



Women reclaiming the city spaces through cycles in Kolkata

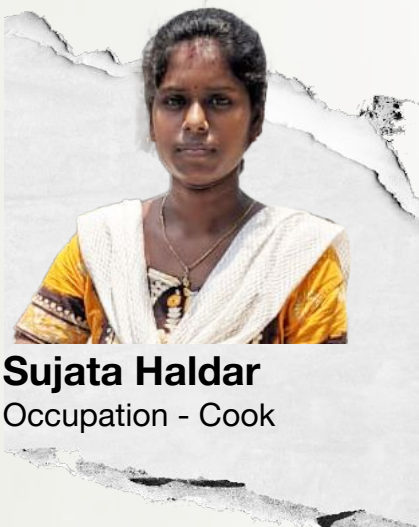
This document explores the narrative of **women domestic helpers** who are dependent on cycles for their livelihood. To understand why these domestic helpers working in New Town, Kolkata choose to cycle, a **focussed group discussion** was conducted where women opened up about their **experiences and challenges** while cycling to work.



CASE STUDY - I

Sujata Haldar, a 28 years old woman is working as a house help in an upmarket housing complex in New Town, Kolkata and cycles to her workplace every day for last 10 years. This has made Sujata extremely **confident, independent and better at managing time**. At the same time, it has also brought out the fierceness in her while dealing with any sort of **harassment and negative remarks** while cycling. But her journey to reach this level of confidence was not an easy change. She struggled to buy her cycle with a loan of 5000 INR; it took her a long time to pay it back as her monthly salary is a mere 7000 INR.

According to Sujata, some of the issues women cyclists face are **negative and truculent attitude** towards women cyclists, two/four wheelers do not give **recognition** to cyclists leading to accidents or injuries of cyclists. Despite the hurdles, she points some good aspects of cycling; one being able to **save money** and utilising it to **feed and educate her children** well. Secondly, a sense of **flexibility, mobility and being independent** that she feels as a result of cycling. Sujata is a perfect example of a woman who has not only adopted cycling as a means to travel but she is also striking an efficient balance between her home and work and cycling has helped her to achieve it.



Sujata Haldar
Occupation - Cook



I don't think that riding cycles is only men's right. I think women can do everything that a man does. They are both equal in every sense.



WHAT SUJATA PROPOSES

Attention to **public washrooms for women** on the roads.





CASE STUDY - II

Sukla Bapari, 37 years old, cycles to work every day for the last 10 years. Being a widow and having three children to support, Sukla takes care of running the household. She saved 500-1000 INR every month to buy her cycle. While pointing out some of the issues faced by women cyclists, Sukla thinks that women find it **extremely difficult to cycle on rainy days.**

She says, “Women travel to the workplace keeping one hand on the handle and one carrying the umbrella which becomes risky as the roads on rainy days are slippery and wind force works against the speed of the cycle.” But cycles at the same time open our **alternatives for greater employability** and help us to be **mobile and flexible.**



Sukla Bapari
Occupation - Cook



“Cycle helps us to reach our workplace on time which is the most important thing for us since we can do double shifts and increase our income otherwise it would have been a far fetched dream.”



WHAT SUKLA PROPOSES

Cycle distribution for poor working women on a subsidized rate will help a large section of society.



CASE STUDY - III

Minati Sikdar had to take a loan of 6000 INR to buy a cycle to go to work. This 36 years old woman says many times the sari gets entangled in the cycle tyre. The **traditional mindset** of family and culture are **not conducive** for women cyclists to wear comfortable attire while cycling which also becomes a **reason for road accidents and mishaps.** She points out that the level of harassment with women cyclists was high earlier since the New Town area was deserted and menfolk sitting in groups for leisure activities would often pass lewd comments.

But now the **level of harassment** on the roads has significantly **reduced** due to **effective monitoring** done by **CCTV cameras** installed on the roads and **overall rise in the confidence level of women cyclists** due to the number of years of cycling experience. In her words, “Men know that if they say something to us, we will not be silent hence they do not take that risk with us. They know **women who can cycle will not take any nuisance on the roads.**”



Minati Sikdar
Occupation - Cook



“When four wheelers come close to my cycle, my hands start to tremble since I once met with an accident, got injured and I had to spend a lot of money on the maintenance. But with each passing day I am becoming a better cyclist.”



WHAT MINATI PROPOSES

Better road safety education to road users to have a **positive and empathetic attitude towards women cyclists.**

Police department’s active **help/guidance** for rescuing lost cycles.



CASE STUDY - IV

Sikha Das's day starts as early as 4 am. After completing her household chores, she leaves for cleaning work to a housing complex. This 35 years woman cyclist shares that women livelihood cyclists face the issue of **menstrual health and hygiene** in the form of menstrual cramps and lack of **clean public toilets** which makes **cycling a difficult experience for women.**

Sikha goes on to say that the **lack of parking facilities** is another issue for women cyclists since there is **no dedicated parking facility** for them. Moreover, women househelps are not allowed to keep the cycle in the shade inside the housing complex. But the good part is having a **cycle helps her to save** on the monthly bus rent which she **utilizes for her children's education.**



We work from morning to evening in double shifts and that is how we are able to feed our families, this way cycle has been beneficial to us, it has become our friend.



Sikha Das

Occupation - House Cleaner



WHAT SIKHA PROPOSES

Better **toilet facilities** for women cyclists.
Functional **road signals** and **road safety sense among road user.**



WAY FORWARD



Building more **cycle parking facilities** by including various stakeholders



Better **infrastructure for public restrooms** for women's health and hygiene.



Functional road signals



Sensitising road users on road safety and **positive attitude towards women cyclists.**

Gender can be a perpetual barrier for women to access work opportunities, infrastructure and strike a balance between work and home. They have to go through the double burden of work and reproductive work and face discrimination and challenges in the process. Efforts to mitigate these gaps by building infrastructure and access of resources can go a long way for women to be an effective workforce and become agents of developing economy.



Women in this FGD travel from Gouranganagar Dhalai Rasta, New Town to Action Area IC, New Town to work.

“Cycle is our life”- Campaigning with women livelihood cyclists for a sustainable and mobile future...



Women livelihood cyclists working as house helpers in New Town, Kolkata came forward in huge number for the campaign to show how their life is dependent on cycle.

