Local Leadership in Action: Gender-Responsive and Climate-Resilient Cities in Asia

30 May 2025 | 10:15-11:30 a.m. | Multifunction Hall 3
A CDIA-organized fireside chat session at the ADB Water and Urban Development Forum

Total Participants: 25

Male: 11 Female: 14

Speakers:
Olga Chepelianskaia - Senior Urban Specialist, Cities Alliance
Santosh Lal Shrestha – Mayor, Tansen Municipality, Nepal
Mohan Maya Bhandari – Mayor, Birendranagar Municipality, Nepal
Ymeng Lim – Director, One Window Service Unit, Battambang Provincial Government, Cambodia
Panya Manivong – Deputy Director, Vientiane City Office for Management and Service (VCOMS), Vientiane, Lao PDR
Sidxay Makvilay – Deputy Director, Policy Division, Department of Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), Lao PDR

Panelists:
Kiyoshi Nakamitsu – Unit Head, Project Administration – South Asia, WUD, ADB
Karishma Kashyap – Associate Director, APAC-Cities, States & Regions, CDP
Bill Ho - Program Lead, ADPC Academy, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center

Moderator:
Lara Arjan – Senior Urban Development Specialist, ADB

Session Summary

Cities in Asia and the Pacific are grappling with climate change and social inequality, often compounded by limited resources and gender-blind urban planning. This session highlighted innovative, city-led strategies for gender-responsive and climate-resilient urban development. In particular, Nepali municipalities underscored the importance of women-friendly open spaces through the Cities for Women initiative, while Battambang Province showcased its nature-based

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solutions and other engineering measures to increase urban resilience and livability. Finally, Lao PDR officials presented various urban development projects emphasizing community involvement, gender equality, and inclusiveness.

In a dynamic fireside chat, technical experts shared practical approaches for overcoming key challenges, such as a lack of data, financing, and local capacity, to scale up inclusive and climate-resilient initiatives in cities.

Key Takeaways

- As the bulk of funding is directed toward major cities and popular tourist destinations, **secondary and tertiary cities face significant challenges due to limited resources,** making it essential to prioritize projects with the greatest impact.
- **Effective project identification relies on multi-level collaboration** that begins at the community level up to the national government. This ensures that initiatives are rooted in local realities, aligned with stakeholder needs and priorities, and designed for more impactful outcomes. Close coordination with the national government further enables cities to access international financing for their projects.
- **Actively involving women in city and community projects** while integrating gender elements throughout the project design **ensures the consideration of diverse perspectives** that can result in more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable solutions.
- **Leaders and policymakers must uphold transparency and responsibility** to build trust and deliver meaningful results.
- **Cities must address both the data gaps and the limited capacity to generate them,** as robust data systems are the building blocks of effective planning and decision-making, and crucial for facilitating behavior change and the acceptability of interventions.
- Instead of relying on project-based training initiatives, **capacity-building should be embedded within institutional structures** to foster a sustained, strategic approach to strengthening systems and building a culture of continuous learning and development.

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