

Challenges and Prospects for the Economic Empowerment of Brazilian Women in the 21st Century

To talk about the economic empowerment of women in Brazil has been a challenge in the last centuries. Although many advances had been noticed in the 20th century, Brazilian women still face a long path towards equality.

Some laws and public policies helped increasing gender equality in Brazil, such as the Decree No. 21.076 of the Provisional Electoral Code, in 1932; The Federal Constitution (1988), in its article 7, provides the prohibition of gender discrimination in relation to wages; Maria da Penha Law (2006) was a great attempt to end violence against women; Law No. 13.104/2015 turned the feminicide (murder a woman as a result of domestic violence and gender discrimination into a heinous crime); Bolsa Família Program empowered many women in the northeast of Brazil¹; and, nowadays, there is a Bill in the National Congress (PLS No. 112/2010)² to establish gender quotas for women on Boards of directors of public companies and mixed capital companies – it has been approved by the Senate's Constitution and Justice Commission in March 8th, 2017.

However, those are *insufficient* initiatives directed to end gender discrimination in Brazil. Unfortunately, at the same time we welcome those attempts, there are many challenges that still interfere in the economic empowerment of Brazilian women. Moreover, Brazil is a country with *continental proportions*, which hinders the creation of a standard to determine the challenges for an effective path towards women's empowerment.

With regard to the challenges for the economic empowerment of Brazilian women, on March 8th, 2017, Brazil's current President, Michel Temer, made a speech stating that women's economic empowerment is good, since they can actually know the price of the products that are being sold in the supermarket³. This situation shows that Brazil still has a *paternalistic tradition*, with conservative values that contrast gender equality in all aspects. The referred speech also reflects the new government position on the status of women, since it didn't indicate at first any woman for its ministries. Nowadays, after complaints made in the national society and media, there are 2 female Ministers for 24 National Ministries⁴.

This situation also shows that *women occupy little space in Brazilian politics*, which hinders, at the outset, the creation of laws and public policies aimed at empowering women. The last bulletin of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) shows that Brazil is only the 153th in a list of 193 countries with regard to political participation of women⁵. In the National Congress, only 51 women occupy the available 513 chairs. In the Senate, there are 12 women senators, 13% of the 81 house representatives⁶. In other national powers, such as the *Judiciary*, only 35,9% of national judges are women. In the Federal Supreme Court (STF), in 2016, out of 11 Ministers, only 2 are women⁷. In the Superior Court of Justice (STJ), 7 Ministers are women out of 33 judges (21%).

¹ See, in this sense, <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/rap/v46n2/a04v46n2.pdf>. Accessed 27 March 2017.

² Available at <https://www25.senado.leg.br/web/atividade/materias/-/materia/96597>. Accessed 27 March 2017.

³ Speech available in <http://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/temer-diz-que-mulheres-analisam-melhor-precos-de-supermercado-21032564>. Accessed 27 March 2017.

⁴ Luisinda Valois, Minister of Human Rights and Grace Maria Mendonça, (Federal Attorney – Advocacia-Geral da União).

Available at <http://www2.planalto.gov.br/presidencia/ministros>. Accessed 27 March 2017.

⁵ Available at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>. Accessed 27 March 2017.

⁶ UN Women, *Brasil: Visão Geral*, available at <http://www.onumulheres.org.br/brasil/visao-geral/>. Accessed 17 April 2016.

⁷ Supremo Tribunal Federal, *Composição atual*, available at <http://www.stf.jus.br/portal/cms/verTexto.asp?servico=sobreStfComposicaoComposicaoPlenariaApresentacao>. Accessed 17 April 2016.

Violence against women is still a question to be addressed, since it does not happen only in the domestic space, but also in the public sphere. With regard to *domestic violence*, according to national research, Brazilian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) suffers a reduction of 10% due to this type of violation⁸. In *private companies*, Brazilian women also face the “glass ceiling”, being hard to conciliate career and maternity, among other challenges. The *wage gap is still a reality* – Research conducted by the International Labor Organization demonstrate that it will take around 70 years to equate the wages of men and women⁹. Considering the domestic working hours, another research conducted by the Institute of Applied Economic Research affirms that women work 7,5 weekly hours at home (apart from work) more than their male partners in Brazil¹⁰. However, apart from the problems that arise from the double journey carried out by women, there is currently a bill proposal to change the *Private Pension Law*, equating men and women in the time of contribution to retirement (65 years old), disregarding the fact that women take longer to reach the time of contribution provided by law, for the reasons above mentioned¹¹.

Another important question to be considered in Brazil is *women trafficking*. The 2016 Report on Trafficking in Persons, conducted by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime shows that 45% of the victims of traffic in South America are women, with 57% of them being subject to sexual exploitation¹². Attention should be given to trafficking in coastal and border areas

There is still a lot to be done – especially – investments in *education*, strong women participation in *Politics*. Women have to make a strong lobby in order to be heard in the creation of laws and public policies with the purpose to guarantee their economic empowerment. It is necessary to change the *culture* of women discrimination in Brazil and *engage men and women* in this matter.

⁸ Available at <http://www.cnj.jus.br/noticias/cnj/56872-brasil-perde-10-do-pib-com-violencia-contr-a-mulher>. Accessed in 27 March 2017.

⁹ *Mulheres no trabalho: tendências 2016*. Available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_457096.pdf. Accessed in 27 March 2017.

¹⁰ *Retrato das desigualdades de gênero e raça*. Available at <http://www.ipea.gov.br/retrato/>. Accessed in 27 March 2017.

¹¹ Available at http://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=29641&Itemid=9. Accessed in 27 March 2017.

¹² *UN Global Report in Trafficking in Persons*. Available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016_Global_Report_on_Trafficking_in_Persons.pdf. Accessed in 27 March 2017.