

MacLennan, Michael (Ed.); Sawyer, Diana Oya (Ed.); Slingsby, Ashleigh Kate (Ed.)

Research Report
Protagonist women

Policy in Focus, No. 27

Provided in Cooperation with:
International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)

Suggested Citation: MacLennan, Michael (Ed.); Sawyer, Diana Oya (Ed.); Slingsby, Ashleigh Kate (Ed.) (2014) : Protagonist women, Policy in Focus, No. 27, International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), Brasilia

This Version is available at:
<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/146070>

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Policy In Focus



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

*A publication of
The International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth
United Nations Development Programme*

March 2014 ■ No. 27

Protagonist Women



The International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) is a joint project between the United Nations and Brazil to promote South-South learning on social policies. It specialises in research-based policy recommendations on how to reduce poverty and inequality as well as boost inclusive development. The IPC-IG is linked to the UNDP Brazil Country Office, the Secretariat of Strategic Affairs (SAE) and the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA) of the Government of Brazil.

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Policy in Focus

Policy in Focus is a regular publication of the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG). This special edition, explores some of the challenges women are faced with around the world while simultaneously pointing to successful cases of change and women's empowerment progress, all the while highlighting the role of protagonist women. This special edition was made in partnership with UN Women Brazil.

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Cover Art: A graphic based on the original painting by Ashleigh Kate Slingsby entitled "Protagonist Women" by the IPC-IG Publications Team.

Editor's note: The IPC-IG is grateful to UN Women Brazil for their support in the development of this special edition. In particular, we would like to extend our thanks to Gisele Neto, for her dedication to the publication of this issue. Special thanks are also extended to our Specialist Guest Editors Diana Sawyer and Ashleigh Kate Slingsby for their editorial support and help in developing the concept for this issue. Finally, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to all of the authors for their generous and insightful contributions, without which, this issue simply would not have been possible.

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United Nations Development Programme

ISSN: 2318-8995

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Protagonist Women highlights examples of women taking the lead in an antagonistic society. The protagonist woman exists on the fault lines of society, championing a now well-established social, cultural and economic revolution. This revolution is aimed primarily at not only garnering women equal rights to men and accounting for historical injustices but carving out a space in society dedicated to tackling the particular challenges faced by women today. In this vein, protagonist women recognise the pluralities of experiences and challenges that exist for women globally. These include biological challenges, those of physical integrity and reproductive health, as well as the challenges and restrictions inflicted by the values and norms of society. This plurality of experiences accounts for the diverse range of issues addressed in this issue of *Policy in Focus*.

Much progress has been achieved for women, demonstrated in the institutionalisation of women's rights in international and domestic law. Thus the issue commences with a look into the realisation of the Maria da Penha Law concerning domestic violence in Brazil (*Maria da Penha Institute, UN Women Brazil*). However, many obstacles to women realising their full rights still exist, as is then demonstrated in Africa in terms of land rights for women (*Mary Kimani, Africa Renewal*). The case of Alyne da Silva Pimentel illustrates the mismatch between services and individual reproductive rights, even in a country like Brazil, home to progressive social policies. (*Mónica Arango Olaya, Center for Reproductive Rights, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, and Valentina Montoya Robledo, University de Los Andes*).

This issue supplies insight into Egypt (*Anouk De Koning, Radboud University, Nijmegen*) and Afghanistan (*Rangina Kargar, Faryab Province Representative, National Assembly of Afghanistan*), where women are claiming their space in society and seeking to increase their bargaining power in everyday negotiations. We then provide evidence of progress being made in the livelihoods of women in terms of female happiness as an expression of their subjective well-being (*Marcelo Neri, Minister of the Secretariat of Strategic Affairs and President of IPEA, Brazil*).

The issue then explores the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (*Dr Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, Representative, UN Women India Multi-Country Office, and Subhalakshmi Nandi, UN Women India MCO*), which has made major strides in enhancing social protection for rural women workers in India. This is followed by a look into the dynamics at play for the more than 43.6 million female domestic workers globally (*Malte Luebker, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific*), then specific insight is provided into the case of Brazil (*Edson Domingues and Kênia de Souza, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil*). We expose the crucial role that gender-inclusive growth has to play in spurring socio-economic development at large.

A broad overview of global initiatives dedicated to women's empowerment via social transfers is then presented (*Maxine Molyneux, Director of the Institute of the Americas, and Nicola Jones, Overseas Development Institute*). Bolsa Família in Brazil (*Ana Maria Hermeto Camilo de Oliveira, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil*) and self-help groups in India (*Ashleigh Kate Slingsby, the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, UNDP*) serve as detailed examples of social protection programmes that facilitate women leading their own empowerment.

Various international commitments derived from summits and international conferences recognise gender equality. Thus we conclude the publication with a look at the Beijing+20 negotiations and the potential impact it will have on women's rights and gendered politics (*Nadine Gasman, Resident Representative, UN Women, Brazil*).

Women are underrepresented and marginalised from leadership positions, rendering protagonist women key contributors to inclusive growth. Women face major structural challenges that demand change to garner greater access to resources for better livelihoods. It is hoped this issue exposes these challenges whilst demonstrating examples of progress; revealing the achievements and ambitions of Protagonist Women.

Femicide and Violence Against Women

by Maria da Penha Institute¹ and UN Women Brazil²

Maria da Penha Maia Fernandes

is a survivor. As opposed to the nearly 50,000 women killed in the last decade due to gender-based violence in Brazil, she managed to survive two attempted murders by her ex-husband. On the morning of 29 May 1983, at age 38, she awoke to the sound of a loud blast. She had been shot in the back, a wound that eventually left her a paraplegic. The perpetrator, her husband, Colombian professor Marco Antonio Heredia Viveros, wearing torn pyjamas and a rope around his neck, claimed they had been victims of a robbery.

Maria da Penha spent four months recovering in several hospitals in Fortaleza, her hometown, as well as Brasília. When she arrived back home in a wheelchair, she was kept under forced confinement by her husband for 15 days. During this period, her husband tried to electrocute her in the shower.

The father of her three daughters—who were six, five and two years old at the time of the crimes—Marco Antonio was extremely violent and prone to shouting, outbursts of rage and aggression. He had beaten his daughters in the past, but Maria da Penha had always tried to defend herself and avoided confrontation. She wanted a divorce, but Marco Antonio refused. She was afraid of leaving him because she constantly witnessed cases of women who were murdered by men and who had said they loved their partners too much to let them go. In March 2009, Maria da Penha spoke to TPM Magazine about her experiences and views on domestic violence, saying that “domestic violence follows a cycle that includes the following stages: violence, apology from the perpetrator, a new honeymoon and a new attack, which escalates and continues into a new cycle” (2009).

At the time these crimes were committed against her, there was no legal provision in Brazil that could protect women who were victims of domestic violence. Maria da Penha had to rely on the police and on the ordinary justice system. Gradually she gathered enough evidence to press charges against her ex-husband and was successfully able to obtain the legal

authorisation to leave her house on the condition that it would not be considered abandoning the home, which could threaten her ability to obtain child custody.

In 1991, Maria da Penha faced her ex-husband for the first time before the courts. Marco Antonio was tried and sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment but was able to walk out of the courtroom a free man because of his appeal. A year later, the defence appealed the decision and was able to invalidate the ruling. Three years later, disappointed with the leniency of the courts, Maria da Penha released the book ‘Sobrevivi... Posso contar’ (I survived... Let me share), in which she told her story. The book reached the offices of two NGOs, the Centre for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) and the Latin American Committee for the Defence of Women’s Rights (CLADEM), both of which followed up with her case.

In 1996, Marco Antonio was once again tried and sentenced to 10 years in prison, but because of further appeals that prevented and delayed the serving of his sentence, he had still not yet been arrested. More than 15 years after the crime had been committed and despite the two rulings against him in the State Court of Ceará, in 1998 the case remained open and the perpetrator still free. That is when CEJIL, CLADEM and Maria da Penha lodged an official complaint against Brazil at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS).

The inconsistencies in the lawsuit and the unjustified delays proved that the Brazilian State had violated international human rights regulations, especially the American Convention on Human Rights and the Convention of Belém do Pará. It was also possible to demonstrate that this was not an isolated case, but that a systematic standard had been set in which women who were victims of gender-based violence were being denied access to justice and within which the perpetrators were continuing to commit abusive crimes with seeming impunity.

In 2001, the Inter-American Commission declared that Brazil was to be held accountable for its neglect and omission,

as well as for its tolerance towards domestic violence against women. In the following year, the Commission had to intervene once again to guarantee the closure of the criminal lawsuit at the national level and the arrest of the aggressor, only six months before the statute of limitations was set to expire. Despite eventually being found guilty before the courts, Marco Antonio still lectured at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte. He served the remainder of his sentence in a closed prison regime for two years and is now free again.

What Maria da Penha endured helped to influence Brazilian legal changes. Law no. 11,340, known as the ‘Maria da Penha Law’, dated 7 August 2006, modified the Brazilian Criminal Code to allow perpetrators of crimes against women to be arrested when caught committing the offence and to authorise their preventive detention. It also imposed stricter punishments and established measures to protect victims.

Before this legal modification, cases concerning violence had been analysed in light of Law no. 9,099/95, by the Special Criminal Courts where only ‘petty’ crimes were judged meaning sentences were limited to a maximum of two years’ imprisonment. Another legal alternative used back then were financial penalties and the imposition of fines. The legislation did not foresee the possibility of the judge issuing an arrest warrant or declaring the preventive detention of the perpetrator. The Maria da Penha Law also considers aggravating circumstances, and establishes protective measures for the victims and recovery mechanisms for the aggressor. As such, Brazil took a step forward by recognising for the first time gender-based violence as a registered and qualified crime.

According to Unifem (2008), the Maria da Penha Law is considered one of the three best pieces of legislation in the world when it comes to fighting violence against women, alongside the Law on Domestic Violence of Mongolia (2004) and the Spanish Act on Protection against Violence (2004).

Effectiveness of the law

In August 2013, seven years after the law was enacted, the National Justice Council (CNJ) held the VII Meeting on the Maria da Penha Law. At the meeting, the Head of the Secretariat for Women Policies, Minister Eleonora Menicucci, highlighted the importance of reporting cases of violence to guarantee the effectiveness of the legislation and the punishment of the aggressors who commit violence against women. According to an opinion poll conducted by Data Popular and by Institute Patrícia Galvão published in July 2013, 86 per cent of the interviewees believe that women were encouraged to report cases of domestic violence after the Maria da Penha Law was approved. At the same event, the representative of CNJ, Ney José de Freitas, stressed that “any measure that can be effectively applied to thwart this type of violence must be disseminated because, unfortunately, we are still in a period of law enforcement; the legislation must be enforced; it is still not as effective as it should be” (2013).

The feeling that violence against women increased after the law came into effect is a natural consequence of the ability to report these crimes. In many cases, women who are victims of violence no longer feel forced to keep quiet, because they know that they are legally protected and they are now encouraged to speak up. Consequently, the visibility of this type of violence, the possibility of publicising it and finding solutions are increasing considerably.

Moreover, the law is extremely popular: according to the same survey, only 2 per cent of the interviewees had never heard of it. Nevertheless, many people continue to be aware of the existence of the law but have no knowledge of its content.

The Brazilian justice system, however, did not keep up with the legislative progress. Although the law has been repeatedly declared constitutional (after some judges refused to apply it), the Brazilian legal sector still does not fully recognise the severity of domestic and family violence.

Femicide in Brazil

According to the 2012 Violence Map, Brazil ranks seventh in a ranking of 84 countries for the number of murdered women. Over 92,000 women have been murdered since 1980—half of them in the last decade. At the apex of violence, femicide—the killing of women simply because they are women—reaches the

BOX 1

Violence Against Women in Brazil

- According to Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos (DIEESE) in 2011, **40 per cent** of Brazilian women have suffered from domestic violence at some point in their lives.
- Furthermore, in July 2013, the opinion poll entitled ‘Society’s Perception about Violence and Murder of Women’, conducted by Data Popular in partnership with Institute Patrícia Galvão (IPC), showed that 54 per cent of the interviewees knew women who had been assaulted by their partners, and 56 per cent stated that they knew men who had attacked their partners.
- Moreover, the 2013 Annual Report of the Brazilian Public Security Forum revealed that more than 50,000 women were raped in 2012—an increase of 20 per cent on the previous year.

Source: DIEESE, 2011.

alarming level of one murdered woman every two hours in Brazil, mostly occurring in a domestic environment (Waiselfisz, 2011). In 84 per cent of these cases (Central de Atendimento à Mulher, 2013), the perpetrator is the victim’s partner, husband, boyfriend or former lover. However, since there are no unified statistics, these numbers may be even higher.

Estimates reveal that 5000 women are murdered every year in the country (Ipea, 2013), the figures in other Latin American countries are also concerning. In Mexico, femicide amounts to an average of 2500 victims per year (CESFCD & UN Women, 2012). In Colombia, 1146 women were murdered in 2012 (Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses y Alta Consejería Presidencial para la Equidad de la Mujer, 2013). In Honduras, 606 women were killed, representing an increase of 246.3 per cent in the last eight years (ONVPH, 2013).

Due to the high femicide rate all over the world, in 2008 the UN Secretary-General launched the campaign ‘UNiTE to End Violence against Women’. This campaign is an effort to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls. The initiative summons governments, civil society, women’s organisations, youth, the private sector, the media, the entire UN system and, especially, men to unite to put an end to the global phenomenon of gender-based violence.

The topic of femicide is at the core of the UNiTE campaign because the highest femicide rates are recorded in Latin America. These are avoidable crimes. Countries such as Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru have already listed femicide (or femicide) as a crime in their legislation and criminal codes. In Brazil, the Senate is

currently analysing a legislative bill that categorises femicide as a crime. By transforming the gender-driven murder of women into a specific type of homicide, it will be possible to thwart violence against women and to reduce impunity.

It is necessary to acknowledge that violence against women and girls is the expression of a social and cultural phenomenon of power and submission between men and women, which leads to multiple human rights violations and which is not natural, acceptable or tolerable in any way. An efficient justice system produces more effective and stricter punishments, which promote not only redress but also have a preventive impact, sending an unequivocal message that violence against women will not be accepted under any circumstance. Thus, by means of our daily and unyielding efforts, we will be able to build a different future—one that will enable women and girls to live their lives free from any type of violence.

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1. The institute is dedicated to expanding and creating mechanisms to restrain and prevent domestic and family violence against women, in accordance with the Maria da Penha law. It is a non-governmental organization, working

on strengthening its identity and objectives through education, women's work and sustainable development.

2. UN Women Brazil is dedicated to the rapid progress of women in society. It works with the fundamental assumptions that women and girls around the world have the right to a life free of discrimination, violence and poverty, and that gender equality is a central requirement for achieving development.

Women Struggle to Secure Land Rights in Africa¹

by Mary Kimani, *Africa Renewal*

Women in Africa contribute 60-80 per cent to food production labour and 80–100 per cent to food processing, as well as storage and transport (FAO). Yet many never regain access or rights to matrimonial land lost after divorce or the death of a spouse. In Africa women often lack rights to land. Land rights tend to be held by men or kinship groups controlled by men, and women have access mainly through a male relative, usually a father or husband. Even then, women are routinely obliged to hand over the proceeds of any farm sales to a male and have little say over how those earnings are used. Moreover, such limited access is very tenuous and can be quickly lost. One study showed that in Zambia more than one third of widows lost access to family land when their husbands died (Chapoto, 2007). It is this dependency on men that leaves many African women vulnerable.

The spread of HIV/AIDS and the stigma associated with the disease have only made women's land rights more precarious. Widows of men who die from the disease have often been accused of bringing the malady into the family, possibly leading to the confiscation of their land and other property.

In response, activists are fighting to introduce or strengthen laws intended to give women more secure access to land and are combating social norms and practices that stand in their way. Despite many obstacles, they are making some headway.

Historical legacy

Researchers from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) note that the marginal nature of women's land rights

is a historical problem in Africa. Before colonial rule, land ownership and access took diverse forms but were largely vested in lineages, clans and families, with male leaders exercising day-to-day control. Members of a particular lineage or clan would seek rights to use land from those community or family leaders.

Except in a few communities, where inheritance passed through the mother, only male heirs have typically inherited land rights. Women rarely had full rights to land. They were seen as secondary beneficiaries via male relatives. Historically women had traditional protections that ensured continued access even after separation, divorce or widowhood. There also were traditional means of arbitration to which women could appeal if access was contested.

With colonial rule came the introduction of Western systems of land tenure. In East and Southern Africa, the high number of white settlers encouraged the privatization and subdivision of land, held under individual freehold titles. In West Africa much land was left under communal forms of ownership, managed by customary leaders.

With independence, some new governments, such as those in Tanzania, Mozambique and Benin, proclaimed state ownership over all land. In Kenya and South Africa private ownership existed alongside lineage or clan ownership. In Nigeria, clan and lineage ownership coexisted with both state and private ownership, especially in urban areas.

Environmental legacy

Over the years, rapid population growth has contributed to the overuse of land and to the depletion of soils. This has

made fertile land more valuable and increased competition for its control. Such pressures, together with changes in family structures and clan relations, have eroded traditional social safeguards that ensured access to land for women. So while many land disputes in Africa are still formally governed by customary law, these protections do not exist in the domain of modern law. Today there are many situations, such as cohabitation without marriage, to which traditional norms do not apply. Consequently, many women have lost access to land.

Many African countries today recognize both "traditional" rules of land ownership and Western-type statutory laws. In Nigeria, the state assumed ownership of all land after independence in 1960. Although this weakened customary land tenure, traditional laws still were recognized by the government in areas of long-established clan and lineage ownership. The recognition of Islamic law in Nigeria's northern states complicated the situation further.

Land titling

One solution that Western development experts initially promoted to overcome the shortcomings of customary law was to give land titles to individuals. Esther Mwangi, a prominent land rights researcher, noted that governments in East and Southern Africa followed the course of land titling, in an effort to ensure that individuals had legal title to their land. This policy was expected to help women secure legal rights to properties that they owned or inherited.

Mwangi's research attests to the fact that the privatization process has actually stripped women of their access to land. During titling operations, it was

mainly men who got their names on the appropriate documentation because they were deemed to be the 'household heads'. Widows lucky enough to get land were allocated the smallest lots.

Land rights activists suggest that one way to give women guaranteed access to land is to separate formal ownership of land from the ability to use it. Thus, while the land may be registered in the name of a man, he would be barred from selling it without the consent of his wife (or wives) or other heirs. As a result, Ghana now has a 'head of family accountability law' that is intended to ensure that family property cannot be sold without others being informed, giving consent or benefiting from the proceeds.

Resistance to reform

But such ideas may be easier proposed than implemented. Activists for women's land rights have tried to have laws passed in many countries, with mixed results. In Uganda, where there was very active lobbying by the Uganda Land Alliance for both men and women to be listed in title deeds as co-owners, the bills have repeatedly come before parliament, yet have failed each time.

Where progressive laws have passed, things do not necessarily get easier. In Mozambique, civil society groups have successfully lobbied and helped to influence the formation of a law in 1997 entitling women to secure access to land and property. However, implementation proved difficult because traditional courts, which most rural women use, still consider the man the head of household and therefore the rightful authority over land.

In Ghana the 1985 Intestate Succession Law and the Head of Household Accountability Law were both intended to create greater security for widows and children. If a man died without a will, the succession law decreed that his property would be equally divided and distributed among his widow, children and other members of the extended family.

Yet a study conducted by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Ghana's Volta Region found that few women knew of the law and that customary practices continued to determine inheritance. That left many women without access to land after the death of their partner.

Changing institutions

What women need is for their basic rights to be entrenched in constitutions and for equal rights of property ownership to be clearly stipulated in the law. Where this has already been done, it is necessary to bring all inheritance and land laws into harmony with the constitution, so that there is no basis for contradictory interpretations.

In addition, legal institutions responsible for implementing the land laws need to operate equitably, be friendly and accessible to women and extend their reach to the countryside. Continuing challenges remain in regards to how to best go about doing so.

Combating negative norms

Broader cultural change is also vital. Land allocations have particular cultural understandings of the role of women. Mwangi's observations regarding the culture of land ownership indicate that men are resistant to the idea of women as property owners and decision-makers when it comes to land.

This is a major issue considering women are overwhelmingly responsible for land productivity. Therefore unequal power relations also need to be addressed within families for a tangible impact to be achieved.

Positive developments

However, some positive outcomes have been achieved. For instance, in Swaziland, women cannot own land because they are considered minors under the law, yet some HIV-positive widows who lost access to land after their husbands died were able to negotiate with a female chief to persuade other chiefs to give them land they could use to secure their livelihood.

In Kenya, community watchdog organizations and other groups providing home-based care for those living with HIV/AIDS are intervening. When they encounter property grabbing, they negotiate, mostly with male members of the family, for women and girls to retain access to the land and property.

In Rwanda, the government passed a law in 1999 giving women inheritance rights equal to those of males, overruling traditional norms by which only male children could inherit property. This has enabled widows and female orphans of the 1994 genocide to secure access to land.

Currently, UN agencies such as FAO, UN Women and the UN Development Fund

are working with non-governmental organizations to raise awareness among women of their rights and to support efforts to entrench equality of access to land within national laws.

UN Women's Africa programme for rural women has several pillars through which women's role in agricultural transformation can be enhanced. It considers equitable land allocation as critical to such a transformation.

One of its strategies is "to strengthen the capacities of the ministries of agriculture to prioritize support to women food production systems in their planning and resource allocation mechanisms." (Asian Development Bank, 2011).

One of UN Women's key messages is that rural women play a key role in food production and food security in Africa. The UN agency encourages governments, development partners and the private sector to enhance women's rights to land, arguing that 'if it benefits rural women, you can call it development.' ■

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1. Please note that this is an abbreviated version of the article of the same name published in the 2012 Africa Renewal Special Edition on Women (p. 37) <<http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/special-edition-women-2012/women-struggle-secure-land-rights>>.

Accountability in the Provision of Quality Health Care for Women: Alyne da Silva Pimentel

by *Mónica Arango Olaya and Valentina Montoya Robledo,*
Center for Reproductive Rights

The Alyne da Silva Pimentel v. Brazil case (Alyne's case) decided by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) in August 2011 constitutes a milestone for the protection of reproductive rights in international human rights law. In addition to being the first international law decision from the universal system that approaches maternal mortality from a human rights perspective, it raises the question of accountability around the obligation to ensure quality essential health care services to pregnant women, without discrimination.

The human rights approach to maternal mortality set forth in this decision and within international human rights law becomes void without accountability mechanisms that can ensure monitoring, responsibility and redress. This article addresses the question of accountability for reproductive rights and the obligation to provide quality health care services in Alyne's case.

Alyne: one of many in Brazil

Maternal mortality has substantially declined in Brazil in the last decade. Millennium Development Goal 5 states that maternal mortality should decline by 75 per cent by 2015. Brazil has reduced it by 51 per cent (Cook, 2013) from 103.43 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1998 to 56 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010 (WHO and UNFPA, 2012). However challenges in providing quality services without discrimination still persist (WHO, 2007). Maternal mortality rates are higher in the North and Northeast regions of Brazil, which contain a greater share of poverty and larger rural populations than the rest of the country.

According to Brazil's Ministry of Health, Afro-Brazilian women are 50 per cent more likely to die of obstetric-related causes than white women (2006a). Other studies even suggest that the maternal mortality

rate of Afro-descendant women is three times higher than that of their white counterparts (Seelke, 2008). Indigenous and low-income women are also affected by higher maternal mortality rates, particularly adolescents and women from rural areas (Ministry of Health of Brazil, 2006a). Brazil has recognised that "poverty is concentrated on black or Afro-descending women" (CEDAW Committee, 2002), and that racism operates within the public health services provided to Afro-descendant patients (AMNB, 2007).

The root causes of maternal mortality in Brazil are racial, socio-economic and gender-based disparities in access to health care (Ministry of Health of Brazil, 2006b).

Alyne's case is emblematic, as it demonstrates the structural discrimination in access to quality health care women face every day. Alyne was a 28-year-old Afro-Brazilian woman who in 2002 suffered a high-risk pregnancy and was denied timely care at private and public health facilities. She died following the delivery of a stillbirth, leaving behind her five-year-old daughter. Had access to basic obstetric health care been provided, Alyne would have survived.

The case was presented before national courts, but in 2007, after five years of ineffective remedies, it was taken before the CEDAW Committee, arguing essentially that the Brazilian State violated Alyne's rights to health care without discrimination. The CEDAW Committee determined Brazil's responsibility.

It established that Brazil had failed to provide appropriate care to Alyne by not performing adequate tests, delaying the services disproportionately, lacking adequate equipment, delaying the transfer to another health facility, and lacking appropriate medical records when the transfer took place.

The State argued that a private institution, not the State, was responsible for the inappropriate care. However the Committee established the State's direct responsibility for the action of private institutions, and its duty to monitor and regulate them.

This finding reiterated the understanding of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the *Ximenes Lopes v. Brazil* case, according to which, when States outsource the rendering of public services, they remain responsible "to supervise their performance in order to guarantee the effective protection of the human rights of the individuals under the jurisdiction thereof and the rendering of such services to the population on the basis of non-discrimination and as effectively as possible" (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2006).

The Committee recommended that Brazil compensate Alyne's mother and daughter and implement general measures to prevent similar incidents and to improve the quality of maternal health care without discrimination. Three of the general recommendations revolved around accountability:

- i. effective remedies around reproductive rights violations;
- ii. the State's responsibility for private institutions that provide public services; and
- iii. adequate sanctions for medical personnel who violate reproductive rights.

Accountability to ensure quality reproductive health care services

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) described four interrelated essential elements within the right to health: affordability, accessibility, acceptability and quality (CESCR, 2000). Quality refers to scientifically and

medically appropriate goods and services, which require “skilled medical personnel, scientifically approved and unexpired drugs and hospital equipment, safe and potable water, and adequate sanitation” (*Ibid*).

The Technical Guidance on the application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of policies and programmes to reduce preventable maternal morbidity and mortality (Human Rights Council, 2012) links quality of health care and accountability. The Technical Guidance details the content of quality health care related to safe motherhood, and fosters “accountability in accordance with human rights standards” (*Ibid*).

It considers accountability “fundamental to each stage of the process—from identifying accountability gaps in a situational analysis to ensuring appropriate monitoring mechanisms and remedies in a national plan, to allocating resources for these mechanisms and remedies, to ensuring feedback from the ground through to implementation in practice” (*Ibid*). It has three basic components:

- monitoring,
- reviewing, and
- imposing remedies.

Monitoring relies on the availability of effective qualitative and quantitative indicators, and functioning information systems. Reviewing operates at the administrative, social, political, national and international levels, and involves public and private actors (*Ibid*).

The remedies component refers to mechanisms to make rights effective (*Ibid*).

Within the Technical Guidance’s description of the three basic components of accountability, Alyne’s case exposed a structural problem: the Brazilian State’s failure to adopt mechanisms, or implement existing ones, to monitor and review the provision of quality health care in public and outsourced private institutions, as well as to provide adequate remedies for and investigate and sanction reproductive rights violations.

Some final remarks

Alyne’s case revolves around the issue of the provision of low quality health

care services to a poor pregnant Afro-Brazilian woman.

This was reflected in the lack of essential medical examinations, inappropriate equipment and facilities, inefficient referral and lack of medical information, in both public and private health care institutions. Such deficiencies were found to constitute a lack of compliance with human rights standards. Unfortunately these problems have not been overcome in the last decade.

Despite the CEDAW Committee’s recommendations and the decision of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the Ximenes Lopes case, regarding the Brazilian State’s obligation to monitor and review the provision of quality health care services, access to quality reproductive health care for vulnerable women, such as Alyne, is still limited. Violations of reproductive rights continue to avoid being prosecuted or sanctioned efficiently.

Alyne’s case addresses the issue of accountability as a central requirement to ensure quality in the provision of health care services. Accountability becomes fundamental to ensure safe motherhood in a broader context of human rights protection.

It brings access to safe motherhood to a new level, not only recognising it as a human right, but ensuring its effectiveness through the imposition of remedies and sanctions in cases of low-quality health care and reproductive rights violations.

The judgement provides an impetus for Brazil and the world to rethink its public policies on maternal mortality and commit to gender equality and non-discrimination.

The decision is a landmark, by not only recognising safe motherhood as a reproductive right in particular and as human right in general, but also by requiring women’s reproductive rights to be effectively implemented and monitored to properly address the provision of quality health care.



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Public Women: Gender and Urban Space in Cairo¹

by Anouk de Koning, Radboud University

Women claiming full access to public space have incited heated debates around the world (e.g. Wilson, 2001; Secor, 2002; Phadke, 2007). In Europe and the USA, feminist activists have put women's right to public space on the agenda through actions such as take-back-the-night marches. In many cities in the global South, the stakes of being in public as a woman have similarly been high. Notwithstanding the common threads in such contestations, gendered definitions of social space differ markedly across urban landscapes. This article touches upon some of the everyday negotiations of public space, class and gender in contemporary Cairo. These Cairene negotiations of public space illustrate the profoundly gendered and classed nature of urban landscapes in Egypt, and beyond.

In early 2011 an 18-day-long uprising brought down the Mubarak regime in Egypt. It temporarily transformed Cairo's central Tahrir Square into an almost ideal counter-republic. The sense of community that resulted from a deeply felt quest for justice created a space in which the usual social fault lines and tensions had no place. Christians protected Muslims during prayer, poor and rich chanted and slept side by side. The exceptional nature of the mass protests seemed to be underscored by the strong presence of women in the square. Since both public space and politics are generally constructed as male domains, the presence of women was seen to indicate the broad base and urgency of the protests. Moreover, the absence of harassments that otherwise marked women's experiences in Cairo's public spaces illustrated to many both the utopian nature of what one could call Republic Tahrir, and the promises of the revolution.

As soon as Mubarak stepped down, much of this utopian promise dissipated, and many of the usual social fault lines resurfaced. Among other things, sexual harassment returned.

This article goes back a few years before the 2011 uprising to explore the stakes with regards to women's presence in public. It examines issues of gender and public space by focusing on the ways in which young female professionals navigated the cityscape of Cairo. What do their urban trajectories tell us about the gendered (and classed) constitution of urban landscapes?

A cosmopolitan class

In the course of 2002 I made the acquaintance of a number of high-powered upper-middle-class women in their late 20s and early 30s. These young professionals were among the most visible exponents of Egypt's new liberal age: young, sophisticated women, relatively fluent in English, who were employed in the internationally oriented segment of Cairo's economy and claimed knowledge of global trends and cosmopolitan fashions (De Koning, 2009b).

The presence of these upper-middle-class women in both professional and social public life had become normalised, even critical to upper-middle-class lifestyles, which were marked by the mixed-gender character of contacts and places. Their negotiations of space and their public performances were part of an elite class project that, on account of its continuous references to *barra*—the 'West' or the 'First World'—can be labelled as conspicuously cosmopolitan.

The safe space of the coffee shop

On a spring day in 2004, I found Amal² sharing a table with our common friend, Miriyam. Randa soon joined us. All three were professionals in their early 30s, from well-to-do families and employed in the internationally oriented segment of the urban economy. Like most of the other women at the Retro Café, they wore tight jeans and T-shirts. The small café with its art, earth tones and modern wooden furniture was designed to give a contemporary, yet warm sense of comfort and home.

Our discussion soon converged on the importance of coffee shops for women. "Coffee shops were able to gather girls from their houses and the club," Amal said. "Before, we did not have places where we could spend time after work." The overwhelming presence of women in most coffee shops indeed presented one of the striking features of coffee shop social life. In these upscale coffee shops both veiled and non-veiled women often constituted more than half of the customers. Many single professional women like Amal and Miriyam had taken to spending much of their time in coffee shops such as the Retro Café.

Since their introduction in the mid-1990s, these conspicuously cosmopolitan coffee shops have become emblematic of a young, upper-middle-class presence in Cairo's urban landscape. The US style coffee shop formula turned out to be ideally suited for the Cairene context, since it was part of global flows of distinctive cultural consumption yet was not associated with 'immoral' spaces of alcohol and subterranean sexuality such as bars or nightclubs. Upmarket coffee shops provided upper-middle-class professionals with new opportunities for socialising, finding partners and other forms of networking and self-presentation.

Coffee shops had wrested such mixed-gender social settings away from associations with immorality and loose sexual behaviour that clung to less exclusive mixed-gender spaces outside the redemptive familial sphere, and thereby offered young female professionals the opportunity of respectable public lifestyles.

The rather exclusive context of the coffee shop helped frame a woman's appearance and behaviour as upper-middle-class and thereby guaranteed that her presence in that space would be read as part of a respectable lifestyle. However, in the streets, where upmarket norms are not hegemonic,

such representations could easily be overturned. The same fashionable *cut* (sleeveless top) would seem out of place but could also be taken as a sign of disrepute and easy morals—an open invitation to comments and even harassment.

Into the urban jungle

In contrast to the closed coffee shops, Cairo's streets were largely characterised by male entitlement. The street was a space for men to inhabit, a space where they could spend time, observe and interact with passers-by, comment and flirt. Unaccompanied young women, in contrast, had a limited and ambiguous status as marginalised, and potentially illegitimate and disreputable, passers-by (see also Ghannam, 2002). They were supposed to be on their way somewhere, have a clear destination and not linger for too long. Hanging around in the streets, especially on their own, was taken as an open invitation for men to make contact.

Young women particularly were subject to constant observation and judgements. Such judgements were based on looks, class markers and signs of modesty such as veils or loose-fitting clothing. Yet each of these styles had to be negotiated across diverse spaces with differing interpretations of a woman's presence. How the tight, yet not too revealing jeans and top or the fashionable matching headscarf and loose-fitting dress would be interpreted depended entirely on socio-spatial context.

Purity and defilement were central issues in the urban trajectories of young upper-middle-class women. Concerns about women's movement focused on their unscathed passage through public space, and invoked the numerous dangers of harassment and defilement that were seen to accompany such presence in public spaces. These were invariably sexualised dangers that threatened a woman's sexual purity and respectability.

The avoidance and barring of unwanted gazes and unwarranted contact, were central features of upper-middle-class strategies regarding transportation. Two common means of transport had come to symbolise the two extremes of experience in public: the bus stood for forced proximity and possible harassment, while the car represented control, protection and absolute freedom of movement.

Gendered fears and the fragility of class

The urban trajectories of these Cairene women show us a city that is crosscut by intersecting fault lines of gender, class, age and lifestyle. They navigated the city based on experiential maps of the city that included spaces of comfort and belonging in which they expected their presence to be framed as respectable and the general public to be held to those same standards of respectability. Their maps also featured open, less class-specific spaces, such as streets, in which they knew they could not control social identifications and feared they might be misidentified.

The public presence of these female young urban professionals had become one of the most significant markers of the young upper-middle-class culture that had developed in Cairo's new leisure spaces in the 1990s. This public presence was, however, fragile and evoked severe anxieties about the possible harm that could come to female upper-middle-class bodies in the city's public spaces.

The dangers that being in public represented for the upper-middle-class female body were simultaneously symbolic and physical. Just as upper-middle-class women's reputations were easily damaged or ruined, upper-middle-class bodies were easily harmed and defiled. The sense of privilege that emanated from this female public presence as the manifestation of a conspicuously cosmopolitan class project, was thus matched by a strong sense of fragility and threat. ■

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1. This article is a revised and abridged version of De Koning (2009a).

2. All names used are pseudonyms.

The Long, Long Struggle for Women's Rights in Afghanistan

by Rangina Kargar, National Assembly of Afghanistan, Representative - Faryab Province

Afghan women have long been marginalised and accorded a subordinate position in their families and society. Their position has been shaped by many factors reflecting the strong cultural and historical roots of gender discrimination in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic and traditional society that has been governed along tribal lines. In addition, years of severe drought, more than two decades of civil war and devastation in addition to five years under the Taliban authorities have left the country one of the poorest in the world.

Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal and child mortality rates in the world. This was the case before the Taliban came to power, as were the extremely low literacy rates among women. However, before Taliban rule, women participated economically, socially and politically in society. Women helped to draft the 1964 Constitution, in the 1970s there were at least three women legislators in the Parliament, and up to the early 1990s women served as teachers, government workers and medical doctors. They worked as professors, lawyers, judges, journalists, writers and poets.

After the Taliban's rise to power, women and girls were systematically discriminated against and marginalised, and their human rights were violated. This resulted in the deterioration of economic and social conditions for women and girls in all areas of the country, especially those under Taliban control. Women and girls continued to be severely restricted in their access to education, health care facilities and employment. Poor health conditions and malnutrition made pregnancy and childbirth exceptionally dangerous for Afghan women.

In 2001 the Taliban government was overthrown and re-established itself as an insurgency movement. Afghan women began to increase their efforts to achieve a more equitable position in society. These years ushered in numerous events organised by Afghan women's organisations, both inside and outside the country, including panel discussions, conferences and international meetings, to ensure that the experiences and needs of Afghan women were recognised and accounted for in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

Today new opportunities have been presented for women to reclaim their rights as active participants in the governance as well as in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Schools for girls are being reopened, and young women are enrolling in universities. Women are seeking to return to their former jobs as teachers, doctors and civil servants. Radio and television broadcasts in Kabul and other provinces once again now feature women commentators. Despite all these developments for women, a myriad of problems persist in the political, social and cultural spheres of life for Afghan women.

Education

It is widely known that education, especially for girls, is a basic requirement for an improved standard of life in any society. However, approximately 85 per cent of women and girls are illiterate in Afghanistan. This can be attributed to widespread gender discrimination in society's customary practices, family poverty, security challenges and a shortage of female schools.

Health

Access to health care services is a fundamental human right, but unfortunately most Afghans, especially women, are deprived of this right. The lack of doctors and nurses, hospitals and health care centres is a critical issue. Poverty and low family income further exacerbate the problem, accounting for the exceptionally high child and maternal mortality rates.

Recent studies on the inaccessibility of health care services to women can be attributed to multiple factors including cultural tradition, non-existent or substandard health care centres, a poor economy, an absence of self-sufficiency and independence as well as a lack of attention to women's health issues by families. This is only compounded by the extremely high illiteracy rates among women. This situation exists despite national and international laws that declare access to health care services as a woman's right.



Photo: Students at a midwifery school in Nili, Afghanistan. UN Photo/Eric Kanalstein.

Violence against women

In addition to the problems women face in health and education, other serious and complex problems exist such as forced marriages, family violence, rape and the exclusion of women from social and political activities that affect their lives. The majority of women, in both rural and urban areas, are faced with family violence.

Domestic violence against women not only has serious physical and mental consequences but also provokes other grave problems in Afghan society including self-mutilation, suicide, escaping from one's family, forced sex work and addiction. Despite the seriousness of this issue, substantial actions have not been taken to tackle violence against women.

Forced marriages

Forced marriages constitute another serious problem for women in Afghanistan and are exercised in different forms. This includes being used as a method of settling feuds (*badal*), as a threat for payment of an ample dowry, as a means of seeking underage marriage, and in the event of unwanted pregnancy.

Widows are considered to be heritage and are not allowed to marry another man willingly in many areas, leaving them vulnerable to either forced marriage or alienation from society. Studies concerning forced marriage attribute these practices to cultural tradition, customs and a lack of family awareness due to poverty and illiteracy. Rape is another problem that exists in Afghanistan for women. It has been committed more frequently and most notoriously in recent years by armed Afghan men.

Despite the multiple challenges facing Afghanistan, remarkable gains have been made in women's rights over the past decade. Since the 2001 fall of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan has made important strides in promoting women's rights, the protection of women and girls, and the participation of women in decision-making processes.

Equality between men and women is mandated by the country's Constitution. Special measures have resulted in a Parliament with 28 per cent female

representation, as well as 2.7 million girls returning to school. These are incredible achievements, bearing in mind that Afghanistan was a very different country for women and girls a mere 13 years ago.

Afghanistan has come a long way. But these gains must be protected. Women's rights continue to be violated, female officials are being targeted and killed, and their legal protection is under threat.

It is imperative that women's rights and empowerment are prioritised in the coming period of transition. Despite these major achievements, women remain one of the most marginalised segments of the Afghan population.

There are concerns about a possible regression in the hard-earned rights achieved. Despite a robust legal framework regarding women's rights, female Afghans still suffer widespread discriminatory cultural practices such as child marriage and limited access to public life, especially in exercising their right to education and participation in the formal labour force and the political sphere.

Recent targeted killings and intimidation of high-level female government officials and activists also raises fears about the future for Afghan women. Such incidents still remain largely underreported because of the associated stigma. The prevailing insecurity and weak rule of law have further hampered women's access to justice.

In Afghanistan, attacks against women and girls have increased at a frightening pace. In 2012, female casualties increased by 20 per cent despite a decrease in overall violence, and by 61 per cent in 2013 (See works of Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, 2013). When girls attending school or women leaders in ministries and Parliament are attacked, it threatens the right of all women to a public life and the potential to occupy leadership roles.

In the end, a political solution has to be developed based on the Afghan Constitution and the promotion of human rights, especially women's rights. The path towards a prosperous future cannot be accomplished if women are not recognised and integrated into society. ■

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Subjective Well-being: Future Female Happiness

by Marcelo Neri, Secretariat of Strategic Affairs (SAE) and Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA)

In the last few years, women have brought about one of the greatest—if not the greatest—changes in recent human history. The cultural and economic revolution related to female empowerment has affected a sizeable share of the world's countries. Brazil, has witnessed the election of its first female President as well as a growing number of women occupying key positions in different areas of the federal government. Such achievements have established role models for younger generations of women.

The National Surveys of Household Sampling (PNAD, Pesquisas Nacionais de Amostras a Domicílios) conducted during the last decade have shown a marked reduction of per capita income inequality in Brazil. Poverty is less affected by a smaller gender wage gap, since poverty is measured by per capita family income. However, the narrowing of the gender wage gap signals significant progress made by women vis-à-vis the labour market and its effect on their earned income.

Trends and what they mean for the future of women

From the standpoint of individual income generation, income improvements have been observed in Brazil among traditionally excluded groups, such as the black and *pardo* populations, as well as people from the northeast, those living in slums, the countryside, and women. Women's individual income levels have risen 38 per cent, against a 16 per cent rise for men. Despite these auspicious results for women, a report on inequality over a decade in Brazil (2011) shows that the controlled gender income gap (controlled for education, regions and urban/rural areas of residence) was not reduced, despite having dropped for all the aforementioned excluded groups, in relation to their respective and more included reference groups.

Looking at Brazil's Monthly Employment Survey (PME) data for the 2009 to 2011

period, similar changes in individual labour income were not observed. Women's income increased by 18.2 per cent during this period, *pari passu*, with men's income (18.4 per cent). If we accumulate the changes observed between 2001 and 2011 through PNAD and PME, individual income gains of 63.1 per cent for women and 37.4 per cent for men can be concluded.

In short, how do we describe the changes in the world of women? First of all, women have led the way in the education revolution. In 1996, the average education level attained by women in Brazil overtook that attained by men, for those 25 years of age and above.

Brazil has focused its social policies overwhelmingly on women treating them preferentially as beneficiaries over men—in the case of Bolsa Família, in 91 per cent of cases, the money is transferred to women in an effort, to try to raise the likelihood that funds will reach their children.

Women's non-labour income—that is, income from Bolsa Família, retirement and pension schemes—essentially everything that does not encompass labour, overtook that of men in 2006.

Happiness

To what extent do these changes affect the prospects of improving women's lives? Literature on happiness has addressed this issue by using subjective indicators, through direct questions. Micro-data from the 2006 Gallup World Poll, which applied the same questionnaire in 132 countries, can be used as such.

One of the advantages of these indicators, unlike the concepts of income per capita, is the fact that individual changes experienced by and produced by women can be captured. Another interesting aspect of the data produced through such a poll is that women from different countries can be analyzed within the context of women worldwide.

More specifically, one is able to address questions such as: On a life satisfaction scale of 0 to 10, who expects to be happier, men or women? Which countries are the most optimistic about the future?

With regard to countries, a future happiness scale by gender and the differences between men and women are presented in Table 1. The Index of Future Happiness (IFH) by gender presents the extreme points of the future happiness scale. It also serves as a comparative platform to evaluate happiness across the BRICS member states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and countries currently facing economic challenges within Europe, incorporated in a sample of countries that reached rankings positions multiples of five in the overall population happiness ranking.

Who are happier, Brazilian men or Brazilian women?

In Brazil, women seem to be happier than men in terms of future happiness (8.98 for women and 8.56 for men) and present happiness (6.73 for women and 6.54 for men), but not in regards to past happiness (5.43 for women and 5.86 for men). This suggests a reversal of relative positions, as we move forward in time. Note that Brazilian men and women boast the highest levels of future happiness in their respective categories, *vis-à-vis* all other 132 countries surveyed. One must, however, be careful to note the extent to which the differences are statistically different from zero.

Gender and geography

Age and demographic composition are seen to affect levels of life satisfaction, particularly future happiness. As such, geography or regional differences rather, are variables that should be controlled for, as well as city size (large, medium and small cities and rural areas).

To observe how the difference between men and women changes from country

TABLE 1

Index of Future Happiness (IFH) and Gender

Country	Women		Men		Difference	
	IFH	Rank	IFH	Rank	IFH	Rank
World	6.74	-	6.69	-	0.05	-
Americas	7.22	-	7.1	-	0.12	-
Brazil	8.98	1	8.56	1	0.42	0
Denmark	8.51	3	8.52	2	-0.01	1
Ireland	8.42	4	8.23	5	0.19	-1
Switzerland	7.96	18	7.67	24	0.29	-6
United Kingdom	7.89	22	7.68	23	0.21	-1
Argentina	7.82	23	7.5	29	0.32	-6
Costa Rica	7.78	24	7.86	17	-0.08	7
Austria	7.76	25	7.63	25	0.13	0
France	7.73	26	7.72	21	0.01	5
Netherlands	7.76	29	7.44	34	0.23	-5
Egypt	7.32	43	6.71	69	0.61	-26
Spain	7.28	45	7.43	36	-0.15	9
Italy	7.28	44	6.94	54	0.34	-10
Morocco	7.27	46	6.95	53	0.32	-7
Senegal	7.21	47	7.01	50	0.2	-3
Honduras	7.17	51	7.25	43	-0.08	8
Mali	7.13	52	7.46	31	-0.33	21
Uruguay	7.12	53	7.08	48	0.04	5
South Africa	6.87	61	6.8	63	0.07	-2
Greece	6.81	62	6.2	92	0.61	-30
India	6.76	64	6.87	57	-0.11	7
Germany	6.67	71	6.91	56	-0.24	15
Peru	6.62	75	6.68	71	-0.06	4
China	6.61	76	6.44	85	0.16	-9
Indonesia	6.57	79	6.23	91	0.34	-12

Source: Centre for Social Policies (CPS)/FGV, based on micro-data from the 2006 Gallup World Poll.

to country, a variant with the interactive variables of country and gender was used. This difference-in-difference model allowed for the measure of gender ratios by country.

In short, Brazilians can not only be considered to be the happiest people in the world in regards to future happiness for men and women, but also in regards to the gender differences that favour women. Furthermore, despite any controlling of observable characteristics, no country possesses higher female future happiness levels than Brazil.

The changes in the lives of Brazilian women have been the result of a focus on education and on work, as well as being the preferential focus of social policies.

Moreover, the relative distance, favouring women, grows as data is examined in a chronological order, which may suggest continued empowerment of women, and their status in Brazilian society in the years to come. ■

Neri, M.C. (2011). *A Nova Classe Média: O Lado Brilhante da Base da Pirâmide*. São Paulo, Editora Saraiva, 312 pp.

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The changes in the lives of Brazilian women have been the result of a focus on education and on work, as well as being the preferential focus of social policies.

Brazilian men and women boast the highest levels of future happiness.

Making the NREGA more Gender Responsive: Reflections from the Field

by Subhalakshmi Nandi and Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, UN Women India MCO¹

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)

was enacted by the Parliament of India in 2005. The passing of this law was as significant as the movements that lobbied hard for it, and was the first ever legislation of its kind in the world, guaranteeing wage employment to the most vulnerable people. It was enacted at a time when there was strong political will from a newly elected government, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) in its first term, and at a time of a vibrant nation-wide call for this legislation from workers' and farmers' movements. NREGA was seen by some as a timely corrective measure by the Indian State, which, despite its long legacy of commitment to economic development with social justice, had adopted a model of economic growth that had continued to marginalise and ignore those worst off and fuel inequalities over the past two decades.

The right to work has been enshrined in the (post-1950) Indian Constitution in various ways shapes and forms. The state of Maharashtra has had an enriching experience running an 'employment guarantee scheme' (EGS) which was the outcome of a struggle for protection from poverty and unemployment that began during the massive drought of 1970-1973. Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Act (1979) provided guaranteed employment to all adults throughout the year in public works involving unskilled manual work with timely wage payment, and encouraged the creation of productive

assets. As guaranteed employment and universality were the cornerstone of this Act, it outlived governments and managed to address destitution. It did this by enabling survival and food security, bringing about social inclusion, ensuring institutional accountability and increasing the 'bargaining power' of poor people, especially the most vulnerable such as women belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities (Right to Food, undated).

Almost 30 years later, the NREGA was enacted, again due to pressure from people's movements. In a country such as India, where 93 per cent of the workforce is informally employed, 79 per cent of women workers in rural areas are employed via agriculture, and earn about 50-75 per cent of the wages that men earn (Saxena, 2012), and of whom about 81 per cent belong to marginalised communities (ILO, 2010), the right to guaranteed employment was (and is) bound to have huge implications. It was also a context in which large numbers of landless labourers were forced to survive on a daily wage rate of less than US\$0.80. NREGA (later renamed the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA or MGNREGA) came with a promise of guaranteeing 100 days of employment to a family within a range of 5 km of their residence, based on written or spoken demand for work. Not only has MGNREGA created a legal and institutional basis for the right to work, rights at work, right to wage parity, and a minimum wage, backed

by strong accountability mechanisms, it is also beginning to inspire a longer-term vision of reviving the agricultural sector by building assets for rural communities and supporting their livelihoods. It addresses poverty, deprivation and vulnerability by providing wage generating employment, creating assets, strengthening Panchayats² and activating local mechanisms for social audit, thereby being both enabling and protective at the same time.

MGNREGA also offers a 'way out' for daily wage labourers from traditional feudal structures, which not only offer piecemeal wage rates but are intrinsically linked to class and caste-based discrimination; often 'bonded' forms of labour. The law is particularly significant for women workers belonging to marginalised communities, who would otherwise have no access to just employment opportunities. MGNREGA provides workers with the opportunity to be part of governance structures—in implementation and monitoring, in ensuring administrative transparency and accountability, through the provision of social audits and the practice of appointing worksite supervisors ('mates').

However there have been some accounts of the MGNREGA not matching up to the Maharashtra Act. The national legislation was a departure from the universal right to guaranteed employment, as the number of days was limited to 100, and what essentially is an individual right of all adults was reduced to a household entitlement, thereby becoming a barrier for women's participation in its very design. Whether the individual, rather than the household, could be the unit of entitlement is not a question that policymakers nor workers' movements took up, and was not debated enough even among feminists (Nandi, 2011). Nevertheless, MGNREGA continues to be the government's flagship programme in fulfilling the right to work. It is the largest of its kind in the world, reaching out to

TABLE 1

Pro-women Provisions in the MGNREGA

- One third of workers to be women
- Equal pay for work of equal value
- Provision of crèche facilities
- Provision of work within a 5 km radius of home

an unprecedented number of poor people in rural areas.

Women's access to and participation in MGNREGA

The scale and significance of the MGNREGA phenomenon is huge. In 2012–2013, a total of over 48 million households benefitted from employment under MGNREGA, of which 52 per cent were women, 22 per cent Dalits,³ and 17 per cent tribal. While there is a lot of research examining the implementation of MGNREGA entitlements, there is very little work on understanding its gender outcomes and structural issues. Perhaps this accounts for the regional disparities. While women's participation in the state of Kerala is as high as 94 per cent, it is only 19 per cent in the state of Uttar Pradesh (Government of India 2010). The difference between states in the north and south can, to some extent, be explained by the long-standing institutional base of women, in the form of women's groups, which have enabled women to build on collective strength and bargaining power to negotiate for decent work. Furthermore, state support and initiatives such as the Kudumbashree programme of Kerala, which has strong linkages with Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), has also been instrumental (Muraleedharan, 2012).

Experience shows that in states such as Uttar Pradesh women do not have the same opportunities in accessing MGNREGA as men. This is partly because the entitlement stipulated in MGNREGA is contingent on the household. Therefore, MGNREGA work (just like intra-household distribution of nutrition, education, assets and income) is prioritised for the 'primary breadwinner'—i.e. men. Another factor limiting women's participation is that provisions such as crèches remain unfulfilled in most, if not all, states. These are the gendered impacts which affect women's access to and participation in MGNREGA.

Moreover, women are not a homogenous group. Marginalised women are confronted with triple hurdles of gender, class and caste in securing work under MGNREGA. For example, single and elderly women are marginalised because work is mostly allocated to couples or families through a group system. The physical nature of MGNREGA work also discriminates against breast feeding

mothers, elderly women, and those with disabilities. Sub-groups of Dalit women, such as Musahar⁴ and Muslim women who are among the poorest, often find themselves completely out of the purview of MGNREGA. A lack of awareness about the Act, about its history, vision and provisions, sometimes makes MGNREGA seem like a 'dole' as opposed to a right.

Dalit Women's Livelihood Accountability Initiative (DWLAI)

To address some of these gaps, the UN Women Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) supported the Dalit Women Livelihoods Initiative (DWLAI), a project that was undertaken with Dalit women of Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh from 2010 to 2012, to bring their perspective into social accountability mechanisms as part of MGNREGA implementation. The project was implemented by Gender at Work, along with grassroots partner organisations in eight districts of Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. This article is based on the lessons from the Uttar Pradesh experience of Gender at Work, across 69 Panchayats of five districts, implemented by four local organisations—Lok Samiti, Parmarth Sewa Sansthan, Sahajani Shiksha Kendra (SSK) and Vanangana. The project aimed at increasing Dalit women's participation in MGNREGA and employed a threefold

strategy of increasing access, participation and enhancing transparency and accountability. This project helped to demonstrate that, where facilitated, women have actively accessed and participated meaningfully in MGNREGA, while being empowered socially, economically and politically (Ojha, 2012).

In Uttar Pradesh, women's participation in MGNREGA has continuously remained below par. The geographical areas of the project intervention and state context are characterised as backward with high levels of impoverishment and marginalisation, low social and economic indicators and a physical climate and terrain which is dry, arid and harsh. Women's participation, especially Dalit women's participation, is beleaguered with the same structural problems of caste, class and gender. In addition, women's engagement with PRIs, which is the key formal institution related to MGNREGA implementation, especially in planning and other decision-making processes, was negligible. Thus, the project sought to close the gap that existed between legislative guarantees and implementation at the ground level. A glimpse of the results achieved in the project is shown in Table 2.

Some initiatives were piloted to promote the participation and leadership of

TABLE 2 Results from DWLAI (2010–2012)

	Baseline (2010)				Endline (2012)			
Percentage of women accessing MGNREGA (%)	61.7				97			
Number of days (%)	<25 87	26-50 8	51-75 2	>75 3	<25 5.9	26-50 24.3	51-75 51.3	>75 12.5
Worksite facilities (crèche) (%)	1.1				2.6			
Women worksite supervisors (mates) (%)	1.2				20.74			
Individual bank accounts (%)	30				70			
Non-MGNREGA wages: agricultural work (in US\$)	Woman 0.8		Man 1.2		Woman 1.3		Man 1.45	
Non-MGNREGA wages: non-farm work (in US\$)	Woman 0.9		Man 1.6		Woman 1.6		Man 1.9	

women under MGNREGA, as workers, mates (worksite supervisors), and as community leaders, working closely with PRIs. For instance, Lok Samiti's project aimed at enabling access to MNREGA for Musahar and Muslim women by getting women from these communities Job Cards and work for the first time since the implementation of the Act, and enabled their participation in mainstream workers' unions. This initiative also sought to break gender and community-based barriers and stereotypes (e.g. the perception that Muslim women are not interested or allowed to do manual work). Sahajani Shiksha Kendra trained Dalit women to become 'mates'. For this they developed a training module specifically for semi-literate women. The module combined perspective-building with skills development and has been used to advocate for policy-level interventions to bring more women into these positions. This model challenged stereotypes related to women's abilities to do 'technical' work. Vanangana initiated an all-women's work site—building a large pond—where Dalit women were involved in all stages of planning and implementing the work.

This model helped to reduce barriers related to women's access to Panchayats, and government departments, while promoting women as capable managers and decision-makers at a large worksite.

The first achievement of the project was an increase in employment and income for women, both through access to employment under MGNREGA, and through an increase in the number of days they worked. As Table 2 shows, 13 per cent of women managed to secure MGNREGA work for more than 75 days, as compared to 3 per cent in the baseline. Almost 77 per cent of women surveyed felt that there had been an improvement in their economic condition, as they had secured more working days. A large percentage of these women claimed that they now spent their money to avoid hunger, repay small debts and pay for their children's education.

The second area of accomplishment was women's greater access to and control over financial resources. Seventy per cent of women managed to get a bank account in their name, as compared to 30 per cent in the baseline. More significantly, 72.4 per

cent of these women are operating the bank account on their own, as compared to 53 per cent in the baseline. Access to economic resources also had a favourable impact on women's say in household decision-making. Nearly all of the women (98 per cent) said they took greater decisions about how this money would be used.

This project also helped women trump gender stereotypes since they had the opportunity to carry out semi-skilled and skilled work under this project. Over the project period about 150 women across all the project sites were trained as worksite supervisors (mates). The number of women that worked as mates increased from 1.2 per cent to 21 per cent during the project period, and women also gained in confidence as a result of doing this work. They learned to do technical tasks such as measuring work, filling in 'muster rolls' (attendance registers) etc., which had traditionally been the domain of powerful men. Clearly, wages in rural areas have increased as a result of these changes. Data from the project (see Table 2) show there was a rise in wages in non-MGNREGA work, both in agriculture and non-farm sectors; and we also see a decline in the gender gap in wages. All these shifts signal changes in the lives of the women, and are indicative of their 'empowerment journeys' through challenging dominant power structures of gender, caste and class (Patel, Nandi and Khan, 2012).

A joint advocacy consultation by UN Women and Gender at Work, showcasing and highlighting the lessons from this project, contributed to the adoption of policy recommendations such as the appointment of women as 50 per cent of mates for all worksites, identification of single women for issuing individual Job Cards, and conducting time and motion studies to formulate schedules of rates that are gender-, age- and disability-sensitive. A letter in this regard was issued by the Union Minister for Rural Development to all Chief Ministers to take forward these policy recommendations from the consultation.

There is no doubt that MGNREGA is a successful social protection measure for the most marginalised and excluded members of society. Within the existing political economy, the passing of the law was a huge battle in itself, and so is its day-to-day

BOX 1

Lessons and Reflections

The strategies that helped to achieve these results were found to be the following:

- Organising women for action, through peer learning, collectivising for building voice and agency, enhancing their bargaining power and developing solidarity. This provided a strong platform for women in public spaces and increased their negotiating power vis-à-vis family, community, landlords, banks, PRIs and the government machinery.
- Awareness-raising and capacity-building of all women in the project area on rights-based approaches, on the law and its provisions and of the process and cycle of MGNREGA right from developing work plans in Gram Sabhas until the payment of wages. In this project, capacity-building also included technical skills training for women and helping women to obtain formal appointments as mates. The unique combination of perspective-based training on gender, caste and poverty, accompanied by technical and legal training, was one of the key strategies that set this project apart from other capacity-building efforts.
- Partnerships and alliance-building was a key feature of this project, whether at the local community level or across the four partner organisations or alliances with key leaders in the community, PRIs, government, and even among fellow activists.
- Campaigns and advocacy efforts were another key feature that led to the success of these programmes at the local level and ultimately contributed to recognition and acknowledgement at the state and national levels, by bringing together a mixture of grassroots women and activists, non-governmental organisations, academics, practitioners, donors and government.

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MGNREGA also offers a 'way out' for daily wage labourers from traditional feudal structures, which not only offered piecemeal wage rates but are intrinsically linked to class and caste-based discrimination; often 'bonded' forms of labour.



Photo: World Trade in Commodities: Search for Stability. UN Photo/John Isaac.

implementation. Yet, from the perspective of its gender-responsiveness, the lessons of the DWLAI suggest that the mere enactment of a law is not enough. A bottom-up paradigm, however, with both rights-based approaches and empowerment processes at its core can have desired outcomes for gender equality. An important element of the gender perspective in a human rights framework is the centrality of 'empowerment' processes. In the literature in recent years, 'rights-based approaches' and 'empowerment approaches' have often been pitted against each other. Part of the reason for this is that the interpretation of these frameworks has been appropriated by players other than those who created the discourse (Cornwall, 2007).

Nevertheless, for gender equality advocates, 'empowerment' remains a critical framework, at the core of which is an analysis of power (Batiwala, 1993). From a gender perspective, therefore, rights and empowerment complement each other. While rights are "the value framework that guides intervention", empowerment provides the "nuts and bolts for organizing communities, particularly those with poor women, around these values and ideas" (Kapur and Duvvury, 2005).

The DWLAI experience reminds us that in addition to a 'protection' and 'prevention' approach, a framework of 'promotion' and 'transformation' (Jones, 2012) can again become part of the discourse, organising and strategising for social protection in India. ■

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The authors would like to acknowledge the research assistance provided by Leena Patel and Suhela Khan for this paper. This paper builds upon the collective reflections and learnings in the journey of implementing the Dalit Women Livelihoods Accountability Initiative (2010-12) with UN Women's partner organisation Gender at Work, and in particular they would like to acknowledge the local organisations in Uttar Pradesh – Lok Samiti, Parmarth Samaj Sewi Sansthan, Sahajani Shiksha Kendra (Nirantar) and Vanangana – on whose work this paper is based.

2. Constitutionally elected body that is the unit of the Indian three-tier system of local self-governance.

3. The term used for the Scheduled Caste community.

4. One of the most marginalised Scheduled Caste communities of Northern India.

Domestic Work: Women's Work, Decent Work?

by Malte Luebker, International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific¹

They often go unnoticed, but their numbers are huge: worldwide, more than 52.5 million women and men work as domestic workers, according to a recent report by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2013a). This is more than the total number of people employed in some large countries such as Viet Nam, Mexico, Nigeria and Germany. This figure is a conservative estimate, based on official statistics; many more have probably gone unaccounted for. Although some men work for households, often as drivers, gardeners or guards, the 43.6 million women domestic workers outnumber them by far.

Domestic work is, therefore, an occupation that is almost entirely performed by women, and for many, it is their main or only entry point into the labour market. Globally, the number of women domestic workers has grown by 14.8 million since 1995 (ILO, 2013a). In Latin America, one in four women with a wage job is now employed as a domestic worker. In the Middle East, every third woman with a paid job is a domestic worker, and globally one in 13 women who earn a wage do so by working for another household. For these women, paid employment means taking care of their employers' households or looking after their children (ILO, 2013a).

Earning a wage is a step towards economic independence and empowerment. However, this only holds true when such wage-generating jobs are decent. For domestic workers, decent work is often still elusive. For many domestic workers, working conditions are often poor, their wages low, their hours long, and their jobs precarious. Many employers still regard those who work for them not as workers but as mere 'helpers' and consider their recruitment as an act of charity. Likewise, many governments exclude domestic workers from the scope of the labour laws that protect other workers.

This leaves many domestic workers without the basic rights that most of us take for

granted such as an entitlement to a weekly day off, which does not apply to 44.9 per cent of the world's domestic workers (see Figure 1). Likewise, while almost all governments set a limit to the normal weekly hours of work within their labour laws, some 56.6 per cent of all domestic workers cannot rely on such a protection, often working around the clock, especially if they live with their employer.

They often do so for exceptionally low wages and, to make matters worse, in 42.6 per cent of all cases they are not even entitled to the minimum wage. Given that most domestic workers are women, maternity protection is another crucial concern. Under national laws, just under two thirds of all female domestic workers are entitled to maternity leave, although not all are eligible to receive maternity cash benefits.

Many domestic workers (currently no precise numbers are available) are migrant workers who have left their country for the promise of a better job elsewhere. As foreign workers, sometimes with an undocumented legal status, they face additional vulnerabilities. In many countries their work permit is tied to an individual employer, meaning that they are vulnerable to or can become dependent on exploitative situations, especially if they have taken on debt to pay for a recruitment fee. Even where regional blocs such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are promoting the free flow of labour, they usually focus on a narrow set of highly skilled professionals, excluding domestic workers, even though this group accounts for a far greater share of labour migration.

Protections vary greatly between the world's regions. The 21.5 million domestic workers in Asia, and their at least 2.1 million counterparts in the Middle East, are generally the least protected. As of 2010, a mere 3 per cent of Asia's domestic workers could turn to labour laws to claim a weekly day of rest, and only 1 per cent could rely

on a statutory limit on their working hours. A guaranteed minimum wage only covers domestic workers in Hong Kong, the Philippines and some Indian states. Far from enjoying maternity benefits, foreign domestic workers in Singapore face deportation if they become pregnant.

Across the Middle East, basic labour protection for domestic workers is almost entirely absent from national labour laws of 2010—a shortcoming in protection that affects mainly migrant domestic workers, who have to rely on weaker safeguards offered by the standard employment contracts that are common in the region.

Other regions, namely Latin America with its 19.6 million domestic workers, show that better legal protection is feasible. All but a few of the region's domestic workers are at least in part covered by labour laws and are hence entitled to annual leave, a minimum wage and a day of weekly rest. Three quarters are protected by a limit on weekly working hours, which in some cases demands longer hours than that of other workers. Nine out of 10 domestic workers in Latin America are, at least on paper, entitled to maternity benefits. Domestic workers in Africa, Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and developed countries are at least in part covered by basic protections.

Do such rights matter for the reality of women's work, or are they a dead letter, as some critics argue? Granted, compliance is often weak, and enforcement needs to be strengthened. Only a third of Brazil's domestic workers are enrolled under the social security scheme.

But this is a huge improvement over the mid-1990s and much better than the blanket exclusion in many other countries. The wages of Brazil's domestic workers have doubled in real terms over the same period, largely due to substantial increases in minimum wages, which, unlike in most Asian countries, also cover domestic workers.

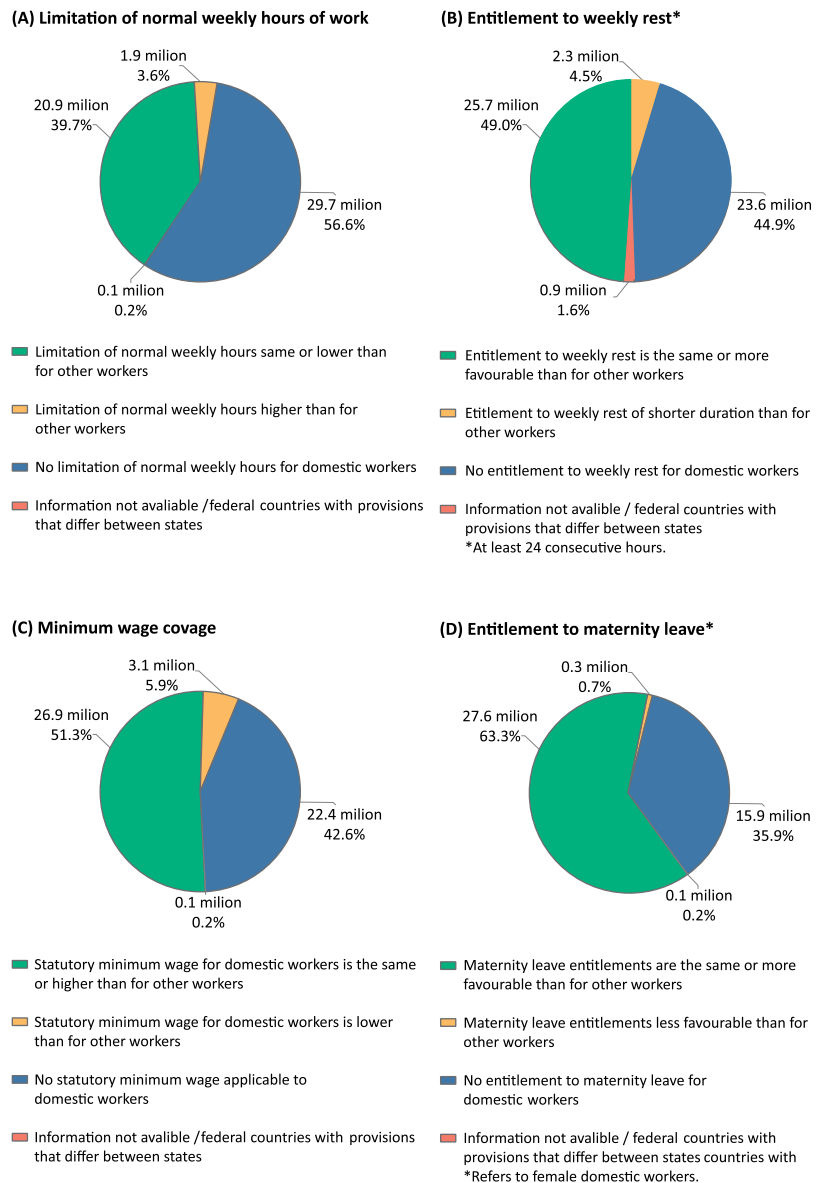
Such basic labour rights not only establish entitlements but also provide a sense of dignity and change public perceptions. When South Africa introduced a minimum wage for domestic workers in 2002, labour economists were left wondering why households started to pay higher wages despite the absence of any credible enforcement mechanism. It turned out that the new regulations themselves had altered perceptions and shifted the balance of bargaining power in favour of domestic workers, encouraging households to increase wages and sign employment contracts (Dinkelmann and Ranchhod, 2010). In the Indian states that recently extended minimum wage coverage to domestic workers, employers and workers alike were often confused about the precise rate they should apply. However, what really mattered was that the state suddenly recognised domestic workers as workers with rights, something that had not occurred to them before.

Since it was adopted in June 2011, the ILO's Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 has set in motion such a re-thinking on a global scale. The Convention starts from the consideration that "domestic work continues to be undervalued and invisible and is mainly carried out by women and girls", setting out a new global standard for the minimum protections and rights that domestic workers should enjoy. So far, 12 countries² have ratified the Convention and are thus committed under international law to implement these minimum standards. In many other countries the ratification process is underway.

Denying domestic workers basic labour rights is no longer acceptable. Countries have begun to act, some of them taking small, others bigger, steps in the right direction. For instance, Thailand has ordered employers to give their domestic workers a day off on public holidays, Singapore now grants such workers a weekly day of rest, and Namibia is setting a minimum wage for domestic workers. In Bahrain, the new Labour Code includes domestic workers in a number of its provisions. The United States has extended the Fair Labor Standards Act's minimum wage and overtime protections to the nearly 2 million direct care workers who help elderly or disabled people in their homes.³ In the Philippines,

FIGURE 1

Coverage of Domestic Workers by Basic Working Conditions Laws, 2010



Source: ILO (2013a).

the new Domestic Workers Act or 'Batas Kasambahay' sets out detailed rules and protections for domestic workers.

But while labour rights are being strengthened for many domestic workers, there are some worrying signs at the other end of the spectrum. Many women and, indeed, girls are still working in unacceptable forms of domestic work, such as forced labour and child labour. Child labour has been ostracised across

the world, with global statistics showing a steady downward trend since the turn of the century. But contrary to this development, the latest ILO estimates show that the number of children engaged in domestic work has grown from approximately 10.6 million to 11.5 million between 2008 and 2012, and two thirds of them are girls (ILO, 2013b). All too often, a start in domestic service at an early age will deprive girls and boys of education and a chance to find a better job later on in life.

By its very nature, forced labour is even more difficult to measure than domestic work and child labour. However, it is believed that there are between 19.5 million and 22.3 million victims of forced labour worldwide, the majority of whom are women. While state-imposed forced labour (10 per cent) and forced sexual exploitation (22 per cent) both play a big role, more than two thirds of all victims of forced labour exploitation are found in the private economy, with domestic work featuring as one of the main perpetrating sectors (ILO, 2012). Horrendous reports

of gross violations of domestic workers' human rights show that much remains to be done until domestic work is decent work for each and every woman engaged in it. ■

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1. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the International Labour Organization.

2. These are Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Germany, Guyana, Italy, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Paraguay, the Philippines, South Africa and Uruguay.

3. See: <<http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/whd/WHD20131922.htm>>.

An Impact Assessment: the Formalisation of Domestic Work in Brazil

by Edson Domingues and Kênia de Souza, Cedeplar, Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG)/UN Women Brazil

Domestic workers, a group consisting mostly of women, have benefitted significantly from real income increases in Brazil. Although salaries for domestic work have increased more than those for other work categories, the average wage is still far removed from that of other occupations. It is necessary to understand the particularities of domestic work in Brazil to be able to develop specific public policies aimed at promoting the well-being of this portion of the population.

In light of this, Domingues and Souza (2012) sought to estimate the impacts of increased wages paid to domestic workers through simulations with a computable general equilibrium (CGE) model. The results of macroeconomic and sector variables were drawn from two direct effects: the increase in the price of domestic work and domestic workers' income gains.

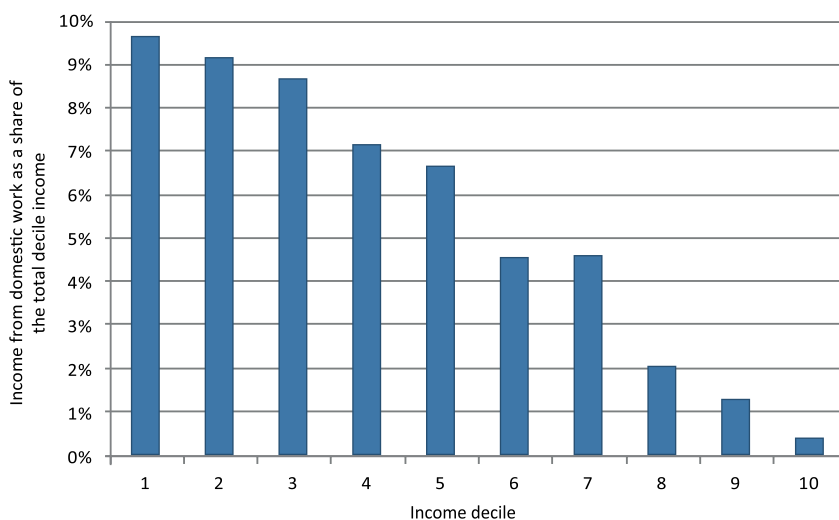
A general equilibrium model computed with recursive dynamics was employed, including details of 117 consumer products, 60 sectors and 10 representative families distributed by income decile. The model was developed by Cedeplar (a regional planning and development centre of the state of Minas Gerais) (Domingues et al., 2011). It was adapted

to incorporate specific data regarding the consumption of domestic services, thus allowing both the distribution of these services by household type as well as the share of domestic workers in each income decile to be mapped.¹

This enabled the location of the effects of the income gains achieved by domestic workers in households under different economic conditions to be extracted. This demonstrated that although the income per worker was higher in the higher deciles,

FIGURE 1

Share of Income from Domestic Work for each Income Decile



Source: Created in house, based on data from POF 2002/2003 (IBGE, 2012a).

the importance of income derived from domestic work decreased correspondingly, reaching 9.8 per cent of the total income in the first decile, and only 0.19 per cent in the 10th decile (Figure 1). Therefore, any increase in income from domestic work is understood to have progressive redistributive effects, as it transfers income from the higher to the lower deciles.

Under the framework of general equilibrium models, and based on the macroeconomic scenario observed between 2005 and 2011, a simulation was conducted with three components, in which:

- i. the number of domestic workers remained fixed;
- ii. the price of domestic labour grows by 10.95 per cent per a year; and
- iii. the income of domestic workers increases annually by 10.95 per cent—distributed according to the participation of these workers in each income decile.²

The simulations allowed for the calculation of the effects these changes in domestic services had on production, employment, wages and consumption in the Brazilian economy. As such, the results obtained showed that 0.58 per cent of the cumulative GDP growth occurring between 2006 and 2011 (baseline scenario)—or about R\$19 billion at 2011 prices—could be attributed to the rising incomes of domestic workers, despite the rise in the costs of these services. The result on aggregate employment was a growth of 0.77 per cent, or about 630,000 jobs.

The increase in the income of domestic workers and the real income increases in the economy were reflected in the 1.90 per cent increase in household consumption, benefiting mainly the lower income deciles, as they received most of the earnings attributed to domestic work. Some 6.61 per cent of the growth in real consumption in the first decile between 2006 and 2011 could be attributed to the effects triggered by the increased income for domestic work, despite the higher price of these services. This figure decreases as we move through the deciles, reaching 0.13 per cent in the wealthiest decile.

Therefore, as a result of rising incomes and consumption, as well as their multiplier effects on the economy, there was an

TABLE 1

Monetary Welfare Gains per Household, Resulting from Changes in the Income of Female Domestic Workers

Decile	Average income per household, in R\$	Average gains in well-being per household, from 2006 to 2011, in R\$	Ratio between the average income and gain in well-being
	1	2	2/1
1	210.71	469.71	2.23
2	379.11	550.86	1.45
3	523.51	641.49	1.22
4	674.80	630.84	0.93
5	859.31	704.21	0.82
6	1,103.00	556.86	0.50
7	1,431.09	714.14	0.50
8	1,954.89	375.88	0.19
9	3,000.83	325.53	0.11
10	8,000.76	169.53	0.02

Source: Authors' elaboration.

increase in production—mainly of durable consumer goods and services, such as home appliances and health services. Monetary welfare gains amounted to R\$25 billion between 2006 and 2011, and were distributed progressively through the income deciles. According to Table 1, in the first decile, cash transfers from social welfare programmes were more than twice the monthly income earned by these families.

On the production side, the sectors adjusted to income and price shocks, changing the production total and the use of production factors (labour). The increase in household income ultimately displaced part of the production factors to the sectors associated with household consumption, which increased production and the use of labour.

The effect of rising prices was negative for all activities. It was, however, offset by the increase in income, resulting in a positive impact on sectors such as 'consumer goods', with a 0.86 per cent increase in production and a 2.31 per cent increase in employment in the sector.

The sectors that benefited most included the 'food industry', 'services', 'durable consumer goods' and 'agriculture and livestock', while others such as the 'extraction industry', the 'intermediate

goods industry' and the 'capital goods industry', experienced a negative trend in terms of production and employment. Such changes were made clear by the composition of household consumption—in particular, by the consumption structure of the lower deciles, where the consumption of subsistence goods was high.

Thus, the economic impact of increased income among domestic workers, a professional class consisting predominantly of women, suggests a path forwards for public policies.

The value added to job categories traditionally relegated to the margins of Brazil's economy improves the living conditions not only of the low-income population but of the economy as a whole, while contributing to the improvement of income distribution.

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1. In the households, 1.74 per cent of household consumption pertains to domestic services. Most of this amount is consumed by households in the upper income deciles, as expected: about 80 per cent of consumption falls into the ninth and tenth deciles.

2. The figures used were drawn from the data observed in the Monthly Employment Surveys from 2005 to 2011 (IBGE, 2012b).

Social Transfers: Strengthening Girls' and Women's Potential as Protagonists in Development

by Nicola Jones, Overseas Development Institute¹ and Maxine Molyneux, University College London²

Social transfers—transfers of small amounts of cash or assets to impoverished households³—are heralded as one of the great success stories of international development. Various programmes reach more than three quarters of a billion people in low- and middle-income countries today and are recognised for providing critical support to families to meet basic consumption needs and improve access to key services (World Bank, 2009; DFID, 2011; UNICEF, 2012).

More contentious, however, is the extent to which they have meaningfully empowered girls and women, enabling them to take up new roles in their households and communities.

Targeting girls and women makes economic sense

Pioneering cash transfer programmes in Latin America (such as Mexico's Oportunidades and Brazil's Bolsa Família) have attracted considerable attention not least because they put the transfer directly into women's hands, drawing on a strong evidence base that shows that women are more likely than men to invest additional income in family welfare (e.g. Hodinott and Haddad, 1995; Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2000).

While these programmes are primarily concerned with improving children's school attendance and health, women have reported that access to cash or assets in their own name not only gives them welcome support to their role as caregivers

but also has the potential to strengthen their bargaining power and position in the household (Hossain and Blackie, 2011; Holmes and Jones, 2013).

Research undertaken as part of Egypt's conditional cash transfer (CCT) pilot, which focuses on mothers and female-headed households, found that women had increased their capability to 'direct their lives' (Pathways of Women's Empowerment, 2010: 2), while women in the occupied Palestinian territories in a beneficiary perception study emphasised that the programme had freed them up from the constant surveillance of their male relatives, not just husbands but also brothers and brothers-in-law (Jones et al., 2013).

In recent years there has been greater attention within social transfer programmes to integrate design features to enhance women's empowerment and gender-equitable outcomes as well as to support their role as mothers. Key objectives include the following:

Reducing gender disparities in education

The importance of education in providing a vital route to empowerment (personal, social, economic) is well established and is acknowledged to be "foundational for all the other development goals".⁴

In recognition of this, a number of CCTs have sought to address the gender gaps in education.⁵ Mexico's Oportunidades and Turkey's Social Risk Mitigation Project

(both CCTs) paid higher benefits for girls, to tackle their disadvantages in enrolment (Fiszbein and Schady, 2009).

Malawi's Zomba cash transfer experiment also focused on reducing adolescent girls' education drop-outs and risky behaviours. In this programme, drop-out rates at baseline fell from 11 per cent to 6 per cent within the first year, with significant increases in re-enrolment rates among previous drop-outs.

There were also positive effects on the sexual and marital decisions of beneficiaries, including declining rates of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy (Baird et al., 2009).

Supporting women's access to reproductive health services

Reproductive health is an area where progress for girls and women has been much more limited, with serious consequences for their well-being and future opportunities, as highlighted in the 2013 *State of the World's Population Report: Motherhood in Childhood*.

While earlier cash transfer programmes focused predominantly on children's health, CCTs are also increasingly providing pregnant women and new mothers with medical check-ups and nutritional and reproductive health advice.⁶

In Haryana State in India, the Apni Beti Apna Dhan programme provides financial incentives for female births to stem the sex ratio imbalance and for

delaying the marriage of girls until the age of 18 (ICRW, 2011).

Facilitating access to complementary services

While social protection programme objectives are broadening, there is also a clear recognition that programmes need to strengthen linkages to complementary services and programmes (Holmes and Jones, 2013).

In Brazil, Chile and Colombia there is a commitment to intersectoral cooperation through CCTs (Soares and Silva, 2010). A single registry supports the integration of households into programmes dealing with food security, housing, banking, credit, and judicial services.

In Bangladesh, asset transfer programmes promote women's savings accounts and aim to link women to credit sources as they graduate from the programme.

Similar bridges to credit schemes are also being scaled up in Palestine's cash transfer programme. In other contexts, programme designers have also sought to address key social vulnerabilities that undermine women's agency, including providing access to domestic and sexual violence prevention and protection services (Colombia and Chile).

Providing skills training, knowledge and raising awareness about rights

Programmes that treat poverty and vulnerability as multidimensional have also sought to go beyond risk management through income support and by developing women's skills and knowledge through training and awareness-raising.

Asset transfer programmes in Bangladesh and CCTs in Egypt, Ghana, Peru and the Philippines promote regular interactions between social workers and beneficiaries to increase women's knowledge of their legal rights, parental responsibilities and skills, health and nutrition.

The more enlightened of these include men in some of the education sessions, recognising that addressing gender inequalities needs to involve men equally.

Promoting women's community participation

While the focus of social transfers has largely been at the household level, there is growing interest in the spillover effects in

the community. Qualitative research indicates that with increased cash women are more likely to participate in family and community events (helped by having enough funds to cover new clothes or gifts essential to inclusion) and are also deemed more creditworthy by friends and peers (Jones et al., 2013). More formally, women's social inclusion by acquiring citizenship rights has been tackled by several cash transfer programmes (e.g. in Brazil, Ghana, Peru) that make participation conditional on obtaining ID registration, which is necessary to access, other social services and political rights.

These programmes and others in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique, encourage women to be involved in leadership roles, either as community facilitators or on beneficiary welfare committees. All-women groups, such as Mothers Clubs, can also provide secure spaces for women to get together to share interests and concerns.

Key challenges remain

While there is evidence that social transfer programmes have enhanced women's agency in some contexts, many still take too little account of gender relations, women's needs and their dual roles as carers and income generators (Molyneux, 2006; Waring et al., 2013), (Bradshaw with Quirós Viquez, 2008), (Chant, 2006). Moreover, failure to acknowledge, let alone promote, the productive capacity of women and their families reduces the opportunities for beneficiaries to graduate out of the programme and poverty (Jenson, 2009; Molyneux, 2007).

With regard to women's agency, programmes have often been criticised for their paternalistic approach to poverty reduction, where participants, especially women, are treated as passive beneficiaries rather than as rights holders and active citizens.

There is, however, a fledgling movement within social transfer programmes, to integrate social accountability mechanisms, including grievance mechanisms to participatory dialogues and social audits, into programme governance frameworks (e.g. Ringold et al., 2012).

When women are treated as citizens and have opportunities to voice their views throughout the social transfer programme

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cycle they will be better able to become the 'makers and shapers' of development as well as promoters of programming in closer alignment with their needs (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001).

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3. DFID (2011) includes cash transfers, public works programmes and asset transfers under the umbrella category of social transfer programmes.

4. See: <<http://www.unicef.org/mdg/gender.html>>.

5. Interestingly too, and in recognition of changing dynamics in gender parity in education, where boys are less likely to attend school, in Bangladesh, Cambodia and Jamaica, cash transfers explicitly promote their enrolment (Fiszbein and Schady, 2009).

6. These include Brazil's Bolsa Família, Bolivia's Bono Juana Azurduy, Egypt's Ain El-Sira, Indonesia's Program Keluarga Harapan, Peru's Juntos, the Philippines' Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program and Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP).

Evaluation of the Programa Bolsa Família: a Gender and Race Perspective

by Ana Hermeto, Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG)

The goal of this article is to identify and analyse how important the Programa Bolsa Família (PBF) is in empowering women and bridging the social and economic gaps that exist between racial groups in Brazil.

Knowledge about these impacts is scarce because the programme is not specifically designed to reduce these disparities, and because there are few representative databases available.

Women are the recipients of the PBF cash transfers, and, in this context, they are considered responsible for their families for all intents and purposes. Some of the potential outcomes of this practice are direct or indirect impacts (positive or negative) on women's bargaining power, which is understood as their role in the family's decision-making process.

Favourable or unfavourable outcomes caused by their participation in the PBF may be analysed in light of the racial group to which these women belong, taking into consideration that the impact on empowerment is directly linked to the programme's implementation model and to its effects on the family and on women, once their bargaining power is altered.

When it comes to indicators that measure job supply for adults in these households, the goal is to determine whether PBF creates negative gender- or race-related labour incentives by reducing the participation of these men and women in the labour market.

On the other hand, if the level of participation increases, this would lead to job-seeking and, consequently, to the

employment of the adult members of a household. A conclusion that may be drawn is that the PBF's main impact on adult employment actually represents an income effect, according to which a rise in the income obtained from cash transfers would increase the demand for normal goods, including consumption and entertainment, and reduce the economic necessity for work, thus decreasing working hours.

In this vein, the PBF would ultimately reduce the level of employment.

Nevertheless, if family labour supply is taken into consideration, it may be concluded that decisions concerning the time allocation of different household members are affected by the value of their time. Since PBF benefits are

TABLE 1

Differences (Risk Ratios) between Comparison Groups



...the hypothesis stating that cash transfers discourage people from seeking work was not confirmed for any of the groups within this study.

Programa Bolsa Família increases the level of employment for women.

	Occupation	Job-seeking	Occupational transition (left job during the year)
Women	1.2743	1.8982 ***	0.9924
Men	1.8461 ***	1.1822	0.5559 *
Black individuals	1.3878 *	1.3115	0.6762
White individuals	2.0330 ***	1.5662	0.6254
Black women	1.0946	1.4002	1.0770
White women	1.5609 *	2.9740 ***	0.8332
Black men	1.6703 **	1.2167	0.4960 **
White men	2.4787 ***	1.1082	0.6188

Source: Cedeplar, 2005.

Obs.: Significance levels: * 0.10; ** 0.05; *** 0.01.

usually granted to families with children, who must attend school, the value of a child's time in the labour market is significantly reduced.

Therefore, since there is less labour availability in the household because the children work less, the level of employment of the other members of the family should increase, in terms of both working hours as well as domestic activities. Women may be subject to additional impacts because they must comply with the programme conditionalities—something that may consume more of their time and may consequently reduce their time devoted to work or leisure.

To obtain indications of the PBF's potential impacts in terms of gender and race, propensity score weighted regressions were estimated for individual results, according to gender and race criteria, using a treatment group (PBF recipients) and a control group (people who do not receive benefits from any type of cash transfer programme) and cross-referencing this data with family per capita income eligibility.

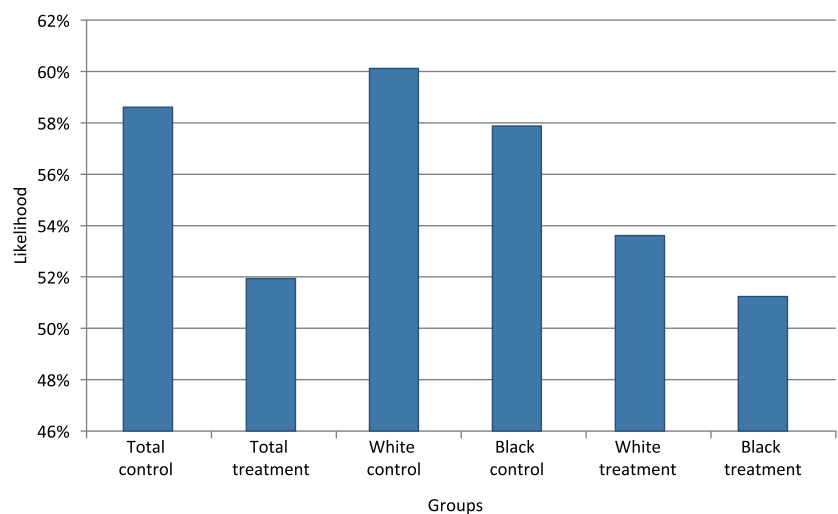
The sample was limited to adults aged 24–59 years old, with the work-related variables analysed being: occupation, job-seeking, transition into unemployment, and use of time (time allocated to work and household activities during a typical weekday).

Table 1 demonstrates the likelihood ratio for the treatment variable coefficient in each of the estimated regressions. With regard to the occupation results, the positive differences for the treatment group are quite significant, especially for men and white individuals. When we combine the groups, the favourable outcomes are concentrated mostly among white men but can also be found among black men and white women. This leads to the conclusion

that, when it comes to occupation, black women are somewhat excluded from such effects. Nevertheless, the hypothesis stating that cash transfers discourage people from seeking work was not confirmed for any of the groups within this study, which is something quite positive. If, on the one hand, the difference between the groups is not significant in regard to women, on the other, there seems to be an increase in the indicator that expresses job-seeking.

FIGURE 1

Likelihood of Women not Making Decisions in any Dimension, by Comparison Group and Race, Brazil, 2005



Source: Cedeplar, 2005.

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By also taking into consideration the indirect indicators for empowerment, greater social participation and level of employment, we may conclude that the PBF has extremely positive short-term results, which are measured when these benefits are granted to the poor Brazilian population in general.

TABLE 2

Differences in Average Daily Time Allocation for Women Black and White, Women and Men

	Head of household			
	Black woman	White woman	Black men	White men
External remunerated activity	25.92***	39.86***	15.11***	16.14 **
In-house remunerated activity	6.81	-12.54 *	2.91	2.33
Household and family	-4.69	-4.67	21.54***	14.42
Childcare	1.81	-14.21	-0.98	-6.77

Source: Cedeplar, 2005.

Obs.: Significance levels: * 0.10; ** 0.05; *** 0.01.

This in particular is extremely important for women. Nonetheless, when these estimates are evaluated against different racial groups, it can be inferred that the effect of job-seeking is concentrated in the racial group of white women. With respect to occupational transitions, which test the hypothesis that individuals leave their jobs once they start receiving the benefits, we found that there is a significant effect, and figures point in the opposite direction only for black men.

Differences in the use of time among adult women were also analysed. By selecting variables concerning time allocated to remunerated activities, both inside and outside their homes, as well as household and family chores, especially childcare, the gender and race perspectives were included using the characteristics of those responsible for the household.

Table 2 presents the results of the difference tests, which confirm in detail that the PBF increases the level of

employment for women. From any of the perspectives used to analyse the gender and race of the person responsible for the household, it is possible to conclude that there is a significant difference in the time women allocate to external remunerated activities.

As expected, in households where a woman is the head of the family, this difference is even larger, especially for white women.

In cases in which the man is the head of the household and the woman is considered the spouse, the difference between the treatment and control groups is still significant.

Considering the reference values concerning time allocation for the treatment group, as illustrated in Table 3, it may be inferred that differences reported in table 2 represent roughly 20 per cent for women in households that are headed by black women, white men and black men, and more than 40

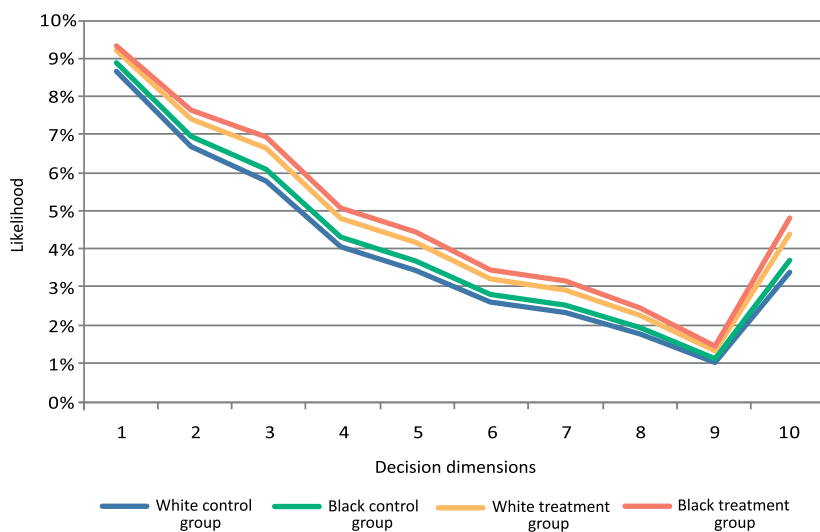
TABLE 3

Reference Values for Average Daily Time use for Black and White, Woman and Men

	Head of household			
	Black woman	White woman	Black men	White men
External remunerated activity	119.29	115.42	59.75	56.49
In-house remunerated activity	31.90	30.21	27.89	57.63
Household and family	301.48	304.24	332.80	356.11
Childcare	219.31	219.42	226.80	237.93

Source: Cedeplar, 2005.

FIGURE 2 Likelihood of Women Making Decisions, by Comparison Group and Race, Brazil, 2005



Source: Cedeplar, 2005.

per cent in cases in which the head of the household is a white woman.

Therefore, the hypothesis that the PBF increases the level of employment for women, in terms of remunerated working hours and not necessarily domestic activities, is reinforced.

The Cedeplar (2005) research also provided a new possibility for analysis, in which a bargaining power indicator was estimated for women, white women and black women in the household for the purposes of quantifying the PBF's role in empowering these individuals within their own families.

This analysis considers women's decision-making power in their homes based on household expenses, children's education, spouse's employment, and use of contraceptive methods.

A variable was devised to quantify these dimensions, and ordered logistic regressions were used to estimate the differences between the treatment and control groups.

Figure 1 shows that most women have no decision-making power in their families, regardless of which group—racial or treatment—was used as a reference. The differences between

the comparison and race groups, however, are quite significant.

In the first two columns of the graph it is possible to observe that there is a 58 per cent likelihood that women from the comparison group are not involved in decision-making, versus a likelihood of 52 per cent for women in PBF beneficiary families. When these women's racial group are taken into consideration, we may conclude that, in both comparison groups, black women have more decision-making power, which becomes evident based on the lower likelihood of not making family decisions.

To illustrate this point, the last column shows that black women from the treatment group are the least likely to not make any decisions for their families.

By including decision-making in our analysis, in the interval between one and 10 dimensions, Figure 2 demonstrates that black women who are PBF recipients have a greater likelihood of making decisions at any of the levels analysed, especially at the intermediate level.

This reinforces the conclusion that this specific group of women ('black treatment group' in the graph) holds greater decision-making power.

The differences between women in the treatment and control groups can be found in all levels.

Moreover, it is important to highlight that women's decision-making power decreases as the dimensions increase, and it rises once again at the maximum level (which considers decision-making in all of the dimensions analysed).

This direct indicator of bargaining power in the family denotes the empowerment of black women in this environment, when it comes to decisions concerning the traditional role of females in the family, as well as their role in the market, outside an exclusive family or household analysis.

By also taking into consideration the indirect indicators of empowerment, greater social participation and level of employment, we may conclude that the PBF has extremely positive short-term results, which are measured when these benefits are granted to the poor Brazilian population in general.

Final comments

This work demonstrates the relevance of differences in gender and race in terms of participation in the labour market, as well as in women's use of time and their decision-making power within the family unit, which are essential dimensions to understanding the process of empowerment of women and black people in Brazil.

As such, there is ample room for gender- and race-oriented research about the impacts of cash transfer programmes. It is quite important to compare the short-term and long-term impacts produced after the implementation of the programme, focusing especially on the all-too-often overlooked dimensions of these impacts.

This will enable us to better understand the process of women's empowerment, which is mediated by the racial group to which they belong.

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Self-Help Groups: Empowering Women in India

by Ashleigh Kate Slingsby, the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG)

In India, self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged as a favoured model of facilitating economic empowerment in poor, rural communities through the provision of microcredit loans. India is home to approximately 8 million SHGs, with the participation of over 95 million households (NABARD, 2013). The impact of SHGs on women's empowerment in India is widely recognized, with over 80 per cent of bank linked SHGs being exclusively dedicated to women. In this context, empowerment is understood to mean access to and control of one's finances (Burra et al., 2005).

What are SHGs?

SHGs are informal groups of 10 to 20 men or women, usually in rural areas, who participate in the accumulation of collective capital to access a microcredit loan from a formal banking institution. The SHG serves as an intermediary between its members and the banking institution, with the aid of either the government, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) or a microfinancing institution (MFI). Only members of the group or community have access to the fund. The group fund serves as a mechanism to achieve self-employment, to ensure that credit is put to good use and that debt is repaid.

SHG membership is based on the discretion of the group itself. Pre-existing community bonds frequently determine membership, as such groupings are a traditional component of rural Indian society. Criteria for membership often includes:

- geographic proximity;
- coming from a similar economic background (usually poor);
- a commitment to repaying the loan;
- a social relationship with established members (friend/family/caste/colleague);
- a good personal reputation; and
- a willingness to participate in group meetings (Reddy and Reddy, 2012: 14).

SHGs have a presence in every state in India; however, implementation of the model varies (Centre for Micro Finance, 2010). Essentially, the SHG model is founded on the principle of solidarity through group collateral—a factor that distinguishes it fundamentally from microfinancing schemes aimed at individuals. By arranging loans on a group basis, transaction costs, paperwork, time and travel are reduced, making lending accessible to poor people in rural areas. Group collateral and the involvement of intermediary institutions simultaneously encourages the participation of banks that would otherwise be dissuaded to do so due to the high risk of default involved in lending to people from poor backgrounds with little financial knowhow.

Why India?

SHGs have existed for over 20 years in India. The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), initiated by the Indian government in 1981, serves as the primary credit provider. The Indian government has prioritised the granting of credit for agricultural and rural development and has exclusively dedicated funding to women's SHGs (WSHGs). This has included the creation of a WSHG Development Fund aimed at enhancing access to bank credit via low interest rates. NABARD takes the lead in partnering with NGOs and the government in promoting and supporting SHGs in rural areas. It ensures visibility, training, financial assistance and 100 per cent refinancing against bank loans for SHGs.

Traditionally, rural Indian women do not have family assets or bank accounts in their name. Therefore, WSHGs enable women to gain a level of economic independence that is not conventionally afforded to them. Notably, WSHGs have been found to improve the health, nutrition and schooling of the children of participating women, as women are more likely to invest their increased income into the well-being of their families (Puhazhendhi, 2013: 21).

Women have also been found to be more diligent participants in SHGs, rendering women's SHGs a productive tool of not only women's empowerment, but poverty reduction at large. The vast majority of SHG members have been found to be married and subsisting on government food subsidies. Therefore, microcredit loans assist families significantly through economic shocks, helping to divert the risk of falling further into poverty. Consequently, SHGs have been found to develop the local economy of rural communities, expanding benefits beyond participating beneficiaries.

The capacity of SHGs to empower women, and the demand among women for participation in SHGs, particularly in lieu of entrepreneurial initiatives, has enhanced the role of women-centred organisations aimed at facilitating WSHGs. Friends of Women's World Banking (FWWB) and the trade union, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), feature prominently in India in this regard. Entrepreneurship represents a founding commitment of many WSHGs. An example is the Kudumbashree Programme in the southern state of Kerala, dedicated to alleviating poverty in communities. India's unique socio-historical circumstances render WSHGs of immense utility in empowering marginalised women such as tribal women and those of underprivileged castes/varnas (Shudras and Dalits or untouchables).

Most of India's poor people live in rural areas. Labour, agriculture and entry-level services are the predominant occupations of rural Indian women. Thus, access to credit enables women to pursue occupations with the potential for greater economic reward. Additionally, WSHGs have been found to have a positive impact on women's confidence and political empowerment. Studies (Tankha, 2012) in Punjab and West Bengal revealed that WSHGs enhance women's financial awareness, improving their financial

decision-making and savings. Therefore, WSHGs contribute to blurring gender lines, enhancing women's negotiating power and consequently, to elevating their positions in their homes and communities at large.

Challenges and criticisms

Between 70 and 80 per cent of Indian SHGs exist in India's southern states. The south is also home to India's highest Human Development Index (HDI) ratings. The correlation between the contribution of SHGs and Human Development is uncertain. A complication exists in isolating which programme has been responsible for empowering women the most, as many women participate in SHGs, independent microfinancing and various government programmes simultaneously. Even so, available data does indicate that most SHGs have had a positive impact on household income, financial knowledge and confidence. Beyond the success that has been achieved lie many challenges.

In terms of coverage, substantial disparities in SHG success exist between states. Furthermore, as recognised in the 2012 State of the Sector Report (Puhazhendhi, 2013), defaulting on SHG bank loans remains a considerable challenge to the maintenance of initiatives. Poor capacity-building represents a central obstacle in this regard. Poor capacity is also responsible for many groups not receiving their loans. Likewise, capacity-building is crucial to reduce members' dependency on external financial advisers, although members have reported that the risk of dependency is outweighed by the potential benefit of a microcredit loan.

A major criticism of SHGs is that available data overestimates the positive impact of initiatives due to self-selection, meaning the participation of women who are already economically empowered. However a study (Reddy and Reddy, 2012) of 1942 SHGs in December 2012 found 43 per cent of SHG members (both women and men) to be landless and 75 per cent to be living below the poverty line—demonstrating that overall the intended beneficiaries are indeed participating in SHGs. Even so, it can be said that women represent the poorest of the poor and are frequently overlooked and, consequently, neglected by SHGs due to social alienation and poor access to information.

SHGs need to actively improve their targeting to enhance the participation of the poorest women, as was exhibited in the case of Bandhan in West Bengal, which implemented 'Targeting Hardcore Poor' (Puhazhendhi, 2013). Furthermore, the background of members in terms of education, gender and caste, as well as the degree of poverty, needs to be taken into account by SHGs. It has been submitted that they should adapt to the specific points of need and provide more specialised services to their members.

It must be acknowledged that the studies that have been conducted on the impact of SHGs have often been sporadic, limited in scope and criticised on the grounds of methodology. Frequently the impacts of loans are not accounted for on an individual or even household level. However, some SHGs appoint bookkeepers, reflecting a well-functioning SHG. The quality and scope of data collection must be improved, most likely with the increased intervention of NABARD, for accurate accountability and impact to be assessed.

Looking forward

In terms of women's empowerment, the success of SHGs has been largely dependent on the purposeful intervention, on the part of the intermediary entities, in targeting gender-related issues, as well as the extent of the impact on those living in extreme poverty. Literacy has emerged as a major determinant of women being leaders of SHGs; however, few SHGs contribute to improving the literacy of their members. Most often the SHG leader determines the use of and access to the loan, thus literacy is rendered a highly decisive factor in achieving the equitable empowerment of women. Unfortunately, it has been found that the majority (62 per cent) of female members are illiterate (Reddy and Reddy, 2012). Therefore, education, financial training and gender sensitisation remain central areas of concern.

In conclusion, SHGs represent a successful model for tackling poverty and empowering women. Reports indicate that SHGs are garnering increased access to credit among an increasing number of participants and that outstanding loans are decreasing annually. Furthermore, SHGs are experiencing greater cooperation among members and adherence to



WSHGs have been found to improve the health, nutrition and schooling of the children of participating women as women are more likely to invest their increased income in the well-being of their families.

SHG regulations, indicating increasing institutional sustainability (*Ibid*). SHGs are an important model of facilitating the economic empowerment of women in terms of increasing their bargaining power, providing financial education, fostering entrepreneurship and enhancing the communitarian bond of poor, rural women in India. Nevertheless, considerable room for growth still exists.

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Beijing+20: Where Do We Stand?

by Nadine Gasman, UN Women Brazil

In 1995, representatives of UN Member States met in Beijing, China, during the Fourth World Conference on Women. This meeting resulted in an agreement to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women and girls all over the world.

Along with the outcomes obtained at the 23rd Special Session of the UN General Assembly in 2000, the conference's final document, the Beijing Platform for Action, became an agenda for empowerment, providing a definition and an underlying policy framework to strengthen gender equality and women's rights. In addition, this has encouraged governments to promote targeted activities.

Twenty years after its inception, the Beijing Platform for Action is still up to date. The document lists 12 critical areas of concern, aside from detailed actions to achieve its strategic objectives. Hence, it is a roadmap to strengthen gender equality and promote women's empowerment in every country.

History shows that the documents signed by Brazil to advance gender equality are a collection of good intentions and some real achievements. Despite this, and the challenging goals that have been set, these agreements are ultimately used as a way to exert pressure on governments to prompt them to deliver concrete results in areas in which they have made international commitments.

We know that a lot of work must still be done to reach the goal of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The Beijing Platform for Action is being reviewed in the interest of highlighting the progress and the challenges in the implementation of these norms, thus providing a tangible path towards development.

The review process

In July 2013 the UN Economic and Social Council tasked the Commission on the

Status of Women (CSW) with reviewing and assessing the execution of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action, 20 years after it was first adopted. The Council asked the states to make a commitment at the national level to perform comprehensive reviews of the progress and challenges in the implementation of the document. It also fostered the creation of regional commissions to carry out the review process. Moreover, the Council asked civil society to actively participate in this undertaking.

The Beijing review and appraisal process is happening at a strategic moment: the global community is intensifying its efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), preparing a post-2015 development agenda, and focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These processes are interconnected and provide a unique opportunity to mainstream gender equality, women's rights and empowerment within the global agenda, not only as a goal per se but as an essential way to promote sustainable development in all its dimensions.

The Beijing+20 programme will involve stakeholders at the national, regional and, ultimately, the global level, who will engage in intense consultation and social and political mobilisation. This process began in July 2013 and gave rise to broad national debates that are currently underway.

This information will fuel the regional reviews, which will take place throughout 2014. The culmination of this process will occur in March 2015, when the CSW will carry out a comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action at the global level. This initiative will also address the opportunities to strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment in the post-2015 development agenda by introducing a gendered perspective.

The 12 critical areas of concern

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action highlighted 12 critical areas of concern, which are:

Women and poverty

More than 1 billion people in the world today, the great majority of whom are women, live in unacceptable conditions of poverty, mostly in developing countries. Poverty has various causes, including structural ones. Poverty is a complex, multidimensional problem, with origins in both the national and international domains.

In Brazil approximately 3.5 million people were lifted out of poverty in 2012. Today in Brazil, around 15.7 million people are poverty-stricken, out of which 6.53 million continue to live below the poverty line. Poverty and extreme poverty exist among families in which the head of household is a woman (34.8 per cent), a black or mixed-race individual (55 per cent) or a person with incomplete primary schooling (26 per cent) (IPEA, 2013).

Education and training of women

Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men.

According to the 2010 Brazilian census, women already outnumber men in Brazilian colleges. Among people who are 25 or older, 9.9 per cent of men and 12.5 per cent of women have at least a college degree.

These figures rise to 11.5 per cent and 19.2 per cent, respectively, for those who were already employed. Female schooling levels are also higher in the 18–24 age group. Additionally, the early school dropout rate is higher among boys (IBGE, 2012a).

Despite this, the 2012 Global Development Report: Gender Equality and Development (World Bank, 2012) reveals that women and men still select significantly different study areas at the vocational and higher education level. They also tend to work in extremely different areas of the 'economic realm', with little change noticed over time (World Bank, 2012).

Women have a greater likelihood than men of participating in low-productivity or low-profitability activities. Therefore, despite the larger number of women in universities, several barriers must be simultaneously removed—in the market in general, in institutions and in the domestic sphere—to modify this inequality.

Women and health

Women have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Their enjoyment of this right is vital to their life and well-being and their ability to participate in all areas of public and private life.

Despite all the efforts and a few advances, there are still essentialist notions in Brazil that reduce the topic of 'women's health'

to the reproductive and private sphere, while men's health is considered part of the productive and public sphere. It is true that we need greater investments in these areas, but we must also break away from such stereotypes in the interest of influencing the development of public policies. We must develop studies to fill in the gaps that still exist in the area of women's health, such as the effects of gender-based violence, mental health, stress and the double work burden.

Violence against women

Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies women's enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

With the approval of Law 11.340, known as the 'Maria da Penha Law', Brazil took a step forward in fighting violence against women. Nevertheless, the justice system must assimilate and adequately enforce the legislation. Impunity is still one of the factors that contribute to the alarming rate of femicide in the country.

Women and armed conflict

An environment that maintains world peace and promotes and protects human rights, democracy and the peaceful settlement of disputes, in accordance with the principles of non-threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence and of respect for sovereignty as set forth in the United Nations Charter, is an important factor for the advancement of women.

In 2011, UN Women and the Ministry of Defence of Brazil signed a Letter of Intent to include a gender perspective in training programmes for Brazilian peacekeepers and to promote cooperation in peace and security issues.

Twice a year, UN Women delivers a presentation at the Brazilian Peacekeeping Joint Centre to the troops who join the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (Minustah). UN Women has also worked to incorporate a gendered perspective into the activities of the Truth Commission.

Women and the economy

There are considerable differences in women's and men's access and opportunities to exert power over economic structures in their societies. In most parts of the world, women are virtually absent from—or are poorly represented in—economic decision-making, including the making of financial, monetary, commercial and other economic policies, as well as tax systems and rules governing pay.

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Women have a greater likelihood than men of participating in low-productivity or low-profitability activities.

Therefore, despite the larger number of women in universities, several barriers must be simultaneously removed—in the market in general, in institutions and in the domestic sphere—to modify this inequality.



Photo: "Nobuhle" by Gabrielle Holmes.

According to data from the Ministry of Labour and Employment (2012), the participation of women in the Brazilian labour market grew more than that of men in 2012. A growth rate of 3.89 per cent was recorded for women and 1.46 per cent for men. Consequently, women now represent 42.47 per cent of the workforce. However, salaries are still unequal: average wages for men rose 3.35 per cent in 2012, and 2.62 per cent for women.

Women in power and decision-making

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country.

The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status are essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life.

In Brazil only 14.81 per cent of the Senators and 8.77 per cent of Representatives elected in 2010 were women. Therefore, although the President is a woman, and there are more women in ministerial functions, women still have to overcome several obstacles to occupy high-echelon positions.

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

Economic development is not enough to reduce all gender disparities—corrective policies and specific budgets to address persistent gender gaps are essential.

The institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women are vital for women's political action, their representation, and for technical, legislative and budgetary planning.

In 1985 the Brazilian National Council for Women's Rights (CNDM) of the Ministry of Justice was created for the purpose of promoting policies to end discrimination against women and to guarantee their participation in the country's political, economic and cultural activities.

In 2002 the State Secretariat for Women's Rights (SEDIM) was conceived. It is also linked to the Ministry of Justice. The mandate of the CNDM remained unaltered.

In 2003 the creation of the Secretariat for Women's Policies of the Presidency of

the Republic (SPM) signalled a transition in the gender equality agenda, which came to occupy a central role in the Brazilian government in view of its direct connection to the Presidential Office and its higher hierarchical status.

Progressive and significant advances were made in the last few years. Nonetheless, we believe that cross-cutting gender policy in Brazil is still under construction. We still have a long way to go in terms of making public-sector managers aware of the importance of this specific issue.

Women's human rights

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birth right of all human beings; their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of governments.

The Platform for Action reaffirms that all human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social, including the right to development—are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, as expressed in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights.

Women and the media

During the past decade, advances in information technology have facilitated a global communications network that transcends national boundaries and has an impact on public policy, private attitudes and behaviour, especially of children and young adults.

The potential exists everywhere for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women.

In Brazil the media in general continues to use gender stereotypes. Women—especially black and indigenous women—are underrepresented in the press. Furthermore, communication vehicles make direct or indirect references to racist, sexist, discriminatory, derogatory and stereotypical ideas and perspectives about women, among other groups.

Nevertheless, new technologies have promoted changes in the way society thinks and acts, producing effects in the ethical, political and cultural spheres. In the wake of these transformations, social movements and some communication sectors have made

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considerable efforts to build an anti-racist, anti-sexist and multi-ethnic media.

The combination of these new possibilities with the pressure exerted by social movements is creating a foundation for the construction of a new political and legal framework for the communications sector.

The appropriate tools exist to reach this new level of female representation in the media.

Women and the environment

Sustainable development is inherently linked to the eradication of poverty, the reduction of disparities, and the commitment of all countries to inclusive and sustainable growth, both in terms of production and consumption.

Women can and should act as agents, leaders and active participants in the advancement of sustainable development if they are given the opportunity to gain equal access to resources, funds, methods and technology.

They play a pivotal role in decision-making and are strong advocates of sustainability.

In 2012 Brazil hosted the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). The conference's final document reaffirmed that women play a vital and leading role in all three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental.

It also established the foundation for the inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment in the SDGs and in the post-2015 development agenda.

Girls and their rights as children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises that "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or status" (1989).

In Brazil the situation in which millions of girls and teenagers find themselves is a major cause for concern, especially those

who live in extreme poverty or are subject to gender discrimination and other types of violence.

In Brazil girls who are 16 years of age or older are allowed to get married. Teenagers who are 14 to 16 years old need legal authorisation to do so. For those less than 14 years old, formal marriage is considered a crime.

Nonetheless, official data from the 2010 IBGE Census (IBGE, 2012b) demonstrate that there are 17,166,761 people between the ages of 10 and 14 in Brazil, out of which 45,785 said they are either in a stable relationship or informally wed.

In 2009, 2.8 per cent of the adolescents aged between 12 and 17 had one or more children (UNICEF, 2011). In 2010, 12 per cent of teenagers aged 15 to 19 years had at least one child (Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2013).

Teenage pregnancies are usually unplanned and unwanted, and most cases result from sexual violence and abuse or from early marriages, usually to older men.

Motherhood becomes a mechanism that reproduces exclusion, poverty and inequality, and it represents a serious threat to the full development and enjoyment of these girls' rights.

These 12 areas of critical concern highlighted by the Beijing Platform for Action are already being analysed at the local and global levels.

The world has enough knowledge, technology and resources to eradicate gender inequalities, and the Beijing Platform for Action appraisal programme will produce new incentives for the advancement of women.

Women aspire to a future in which the world is wholesome, free from hunger, violence and poverty; a world that prioritises equality, human rights and gender equality; where women and men, girls and boys have the same right to resources and opportunities, and share the same leadership positions and decision-making power; a world where women are acknowledged as a coherent, integrated, innovative and dynamic force to promote

sustainable development for present and future generations. UN Women has been tirelessly working to help Brazil one day achieve this goal. ■

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It is necessary to acknowledge that violence against women and girls is the expression of a social and cultural phenomenon of power and submission between men and women, which leads to multiple human rights violations and which is not natural, acceptable or tolerable in any way.

Maria da Penha Institute and UN Women Brazil

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When women are treated as citizens and have opportunities to voice their views throughout the social transfer programme cycle they will be better able to become the 'makers and shapers' of development as well as promoters of programming in closer alignment with their needs.

**Nicola Jones, Overseas Development Institute and
Maxine Molyneux, University College London**

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In the end, a political solution has to be developed based on the Afghan Constitution and the promotion of human rights, especially women's rights. The path towards a prosperous future cannot be accomplished if women are not recognised and integrated into society.

**Rangina Kargar, National Assembly of Afghanistan,
Representative - Faryab Province**