

How Buenos Aires uses the SDGs to advance women's rights

A data-driven approach to gender equity in the public space

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In 2016, when the city of Buenos Aires began to incorporate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into a concrete plan of action, we were faced with the challenge of mainstreaming Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5—ensuring efficient and effective gender equality initiatives—into all facets of public policy, without accurate or transversal gender-based data.

Effectively starting from scratch, we created the [Buenos Aires Gender Indicator System \(SIGBA\)](#) to measure gender gaps across three elements of women's autonomy: physical, economic, and decisionmaking. The foundation for designing a [clear data-based gender strategy](#), it enabled us to work towards transforming Buenos Aires into a city where women can easily travel and enjoy public space without aggression or violence, where they can be responsible for their own economic development, and where they can hold key decisionmaking positions in the public and private spheres.

Understanding the obstacles through better data

Along the way, we've learned that **the best policies to improve women's autonomy are those that are anchored in citizen participation and open government**. One example of this can be seen in how we have adapted mobility policies—a crucial factor when it comes to accessing opportunities—in a vulnerable neighborhood in southeastern Buenos Aires.

Around 99.7% of Buenos Aires' population has access to public transport within five blocks from their homes. However, women living in vulnerable neighborhoods face the added challenge of having to commute from their neighborhood to the rest of the city. Their mobility is also still largely rooted in gender stereotypes. The underlying infrastructural characteristics of our more vulnerable residential communities—narrow streets, irregular ground, safety concerns, public transport stops located on the neighborhood's outskirts—coupled with the more prevalent characteristics of how women travel—shorter but more frequent trips, often in the company of children or other people they are assisting—make it absolutely essential to better tailor mobility policies for women.

The [BA SDG 16+ Lab: Gender, Mobility, and Security in Rodrigo Bueno](#) was set up by the Buenos Aires city government and UNDP Argentina in the city's Rodrigo Bueno neighborhood. A space for co-creating innovative solutions, its objective is to accelerate the achievement of the Global Goals.

Rooted in SDG 16, a cross-cutting goal that promotes open government and citizen participation in the co-creation of policies, the Lab generates **evidence-based data to design comprehensive public policies that improve safety, mobility, and quality of life, boost access to opportunities, and reduce gender gaps**. While explicitly focused on SDGs 5 and 11, it has a direct impact on SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, and 17.

The way the Lab collects and employs data is highly innovative. It uses techniques like crowd mapping and crosses over information from multiple sources—conventional and non-conventional, as well as in-depth interviews, and specific mapping carried out by the neighborhood’s residents. Key to its methodology is the **participation of Rodrigo Buenos’ women**: giving them a voice in the process, translating their needs into data, and co-creating solutions.

A space mapping technique is also employed using a mobile app installed on women’s phones to collect data in real-time and understand the intricacies of their mobility: reasons for commuting (care-related tasks, education, paid work, shopping, and leisure), variety of destinations and travel times, safety perceptions, and the level of satisfaction with the means of transport used. The Lab’s studies show for example that bus travel accounts for 25% of all commutes, while bicycle travel accounts for just 2%. This is because almost half of trips are taken with children: 50% of which are for care-giving activities, 30% for shopping and 20% for education.

From data to tangible policy change

Clearly, these tools and data are only successful if they translate into effective decision making. One way we’ve used data from the Lab to influence policy formation is through collective intelligence workshops that bring together different government departments, national and regional UNDP representatives, and members of the academic community, who collectively evaluate the data to devise integrated policies that address the three dimensions of women’s autonomy.

As a result, the Lab was able to create a comprehensive response to help improve women’s quality of life through a range of small-, medium-, and large-scale solutions, such as changing the placement of a traffic sign to improve road safety,

increasing the frequency of public transport before and after school hours, adding more bus lines to and from the neighborhood, and installing new bus stops around new housing complexes. All this was achieved by actively listening to women’s needs.

Each step taken and process used by the Lab has been meticulously registered, and feeds into the City’s Sustainable Mobility Plan for Vulnerable Neighborhoods. **All the apps used are in an open-source format to ensure their replicability in other neighborhoods or cities around the world.**

The methodology behind the Lab’s data-driven policies is similar when it comes to the formulation of more wide-reaching gender-related policies. Looking first at inequality gaps gleaned from the SIGBA gender indicator system mentioned above and prioritizing the three dimensions of women’s autonomy, the government’s Gender Roundtable (comprised of the city ministers and/or secretaries in charge of human and citizen development, housing, education, health, transport, communication and security, among others) develops tailored proposals and approaches with respect to how the Strategy should be implemented for each government ministry or agency. This has led to policies extending family leave for both parents, increasing credit lines for women entrepreneurs, and undertaking electoral reforms to ensure women make up at least half the electoral rolls for legislators, among others.

This approach enables us not just to better guarantee women’s rights but also their economic development and representation in decision-making processes. **The SDGs are the exact tools we need, not to return to business as usual, but to take us far, far beyond this, towards a fully inclusive, resilient, and sustainable city.**