

The Mayor of Bogotá and first female and openly lesbian mayor in the Colombian capital's history, Claudia López Hernández has an emphatic focus on the environmental, social equity and anti-corruption agendas. Mayor López was a Senator of the Republic of Colombia between 2014 and 2018 and the vice-presidential candidate in the 2018 presidential election for the Green Alliance party.

Claudia López Hernández

MAYOR OF BOGOTÁ

COLOMBIA

How do you define feminism?

I believe it is the recognition that humanity has historically been around the primacy, if not hegemony, of men and a systemic inequality in relation to women. So, first and foremost, feminism makes this recognition, and secondly, what it proposes is to recognize and overcome all barriers that limit the freedom, autonomy, and equality of women, so that they can fully develop their potential with freedom and autonomy.

- Women have the knowledge to avoid situations leading to harassment
- They know what forms of sexual violence are
- They can confidently report it
- Reporting through the Purple Hotline prevention and protection services are effective
- Public transportation workers (drivers, managers, and collectors) are trained to receive complaints and know how to react, process, and attend promptly to any woman who is a victim of harassment, gender violence, or insecurity

In your view, what is a feminist transport system?

In my opinion, it is one that guarantees freedom, autonomy, and equality for women, not just in public transportation, but in the overall urban development of the city. In Bogotá, public transportation is by definition quite feminized, with two out of every three users being women. That's why it must be feminist, and that's what we are trying to do in Bogotá.

Likewise, we are addressing the design of the system. From the measures, comfort, visibility, ergonomics, streets, stops, what is reported on public transportation advertisements, some of the most viewed in the city, must have a gender perspective.

Gender equity and specific care for women have been incorporated into both Bogotá's Mater Plan and Sustainable Mobility Plan which are based on strengthening a multimodal public transportation network with a metro system. In the short term, we are working to make public transportation a safe space for women, as it is perhaps now the place where women are most harassed. We have strengthened awareness activities so that:

But feminizing public transportation is not only done from the perspective of the users, but also from the perspective of services providers. Transportation is one of the sectors, like construction, that generates a lot of employment, but it is very masculinized. That's why, to feminize transportation in Bogotá, we are incorporating women not only as users, but as system managers, as drivers, as people in the maintenance and mechanical service. In fact, Bogotá has a mixed system, with public and private operators. We have a public operator called 'La Rolita', in honor of the women of Bogotá, which is managed by a woman and where two out of three employees at all levels of service are women.



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How does the experience for women and girls in Bogotá influence your work?

Not only does it affect my work, but I am also the subject that influences it. I am the first female Mayor, and for me, the gender perspective is not just a focus to sound politically correct; it's a principle of life, public management, and budget allocation at all levels of public administration. Affirmative actions must be taken because large gaps for women cannot be overcome through passive actions. The creation of the Care Blocks, the feminization of public transportation, are all part of this perspective.

The pandemic created a new challenge, with many women forced to return to unpaid care roles. We are addressing that setback with specific programs and investments, providing women with opportunities to return to the labor market, and retrain to find better job options. It has all been worth it, because despite the pandemic, Bogotá today has the lowest labor gap between men and women in history. It has been a great effort that did not happen only due to market action, but thanks to social inclusion policies, feminization, Care Squares to free women from unpaid care, training and education for women, support for their businesses, and effort from public employment, whether in public works or with social services to give priority to women and young people.

Who is your feminist role model?

I have several references, women that I believe were very feminist, who may not have recognized themselves as such in their time. Esmeralda Arboleda, one of the suffragettes who led the movement for women to have the right to vote in Colombia from 1957, is an extraordinary reference for me. There is also Florence Thomas, the Dean of Feminism in Colombia, and Ana Falú, in Latin America, who has had an extraordinary job that is

always a great inspiration. Finally, my wife Angélica Lozano, and Ángela María Robledo in Colombia, are the people who have served me best as a reference of feminism and feminist political action.

Have you had any transformative experiences that have guided your motivation in the field?

I think that nothing is more transformative than feeling the weight of machismo and patriarchy firsthand, in my case, in addition to homophobia. Possibly the most transformative experience, because of how painful it was, was my experience as a senator of the republic. It is the most macho and homophobic environment that I have worked in in my entire life. For me, machismo and homophobia were something unfortunate that happened to others and that had never happened to me, until I was in that scenario as a senator, for four years.

Although it was tough, it was also a very transformative experience, precisely because of that. Because I worked on the women's commission of Congress, with women of radically different ideologies, with whom we could have many ideological and political confrontations, but with whom we could agree on a common feminist and gender-based work agenda. So, in both senses, it was a very transformative experience.

If you could go back in time, what would you tell your younger self as I entered this field?

At 52 years old today, if I could go back 25 to 35 years, I would tell myself the same thing: They will bully you, they will tell you that you are not capable, but you will change the world, because feminism, change, and equality are unstoppable!