

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](#)

Development Projects and Violence Against Environmental and Land Defenders in Brazil by Sinara Gumieri

Since 2015, Brazil has been tragically deemed one of the [deadliest countries](#) in the world for environmental and land defenders. According to [Global Witness](#), in 2015, 50 people who took action either voluntarily or professionally to protect the environment and land rights against business projects such as mining, dams, and agribusiness plantations were killed in the country. In 2016, there were 49 killings, and in 2017, 47.

On January 24 2018, [Marcinho Matos](#) was gunned down in front of his six-year-old son at home in the backlands of the state of Bahia. He was a member of [Brazil's Landless Workers Movement](#), who have been fighting for land reform and against injustice and social inequality in rural areas in the country for over 30 years. His death is being investigated as possibly one of the first land-conflict related killings of 2018.

There are hardly ever any reparations for such cases. Even though most perpetrators are third parties, [the State plays a clear role](#) in fostering violence. The story goes: the stronger the "Beef caucus" (pro-agribusiness) at the National Congress gets, more deforestation (and carbon emissions) is necessary to make way for more roads, industrial waterways, mines, cattle ranches, and soy plantations. Facing forced community displacement and loss of their livelihoods, peasant workers or indigenous leaders become environmental and land defenders and their resistance is met with extreme violence. Often disconnected from such movements, urban human rights defenders who frame the debate on shrinking civil society space, also play our parts in invisibilizing farm workers and indigenous leaders in environmental struggles.

On a positive note, the [Supreme Court](#) has just set a limit to Brazil's colonial development projects by protecting the inalienable community land rights of [Quilombolas](#), the people living in the traditional and

remote communities originally established by Afro-Brazilians, mostly escaped slaves, since the 17th century. The Court rejected a policy that required Quilombolas to prove that they occupied the land they claim since 1988, the year of the Brazilian constitution. Taking advantage of traditional communities' frequent forced displacement, the policy favored wealthy landholders coveting Quilombolas' lands. During the almost 15 years the legal battle lasted, violence against Quilombolas rose. Communities now have some renewed hope for fairer Quilombola land titling processes.

India: From a Smart City to a Sustainable City?

by Jasmine Lovely George

A city's governing body's plans are used to shape the work and infrastructure in the city over a period of time. When Bangalore Development Authority released the master plan for 2031, at [Hidden Pockets Collective](#), we saw this as an opportunity to look at the gendered needs in the city and highlight the same. As any new developing city, it had all the components of development. It had allocation for industries, it had allocation for roads, and it was very much based on the design of a concrete city. What seriously affected us was the lack of imagination employed by the urban designers in including the vision of a young woman living in this city.

[Smart City](#) has been one of the key visions of the present government which has allocated resources for designing [100 smart cities](#) by the end of 2020. Several cities have been submitting proposals to be accepted by the government. Some of the [features](#) of a smart city are access to the open spaces, walkable localities and strong emphasis on tech-based solutions.

A gender lens is lacking in the smart city solution, which means that it does not reflect the lived-experiences of people from marginalised communities living in these smart cities. For

example, in Bangalore, the IT Capital of India, the governing authority's latest draft solution put more emphasis on developing lands for industries and technology, than the concerns of women, persons living with disabilities, migrant communities, children, and the elderly.

This silence over including experiences of different populations in the draft model of smart cities will mean lopsided development. For example, when it comes to allocating resources, there is nothing mentioned about [street lighting or footpaths for pedestrians](#). There are many cases of harassment in densely populated areas but this has not resulted in allocation of resources for the [safety of people](#) of different genders in these specific areas.

Cities are the economic centres for most nations, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by member states emphasize seeking a sustainable economic model which is more socially, economically and ecologically beneficial. SDG11 discusses [sustainable cities](#) with a transformative agenda that believes everyone must have a dignified life, and create preconditions that allow people to grow and flourish. Some of the targets of Goal 11 clearly provide for accessible transportation, as well as green and safe public spaces, which can be used by people with disabilities, older people, women and children.

Indian cities need to re-examine some of these targets, and must understand the value of making sustainable cities over smart cities. Cities can't exist in vacuums and not including the concerns of the citizens of these cities further marginalizes them. Government has to see value in making cities universally accessible and inclusive.

Silencing of The Lambs : A Personal Reflection Based on Experience Working in and With Civil Society Organizations in Nigeria

by Fadekemi Akinfaderin

When Nigeria's military ruled the country, they made attempts to crush the voices of civil society actors who challenged the dictatorship. During this period, civil society, especially individual activists, were instrumental in ensuring the restoration of democracy in the country. Since the country returned to civilian rule in 1999, civil society has grown, including an increase in the number of Civil Society Organizations (CSO), yet very little has changed since the military era with respect to repression of voices and organization of citizens. If

anything, post-1999, repressive strategies being deployed by the State are more intense but smartly and cunningly cloaked under the cloth of democracy.

Between 2015-2017, [Spaces for Change \(S4C\)](#), a human rights and good governance organization, conducted a study in which they tracked 103 incidences where the Nigerian government restricted free speech, association and assembly rights. The [study](#) concluded that Nigeria's civic space oscillates between obstructed, repressed, and closed, based on [the CIVICUS five-pronged classification of civic spaces freedom](#).

Opinions about regulations and restrictions on civic spaces vary significantly amongst the public. The segment of the society, including the State, calling on more control of civil society have used various arguments. These includes (1) [curtailing fraud and financial crimes by CSOs](#); (2) [counteracting terrorism and violent extremism as CSOs are being used as a channel for funding terrorism](#); (3) upholding religious and culture values since some of the programs implemented by NGOs promote "western agenda"; (4) [protecting national interest and sovereignty](#); (5) protecting rights of public officers against character defamation by activists and (6) preventing public rage and violence against the government due to statements from activist.

The silencing of CSOs and individual activists has taken many shapes and forms in Nigeria, including but not limited to legislative regulation, public bashing and de-legitimization, restriction in use of public spaces, harassment and intimidation by security officials and tokenistic involvement in public policy formulation and implementation.

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

Crackdown on Human Rights in Pakistan

by Sheena Hadi

Just before the start of the New Year, the Ministry of Interior issued a notice to 29 international non-governmental organizations (iNGOs) that they were to [discontinue their work and leave the country within 60 days](#). The justification for the refusal to approve the registration of the organizations in question was stated as having to do with their work acting against "Pakistan's strategic, security, economic or other interests" along with highlighting that financial fraud was a

significant concern. Those NGOs operating in highly militarized parts of the country were also [singled out for possible ties to espionage](#).

Government antagonism towards NGOs grew dramatically after the 2011 capture of Osama Bin Laden on Pakistani territory, when a local doctor who helped track the target indicated that he had been [introduced to the CIA through Save the Children's polio eradication program](#). While the organization denied the accusation, they were evicted from Pakistan in 2012 and a number of other organizations focusing on polio campaigns in particular, faced government scrutiny along with community backlash. Subsequently, official government restrictions were placed on INGO registration which has made it challenging for a number of organizations to operate, and has been further exacerbated by [informal measures such as denial or delay of visas, and multiple layers of approvals for new projects](#). Local NGOs have also been pulled into the politics by having to register with the Economic Affairs Division through a complex and often unclear process, which the government has not shown capacity to manage.

The hostility shown towards INGOs, many of which have done decades of work in Pakistan on humanitarian and other development issues, echoes the country's overall position towards being challenged on human rights violations. In the past several months, human rights activists, bloggers and journalists have disappeared or been found murdered, with [Raza Khan, a peace activist, being the latest missing person case reported](#). However, the government is facing push back, with [countrywide protests demanding the return of missing activists](#) and banned organizations submitting petitions to courts in protest.

The protests have resulted in some wins, with several writers and activists eventually being returned, and a majority of the 29 organizations succeeding in having operations momentarily re-opened while investigations continue. However, the position of the government has been made clear regarding the restricted space for human rights dialogue in Pakistan, and for those continuing to focus on rights-based issues, the environment is not going to get any easier to work within, or any less precarious.