

# CELEBRATING THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN IN PLANNING ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

/ Jenna Dutton, PIBC Candidate Member

**World Town Planning Day (WTPD) occurs annually on November 8 to celebrate planners' accomplishments and recognize their contributions to communities around the world.**

Observed in over 30 countries, the majority of planning organizations celebrating WTPD are members of the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP). CAP has been connecting planners across the Commonwealth for over 50 years and represents close to 40,000 planners working across all levels of government, the private sector, non-governmental, community-based, and grassroots organizations. Members of the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) and the Planning Institute of British Columbia (PIBC) are automatically CAP members, providing a great opportunity to access an extensive, international community of practice through which we can share knowledge and resources relating to all aspects of planning.

A global institution, CAP plays a significant role in promoting the profession of planning as fundamental to the development of sustainable human settlements, mitigating the impacts of climate change, and building resilient communities. One of CAP's many roles has been to provide guidance to advance gender equity in the built environment across its member countries. The planning profession has recently seen an influx of international resources and toolkits regarding gender inclusion in urban planning. For example, the *Her City Toolbox* is a collaboration between UN-Habitat and Global Utmaning, focused on amplifying the global involvement of girls in urban development to create cities that will work for young women and, ultimately, for everyone else, too. Recent research from ARUP, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the University of Liverpool incorporates the perspectives



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of a diverse array of women from 20 countries across 6 continents and highlights how sustainable cities work better for women and, likewise, how cities that are more gender inclusive also tend to be more sustainable overall. The report argues that we first need to address barriers to women entering city planning and related professions in order to effectively tackle gender bias in the lived urban environment. Despite the increasing scope and diversity of international research and guidance on gender-equitable cities, there remains an urgent need to address gender equity in urban planning practice.

To address the disconnect between research on gender equity and the realities of planning practice, CAP launched the Commonwealth Women in Planning Network (CWIP) in 2018. Guided by its internationally endorsed *Women in Planning Manifesto*, CWIP recognizes the need for strategic leadership and gender-inclusive governance models at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Similar to the approach taken by UNDP, the Manifesto was collaboratively developed by 34 female planners across 10 countries, including those living and working in urban, rural, and Indigenous communities. Through research, advocacy, and partnership-building, CWIP is dedicated to providing practitioners with a gender-based lens to examine the design and management of the built environment, advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and provide support for women working in the planning profession.

CWIP also recognizes that women's access to – and participation in – the planning profession varies greatly across CAP's member countries. For example, the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) 2020/2021 *Equity Diversity & Inclusion Insight Survey* revealed that the number of women in planning practice drops significantly as seniority increases (p.16). This means that the majority of decision-making power remains in the hands of men. Likewise, in the United Kingdom, the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) published a paper in

2020 entitled “Women and Planning: An analysis of gender-related barriers to professional advancement.” Within its pages are many critical insights, including that more than half of survey respondents felt their opportunities for promotion are limited by their gender and that women are particularly at risk of discrimination when returning from maternity leave. Through our work with planning organizations across the Commonwealth, CWIP found that the desire or capacity to ensure gender equity in planning practice is commonly insufficient or non-existent. However, CWIP maintains that there is potential to leverage existing tools and promising practices to shift planning toward more context-specific, gender-inclusive, and resilient practices.

Gender inequity in planning practice is known to spill over into the lived environment. For example, in India, women's participation in the workforce dropped from 30.27% in the 1990s to 20.8% in 2019, a trend that was compounded by unsafe public spaces, lack of efficient public transport, and available services such as public restrooms. While the connection between women's access to employment and gender equity in the urban environment has been identified numerous times in the research, we are far from reaching gender equity either within the planning profession or within the cities we plan. The decisions that planners make every day can have lasting – and compounding – impacts on the populations we serve.

While our specific titles and roles may vary, there is a need to consider how our approaches to planning impact the global community and how we may benefit from learning from those with lived experience, including our international colleagues. Whether by connecting through in-person and online events, reaching out to planners in different countries, or analyzing approaches from other jurisdictions, our collective community of practice is always improved through both sharing learnings and practicing cultural humility. Throughout 2023, CWIP will be collaborating with organizations, including Cities Alliance

and UN Women, to host events and share tools regarding embedding gender-inclusive practices into planning. Importantly, these events will be open to women, men, and gender-diverse individuals for collective learning. We value our volunteers from a diversity of CAP member countries and are always open to collaborating with any planners and organizations focused on creating more inclusive communities.

World Town Planning Day reminds us that the profession and practice of planning exist far beyond our local, regional, and national geographies. Across the Global North and Global South, planning has a major part to play in ensuring the creation of equitable futures for all.

Jenna Dutton is Co-Chair of the Commonwealth Women in Planning Network and a candidate member. To join or get in touch with CWIP, please visit <https://www.commonwealth-planners.org/cwip-network>, connect with CWIP on LinkedIn, or email Jenna at [jennadutton@gmail.com](mailto:jennadutton@gmail.com).

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