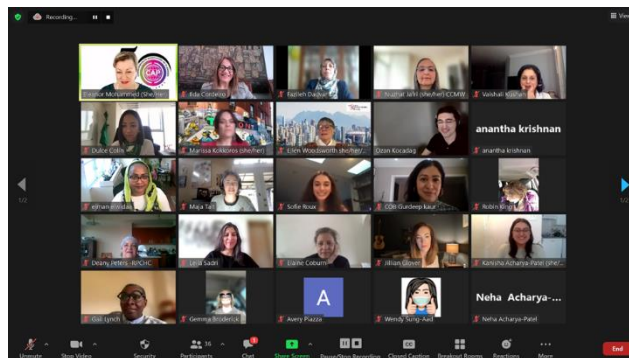


Urban Thinkers Campus – Transforming cities to be inclusive, equitable, and just through a paradigm shift towards gender equality.

Toronto, Canada 7th & 8th March 2022 – The Urban Economy Forum and the Commonwealth Association of Planners partnered with the World Urban Campaign to organize the **Urban Thinkers Campus – North America Women and Urban SDGs: An Urban Paradigm Shift Towards Gender Equality**, in honour of International Women's Day. It brought together government officials, elected representatives, women's organisations championing women's rights, city leaders, urban planners, the private sector, and academia from nearly 90 different cities in over 20 countries. The event provided a platform for an open dialogue to exchange ideas and share practical solutions for a positive urban transformation using a feminist approach. The Urban Thinkers Campus (UTC) was also an occasion to launch the **City We Need NOW!** campaign for North America with the focus of empowering women and girls in cities and towns worldwide. Urban Economy Forum is the lead on the regional dialogue for this global campaign.



Cities have a key role to play in promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls to be active members of society. “Well planned cities can be a catalyst for inclusion and power houses for economic growth” stated the Executive Director of UN-Habitat Maimunah Mohd Sharif in her message to the participants.

Historically city design and planning excluded women's participation in city-building which have led to significant urban inequalities. To understand and redress these inequalities requires a paradigm shift from a male-centric urban development model to a gender-inclusive one. “This shift will challenge long held [bias] assumptions ... and bring voices and perspectives of women and girls forward in areas where they have been discounted and ignored for far too long” observed Her Excellency Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Governor General of Ontario.

According to The Hon. Leah Gazan, MP for Winnipeg Centre (Canada), “poverty and exclusion for women and girls in Canada are the key drivers of homelessness in this country.” The right to housing as a human right needs to be addressed when developing affordable and accessible housing for All. This is particularly true for women and female-headed households and diverse gender groups.

Throughout North American urban centres we are seeing the movement towards Women Friendly Cities. This shift takes into account women and girls full participation in the social, cultural, economic and political life of the city. “When planning cities it is important that gender equality and an intersectional lens is included in the decision-making process on how cities are planned and developed” said The Hon. Salm Zahid, MP for Scarborough Center in Canada. Only then can cities be built for women and by women. A Women Friendly City is inclusive and promotes gender equality. This is the UN-Habitat campaign for the City We Need NOW.