

Every month RESURJ members will collectively share and reflect on some news highlights affecting sexual and reproductive, environmental and economic justice from the different regions and countries we work in... [read online](#)

Brazil: Austerity Measures and Growing Attacks on SRHR, Gender Equality and Family Diversity

Brazil begins 2017 with a [great economic crisis](#) – which fueled the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the political chaos the country has been in – with one of the harshest austerity measures in the world: the freezing of the federal budget at its 2016 amount for the next two decades. The constitutional amendment nicknamed [“the end of the world”](#) by its opponents, limits the already insufficient funding for education, health care, pensions and infrastructure, and will only harm Brazil’s poorest and most vulnerable groups. The approval of this fiscal adjustment strategy with [no real evidence of efficiency](#) was a priority for unelected president Michel Temer’s government. Temer now has announced equally harsh reforms of the pension system and deregulation of labor laws, while remaining silent about much fairer fiscal changes, such as increasing taxes on the wealthy. Unsurprisingly, the current administration is highly unpopular but strongly supported by corporations.

Meanwhile, [attacks on sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality](#) are growing in the country. In late November 2016, the Brazilian Supreme Court made the headlines when ruling a case on the imprisonment of employees of a clandestine abortion clinic in Rio de Janeiro, as [three Justices voted that abortion should not be a crime](#) if performed in the first three months of pregnancy. The decision did not decriminalize abortion in the country, since in Brazilian law, a decision like this one is not a binding precedent. Despite being an important step in the abortion debate in Brazil, it was quickly responded to with

fury by the christian fundamentalist caucus of the National Congress. The caucus wants to pass legislation to grant fetuses absolute rights over women’s rights. Additionally, the national conservative crusade to prohibit gender debates on schools by presenting it as an “anti-traditional family ideology” continues to advance: in late January 2017, the mayor of a northern city decided to [rip off pages of public school textbooks picturing family diversity](#), which portrayed same sex parents with adopted children. The local Public Prosecutor’s Office is now challenging the illegal measure.

Mexico: Deepening Inequalities With New Neoliberal Rollbacks

Even before our northern neighbor inaugurated their new president, Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto opened 2017 on a sour note. The New Year came with a rise in fuel prices which quickly resulted in [many demonstrations across the country. The reasons behind the protests are many; but the scariest of them was the privatization of the energy sector.](#) Mexico has shifted from having socialist policies in the late 30s with strong public institutions and moves to nationalize oil; to a more neoliberal agenda in the mid 90s. And finally 2017 started showing us the clear negative impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

[The new US administration](#)’s decisions on trade with Mexico are bringing the entire country to its knees. It looks like the NAFTA is not enough for the US, they feel Mexico, [always friendly and willing to bend to their needs](#), will need to bend even further to please and maintain the unhealthy and dependent relationship with its abuser.

The possibility of Mexico finally looking to other,

southern allies and other, fairer, trade partners as suggested by [Evo Morales](#), is not appealing to our government. Mexico will keep [thinking of ways](#) to maintain the status quo, deepening the inequalities, willingly exploiting more and more women in maquilas, as well as exploiting the already very exploited campesinas and campesinos, while benefiting only a few rich people in the country.

December 2016 and January 2017 brought with it extreme cruelties toward Mexican teenagers. On the one hand we have the story of Rubí. Against her will, her parents celebrated her 15th birthday party with a traditional fiesta de quince años. Her father decided to host a huge party, inviting everyone from the community, as is the tradition in towns across the country. However, this time instead of sending invitations through conventional ways (posters, community radio, etc.), Rubí's parents decided to use YouTube. Our extremely cruel, classist, neoliberal and mean society decided to bully Rubi by [making a joke out of it by inviting themselves to the party](#), and then [the party](#) became a problem for the family and for the town itself. On the other hand, in a private American School in Monterrey, Nuevo León, a [15-year-old](#) boy [came to school with a gun and opened fire on](#) his teacher and two students before shooting himself. This event has no precedent in Mexico.

Finally, [some artists](#) and even [companies](#) found creative ways to poke fun at [the wall](#) that US President Donald Trump wants to build on the US/Mexico border. Let's unite and resist from the trenches by building bridges, not walls.

Pakistan: Will Pakistani Women and Adolescents Benefit From Government's Commitment to Universal Access to Reproductive Healthcare?

In 2012, the [London Summit on Family Planning convened](#) in which 37 countries agreed to make commitments to promoting family planning reaching the most marginalized women globally. Pakistan, with a contraceptive rate of 26%, was one of the countries, which [made a commitment](#) to ensure universal access to reproductive healthcare and increase the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) to 55% by 2020. With a federal government system, which devolved rapidly in 2011 into provincial department

governance, Pakistan faces the challenge of building momentum across provinces, which vary greatly in their access to resources and the challenges and constraints faced in building a stronger reproductive healthcare system.

The government's commitments present potential benefits for Pakistani women if execution can be structured in a sustainable manner. [These commitments](#) include the integration of an essential reproductive health service package, re-prioritizing family planning in the Lady Health Worker door-to-door workforce (who have largely been derailed by other health related initiatives such as polio vaccines), and strengthening supply chains for contraceptives. In addition, the [Costed Implementation Plan \(CIP\)](#) has, for the first time, included an emphasis on reaching out to adolescents and young people as a critical target audience in developing a sustainable approach to population development. Clear limitations exist, most notably that direct language about sexual behavior, access to contraception and a range of reproductive healthcare is still prohibited for unmarried adolescents. However, space has been made for strong civil society input to work with the Departments of Health, Population Welfare and Education, which leaves some room for influence.

While Pakistan has signed onto several UN resolutions related to women's health, security, and education and has also nodded in the direction of young people through references to Life Skills Based Education in the [Youth Policy of 2009](#) and Education Policy of 2009 (in revision), the CIP may have the potential to lead to more direct benefits reaching women and girls. This may, in part, be attributed to the government's recognition that reproductive health and access to contraception is critical to any sustained growth of the country.

With upcoming elections in 2018, the current government is looking for markers of growth that can be showcased both internationally and locally with the hope of re-election. The hope remains that women and adolescents see some benefits in policy implementation and service delivery.

Philippines: Being Young and a Women in 2017 Will Be Harder Than Ever

[Shannon Carpio is one of Liezyl Margallo's aliases](#). But since the news of her arrest, the 23-year-old is now called by many other names: savage girl, true evil, monster, materialistic bitch, piece of shit, among others. Margallo took part in the sexual torture and violation of children as young as 18 months, including the sodomization of a 12-year-old girl which eventually led to her death. People commenting on social media have wished death and torture upon Margallo. Her case has added fuel to the ongoing debates on the reinstatement of capital punishment in the Philippines. In addition to this case is a rising number of [extra judicial killings in the context of the war on drugs which have turned a sizeable number of poor, young women into widows and single mothers](#), a [legislative move to lower the age of criminal liability to 9 years old](#), as well as the [populist uproar against the health ministry's distribution of condoms as a way of preventing sexual promiscuity among young people](#).

This is the Philippines less than a month into 2017. The forecast for the rest of the year for young women in the country is disconcerting.

It is difficult to be young and a woman in the Philippines. This assessment is not shared by many given the stronghold of national and local policies and programs that exist in the country that affirm the rights of women and girls. But these also reflect the painful reality that the human rights of Filipino women and girls are violated so easily, such as in the case of the [Executive Order on Reproductive Health](#), which circumvents the legal obstacles faced by the [Reproductive Health Law](#).

Change is never easy. While barriers are being broken with [a trans man and his wife heading two separate national agencies on youth and film](#), and more young women able to complete basic education, the discriminatory labels and the glass ceilings persist.

[Margallo's story](#) is one of a young woman struggling to keep it together and trying very hard to get away with it. What people seem to forget is that [Margallo was a child when she met Peter](#)

[Scully in 2011](#). She's now 23 which means she was about 16 when it all started.

There is no excuse for what she did. Indeed she has to be held accountable. But the easiest thing to do is to blame her without understanding what brought this young girl to join an older man in committing such violence toward other children.

There are too many children living on the streets being primed for such behavior. [Margallo's](#) story is not unique. That is an even scarier fact.

But the world is round, despite the challenges that 2017 will bring in undermining gender equality and women's human rights in the country, the desire of Filipino young women to survive is evident. How they do it, given the limited opportunities they have is another matter. This 2017, Filipino young women will find quiet and loud ways to take life by the reins.

Rwanda: How the Global Gag Rule Will Affect Young People's SRHR

Maria is a young girl living in rural Rwanda where it's considered taboo for parents and adults to discuss sexuality with young people and especially with girls. So Maria grows up with less information about sexual and reproductive health. If Maria goes to school, she still won't get access to complete and factual information because comprehensive sexuality education is not part of the school curriculum. She will learn from peers and from what she hears on the radio and sometimes on television.

As she grows into puberty, to avoid an unwanted pregnancy, she would have to either abstain from sexual intercourse or rely on the hope that her boyfriend will use a condom --if the boyfriend can afford it. If she wants to know more, her only option is to go at a local health center or a youth friendly center, which could be miles away from her home. There she can choose from a variety of contraceptives.

The majority of Rwanda's population (84%) lives in rural areas where services are still not easily accessible. [The population is essentially young](#).

[with 43.4% of all Rwandans under age 15.](#)

The Strategic Plan to Accelerate Progress towards Reducing Maternal and Neonatal Morbidity and Mortality for 2009–2012 identified adolescent [access to sexual and reproductive health \(SRH\) services as a key priority](#) due to high fertility rates among adolescent and young adults.

Rwanda's health system relies heavily on foreign funds for everything that has to do with infrastructures, equipment, personnel and medicines. Although trends show there's a decline in depending on external funds and increasing domestic resourcing, more than half of the funds are from foreign sources. According to the [Rwanda health resource tracking output report for 2014-2015](#), in the two previous fiscal years, 27% of US funding went to Rwanda's health care system.

SRH is one of the least funded programs of the Rwandan health care system. One of the most highly funded programs includes disease prevention and control. The maternal and child health sub-program makes up only 1.5% of the total budget while family planning and reproductive health represents only 2.3% of the total budget. The funding that goes specifically to young people's SRH is not separately indicated since it's not a separate sub-program and could be even less.

As we know, with President Trump's Executive Orders, the Global Gag Rule was reinstated in January 2017. It bans any international health organizations or NGOs that receive USAID funding from counselling women on family planning options that include access to safe abortion. This means that funding to support Rwanda's health care system overall will be drastically reduced, including funding to support SRH services. This will place young people who depend on subsidized SRHR services at more risk than adults, which will expose them to higher risk of unwanted pregnancies, STIs and unsafe illegal abortions.

Domestic resources in the health sector will be redirected into programs that are regarded as "core services" and SRHR may not be prioritized. Reduced foreign funding presents an opportunity to be less depend on foreign funding as more efforts go into real domestic resources

mobilization. Nonetheless, some programs will definitely suffer as this change gets adopted and more efforts to push for redirecting domestic funding into SRHR will be needed.

Senegal: A challenging political climate, armed violence and SGBV are worrisome trends for 2017

Since the adoption of the Parity Law in Senegal in May 2010, election years are always seen as an opportunity to further increase women's political participation and debate over the relevance of the law in the Senegalese context. Since 2015, the country has been in the throes of preparing for parliamentary elections, [scheduled for 2 July 2017](#) with the usual debates around whether the voter lists, [voter registration and infrastructure will be ready in time and respect national, regional and international standards](#).

Even though this election could have been a great opportunity for several young women to enter parliament, the process of just registering to vote is so cumbersome that very few have even voiced their intention to run or have started approaching political parties to be on their lists. Indeed, due to the adoption of the West African ID cards, all Senegalese nationals have to go their local city hall and apply for new ID and voter cards. After sometimes queuing since 5 am, the first 50 people are told at 8 am to come back at 2 pm the same day to fill in a form, be photographed, and be fingerprinted. Then at 2 pm, they must again queue and after hours of waiting for one's turn, they receive a receipt and are requested to come back in four months to collect their documents. The issue is that, under the Senegalese Electoral Law, in order to be a candidate and benefit from the parity provisions, you have to be a registered voter and produce your electoral card. Therefore, it is only a few weeks, at times only a few days, before Election Day that potential female candidates might be courted by the multiple political parties to fill in the necessary alternative positions within the party lists because without them the Electoral Commission will not authorize parties to run.

With all these challenges, we can hardly hope for

upcoming campaigns and party manifestoes to address the key issues affecting a population of 14 million and particularly those of young women. Rising unemployment and socio-economic inequalities, lack of access to quality education and health services are only a few of these concerns. The recent explosion of armed violence, the pervasiveness of SGBV (especially domestic violence, rape and lack of access to abortion services) and the volatile climate within and among political parties are all sides of a very worrisome trend carried into 2017.

Senegal has long prided itself as one of the best and most peaceful democracies in Africa. It has taken the regional lead in enforcing respect of election results in neighboring countries like The Gambia. Hope remains that the upcoming election will be organized in such a manner that it can play its role as in any society: provide the opportunity for the population to express the vision it has for the next 5 years, and come forward to freely, equally and fairly chose their representatives.