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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...

Brazil: Latest in Austerity to Target Public Spending on Health and Education

The main fiscal adjustment strategy of Brazil's unelected Michel Temer government is a constitutional change which will [freeze the budget for public spending](#) – including by limiting expenditure for education and health – for the next 20 years. Already approved in the Lower House (PEC 241), this Proposed Constitutional Amendment is expected to pass in the Senate (PEC 55) by December, therefore restricting already meager resources for protection of social rights in historically under financed areas. Defended by the government as the only way out for Brazil's economic crisis and approved with no social participation, debates on this measure have been accompanied by silencing much [fairer fiscal changes](#), such as increasing taxes on the wealthy and public debt auditing and restructuring, both Brazilian constitutional provisions never implemented.

This phase of new austerity policies has been conveniently accompanied by public reinforcement of family centered – therefore, women centered – discourses as solutions for social problems and inequalities, rather than ensuring just social policies are in place. First lady Marcela Temer was recently nominated as some sort of unofficial [ambassador for the Happy Child social program](#). In her speech, she stressed the importance of “maternal instinct” to invest in affection during early childhood as a way to prevent violent behavior among adolescents – while no mention was made to access to quality education and health care, adequate housing, food security, leisure time and protection against violence for children and adolescents. Meanwhile, many adolescents are [occupying schools](#) throughout the country to protest government measures which are increasingly [threatening the education system](#), not only through budget cuts but also through attempts to prohibit political debates – whether on gender, class, race, inequalities – in the classroom.

Egypt: A Stricter Female Genital Cutting Law is Only Just One Step in Eradicating the Violation

Last August, the Egyptian government finally succumbed to public pressure and advocacy from a number of NGOs working on women and child rights' issues to introduce [amendments](#) to its 2008 law banning female genital cutting. The latest outcry broke out with the [death](#) of a 17-year-old girl in Suez at the hands of a doctor (prosecution is ongoing, and the mother has just been [released](#) on bail). With these amendments, Egyptian law now stipulates a prison term of 5-7 years for those who carry out FGC and up to 15 years if it results in the death or permanent disability of the girl-an aggravated circumstance. Furthermore, making it a felony rather than a misdemeanor [increases](#) the statute of limitations to ten years – which gives the girls the opportunity to report it later on in their lives. The amendment however, failed to repeal Article 61, which stipulates that the person who carried out the operation can be exempted if it was necessary ‘to protect the self’, therefore, giving some leeway to doctors to escape retribution.

The amendments did not come without controversy. For one thing, NGOs working here in Egypt have told the government that [this is not enough](#): the law will not be implemented unless it's accompanied with more non-penal provisions, such as comprehensive sexuality education; a rights based campaign focusing on the “rights of women and girls to equality and a safe, satisfying sexual life”, and adopting a code of ethics in consultation with the Doctors' Syndicate to enforce accountability. In the first conviction in January 2015 since the law was passed in 2008, the doctor who had resulted in the death of a 13-year-old had remained at large until [earlier this year](#)-some even say he was still practicing medicine.

Opposition also came from some MPs, one of whom [said](#) we should not be criminalizing FGC because half of Egyptian men are impotent. Despite the huge outcry and backlash from the statement, that same MP also [spoke](#) a few months later on an unrelated manner but said all female college

students should be subjected to virginity testing to combat informal marriages. These statements are more than enough to prove that the law will never be [enough](#).

Mexico: A Fugitive Former Governor, a Rise in Targeted Femicide and a First Constitution for Mexico City

Javier Duarte the former governor of Veracruz in Mexico had to step down to face corruption charges against him on the 12th of October, and somehow he was able to hide from the government - he's nowhere to be found. [He is accused of diverting \\$35m USD](#). This is the person that on the one hand made Veracruz the most dangerous place in Mexico for journalists, and on the other amended the local constitution to "protect life" from conception. It was clear from his time served as governor that his real interests were not with the people of Veracruz, but with himself and keeping higher authorities happy and therefore silent; for example, one of the accusations levied against him is that he used some of the money he siphoned off to support President Enrique Peña Nieto's presidential campaign.

In other news, the femicide epidemic in Latin American countries has been spreading; the women's movement in Argentina was recently outraged by the rape and killing of Lucía Pérez. [Women across the region showed solidarity](#), arising from [our own reality with femicides](#) and took to the streets for #BlackWednesday [asking #NiUnaMenos](#) (translated to "Not one less", and meaning we will not lose one more woman to male violence). In Mexico, in addition to the alarming epidemic, we have also to account for specifically the targeting and femicides of trans women, [and highlight how this is happening while there are movements promoting](#) and inciting against gender issues, and reinforcing stigma, which in turn is validating and promoting hate-speech and actions against non cis-gendered people.

Finally, the first local constitution for Mexico City is still in the process of being review by the ad hoc congress, there are several ways to participate and very different voices were given the opportunity to send proposals. Public hearings have started on the 24th of October, [but it's still unclear how all these proposals and diverse voices will actually feed into the constitution](#). The debate as to be expected within the feminist groups is whether to finally acknowledge sex work as a lawful activity as its now stated in the draft that is been discussed. [The government of Mexico City has a strong position defending it as such](#), but some within the ad hoc congress are not, in particular the right wing and [some feminist congresswomen](#).

Nigeria: President Buhari's Many Rooms

"I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room...".

These are the word President Buhari said in response to questions about his wife's criticism of his administration. [Aisha Buhari's words](#) came as a shock to many people. It is very rare to see a woman, not to mention the First Lady, being critical of politics. And she didn't just make any political commentary, she expressed her displeasure with the current administration, and stated that she would not support a re-election bid by her husband if he chooses to contest in 2019.

Both men and women have reacted with [anger](#) to the President's reaction in both the traditional and social media. Some male public figures took to social media to post their pictures cooking or cleaning the kitchen in defiance to the president's statement. Senator Ben Murray Bruce posted a picture of himself with his wife, adding: "my wife belongs by my side". But not all legislators reacted in the same manner to the president's statement. Senator Binta Garba, the Chairperson for the Senate Women Affairs Committee, [said](#) "I am proud to belong to the kitchen and other rooms."

The statement made by the President is also a reflection of how much his administration prioritizes women's rights and gender equality issues. During his campaign, he [promised](#) to uphold women's rights by enshrining protection in the constitution and ensuring that women are adequately represented in political appointments. Currently, he has appointed only 6 women out of 36 positions in his cabinet, a far cry from the 35% mandated in the National Gender Policy. It is very clear that the president doesn't see any role for women in Nigeria, other than to take care of men. It is also evident that very little progress might be made through this administration to uphold the rights of women and girls; for example, through the domestication of the CEDAW or the adoption of legislation upholding gender equality adopted. 2019, can't come fast enough!

The irony to the entire goof, was the fact that he made this statement standing next to the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel: A woman!

Pakistan: New Laws on "Honor" Killing and Rape Still Leave A Significant Gap

Following the widely publicized honor killing of social media celebrity Qandeel Baloch in July 2016, the sitting Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, along with key individuals from his party, PML-N, made public statements about the need to pass a more comprehensive law on honor killings. On October

6th, 2016, Sharif congratulated the Parliament on passing the anti-honor killing and anti-rape bills stating, “We have succeeded in our efforts today; there is no honor in honor killing”.

With rape conviction rates at close to zero percent nationally and the vast majority of honor killing cases ending up in a financial settlement outside of court under Islamic *diyat* laws (monetary compensation for murder), new laws were indeed necessary. The new laws have included a provision to conduct DNA tests on both the alleged victim and perpetrator in rape cases, and have decreased the flexibility in the pardoning culture of honor killings by integrating a mandated prison sentence. In other words, the individual who has committed the murder (often a male family member) can only be pardoned from capital punishment, not from imprisonment, by other male family members of the victim. This change in the law has been celebrated as closing the “loophole” that existed which, for the most part, allowed perpetrators to face little to no repercussions for their crime.

However, those who work on the implementation of the law have expressed criticism suggesting that the “devil is in the detail” with the new law failing to make honor crimes unequivocally non-compoundable. While judges have been granted more power, settlement options still exist suggesting that lawmakers in Pakistan are not yet comfortable with completely repealing Islamic laws such as *qisas and diyat*. Moreover, the language of the law has largely remained stagnant with the definition of honor killings remaining the same even while activists and women’s groups have long campaigned to remove the use of the term “honor.” And finally for those working on the ground on behalf of victims, the reality of the situation remains that most cases do not even make it to the courts because of the societal norms surrounding these crimes along with widely used informal justice systems (*jirgas*) and practices of police stations which often support settlements in favor of the perpetrators. Thus while the change in the law reveals pressure tactics on the state have resulted in a degree of action, the question remains as to whether such ornamental changes can really impact the lives of women positively.