

## **Urban Female Leaders (LFU) initiative**

### **- The urban transformation is female! -**

GIZ's Gender Competition 2024 Proposal  
Category: GE1 Projects

#### **Context: Brazilian Reality**

Gender equality and human rights are key factors to be considered in all sustainable development projects. Since gender, in the wider sense, correlates with ethnicity, class, age and others, it is a determining factor for the level of accessibility to resources and opportunities.

Despite existing constitutionally guaranteed rights and ratified international obligations regarding human rights and gender equality Brazil continues to face cultural and political barriers that are structurally patriarchal, sexist, and racist.

Gender inequality in Brazil is a multi-faceted structural issue with ramifications throughout the country's history, closely accompanied by various other types of inequalities and discriminations, such as racism, homophobia, income disparity and lack of political representation. Although a lot has changed in the last decade, with important steps being taken in favor of women's rights, narrowing the gender gap worldwide, Brazil remains behind in its effort to achieve gender equality when compared to other countries throughout the years. According to the Global Gender Gap annual reports from the World Economic Forum (2015-2019) – which measures inequality based on economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health/survival rates – Brazil's score changed very little in the last five years.

Despite representing most of the Brazilian population, around 51.1%, Brazilian women occupy only 37.4% of leadership positions in the public and private sectors (IBGE, 2019). To build more inclusive policies it is therefore essential to strengthen female representation, especially with an intersectional approach, valuing black and indigenous women in decision-making spaces.

When discussing urban development, it is also important to highlight how these social structures define the way people, especially women, interact with the city and how to address the inequalities that affect their lives.

For years, the construction of cities has made women's needs invisible. In Brazil, only 12% of municipalities are currently led by women mayors. Black women occupy an even smaller place, leading only 3% of municipalities (Alziras Institute, 2022). Despite representing a minority in city administrations, women are the ones who experience urban problems most intensely. In terms of mobility, for example, they are the main users of public transport. In terms of housing, they are the ones most affected by the poor quality of housing and the lack of urban infrastructure, such as basic sanitation and garbage collection, especially those living on the urban peripheries.

What drives us is the desire to see Brazilian women recognized, and valued and represented in urban spaces, as well as to highlight the crucial role they already play and which can still be optimized in Brazil's development as leaders, as entrepreneurs, as full citizens, and other functions.

### **The Urban Female Leaders (LFU) Initiative**

Launched in August 2022, the "Urban Female Leaders (LFU)" initiative is a network of female leaders for urban sustainability, formed by women, especially those in leadership positions in local governments. The idea is to create a space for mayors, secretaries, coordinators, team leaders and other women in leadership positions to exchange, embrace, learn and grow. The activities, content and priorities of this initiative are a collective decision.

The initiative strengthens women as protagonists in urban planning and development. It points out relevant aspects of women's interaction with cities, including decision-making issues, public safety, poverty, their specific interactions with public spaces and more. With this vision of the future we want in mind, the group proposes and undertakes commitments that will be achieved through the engagement of the people and institutions taking part. We are thus seeking to strengthen women's leadership through meetings, safe spaces for exchange, networking, active listening, lectures, and trainings.

The "Urban Female Leaders" is an online platform of the Network for Sustainable Urban Development (ReDUS). This is a network for people, organizations, and initiatives to discuss the future of Brazilian cities. The aim of the network is to create and strengthen collaboration between communities of practice for sustainable urban development.

ReDUS provides tools for the management, participation, and engagement of the Community, such as: a repository of materials and references, registration forms, forms for managing surveys, an automated attendance list, generation of a certificates of participation, a schedule of activities and assignments, a home page with a description of the initiative and a visualization of the community, which enables and facilitates interaction between people and the building of new initiatives.

We also seek to identify risks and potentials about the connections between gender and environmental sustainability, leading to better and more comprehensive urban planning. In addition, we want to establish a common space for exchanges between female leaders, give visibility at a national level and highlight the importance of women's participation in all stages of formulating and implementing urban policies, especially gender-sensitive ones. Join the initiative is voluntary and open to any woman, cis or trans, working in any local government in Brazil.

The initiative's shared vision seeks to bring together women who have significant influence in their institutions and organizations and who are willing to employ the means and resources at their disposal to leverage a women's leadership agenda in Brazil for sustainable urban development.

The initiative was founded within the scope of two urban projects: **Support for the Brazilian National Agenda for Sustainable Urban Development (ANDUS)** and **Sustainable Urban Development (DUS)**, which are part the Urban Transformation Team, responsible for the approaching and implementation of projects on the theme of urban transformation by GIZ in Brazil.

The two projects took on the roles of obtaining relevant information, initial communication with stakeholders and drafting preliminary content. In addition, by adopting an inter-federative approach to formulate public policies, we aim to identify good practices at the local level, promoting constant improvement of actions at the federal level, especially in the mainstreaming of gender and human rights on the agenda of the Brazilian Ministry of Cities, the political partner in the implementation of the above-mentioned projects, and other strategic partners.

Among the benefits identified, the initiative seeks to: (1) connect women with similar professional challenges; (2) learn about and understand the connection between gender, urban transformation and climate change in cities; (3) learn about concrete examples and sustainable solutions; (4) expand and connect their own actions and ideas to achieve transformation; (5) listen to women's experiences in the city; (6) seek links between concrete solutions and guidelines for political agendas; (7) capacity building.

The benefits cover the technical, management and personal skills of professionals in the field, especially access to relevant information, peer learning, networking and so on.

## Activities and achievements

In line with Germany's Feminist Development Policy, the activities organized by the initiative take an intersectional approach, focusing on women and other marginalized groups, placing their needs as urgent measures for building more equitable cities and empowering them as agents of change for urban transformation.

Most of the activities were carried out in partnerships with third sector institutions, international organizations and city governments, whose actions also focus on sustainable urban development, the promotion of human rights and women's empowerment.

The initiative currently counts on the participation of about 130 women, from 62 Brazilian municipalities of 21 different regions. In just over a year, 9 online activities have already been conducted, with the following standing out:

- Training on **inclusive and non-sexist language**, which aims to reverse, through words or structures, situations of invisibilization and discrimination against women, LGBTQIA+ people and BIPOC in written, verbal, and visual communication (the training was created by the Work Group for Gender & Human Rights from GIZ in Brazil).
- Training on **clear and non-violent communication**, focusing on methods to structure conversations and empowering women as leaders, with practical examples.
- **"Gender and BIPOC sensitive budgets"** – the guests from the Tide Setubal Foundation and the organization *A Tenda das Candidatas* ("The Women Candidates Tent", in English), who are responsible for the publication of the same name, spoke about how to integrate a gender and BIPOC perspective into the municipal public budget.
- **"More inclusive cities for women and girls: participatory tools to qualify local public policies"** – a discussion with UN-Habitat on the challenges and dimensions of promoting gender inclusion in the urban context and their work to support local governments in implementing inclusive policies, using methodologies with women of different ages, ethnicities, gender identities and sexualities and socioeconomic status.
- **"Social and gender dimensions in the Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) sector"** – a presentation about Municipal Basic Sanitation Plans and integrated MSW management, targets and indicators for municipal public management and examples of good practice. Participating in the discussion were the environment secretary of the municipality of Contagem/MG; the president of a waste pickers' cooperative in Brasilia/DF; and a technical advisor who was part of the ProteGEEr, a GIZ-Brazil already concluded project that conducted studies to deepen intersectionality in the promotion of leadership in the sector and equal opportunities in MSW management. The guests, all women, shared their experiences, good practices in their work and approaches on MSW.

Most of the activities are offered only to the initiative's community and led only by women. These virtual activities are not recorded, as we do our best to create a comfortable and safe environment to promote the exchange of ideas and experiences.

Since the launch of “LFU”, we have had the support of the National Front of Mayors (known as *Frente Nacional de Prefeitas e Prefeitos* - FNP, in Portuguese), a national municipal organization run exclusively by mayors, bringing together all Brazilian municipalities with more than 80.000 inhabitants.

In 2023, the partnership with the FNP was improved. Due to the success of the collaboration, we are working on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to soon formalize the cooperation between FNP and the Urban Transformation Team.

In addition to the collaboration with the FNP, since May this year the LFU has also established a partnership with UN-Habitat to provide institutional support and organization of the initiative’s activities. The collaboration with the organizations promotes visibility, synergy, sharing of resources and best practices, optimizing the results of the Urban Female Leaders initiative and its capacity to empower female leaders.

We expect that, in the future, other social organizations, companies, public authorities and government entities in general will be able to take part in this initiative.

### **Challenges and the future of LFU**

Great care is being taken that the activities themselves include different perspectives and offer a space for the women themselves to act as protagonists. The challenge to be addressed is now to ensure the initiative continued success through a more horizontal coordination and management, so that partner institutions become more autonomous in proposing and conducting activities.

In addition, it is essential to increase active community participation. This challenge involves developing effective engagement strategies that encourage diverse representation and the inclusion of marginalized voices. As part of future activities, it is planned to address the theme of urban mobility, recognizing it as a central issue for territorial articulation and sustainable development. Another topic of interest to the community is the lack of arborization and sanitation and how the black population is most affected by extreme events, a result of environmental racism. There are also plans for discussion groups on female entrepreneurship and participation in events on the subject.

In addition, the promotion of face-to-face meetings will provide valuable opportunities for networking and strengthening ties between participants. Establishing new institutional partnerships is also among the priorities, with a view to expanding the initiative's reach and impact in promoting gender equality with other sectors for urban development.

Check out the **Urban Women's Leadership (LFU) initiative** at the Network for Sustainable Urban Development (ReDUS): <https://www.redus.org.br/liderancas-femininas-urbanas>