar spaces have lost their meaning, entire neighborhoods demolished, and family homes razed. The physical transformation in space mirrors much of the spiritual and emotional change occurring within people's hearts and lives. Just as many have become physically lost in China's restructured cities, so too are people struggling to find their emotional footing amidst such rapid social and relational change.

One young woman who was forced to move out of her courtyard home and into a high-rise building said that "people are becoming estranged. They don't know each other even when they are neighbors. This is a disadvantage to development. I don't think there is really anything to bring them together." A middle age woman who also grew up in Hohhot describes her relationships and how they have changed in recent years:

People felt closer to each other then. Now you don't even know who lives upstairs or downstairs. We don't knock on people's doors to visit others. Chinese people traditionally excel in relating and talking together, but because of these changes we have lost contact with others. The close relationship among people has changed . . . I am not as happy as I used to be. The neighbors were like my family members. If someone cooked, you could all eat together, but you don't see this anymore.

Relational isolation and loneliness is also prevalent among women who migrated from rural to urban areas. The faster pace of life, the emphasis on work, and the time constraints that many urban people have on their time often made these women feel relationally disconnected. One woman in her 30s said:

People are lonelier than before. This is why a lot of people in the countryside don't want to live in the city. Because in the city you live in an apartment building and, once you go in, you don't come out to socialize with others. But if you are in the countryside you go outside and everyone hangs out together. Also, people in the countryside are very lively and exciting. I don't know if it is because their stress is less or what. Since the city has developed, people's relationships have gotten more distant. The time people have to just talk has also gotten less and less. . . . Before, you could grow some vegetables or have a garden next to your building. But now everything has changed to big buildings. Things are so expensive, people's stress is so high, and individuals only think about making money, so people don't care for others or making time to be with people. A person just has their scheduled or regular friends.

## Roles of Women

Multigenerational families in China traditionally lived together under one roof. Prior to China's mandatory one-child policy, women generally grew up with siblings, having to share resources, time, and space with others in the family. There was little concept of private property or personal space. The one-child policy, however, has created a generation of women with a growing need for individualism and independence. Although most women still have a strong commitment to filial piety and are willing to take care of their parents, many families have started to live separately from the elderly if they have the financial means to do so. This, too, has created more relational separation in the city and has ultimately fueled some women's feeling of isolation.

In conventional Chinese society a woman's primary function is to marry and bear children, male children to be precise. According to Confucian values, a woman's worth is defined by her relationship to her husband and her sons. Many believe that "mothers are honorable because of their sons, wives are honorable because of their husbands" (母以子贵,妻以夫荣) (Du, p. 53). Prior to Liberation, many women had little education and may not have even had a personal name. Instead, she was often just known as daughter number one or wife number two (Hays 2008).

A long-established preference for sons, the one child policy, and female infanticide all contribute to the noticeable gender imbalance in China today. It is estimated that 117 boys are born for every 100 girls which will result in 30 million more men than women of marriageable age by 2020 (Guilford 2013 and Brooks 2013). In predominantly Han areas the gender imbalance is more extreme than in ethnic minority regions where women can have more than one child. The women interviewed in this study live in one of China's most ethnically diverse provincial capitals, yet there was still a gender ratio of 51.01 percent men to 48.99 percent women between the years 2000 and 2010.

Women in this study frequently expressed the belief that urbanization has had a positive impact on the way city residents' view having daughters. Living in the city means a family has less need for sons to work the land as manual laborers and so today other attributes determine a child's value to the family. A few women mentioned a preference for having a daughter because they believe she would be more likely to take care of them in their old age. Others felt sons were too great of a financial burden. As one woman said:

Attitudes have changed in the city. Daughters are now more valuable than sons... If my daughter is pretty, I can marry her off to someone rich. To get married in China, the man has to get an apartment and a car ready. The woman need not provide for these things. For this reason, many people would rather give birth to a daughter than a son. To give birth to a girl is considered a blessing.

There are numerous implications to the gender imbalance in society. Lower income men are often unable to find a wife and this is fueling a rise in human trafficking across the country. It has been reported that girls in urban areas are increasingly abducted and sold to families in rural communities where there is a need for female children. When they are taken, they are:

used as laborers or as brides for unwed sons . . . . It is not uncommon for parents to send their kids off to school and never see them again. The child victims are usually sold to parents who want a child or a spouse for their child. Some are sold to factories for forced labor, or forced to work as prostitutes, maids or beggars. (Hays 2008)

## Social Challenges

According to women in this study, female infanticide and human trafficking are just two of the social ills resulting from modernization and urbanization. The enormous influx of money into their community is also connected to increased government corruption, bribery in the educational system, and fraudulent behavior in society. One middle-aged woman stated, “our society is so different now. It has become so corrupt. The more power a person has, the richer a person gets.” According to another woman, certain corrupt practices that were once referred to as black (黑色), or evil, have now been downgraded to grey (灰色) because they have become so commonplace in society. What was once considered morally unacceptable has now become an area of ambiguity. When interviewed, some women expressed deep frustration with what they dubbed the reintroduction of “pre-1949 societal ills” such as prostitution, men taking mistresses, and unequal hiring practices. For much of the mid to late 20th century the government exercised tight controls to regulate these types of issues but when economic freedom and urbanization came, fewer controls were left in place.

Consistently, women spoke of how frustrated and helpless today’s society makes them feel because it seems that hard work, intelligence, and effort are not enough to improve their family’s lives; money and relationships are the primary means of getting ahead and everything else seems unimportant. A lot of women expressed anger at these unfair practices but felt hopeless that one person could change the system.

Bribery has become particularly acute and women said it is increasing on every level of society. Some industries have commonly had a reputation for being more corrupt than others; business and construction were always more likely than education to be tainted because education was considered a “clean” profession. Today, however, it has become commonplace even for parents to bribe their child’s teacher. To insure a child will be treated fairly or promoted to the next grade a bribe is often expected. Even after graduating from college a person has to pay upwards of 100,000 to 200,000 RMB to get an entry-level job. Without the right relationships and bribe money, it is difficult to succeed. As one woman stated:

Anyone who is a leader has been paid money by all of those under them. They have their own people. There is no way that this will ever change. In fact, it will only get worse and worse. The number of people with money is increasing. Those with money and relationship will get even better positions.

Many women equate bribes with an investment in their future. When asked how individuals could afford to pay these kinds of bribes, several women said that once a person gets the job he or she will start taking bribes from others to get their money back. Many believe the only way

out of giving bribes is to send their child overseas where he or she will be judged according to merit and not according to the amount of money paid for a position.

Most Christians interviewed refused to pay bribes and sought to build alternate systems that worked with their moral convictions. Some Christians have chosen to start homeschooling groups to maintain greater control over their child's education and avoid an increasingly corrupt school system. Homeschooling is still an anomaly in China because education is highly regulated and once a child is pulled out of the system he or she is unlikely to ever get back in, diminishing prospects for college and future employment.

Women make up an estimated 49 percent of China's population (*The Economist* 2011) and are an influential part of the economic and social fabric of society. They balance multiple responsibilities, fulfill customary expectations in the home and make up 46 percent of the overall workforce (*The Economist* 2011). Although many women are happy to have more choices in their personal and professional lives, others feel torn between these expectations and roles.

Most women in this study believe there is greater inequality in the workforce due to urbanization and the privatization of business that has taken place over the past twenty years. Today, if a young man and a young woman go for a job, every woman interviewed unequivocally stated that the man would get the position. Employers fear hiring a young woman who they believe may get married and have a child. Women are viewed as a potential economic drain on a company because they may ask for maternity leave and time off to take care of family matters. One middle-aged woman said:

Women in China are attaining higher qualifications and it is easier for them to get a degree. If they are willing to spend the money, they can even get a doctorate. They are attaining higher qualifications but their employment opportunities are fewer because most companies want to hire men. Some industries such as hotels are willing to take women to be attendants or secretaries. Most companies are not willing to employ women because they think that women will eventually want to get married, get pregnant, and have a baby. They don't want to invest money in a woman who will be there for only a couple of years, so they'd rather employ men.

It is hard to prove unfair hiring practices and so many women continue to struggle with finding gainful employment. One woman described how competitive and stressful it has become for women in the work force because there are so few positions for women compared to twenty or thirty years ago. She said:

With every ten job openings only two spots would typically be given to women. The other eight vacancies will be given to men. Women make up a significant percentage of those applying for jobs. Yet how is it that they are not able to secure good jobs? For the same entry-level job, they'd give eight of the vacancies to men and leave only two vacancies open for female applicants. It has become extremely competitive for women trying to get those two spots. Therein lies the stress. The pressure that women face in this society comes mainly from their job. Stress from other areas of life is comparatively manageable.



With great sadness one woman summed up her feelings on China's rapid development by saying, "Even though materially speaking China is getting better, deep down China is morally sliding down fast." In their interviews, many women mentioned one of two reasons for the declining morals they saw in their community: the introduction of Western values that they linked to modernization and the breakdown of social control that the government once exercised through the work units. The work unit managed every aspect of people's lives and even dictated morality. Individuals could not choose for themselves right or wrong but instead a moral system was constructed and superimposed over their lives.

Divorce and extra marital affairs were uncommon in post-Liberation China but have experienced a resurgence in recent years. One woman said the breakdown of her husband's work unit ultimately led to her husband having an affair and to their divorce. When asked why this social trend is becoming more common in society she said:

Few people got divorced [back then] because of the public voice. Society put stress on a person. For example, if a man had an affair, his wife could go to his company to talk with leaders, the trade union and representatives of the women's ministry. They would then publically attack him, asking 'How could you do this? You were wrong and immoral. How could your child face other children when his or her father messed around?'

In a shame-based culture a person's actions reflect not only on him or herself but also on the wider community. The work unit pressured individuals to conform and not bring shame upon one another; however, as people became more transient they also had fewer ties to the system that kept them morally accountable for their actions. As cities grew and the work units disappeared, people eventually had to make choices on their own which they had not been equipped to make.

Another individual expressed sadness at the choices many young women were making in her community; choices she felt were reflective of Western cultural values. Prior to China's opening up to the outside, women followed more traditional roles and were conservative in their relationships with men. However according to this woman:

After China's open policy, much of the good and the bad of the Western world was brought into Chinese culture, the sex trade (red-light) industry and prostitution, for example. China all of a sudden had this industry; STD's, AIDS, extra marital relationships and all this other stuff exploded. You know things like this never happened in the past but people's thinking and values I feel [were different] . . . honestly they are not as good as before. People used to be more simple and pure.

Recent economic prosperity and the growth of cities have also intensified many women's already strained marital relationships, particularly those whose husbands are influential or wealthy. According to several interviews, it is commonly understood that when a man becomes successful

he will likely take a mistress and engage in more corrupt business practices. The following phrase was repeatedly used by women when discussing this social trend, “nanren you qian bian huai, nuren bian huai you qian” (男人有钱变坏, 人变坏有钱). This means that if men have money they become corrupted and if women are corrupted they can become rich. One 47-year-old Han woman said:

In China, women are the weak ones. If women my age have a talented husband and he has a great job, he will have an affair... If the man is a government official, his wife probably knows that he has a lover outside. The wife just leaves it alone because she cannot deal with it. Few women will get divorced if they know that their husbands have a girlfriend. These women are weak but they also put their children as the highest priority. Women think that if I get divorced, what am I going to do with my children?... The woman who doesn't get a divorce because she wants to at least maintain the image of having a close family. If the man has a high social status and income, his wife may know that he has many girlfriends. Some women may not know, but even if she does she may not say anything. She has to support her family, so she thinks it is no use to quarrel with him. He may confess that he is wrong and claim that he doesn't want to get a divorce, but he still won't correct it. Many men are like this.

Younger women brought up under the one-child policy viewed marriage much differently from their older counterparts. When marriage became too much of an inconvenience or they did not know how to navigate relational conflict, they were more quick to end a marriage. One young woman had friends that divorced within days of getting married. She said:

Some thought they were too careless in the way they approached their marriage. In the past, it was a rare thing to divorce but now it does not matter at all. People casually talk about it in their leisure time as opposed to before when people would gossip about it. Anyway, [my friend] can find someone else.

## Urbanization and Minorities

Urbanization has influenced the lives of minority women in distinct ways from their Han Chinese counterparts. This is most obvious among minorities with pronounced religious and linguistic distinctions such as the Mongolians and Hui. In this study, minority women gravitated toward ethnic enclaves when they perceived a personal inability to integrate with the majority group because of challenges in communication, conflicts in cultural practice, or values that set them apart. Younger minority women who were bilingual and grew up in urban centers were more likely to share a common identity with other ethnic groups in the city. They had a variety of friends and were more open to rapid cultural and economic changes.

Migrant minority women, particularly those who came to the city later in life, found it most challenging to adapt to a multicultural and rapidly changing urban environment. These women often felt at a cultural and social disadvantage in China's cities. One migrant woman said that growing up in the countryside her people bought and sold products with one another at a fixed

price. It was only after she had moved to the city that she learned the Han Chinese practice of bargaining, which she found distasteful. Many migrant minority women also find linguistic isolation to be a problem if they are not able to network with others from their people group within the city.

Some minority women have been fully integrated into culturally Han cities. Women who are the product of intermarriage, grew up in a multicultural part of the city, or whose education was in Mandarin generally feel fewer distinctions between their ethnic people and the dominant Han Chinese. Such individuals do not have verbal or cultural barriers to prevent them from finding good employment or receiving a higher education. They freely interact with a variety of people in both social and professional situations and do not have as strong an ethnic identity. As one Mongol woman stated:

In Hohhot most people have already assimilated. Even though there are many Mongols living in Inner Mongolia, the line between Han and Mongols is not that obvious anymore because the Han and the Mongols pretty much think alike now. In Hohhot, you can't tell the difference between a Han and a Mongol because our lifestyles are just about the same—from food to the way we think. Many Han like the Mongols because of our friendly and open personality. Each culture has their own beauty and their own ugliness, but the Han and the Mongols in Hohhot are very similar.

Another woman saw assimilation into the Han Chinese culture as an inevitable part of living in the city because of the shared living environment. As she stated, “slowly the Mongols have been integrated and changed by the Han because of working together, learning together, and living together...” Although some women in the city saw full integration as unavoidable, others worked very hard to remain distinct and grieved the loss of cultural identity associated with living in urban centers.

A woman's level of integration often boils down to her self-identity and her willingness to adapt to another culture. If her primary identity revolves around the language, foods, religion, and cultural traditions of her people, she often fights hard to maintain that distinction even in light of other social changes. These women are generally raised in the countryside, have strong ties to the land, and are concerned for the future preservation of their people. If a woman's identity is concentrated more in areas of professional advancement or social integration she is generally more willing to accommodate to the expectations of the majority.

## Conclusion

Chinese women are experiencing unprecedented personal and professional challenges as a result of rapid urbanization. In recent decades, many have experienced great financial gain and also deep personal loss due to political, economic, and social challenges that have emerged. Migrant women have faced particular difficulty as they leave behind valued community, family members, and social connection to seek a better life in Chinese cities. They often experience pressure to discard previous traditions and practices in order to conform to their new urban culture, yet in

doing so they still struggle to build relationships with urban women. This creates social isolation and a reexamination of identity for many facing these issues. It also results in migrant women congregating together for support and community, particularly if they share common ethnic, linguistic, or geographic connections.

It is important for government agencies, non-profits, and others with interest in offering support to women to be aware of the unique challenges they face in urban centers throughout the country. Giving women a voice to express their experiences is vital to understanding how they perceive needs within their own communities and what they deem to be of value. This insight enables strategic decisions to be made regarding use of resources and how to better promote overall human development within these growing cities.

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