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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: The Most Dangerous Country for Land Activists

The non-governmental organization Global Witness has granted Brazil a tragic title: [we are the most dangerous country in the world for environmental and land activists](#). In 2015 alone, 50 defenders were killed in Brazil. The most common plots of the registered cases involve rural and riverside communities in the Amazônia who oppose deforestation and other interests of landowners, as well as the massacre of indigenous peoples whose lands are preyed upon by agribusiness.

There are signs that 2016 will keep us on the podium of destruction. Two days after the Global Witness announcement, [the body of fisherwoman Nilce de Souza Magalhaes was found](#). She was an activist with the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) and known for calling attention to the human rights violations committed by the business group responsible for the Jirau hydroelectric plant in the state of Rondônia. She had been missing for 5 months, and her body was found tied to stones at the bottom of the river where she fought for her community's livelihood. A week earlier, 70 farmers in pickup trucks ambushed and opened fire against a thousand of Guarani Kaiowá Indians in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. [The indigenous leader Cloudione Rodrigues Souza, 26, died in the attack](#), and at least six other people were injured, including a 12-year-old child. At the moment of the attack, the indigenous group was occupying an area already recognized as indigenous land, but not yet registered by Brazilian authorities.

Brazilian government's hands are covered in land and environmental defenders' blood. Suspended President Dilma Rousseff's terms of government [hold the worst record in environmental justice in 20 years](#): there has been little to no progress on land reform, and on quilombola and [indigenous peoples land](#)

[demarcation](#), while often illegal big agribusiness and [hydroelectric dams](#) development projects thrive by feeding on the destruction of entire communities. It is the fresh 21st century face of a 500-year old genocidal colonization.

Egypt: When the Medicalization of FGC Exacerbates the Situation

The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights issued a brief legal [analysis](#) examining the loopholes in the framing of Article 242 bis of the Penal Code which criminalizes female genital cutting. The analysis came at the heel of last [month's](#) death of a 17-year old girl at the hands of a doctor, and recent studies indicating that the procedure has become [medicalized](#) with almost 37% of all FGC procedures being conducted at the hands of physicians or a health professional. The organization presents four amendments to the law to make it more effective, particularly in light of the fact that since the law was passed in 2008, there's been only one conviction and according to the report, the physician accused of the death of a girl in 2013 is not serving his prison term.

The first of the legal amendments recommended by EIPR is to change the law so as not find the [parents](#) legally liable. The report indicates that that could inhibit parents from reporting physicians in fear of being prosecuted. The article not only penalizes the families, it also does not provide for a reduced penalty if the parents report the incident. Secondly, the act needs to be classified as 'unlawful-act manslaughter' and not 'criminal-negligence manslaughter' with the first having a more severe penalty of 15 years imprisonment while in the second, it's either a fine or imprisonment of LE500 (which is less than USD\$100). Thirdly the report recommends also implicating and fining the medical institution involved in the illegal operation as it facilitates the medicalization of

the violation. Finally, the report recommends that removing the reference to Article 61 of the Penal Code in Article 242 bis, which stipulates that there will be no punishment for the individual who commits this crime out of necessity, to protect himself or someone else, and that there be no other means to do so except by carrying out the illegal act.

The report also concludes by casting doubt on the government's [efforts](#) to combat FGC, stating that criminalization alone will not resolve the problem and that more effort needs to be exerted in combatting the practice, including by correcting gender stereotypes through comprehensive sexuality education introduced nationally at schools.

India: Overwhelming Majority of Young Women Seek Abortion Due to Lack of Contraceptives Knowledge

[A recent study by IPAS](#) of married and unmarried women in India showed that failure to use contraceptives, or a lack of knowledge about them, among young women is the biggest cause for abortions in India; with 80 per cent abortion stemming from contraceptive failure. The study indicates that frequent lack of contraceptive usage is highest amongst young women aged 15 to 24. The study reflects data collected and studied by the Government of India, that show low use of contraceptives across India. According to one report, 94.5 per cent of women in India know about contraceptives but 50.2 per cent practice them.

The findings of the study highlight the need for the country to accelerate its programs on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Information, particularly Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Whilst some states in India are currently implementing different versions of the Central Government introduced [Adolescence Education Programme](#), the AEP remains limited in its reach to select students within schools. Opportunities to expand robust CSE programs in existing national programming [such as the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram \(RKSK\)](#) can create safe spaces for adolescent girls and young women to access information on contraception including access to safe abortion within the larger context of negotiating their mobility and access to services and SRH information. The RKSK, considered the country's National Strategy on Adolescent Health also integrates

opportunities for peer-led community leaders to work with front line health workers in creating an enabling environment. It is important that information on contraceptive choices as well as SRH not be delivered in a piecemeal, disease-prevention framework, but be made available to adolescents and young people in a sex-positive and with a rights-based lens.

[Additionally, conflations between existing laws](#) such as the Protection of Children of Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act need to be reviewed, as these further stigmatize existing safe abortion services and make them harder for young women to reach. India has the highest number of girls who die in childbirth in the world and with 22% of the country's population being adolescents, [the need for them to have access to safe abortion services is critical.](#)

Mexico: Justice for Femicide Victim after 6 Years, whilst the Supreme Court Dismisses Opportunity to Examine Abortion Ban

Finally, after six years, the mother of Mariana Lima Buendía might finally see Julio César Hernández Ballinas, the man who is suspected to have killed her daughter, serve a prison sentence for the crime he is being accused of committing. Julio Cesar was Mariana's husband, but after many abuses and threats of "killing her like the others", she decided to end the relationship and leave him. Since Julio was a police officer, he used his strings to shut down the investigation shortly after the murder, and instead it was labeled as a suicide. Together with the Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Femicidio, Mrs. Buendía was able to push to [reopen the case](#) and last week [Hernández Ballinas](#) was reprimanded pending further investigations.

Also during the last week of June, human Rights defenders in Mexico, especially those who work on women's rights, were expecting that our Supreme Court would follow the positive ruling on abortion that happened in the U.S. with the [Women's Health Center in Texas](#), where the Court dismissed a law in Texas that shut down most of the State's abortion clinics. Mexico's Supreme Court had to discuss a case of a woman that was denied her right to abortion due to health risks. The judge that presented it was proposing changes to the Federal Penal Code, essentially ending

the ban on abortion by removing the limited grounds upon which a woman can seek an abortion - currently if the abortion endangers a woman's life or in cases of rape. But instead of having a real conversation on abortion and their stands on the issue as judges, they decided to [dismiss it](#) based on technicalities. Yes, we women's rights activists deserve the opportunity for this issue to be discussed at the Supreme Court. However, at the same time, we, as a movement, owe each other more transparency and preparation to be able to mobilize society support to move forward an opportunity like this because the discussion needs to be fueled by people on the streets as much as by lawyers and advocates lobbying inside the Court House.

Nigeria: Livelihood Based Conflict in Nigeria's Central Region - Impacting the Lives of Women and Girls*

In Nigeria's middle belt, the competition between farmers and pastoralists for key natural resources including land and water has resulted in violent conflicts. While these forms of conflict are not new to the region, the increase in use of small arms has taken these [conflicts](#) to a new dimension. There seems to have been a surge in the number of violent conflicts since 2014 and the incidences that took place in Benue and [Enugu](#) forced the general public and government to pay attention. Sadly, this comes at the time when Nigerians felt optimistic about the improvement in security, since the government seems to be making some progress in addressing the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East region.

A report from Mercy Corp estimates that Nigeria loses 14 billion naira on an annual basis due to the clashes. Within this discourse, there are limited conversations about the impact of this conflict on women and girls. The public [hearing](#) conducted by the Nigerian Senate was a perfect reflection of this narrative, as only one out of over fifteen submissions made by different interest groups mentioned the impact on women and girls. The scope of the discussions on the impact on women and girls has largely been narrowed down to sexual violence. Evidence provided by women and girls in livelihood affected communities shows that women and girls face additional risk beyond sexual violence. In crisis situations, women and girls are thrown into extreme poverty, when the head of the household or they themselves lose their

source of livelihoods or the main breadwinner dies during violent conflict. They are also more likely to experience food shortages and insecurity that can lead to severe malnutrition and loss of community assets such as health centers, which reduces access to critical health services including maternity care and sexual and reproductive services. Understanding the differential impact of conflict on women and girls is important to developing strategies to help community prevent conflicts and cope with the impact of violent episodes. It is also critical in helping to shape and outline the roles women and girls can play in the formulation and execution of these strategies.

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

Pakistan: Religious Body Supports Rights for Transgender Community

For several weeks, religious bodies have been come under scrutiny by civil society after the controversial declaration made by the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) stating that men should be allowed to lightly beat their wives and that the Women's Protection Bill passed by the Punjab Government was "[unislamic](#)". However, a new *fatwa* passed by the Tanzeem Ittehad-i-Ummat, a group of 50 clerics, has addressed transgender rights including marriage rights stating that it is permissible for transgender individuals to marry as long as they do not "[show visible signs of both genders](#)". Furthermore, the *fatwa* also addresses inheritance and burial rites stating that they should be consistent with laws and practices that [apply](#) to all Muslim men and women and that families who do not abide by inheritance laws should be held accountable by the state.

Marriage for transgender individuals in Pakistan has been complicated due to ignorance regarding their gender identity. Transgender activists state that marriages, while protected by Shariah law, often result in action from the police who classify them as same sex marriages which are still outlawed by the state. In 2012, Pakistan's Supreme Court declared equal rights for transgender citizens, which included the right to vote, inherit property and assets. However, social stigma and persecution against the community has remained high and law

enforcement is often unwilling to intervene when incidents of violence occur. Thus, while the issued *fatwa* is not legally binding, there is a hope that it will at least be socially influential particularly where it clearly states that acts that intend to humiliate or insult transgender individuals should be considered a crime under Islam.

Rwanda: Women's Reproductive Rights in Question as Rwanda Hosts the 27th African Union Summit

Rwanda is hosting the 27th [African Union summit](#) (10-18 July 2016), the same year declared by the AU as the year of Human Rights with particular focus on women's rights. Rwanda is considered one of the most [progressive countries](#) in advancing women's rights in different aspects. The country is ranked the 1st worldwide for having the highest number of women parliamentarians (64%) and has revised most laws that were discriminatory on basis of gender and no wonder the 2015 Global Gender gap ranked Rwanda 6th worldwide.

However, the reality is different for reproductive rights. In 2009, there were approximately 60,000 induced abortions — [an annual rate of 25 abortions per 1,000 women](#) which are mostly unsafe due to criminal laws in place. In 2012, Rwanda lifted its reservations on [Maputo protocol](#) article 14 (c) and took a step to revise the criminal law on abortion that was in existence since 1970s. The current revised law still doesn't fully comply with the Maputo protocol since more restrictive conditions were added that require anyone seeking an abortion to acquire a court order and an approval from 2 doctors. The law also still limits the grounds upon which women can seek an abortion, doesn't clarify procedures to seek an abortion for minors and violates women and girl's rights as they go through costly and lengthy court public processes. A recent [study](#) shows that in Rwanda, unsafe abortion affects mainly young and poor women and girls.

The situation is further exacerbated by women parliamentarians and other prominent women leaders' silence and lack of concern for this issue. Their approach has always been confined to their religious beliefs and traditional gender biased values.

The pre-AU summit High Level Panel Meeting on Gender Equality (8-9 July) will discuss implementation of the Maputo protocol. Gender and feminists activists remain optimistic that the government will review its position and commit to decriminalizing abortion so that Rwanda can rank the best in all aspects of women's rights.

UK: The EU Referendum and the Demonization of the Working Class*

RESURJ member Mari-Claire Price shares her reflections on the recent referendum results of the UK's membership of the EU: There has been a great deal of misinformation and fearmongering that led to many protest votes on both sides, growing racism and xenophobia in the UK and across Europe that was central to much support to leave, as well as the largely unreported nuances of votes to leave, including those against the status quo, against the establishment, and against neoliberal policy, austerity and the EU's treatment of refugees and migrants. The demonization of the working class and poor has manifested in the days since the results, given that many working class areas voted for leave, coming hand in hand with the crediting of racists with power and influence over votes to leave. In a time of much chaos and dangerous uncertainty in the UK and within the EU, following the referendum results, there also lie opportunities.

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