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BABAE KA, HINDI BABAE LANG: DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF A WOMEN-FRIENDLY CITY IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Gender equality is a critical aspect of creating an inclusive city. The debate on gender equality objectives centres on balancing practical and strategic needs and classifying gender mainstreaming as integrationist or transformative. Consequently, women are often excluded from participation. This study focuses on gender-inclusive activities and infrastructure elements to enhance Subang Jaya, Malaysia, as a Women-Friendly City, and aims to develop a gender-responsiveness framework. The researchers reviewed 29 years of peer-reviewed literature on gender mainstreaming from 1995 to 2024 to examine scholarly trends in gender equality in urban settings and women-friendly cities. The researchers also reviewed the guidelines, including the New Urban Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, UN Security Council Resolutions, UNESCO Priority Gender Equality Action Plan, UN Human Rights, Environment, Gender Equality, Selangor Women's Policy, and Subang Jaya Women-Friendly City Action Plan. A qualitative method was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (e.g. city council members, urban planners, and state assembly women of Subang Jaya) to validate the gender-responsiveness framework. The proposed framework comprises 12 components: (1) governance and leadership, (2) safety, (3) housing and land rights, (4) economic security, (5) education, (6) health, (7) transportation, (8) environment and resilience, (9) art, media, and culture, (10) infrastructure and services, (11) urban spaces, and (12) peace and security.

Keywords: Women-Friendly City, Gender-Responsive, Gender Equality, Subang Jaya.

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INTRODUCTION

Urban areas are home to most of the global population and serve as complex spaces shaped by both natural and cultural elements. However, access to these spaces is not equally experienced, especially when factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, and sexuality are considered (Rojas-Rueda et al., 2019; Nyelele & Kroll, 2020). The concept of urban rights, including housing, participation, and freedom of expression, must be inclusive to ensure an equitable city life (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2013).

Since the 1980s, critical urban studies have highlighted how urban spaces reflect and reinforce gender inequalities, often shaped by male-dominated planning and governance systems (Bondi, 2013; Koskela, 1999; Fenster, 1999a; Hayden, 1985; Wekerle, 1984; Efe Güney et al. 2020, Kaypak 2014, Koskela 1999; McDowell, 1999; Chang et al. 2022; Bansal et al., 2022). Research has shown that women and marginalised groups frequently experience public spaces as unsafe or inaccessible, leading to social exclusion (Browne, 2007; Garcia-Ramon et al., 2004; McShane & Coffey, 2022).

In response, the concept of “women-friendly city” women-friendly cities has emerged (Arjmand, 2017; Khakpour et al., 2017; Short, 2014). These initiatives aim to incorporate gender-sensitive infrastructure and planning, ensuring equitable access to healthcare, education, employment, and safety (Kaypak, 2016; Malhotra and Dobriyal 2021; Tekinbaş 2015). Feminist movements and international bodies such as the UN and World Bank have championed these transformations to address systemic gender disadvantages in urban environments (United Nations, 2005).

Despite progress in developed countries, there is limited research in developing countries such as Malaysia. This study addresses this gap by focusing on Subang Jaya as a case study to develop a gender-responsiveness framework for a Women-Friendly City. It aims to bridge academic and practical approaches to promote inclusive urban planning within Malaysia’s socio-political and economic contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Inclusive City

The inclusive city is "a place where everyone has the power to participate productively and positively in the opportunities the city has to offer, regardless of the property, gender, age, race, or religion" (United Nations, 2002). Although it targets third-world cities, this concept suggests universal standards. The right to the city is the main criterion for inclusion, as stated in the UN's broad agenda for human rights (United Nations, 2002; UNCHS, 2000), encouraging governments to promote inclusion and sustainability. Scholars have linked inclusive cities with social sustainability and spatial accessibility (Dempsey et al.

2011; Liang et al. 2021). Lefebvre (1996) wrote about the rights of a city . While gender is not explicit in his conception (Simonsen, 2005; Vacchelli & Kofman, 2018), it involves access for every resident: *"Complemented by the right to difference and the right to information ... should modify, concretise and make more practical the rights of the citizen, an urban dweller and user of multiple services. It would affirm, on the one hand, the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would cover the right to the use of the centre, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck in ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the 'marginal' and even the 'privileged')"* (Lefebvre, 1996). Access is applied to the physical environment and information via the ICT infrastructure. These services must be guaranteed to everyone, recognising differences in gender, age, and disability (de Oliveira Neto & Kofuji, 2016). For greater inclusivity, the focus should be on citizens' needs rather than on ICT services. The fear of crime while walking at night particularly affects women (Cho & Park, 2017; Pain, 1997, 2000; Painter, 1996), depriving them of free movement and creating gender inequality. This can be reduced through neighbourhood and street designs (Cozens et al., 2005; Seo & Lee, 2017).

Gender Mainstreaming and The Women-Friendly City

Gender mainstreaming has been applied in urban planning to safeguard inclusion and equality between both women and men (Urban Development Vienna, 2013 Guevara, 2020;). Gender mainstreaming, which began in the 1980s in Europe, aimed to prevent discrimination based on sex, race, religious beliefs, disability, age, or sexual orientation (Treaty of Amsterdam, 1999). "Gender refers to a person's social gender rather than just the biological differences between women and men and also includes the respective person's upbringing according to gender roles, social expectations, and (behavioural) norms of women/girls and men/boys" (Urban Development Vienna, 2013). Gender mainstreaming represents a social agreement that respects the everyday lives of women and men, translating to gender-sensitive urban planning and ensuring planning decisions considering both female and male perspectives. The concept of a women-friendly city emerged in the 1970s when women's activists in North America demanded safety in daily life. The 1980s focused on women's safety, in terms of urban planning and gender integration. Women-friendly cities gained global recognition through the 'European Declaration for Urban Women (ECWC)' in 1994 and 'UN Habitat II Urban Women's Life' in 1996. Gender mainstreaming acknowledges that women and men experience urban environments differently, requiring specific attention throughout the planning stages, from goal formulation to implementation and evaluation (Urban Development Vienna, 2013) (Figure 1).

Gender mainstreaming in planning processes

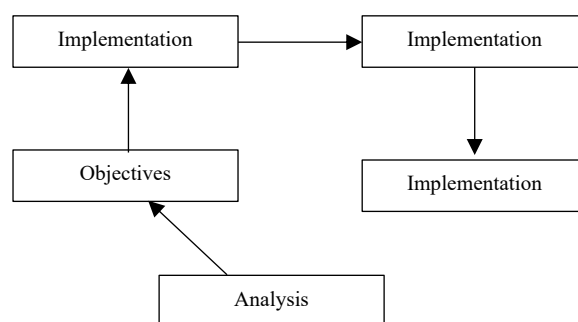


Figure 1: Diagram of gender mainstreaming in the planning process
Source: Urban Development Vienna (2013)

Gender Equality in the Malaysian Context

Malaysia has demonstrated its commitment to gender equality by ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and endorsing the Beijing Declaration, recognising the importance of advancing gender equality and women's rights (UNDP, 2023). In recent years, there has been an increased focus on addressing social and environmental inequalities, with the World Economic Forum emphasising social justice for greater inclusion (Jenkins 2020). Policies related to the Women's Friendly City include the New Urban Agenda (NUA); Sustainable Development Goals (SDG); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); UN Security Council Resolutions (SCR); UNESCO Priority Gender Equality Action Plan (2014–2021, 2019 Revision); the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); UN Human Rights, the Environment, and Gender Equality (2021); Selangor Women's Policy; and the Subang Jaya Women's Friendly City Action Plan. Despite these commitments, progress towards gender equality in Malaysia remains slow, with a major concern being inadequate sexual harassment legislation, leaving women vulnerable without proper legal protection. Malaysia's gender gap index ranking of 103 of 146 countries (UN WOMEN, 2014; UNDP, 2023) shows significant disparities between men and women in terms of education, economic participation, political representation, and access to resources.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers conducted a comprehensive review of 29 years of peer-reviewed literature on gender mainstreaming, from 1995 to 2024. They examined scholarly

publishing trends related to gender equality in urban settings, gender mainstreaming in urban or city planning, and women-friendly cities. This extensive review led to a thematic synthesis of existing literature and identified key themes and trends. Additionally, the researchers reviewed various guidelines, including the New Urban Agenda (NUA), Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), UN Security Council Resolutions (SCR), UNESCO Priority Gender Equality Action Plan (2014–2021, 2019 Revision), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), UN Human Rights, the Environment, and Gender Equality (2021), Selangor Women's Policy, and the Subang Jaya Women-Friendly City Action Plan. This comprehensive literature review and policy analysis aimed to develop a gender-responsiveness framework for a women-friendly city for further validation by experts.

To validate and refine the developed model, the researchers conducted interviews with six experts from February to May 2024 to gain insights into the planning and operational processes of Subang Jaya as a Women-Friendly City and to ensure the model's practical applicability and effectiveness. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with city council members, urban planners, and state assembly women in Subang Jaya, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Interviewee and selection criteria

Interviewee	Selection criteria
City Council Member 1	Department of Corporate & Strategic Management
City Council Member 2	Department of Corporate & Strategic Management
Urban Planner 1	Department of Urban Planning
Urban Planner 2	Department of Urban Planning
City Council Member 3	Department of Community Development
State Assembly Women Of Subang Jaya	State Assembly Women Of Subang Jaya

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented in the following two sections. The first section presents the gender-responsive framework for a women-friendly city, including 12 components (Figure 2). This framework was developed through a literature review and policy analysis and validated by six experts through semi-structured interviews. The second section is divided into three stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. The results were summarised based on the Selangor Women's Policy, the Subang Jaya Women-Friendly City Action Plan, and expert interviews.

Gender-Responsive Framework for A Women-Friendly City

Through a literature review and policy analysis validated by six experts, the researchers developed a gender-responsive framework for a women-friendly city comprising 12 components. The details of these 12 components are listed in Table 4.0.

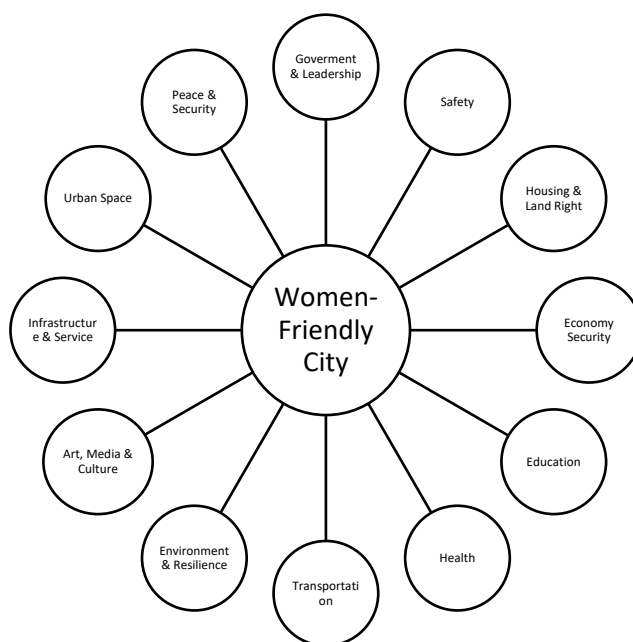


Figure 2: Model for Women-Friendly City

Planning

Selangor was the first state in Malaysia to implement a gender-mainstreaming (GM) initiative in line with the Selangor Women’s Policy. The Selangor Women’s Policy has five key principles and seven main goals that guide GM initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women in the state (Table 2).

Table 2: Selangor Women’s Policy

Key Principles	Main Goals
Key Principle 1: Gender Mainstreaming in Development	Goal 1: Promote a gender-sensitive development framework strategies.
Key Principle 2: Economy and Livelihood	Goal 2: Improve the socio-economic status and autonomy of marginalized women. Goal 3: Narrow the gender gap at all levels and aspects of the labour market
Key Principle 3: Representation and Leadership	Goal 4: Accelerate the participation, representation, and decision-making of women in public and political life
Key Principle 4: Safety and Well-being	Goal 5: Enhance the health, well-being, and mobility of women. Goal 6: Freedom from violence, freedom from fear
Key Principle 5: Creativity and Innovation	Goal 7: Realize the creative talents and innovation of women

Subang Jaya is in the District of Petaling, Selangor, with a land area of 161.8 square kilometres. The demographics of the women in Subang Jaya comprise 49% of the total population. Subang Jaya developed the Women Friendly Green City Action Plan (BHMW) aligned with the Selangor Women's Policy, focusing on inclusivity and empowerment. The BHMW ensures that no group is left behind in town planning and development by empowering communities to overcome rising costs and poverty, especially for B40 women. The Women Friendly Green City Action Plan (BHMW), comprising of four strategies and action plans (Table 3), was proposed by Mayor YBrS TPr. Hajah Noraini binti Haji Roslan.

Table 3: Subang Jaya Women-Friendly City Plan

Strategy	Action Plan
Strategy 1: Healthy Lifestyle	Women's Health and Well-being Active Lifestyle and Women's Personality Recognition and Inclusive Development of Women
Strategy 2: Socio-Economic Improvement	Quality Education Socio-Economic Status and Autonomy of Women
Strategy 3: Safe Cities	Inclusive Urban Planning for Women Education and Awareness
Strategy 4: Infrastructure	Women-Friendly Infrastructure

As stated by City Council Member 1, "*some advancements have been made in the legal framework, but substantial equality for women remains unachieved. Policymaking in Malaysia that focuses on women has been led by*

the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development to protect women, prevent discrimination, and enhance their status. While efforts to develop female resources and improve formal equality have progressed, improvements in labour, family, and welfare are still needed. Previous policies have mostly benefited underprivileged women, leaving many others unaddressed, and failed to meet diverse needs across provinces and urban settings."

"Women face insecurity in public restrooms, transportation, parking lots, childcare facilities, and walkways. Despite legal advancements, many women still experience difficulties in daily life," as stated by City Council Member 2.

The Subang Jaya Women Friendly City Action Plan, proposed by Mayor Ybr's TPr. Hajah Noraini binti Haji Roslan following her 2017 inauguration, aims to move beyond existing women's policies. The plan takes a comprehensive approach to city planning considering women's perspectives, with the objective of reducing the difficulties women face and promoting their societal participation.

Implementation

The "Women Friendly Green City Action Plan" employs strategies to create a women-friendly city environment (as shown in Table 3). It aims to minimise women's daily inconveniences by incorporating their perspectives into policymaking. The Women Empowerment Selangor (WBS) managed women's policymaking until the launch of this action plan, which shifted the focus to comprehensive governance incorporating women's perspectives into every city policy implemented by the Subang Jaya City Council. While WBS oversees women's policy management, each office develops specific programs, with civic groups involved in planning, implementation, and assessment to promote Gender Mainstreaming, the Gender Mainstreaming (GM) Project in Selangor has taken a phased approach.

City Council Member 1 stated: *"In the first year (2017), four pioneering departments conducted gender training workshops and audits, and developed Gender Action Plans led by Gender Focal Points (GFP) and teams (GFT). This work earned recognition from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), citing GM Selangor in its Gender Responsive Budgeting Manual. The second year included an Appointment Letter Presentation Ceremony for new GFPs and GFTs, expanding to include Klang Municipal Council (MPK), Hulu Langat District and Land Office, and Islamic Education Division, JAIS."*

The Women Friendly Green City Action Plan focuses on delivering substantial benefits to women through practical policy. According to City Council Member 3: *"We identified women's inconveniences in the city*

environment and modified them into women-friendly alternatives. We assessed women's needs through expert advice and public surveys to improve facilities." In June 2017, the policy expanded to four areas: "Equality, Inclusivity, Wealth, and Empathy"

The following activities and initiatives align with the gender responsive framework for a women-friendly city:

(a) Governance & Leadership

The Women's Leadership Academy (AKW) provides a platform for women's representation in Selangor, aiming for 30 percent representation in public and political life. Initiatives include leadership training, lifelong learning, research grants by the Empowerment Institute (IWB), a Women's Health Forum on "Women and Public Health in the COVID-19 Pandemic Era", and the Cakna Webinar Series on "Family Responsibility Sharing."

(b) Safety

The Domestic Violence Committee, chaired by the Selangor State Standing Committee on Public Health, Unity, Women's Development, and Family, conducted discussions to address domestic violence during COVID-19 pandemic. The Special Domestic Violence Complaints Hotline (SELamat Line) on 03-64195027 launched on 1 November 2021 with state agencies and NGOs to address domestic violence issues.

(d) Education

Implementation of the "Women in Science and Technology + COVID-19 = What is the Best Formula" 's Forum on the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, observed February 11th by the UN.

(e) Health

The city council conducted health roadshows under the Gaya Hidup Sehat Program, including a workshop for Subang Jaya women on managing work and family stress.

(f) Art, Media & Culture

The Orchid Book documented the accomplishments of the Selangor Women's Policy Organisation. The Proceedings of the Hybrid Selangor Women's Conference was published with 17 papers from the 2021 Conference at the HaSSel Expo. The Teacup Series event highlighted the importance of data in gender development planning.

(g) Infrastructure & Services

The City Council provides women's infrastructure in buildings under its administration. *"As of September 2020, there were 141 dedicated women's parking bays, 185 women's toilets, 16 lactating rooms, nine women's swimming pools, and three women's gyms across the city. The council upgraded pedestrian walkways with women-friendly features, landscaping, tree shades, and placemaking in hawker areas, and installed over 100 CCTVs and streetlights in SS15, SS16, and Puchong Utama"*, as indicated by Urban Planner 1.

Urban Planner 2 highlighted that the council enforces a 2% + 2% parking bay allocation for commercial premises, with 2% for women and 2% for disabled drivers. These parking bays are for single female drivers, pregnant women, and women with children, located near entrances and lifts. The bays have LED lighting and CCTV cameras connected to the MPSJ Headquarters for monitoring, along with panic buttons and buggy services.

City Council Member 2 stated, *"We built an institutional framework involving expert and civic groups (government agencies, SJCC Internal Department, State Assemblyman, developers, NGOs, Higher Learning Education, and local communities). This enabled women to participate in planning and policy execution through diverse methods – regular meetings, expert group meetings, online feedback system, and on-site monitoring."* To strengthen the "Women Friendly Green City Action Plan", the Subang Jaya City Council developed guidelines for facilities and promoted the project by certifying qualified private sector facilities.

Evaluation

To assess the implementation of initiatives, Subang Jaya a Women-Friendly City. As stated by state assembly women of Subang Jaya *"the incorporation of Universal Design and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design into new and existing buildings enabled the city to reduce crime rates by 17 % between November 2019 and November 2020."* This decline resulted from enhanced safety features and inclusive designs that discouraged crime and increased residents' security. This success demonstrates the effectiveness of the Universal Design and CPTED principles in creating safer cities for women.

The success of Subang Jaya's Women-Friendly City is attributed to Mayor's leadership, including project reviews, citizen engagement, and problem-solving. As stated by Urban Planner 2, *"The "Women-Friendly City" goes beyond gender equality and mere institutional improvement and is drawing a very positive response from Subang Jaya residents. The key to the success of the project is the strong and persistent efforts of the Subang Jaya Mayor, the city government's top policy decision maker. She thoroughly reviewed the status of*

the projects regularly and actively collected the opinions and ideas of citizens as well as each department of the city government by holding presentations and assessment sessions. The City Mayor led the women-friendly city project task force team, checked problems in the process of carrying out the project, and provided solutions to resolve them."

The Project influenced city governance by encouraging public servants to include women's perspectives in policy making. Through citizen governance, women participated actively in policy development and evaluation, becoming crucial to the project's success, as noted by City Council Member 3: *"One of the most significant changes made by the "Women Friendly City Project" Women Friendly City Project within the city government is that public servants of the city government began to understand the need to consider women in policymaking. Through a wide range of education, training, and workshops, they recognized the importance of incorporating women's perspectives into the fulfilment of their duties."*

CONCLUSION

Cities aiming to be women-friendly must ensure that urban development efforts respond to both men and women's needs. Women experience cities differently, making it crucial to prioritise their need for sustainable development. Although Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework, their achievements rely on local actions. Developing gender responsiveness for a women-friendly city is essential, focusing on SDG 3, promoting gender equality, and women's empowerment. The gender-responsiveness framework comprises 12 key components: (1) governance and leadership; (2) safety; (3) housing and land rights; (4) economic security; (5) education; (6) health; (7) transportation; (8) environment and resilience; (9) art, media, and culture; (10) infrastructure and services; (11) urban spaces; and (12) peace and security. By adopting a gender-sensitive perspective across these components, cities can create environments that better serve women's needs and promote inclusivity and safety.

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Table 4: Components for Women-Friendly City Model

	New Urban Agenda (NUA)	Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	UN Security Council Resolutions (SCR)	UNESCO Priority Gender Equality Action Plan, 2019 REVISION, 2014-2021	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)	UN Human Rights, The Environment, and Gender Equality, 2021
<p>1. Governance & Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Women & Girl Empowerment in all fields and levels, ensuring equal rights and participation in Decision-Making. ii. Stakeholder Dialogue with women. iii. Women Participation at urban and territorial policy and planning. iv. Gender-responsive budgeting in financial planning and management. v. Civic responsibility and women's participation in governance through access to information and communication technologies. 	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓				
<p>2. Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Eliminate violence and harassment against women and girls in all private and public spaces. ii. Eliminate harmful practices against women and girls. iii. Improve road safety and incorporate it into sustainable transportation infrastructure design, prioritizing the needs of women and girls. 	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓				
<p>3. Housing and Land Right</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Gender-responsive housing policies. ii. Gender-responsive solutions for land and property rights, with a focus on securing land tenure for women. 	✓ ✓	✓	✓				
<p>4. Economy Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Equal pay for women ii. Improve livelihoods, working conditions, and income security for women in the informal economy. 	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓				

