



GENDER & POLICY LAB  
GREATER CHENNAI CORPORATION

# Building A Gender Inclusive Chennai: Learnings and Way Forward

Chennai Gender and Policy Lab



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### BUILDING A GENDER INCLUSIVE CHENNAI:

### LEARNINGS & WAY FORWARD

Date: November 9, 2023

Venue: Amma Maligai Auditorium



Report by **AuxoHub**

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\*Team Gender and Policy Lab





## Welcoming and Felicitating the Dignitaries

Gender and Policy Lab (GPL) hosted the event- "Building A Gender Inclusive Chennai: Learnings and Way Forward" on 9 November 2023 at the Amma Maligai Auditorium from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM in order to launch the official logo of GPL and the bilingual annual reports. During the welcome address, the Policy Expert, Tmt. Vaishnavi Chidambaranathan spoke that the event symbolised the collective commitment of different stakeholders including the government, civil society organisations and the public to create an inclusive Chennai. The policy expert acknowledged the launch of GPL as the state government's continuous effort to bring equity in all aspects of governance.

By recalling the launch of the Gender and Policy Lab in April 2022, the policy expert stated that the Lab stands as a testimony to the commitment to gender inclusivity of the Honourable Mayor Tmt. Priya Rajan and the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC). The event was envisaged not only as a celebration of the Lab's one-year progress but also as a platform to share their reflections on the learnings so far. Speaking about the agenda, she said that the launch of the logo and the Annual report will be followed by the presentation of key findings from the city-wide perception study. Following this, the dignitaries and the public were to be asked to share their vision for inclusive Chennai. The policy expert reiterated that the event is a setting stone for a future where every voice matters in a safe, inclusive Chennai.



In order to honour the presence of the dignitaries -Honourable Mayor Tmt. Priya Rajan and Deputy Mayor Thiru. Magesh Kumar, Commissioner of GCC Thiru Dr J Radhakrishnan IAS, Deputy Commissioner of Education, Parks and Playfields, Tmt. Dr. Sharanya Ari IAS, Commissioner of Police Thiru. Sandeep Rai Rathore, Joint Commissioner Works Thiru. G S Sameeran IAS and Assistant Director General of Police, Tmt. Kalpana Nayak were felicitated with books. Following this, an introductory video briefing on the roles, functions and activities of the Lab in the past year was displayed.



## Overview of GPL's Activities

The Deputy Commissioner of Education Tmt. Dr Sharanya Ari IAS who is the officer in charge of GPL spoke about the theme of the event, "EmpowHER Chennai", which conveyed the essence of the larger vision of the gathering- "To empower the women of Chennai to build an inclusive Chennai". She listed the Lab's exceptional body of work exhibiting successful collaborations not just within GCC but with sister organisations as well. Highlighting the most prominent projects taken up, the Deputy Commissioner mentioned that the GPL team has undertaken more than 32 activities in the past year. The Working Group and the Voluntary Advisory Committee have played a major role in the success of these activities. The Deputy Commissioner reminded that the Lab's long journey ahead will strengthen their goal towards inclusive Chennai while ensuring nobody is left behind.



## Commitment to an Inclusive and Safe Chennai



Following the Deputy Commissioner of Education, the Additional Chief Secretary and the Commissioner of GCC, Thiru. Dr J Radhakrishnan IAS was invited to provide the inaugural address. Emphasising the need for collaboration to build a safe city, the Commissioner drew from a question posed by the former late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Thiru. Dr Karunanidhi- Who is truly responsible for the city? Thus, highlighting the need for proactiveness in response across all stakeholder levels.

Although Tamil Nadu and Chennai are performing well in indicators related to gender inclusivity and safety, the Commissioner highlighted that the commitment and responsiveness should continue to bring a long-lasting change. He thanked the Honourable Chief Minister for his proactive initiatives and interest in the well-being of the citizens. The Commissioner appreciated the effective utilisation of Nirbhaya funds by all the stakeholders involved.

As the first city in India to implement a Lab focusing on citizen safety and inclusivity, the Commissioner emphasised the importance of not just highlighting the positive aspects of the city but also accepting and addressing the negative aspects. He also urged the audience to study the findings of the perception survey and come up with implementable solutions. Finally, the Commissioner lauded the Lab for being always ready to go above and beyond and providing "360-degree" insights about the city itself.

## Efforts at Reducing Crime Against Women



Thanking the Honourable Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu for his continuous efforts at creating safe spaces for women, the Commissioner of Greater Chennai Police (GCP), Thiru. Sandeep Rai Rathore explained that the sensitivity over the safety of women and children has developed over the years.

The Commissioner stated that a safety and inclusivity survey conducted by an international consultancy ranked Chennai to be the safest Indian city. Aligning with the efforts of GPL and Nirbhaya funds, GCP has undertaken many initiatives including the establishment of women-only police stations in the city.

Today, Tamil Nadu, boasting the highest number of women-only police stations in India, currently has 37 such dedicated facilities. Further, the Commissioner mentioned many other initiatives taken up by GCP for the safety of women and children. Reaffirming GCP and GPL's collective vision of creating a safe Chennai, the Commissioner suggested that the Lab should try to address the practical challenges the stakeholders face while implementing safety and awareness initiatives in the upcoming years.

## Chief Minister's Commitment to Women's Safety

The Deputy Mayor of Greater Chennai Corporation, Thiru Magesh Kumar, thanked the good governance in the state of Tamil Nadu under the honourable Chief Minister's leadership. He highlighted that out of the 200 ward counsellors of Chennai city, 102 of them are women.

Being a parent to two daughters, he mentioned how he feels safe when his daughters are outside in the dark hours because of the numerous initiatives taken by the stakeholders to make Chennai safe. Congratulating the Lab and other stakeholders for their efforts in the past year, the Deputy Mayor shared his commitment to women's safety and gender inclusivity in the city.





## Launch of the Logo and Bilingual Annual Report

The dignitaries of the event collectively launched the logo of the Gender and Policy Lab. The three triangles of the logo signify the female, male and diverse genders while the circles placed above indicate balance and mainstreaming. The larger outer circle of the logo signifies mobility and freedom of movement in the city. Following this, the dignitaries also released the bilingual (Tamil and English) Annual Reports of the Gender and Policy Lab which is a compendium of the Lab's works over the past year.



*Launch of the Gender and Policy Lab Logo*



*Release of the bilingual Annual Reports*

The winner of the pan-Indian logo designing competition, Mr. Vishwanathan Sridhar from Odds Studio was felicitated with a cash prize of Rs. 10,000. The competition witnessed over 140+ entries from across India.



*Logo design competition winner being felicitated*

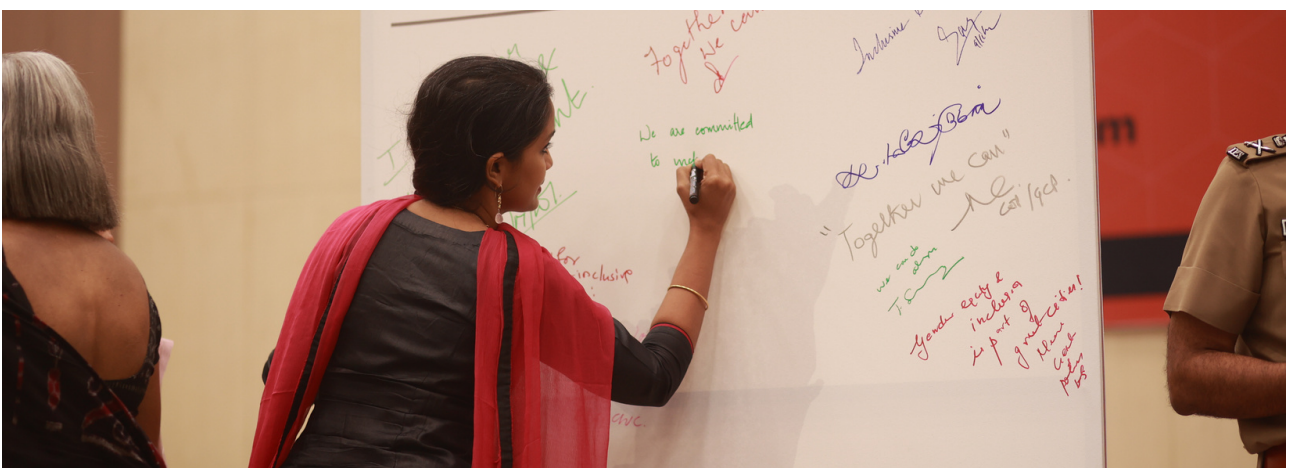
## Women-Centred Initiatives in the City

The Honourable Mayor of GCC, Tmt. Priya Rajan spoke about the focus on women-centred initiatives taken by GCC through the Gender and Policy Lab and the Greater Chennai Police. Recalling the establishment of the Lab a year ago, the Mayor appreciated the Lab's continuous initiatives towards creating a safe and inclusive city throughout the year. She thanked the Greater Chennai Police for showing unwavering support to the Lab in order to carry out the initiatives effectively.

She highlighted that the initiatives focus on women of all age groups- from school-going girls to elderly women using public spaces. While speaking about the initiatives taken by GCP and GCC, she spotlighted the establishment of CCTV cameras and street lights in all localities by promptly responding to the grievances received. Thanking the honourable Chief Minister for his support to women-centric initiatives, the Mayor brought to the forefront that other cities including Hyderabad and Bangalore are also in the process of establishing a Gender and Policy Lab following Chennai. She congratulated the Lab for its successful completion of one year and committed to supporting the Lab in all its future initiatives.

## Pledging for an Inclusive Chennai

A short video highlighting the key findings of the perception study and people's opinions about safety in the city was displayed. As the pinnacle of the event, the dignitaries were invited to share their vision for Chennai on a message board and pledge their commitment to making their vision a reality.



## Highlights of the Perception Study

The Gender and Policy Lab lead, Tmt. Meera Sundararajan presented the key findings of the city-wide perception study conducted by the Lab. Dr Meera mentioned that this first-of-its-kind study in Chennai aimed to obtain a comprehensive and representative understanding from women across the spectrum of demographics, on the public transport used, public spaces assessed, the perception of the safety, use of public infrastructure and factors that restrict reporting harassment. The survey sampling details can be found in the [English](#) and [Tamil](#) Annual reports.



The key findings of the study are as follows:

### Mobility Experiences and Difficulties



Women in the city travel for purposes ranging from work (40%), purchasing household needs (36%), education (20%) and social and recreational reasons (16-17%). Buses, two-wheelers and autos are the most commonly used travel modes. They travelled an average of 5.8 kms for work and 3.6 kms for education every day. Women with disabilities and elderly women mentioned challenges in accessing public transport and a lack of public empathy. Transgender women shared experiences of discrimination and harassment in public spaces.

### Satisfaction with Public Transport



88% of the women agreed that there are frequent public transport services available during the day. About 70% of women felt public transport is affordable, 77% mentioned that it is comfortable, 76% reported it is clean and 72% of women agreed that public transport staff are helpful and sensitive towards the safety of women passengers. The free transport for women was also seen as being very useful. However, 68% of women felt that the frequency of all bus services after dark needed improvement. Last-mile connectivity was a matter of concern with the non-availability of autos and high fares being problems.

### Usage of Public Places



Majority of women agreed public places are well connected through public transport (83%) and public places are well-lit (78%). However, women still felt hesitant about using public toilets to relieve themselves or utilise subways. Women do not use public parks as frequently as men. The presence of alcohol shops anywhere in the city makes women and girls avoid the space. Transgender persons still find acceptance in public places difficult and persons with disability find access a challenge.





### Perception of Chennai as a Safe City

The perception of Chennai as a safe city among women seems to be high. About 53% of women rated the city as safe but only 43% of men rated the city to be safe. Only 29% of transgender respondents rated Chennai to be safe. 95% of men and 78% of women did not think that the city was high in crimes against women. However, 52% of transgender persons felt that the crimes against them were high in Chennai.

### Experience of Sexual Harassment in Public Spaces and Public Transport

A total of 12-22% of the women respondents mentioned having faced either visual, verbal, physical, stalking, soliciting or violent forms of harassment in public spaces and transport which is lower than the findings of a study by GIZ and the Government of Kerala<sup>1</sup> where over 50% of the women have mentioned experiencing harassment. However, hesitance and reluctance in sharing the experiences among women may be higher in Chennai.



A more serious problem is that women experiencing harassment did not take action. The reasons ranged from not being aware that such cases can be reported to authorities are the lack of awareness of reporting mechanisms and a desire to not draw attention to themselves by taking action. The awareness levels for women seemed lower than that of men and transgenders when it came to reporting mechanisms. Concerning intervention by bystanders, 62% of the women who experienced harassment said that no one intervened. Whenever there was any intervention 45% of women said it was from the police and only 38% said it was from known people or strangers.

### Responses of Men and Bystanders to Harassment

Despite the better awareness levels, the action taken by men when they witnessed cases of harassment of women in public spaces and public transport is low. About 43% of men mentioned witnessing sexual harassment of women in public places in the last 3 months. 18% of men reported that they did not do anything even when the victim was known to them whereas 14% of men reported the same when the victim was a stranger. Around one-fourth of the men who did not intervene mentioned the hassle of dealing with the system or authorities (29%) and fear of getting attacked (25%) as the main reasons. 20% of them said they did not intervene because they felt it was on account of the women's clothes or behaviour.



## Public's Vision for Chennai

Following the presentation on the key findings of the perception study, the audience were asked to share their vision for Chennai.



"As the president of Veera Pengal Munneta Sangam and an auto driver, I would like to flag some challenges we face while accessing public toilets. Most of them are non functional or we have to travel long distances to use them. Besides, we also face harassment from male auto drivers. Even though we have the support of the police, we need a permanent solution to these issues."

**-Mohana**

1. Gender sensitive reforms in public transport- a case of Kerala. Social Justice Department, Govt of Kerala, Kerala Metropolitan Transport Authority, supported by GIZ, December, 2021

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"I work with the girl children belonging to resettlement communities. There are very few parks and playgrounds in these areas which are also occupied by boys. These girls do not have access to even play, which is a beautiful part of their childhood. Not only in these communities but everywhere in the city, we women should claim access to public spaces such as parks, pavements and playgrounds."

**-Valarmathi**

"I work for the welfare of women in relocated colonies. Most of these women do not avail job opportunities far away due to the fear of leaving their children alone without care. I request the GCC to increase the number of Anganwadi centres and make after-school care centres affordable for everyone. So that these women can go to their jobs, improve their economic situations while not worrying about their children."

**-Esther Mariam Selvam**

"In the times when my family is scared to send me to my tuition centre located next street alone, I dream of a Chennai where I can spend a night on the beach alone, safe and fearless."

**-Dharshini**

"It is difficult to find housing for single women who have come to the city for employment unless they are accompanied by men. The house owners are hostile towards them asking personal questions and sometimes even indulging in moral policing. I request the GCC to spread awareness to different housing societies regarding this."

**-Shraddha**

"When we speak about public spaces, we tend to overlook government institutions. But these are also public spaces that women need access to. But unfortunately, women experience hostile behaviour and discrimination even in these government institutions such as police stations and government hospitals. This situation should change!"

**-Archana**

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## Conclusion

Citing Jean Jacobs, stating "Cities can offer opportunities for everyone only when they are collectively created by the entire community", the Communications expert of the Lab, Tmt. Steffi Cherian extended her gratitude on behalf of the team to the dignitaries, the attendees and the press. She thanked the sister organisations of the Lab including GCC, GCP, CMRL, CUMTA, Railways, Social Welfare, Foreign delegates and civil society organisations for their support and coordination for all of GPL's initiatives. Further, she extended her gratitude to team AuxoHub for compiling the annual reports of GPL, Binisha for creating all the collaterals for the event, Power of Sura for designing the tote bags, Ipsos Market Research who conducted the city-wide perception study and the fellows of Citizens of Safe Mobility for their constant support. While concluding the event with the spirit of commitment and collaboration, she reaffirmed GPL's vision for a safe and gender-inclusive Chennai.



