

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: Ongoing Political Crisis Threatens to Derail Democratic Progress

The ongoing political crisis is now being fueled by the biggest corruption investigation the country has ever seen; a judge with a savior complex, [mainstream media selective right wing coverage](#) of it all and a historical hatred against the Worker's Party and the social changes implemented before the crisis began. There is nothing worth defending about current Dilma's government, but what has been taking hundreds of thousands of white middle class people to the streets to demand her impeachment has more to do with hatred against the social progress for extremely poor people achieved by the Workers Party than with corruption charges (which Dilma herself has not been charged with so far). Even the compromises the current government has made on adopting liberal neo-developmentalism policies or its willingness to negotiate and compromise with everyone on the political spectrum in the name of a political stability that never came, have not had any effect in subsiding this anger and hatred. There has been some [frightening institutional developments](#) of all of this over the last few days, including the leaking of illegally recorded presidential phone conversations by a judge and the advancement of the impeachment proceedings with no evidence of a presidential crime, which pose a real threat to the plan of living under a democratic rule of law.

Brazil: Beyond the Zika Zone

The Zika virus continues to take a toll on the reproductive lives of women. Until recently the epidemic was concentrated in the Northeast of Brazil, termed the Zika Zone, however, news have reported that the virus is [spreading to the Southeast and center](#) of the country – populous regions of Brazil. While the government has [summoned the military](#) to play a central role in prevention and spreading awareness, combating the epidemic calls for a far more comprehensive approach taking into account the [growing inequalities in the country including income, gender and geographical inequalities](#). The [latest epidemiological bulletin](#) issued by the Brazilian Ministry of Health showed that, between October 22nd 2015 to March 26th 2016, 6,776 suspected cases of babies with “microcephaly and or other central nervous system alternations,” have been notified. Out of these

notified cases, 944 have been confirmed for alterations, and 130 tested positive for Zika virus. 4,291 cases remain under investigation.

[Anis Insitute of Bioethics](#) said it will present a case to the Brazilian Supreme Court. The case calls for a comprehensive package of family planning, including specialized pre-natal accompaniment, access to quality information regarding the epidemic, its risks and diagnosis for Zika. It also asks for the right to legal and safe abortion if desired by the woman due to psychological stress and torture due to carrying a pregnancy to term during the epidemic and the unknown effect of Zika syndrome, which goes beyond microcephaly. And for women who give birth to babies with disabilities, the action demands full social protection for the woman and child including provision of cash transfer benefits.

For a more comprehensive updated on the Zika Virus crisis please check our recent blog post on the issue.

Chile: Taking Steps toward Easing the Abortion Ban

Chile is one of the three countries in Latin America (El Salvador and Nicaragua are the other two) where abortion is forbidden on all grounds and it is now taking steps to pass a bill allowing abortion under three conditions: fetal unviability, if the woman was raped and to save the life of the woman. The proposed bill has passed in the first chamber and waits approval in the senate. The move by the President Michelle Bachelet, [whose popular support is decreasing](#), is long overdue given her history as a champion for women's rights and as a self-identified feminist. However, the [bill faces strong opposition](#) in both houses despite the fact that it calls for the minimum conditions, and given that many abortions in Chile do not fall under the conditions specified by the proposed bill.

Egypt: Human Rights Community at an Unprecedented Risk

A civil society crackdown is starting to move forward full force. Since the beginning of the year, there have been several attempts to clamp down on human rights activities. In February, there was an attempt to shut down a leading NGO documenting police torture-[Al Nadeem Center](#). And now more recently,

the re-opening of a 2011 legal investigation into foreign funding of human rights organizations. [Case no 173](#) includes charges that carry life sentences for human rights defenders. There's a travel ban on a few human rights defenders (including founder of Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights Hossam Bahgat - a leading human rights organization in the country), as a result and an [attempt to freeze their assets](#). The more alarming aspect of it all is that it seems that the more embarrassed the government is by its human rights record, the stronger the backlash against national human rights work.

Egypt: Celebrating Women's Rights Day: Attempts by Governments to Contain Social Progress

There is much to be said about how the 2011 Revolution managed to empower young feminists in Egypt to stand up and fight stronger for their rights. From winning battles against sexual violence and harassment, to affecting media messaging on sexuality in a more positive fashion, the feminist movement in Egypt has had its hand full. All this in the face of a government which has launched a [crackdown](#) against homosexual conduct which remains ongoing until [today](#).

India: Mahila Samakhya Set to be Merged with the National Rural Livelihood Mission

The Mahila Samakhya program is set to be merged with the National Rural Livelihood Mission, after the Central Government discontinued funding to the exemplary grassroots program working on education and empowerment of women from marginalized communities for the last 27 years. Previously, the program operated under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, but had autonomy in matters of its operations, which reaped significant results in increasing public participation of women, mitigating violence against women, and in education. The merger with NRLM program will affect the autonomy of the program, since the NRLM program has its own aims and structures, which treats women as mere beneficiaries (PLD-Newsletter-Vol.8-IV-Jul-Aug-2015). The authority to design and structure future direction of the program will also lie with the NRLM, which imperils [the independent structures created by Mahila Samakhya](#).

India: Supreme Court Order Awaited in the Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple Case

The tradition of banning women from the temple has been followed since 400 years. The Sabarimala Ayyappa temple has since years restricted entry of women between 10 to 50 years of age. This matter was taken to the Supreme Court by Indian Young Lawyers Association and five women advocates asking to uplift the ban. At a [hearing](#) in January the

Court asked the Travancore Devaswom Board the reason behind not letting women enter into the shrine and proof to show that women did not enter the shrine historically. The court also said that no temple or its governing body can prohibit women from entering the shrine. This ban on entry of women was imposed by the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Rules, 1965. The constitutionality of the ban was previously challenged in the Kerala High Court but it upheld the ban in 1991.

The Bombay High Court is also awaiting the Supreme Court judgment in this case before deciding in the case of Haji Ali Dargah, where the ban on women from entering the sanctorum of the Dargah was challenged in 2015 (PLD-Newsletter-Vol.8-IV-Jul-Aug-2015).

India: Marital Rape Still not Criminalized

In a recent response to a question to the current government if it has any plans to criminalize marital rape, Minister of Women and Child Development Maneka Gandhi [shared](#) that laws on marital rape cannot be "suitably applied in the Indian context due to various factors like level of education/illiteracy, poverty, myriad social customs and values, religious beliefs, mindset of the society to treat the marriage as a sacrament, etc." The current government has refused to include marital rape as a crime under Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, which presently excludes sexual intercourse by a man with his wife. This is despite the Justice Verma Committee Recommendations Report released in the country as a result of a brutal incident of sexual violence which took place in New Delhi on December 16, 2012. Ms. Gandhi's comment represents in part the quality of political insight and opinion on criminalizing marital rape. The issue has been similarly represented by earlier comments in parliament when the Justice Verma Committee Recommendations were presented, citing culture and the sanctity of the unit of the family as to some of the reasons to why this issue is a "hornet's nest not to be disturbed." Read [this](#) for more background on the issue.

Mexico: Violence against Women and Poor Governance

Violence against women, specifically femicide, in Mexico is on the rise with an [alarming rate of 7 women killed](#) every day in the country. Recently in the state of Veracruz, a group of [rich and powerful young men raped a 16 year-old girl](#) and they have not been charged for the crime. Despite the fact that there are videos of them apologizing for the rape, their wealth and affluence has afforded them impunity. As authorities take no action to prosecute these rapists, Anonymous – an international group of network and hacktivists - started releasing personal

information of the four men because prosecutors refuse to bring justice to the case. The abhorring state of violence has driven women to fight sexual harassment in the street of Mexico City by [using music and confetti guns](#).

Nigeria: [Missed Opportunity in Securing Gender Equality](#)

As part of the International Women's Day commemoration events, the Nigerian Senate debated issues relating to women rights, during which the Senate Leader called on men to take on second wives. With this kind of statement it was no surprise that a week later, the Gender Parity and Prohibition of Violence against Women bill was thrown out before the opportunity to be reviewed at a public hearing.

This proposed law aims to domesticate the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Nigeria. The [bill](#) sought to end all forms of discrimination in public and private settings, liberalize abortion laws to include cases of incest and rape; ensure gender parity in basic education and institute a 35% quota for women in leadership positions.

It is mind boggling that in 2016, women and girls' human rights will face such a major set-back. This is the feeling of [Nigeria social media](#), which is largely made up of young people. While many believe the action taken by the Nigerian Senate is due to the lower number of women in the legislative body, only 7 females Senators out of 109, it is also a broad indication of how the society at large views women and girls. Patriarchy is alive and thriving in many Nigerian communities.

Pakistan: [Backlash against Newly Adopted Law Combatting Violence against Women](#)

There has been non-stop backlash from the right and from religious groups about the newly adopted law combating violence against women; it is being accused of being "[un-Islamic](#)", and is being [challenged](#) before a top court in the country. Other justifications being used are that it promotes divorce and defames marriage. The best one yet is that it doesn't have anything about the protection of men in it who are also at threat. So far the Nawaz government is holding firm and not backing down on this one but women's rights activists worry that it will be traded for something in the near future. The current government has said that it remains committed to the law. The law was adopted last month in Punjab.

Pakistan: [Law Passed against Child Sexual Abuse](#)

The Senate has passed a bill that criminalize sexual assault against minors, child pornography and trafficking. The age of criminal responsibility in this bill is also being raised from 7 to 10 years of age. Under the revised legislation, sexual assaults will be punishable by up to 7 years in prison and for child pornography an additional 0.7 million-rupee fine. Prior to this legislation, only rape was criminalized.

The legislation is a response to the Kasur incident, which occurred in August 2015 in which hundreds of pornographic videos of children were found in the village of Hussain Khanwala in the Punjab province.

UK: [The World Can't Wait for Women's Economic Empowerment](#)

The United Nations Secretary General launched the [High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment](#) during the 60th Commission on the Status of Women. Hosted by UN Women and co-chaired by Luis Guillermo Solis, President of Costa Rica, and Simona Scarpaleggia, CEO of IKEA Switzerland, the panel was backed by the UK government who recognized that "the world can't wait for women's economic empowerment."

Justine Greening, UK Secretary of State for International Development, when [introducing the Panel](#), only referred to the UK's commitment to women's economic empowerment nationally in addressing "glass ceilings" in employment, increasing numbers of women on FTSE 350 boards, introducing league tables on the gender pay gap, and providing start-up loans for women business owners. Although all are important issues, the UK has so far failed to address the various ways women, their families, and communities are being pushed into poverty and worsening poverty by the experimental fiscal policies and cuts to public services introduced over recent years under the auspices of austerity. Women across the country, including single parents, [disabled women](#), migrant women and survivors of domestic violence are drastically affected by the introduction of universal credit, [the bedroom tax](#), the introduction of more stringent sanctions and conditionality on various benefits including sickness benefit and job seekers allowance, cuts to the independent living fund, significant increases in low paid and insecure work, as well as a rise in zero hours contracts.

This excerpt is from an article published on the [Feminist Voices](#) blog. To read the full article, click [here](#).