

## O Panorama da Governança Global e o Olhar Feminino nas Organizações Internacionais.

The Panorama of Global Governance and the Feminine Perspective in International Organizations.

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### Resumo

**Propósito:** Este estudo analisa a participação feminina nas instituições internacionais de governança econômica global, com foco no Banco Mundial e no Fundo Monetário Internacional (FMI). O objetivo é compreender como as políticas de igualdade de gênero foram incorporadas nessas organizações e identificar as barreiras ao avanço da inclusão feminina.

**Metodologia:** A pesquisa adota uma abordagem descritiva, bibliográfica e qualitativa baseada em revisão bibliográfica de artigos científicos, relatórios institucionais e documentos oficiais. Para a seleção das referências usou-se da base Scielo e Scopus, pautados em critérios específicos, considerando palavras-chave relacionadas ao feminismo, inclusão, governança e instituições internacionais.

**Evidências:** Os resultados evidenciam que, apesar do discurso institucional favorável à igualdade de gênero, a implementação de políticas efetivas ainda enfrenta desafios estruturais. O Banco Mundial tem promovido iniciativas voltadas à inclusão feminina no setor privado, enquanto o FMI demonstra uma abordagem limitada ao tema, com pouca incorporação de perspectivas de gênero em suas políticas econômicas. Além disso, a neoliberalização do feminismo emerge como um fator que pode obscurecer desigualdades estruturais.

**Originalidade/Contribuição:** A inovação da pesquisa reside na análise crítica das contradições entre as políticas e a prática na governança econômica global. O estudo contribui ao ampliar o debate sobre o papel das instituições internacionais na promoção da equidade de gênero, destacando a necessidade de abordagens mais abrangentes e efetivas para garantir a inclusão feminina em espaços de decisão global.

**Palavras-chaves:** Governança Global; Feminismo; Igualdade de Gênero; Instituições Internacionais.

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study analyzes women's participation in international institutions of global economic governance, focusing on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The objective is to understand how gender equality policies have been incorporated into these organizations and to identify barriers to advancing women's inclusion.

**Methodology:** The research adopts a descriptive, bibliographical, and qualitative approach based on a bibliographic review of scientific articles, institutional reports, and official documents. The Scielo and Scopus databases were used to select the references based on specific criteria, considering keywords related to feminism, inclusion, governance, and international institutions.

**Findings:** The results show that, despite the institutional discourse favorable to gender equality, implementing effective policies still faces structural challenges. The World Bank has promoted initiatives aimed at women's inclusion in the private sector. At the same time, the IMF demonstrates a limited approach to the topic, with little incorporation of gender perspectives in its economic policies. In addition, the neoliberalization of feminism emerges as a factor that can obscure structural inequalities.

**Originality/Value:** The research innovates by critically analyzing the contradictions between policies and practice in global economic governance. The study contributes by broadening the debate on the role of international institutions in promoting gender equality, highlighting the need for more comprehensive and practical approaches to ensure women's inclusion in global decision-making spaces.

**Keywords:** Global Governance; Feminism; Gender Equality; International Institutions.

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## 1. Introduction

The economic, political, and social transformations that the world was facing enabled the emergence of new actors in the system - multilateral organizations, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), transnational corporations, universal religions, and telecommunications users. Therefore, the mutability of the international system requires a holistic understanding of the cooperative dynamics and agreements between governments and international actors that satisfy both (Oliveira Pizarro & Moraes Rial, 2018).

These changes in international dynamics and actors are based on the need to focus not only on the State and the Market as actors in the global arena but also to give voice to citizens and their organizations in civil society. These constituents constitute a new set of relationships different from those carried out based on the interests of the State or the Market.

The concept of global governance, developed in the 1990s, is new. Although many doubts and uncertainties remain about its meaning, it has been widely used in various areas of scientific knowledge. Governance should not be confused with the act of governing; it represents an instrument of analysis and action that goes far beyond the limits of national states, although these are also essential actors that participate in its processes and activities.

Global governance, which encompasses fundamental aspects such as authority and hierarchy, has driven the role of international organizations (IOs) in recent decades. These allow certain groups to present key issues at the center of the global debate. In addition, governance goes beyond borders and personifies IOs independently regarding their objectives (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019).

In recent decades, there has been a growing interest within the international political economy (IPE) on issues of the weakening of the liberal international order, which encompasses free trade, security, and democracy, and a worsening of global inequalities following the 2008 financial crisis and, more recently, due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Prügl & Tickner, 2018). In addition to these discussions, the focus has been on how new international actors enact and execute economics and politics locally and through various

cultural practices. However, there has been a small share of female voices and a low bias towards gendered social relations as a preponderant factor (Elias & Roberts, 2016).

There has been a growing coalition between capitalist states, regional and international financial institutions, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that recognize the need to promote gender equality for women globally. Even though women have been chosen as leaders of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other international institutions, there is still a question as to whether some gender equality issues have actually become visible at the highest levels of global economic and political governance, or whether these changes are simply a facade for business as usual, that is, neoliberalism with a feminist face (Prügl, 2017; Waylen, 2022).

In Perrons' (2005) view, taking gender issues seriously in social, economic, and political discussions at an international level makes it possible to understand the power of adjectives such as normal and natural in more detail. However, the term gender remains one of the most slippery concepts in global governance, persistently invisible on many occasions and surreptitiously removed from discussions.

This chapter understands that international governance becomes increasingly necessary and crucial since global problems require solutions in the same measure. Despite greater participation and inclusion of female leaders in international bodies, there is still a gap in how feminist agendas have been incorporated into global governance. Therefore, the objective is to elucidate how gender policies in different contexts of institutional bodies have been implemented and to outline the main barriers to advancing the inclusion of women.

This research is justified because few studies discuss the relevance of female presence in global economic governance (GEG) institutions and which mechanisms actors use to ensure a gender equality agenda in GEG institutions (Holmes *et al.*, 2019; Waylen, 2022).

## **2. Theoretical Basis**

### **The Role of Global Governance**

Governance has a deep-rooted meaning outside of public administration or companies. However, in the 1990s, it began to be used by international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank (WB). The idea is that governance is not restricted to the managerial and administrative aspects of the State (public sector) or good business practices, as it is noted that it has a comprehensive definition and can be practiced by various institutions.

Governance is related to economic restructuring, corporate governance, debt management, financial liberalization, and so on (Griffin, 2015). Discussions of global governance can be divided into two categories: global governance as a series of observable phenomena and global governance as a political program.

The first definition portrays governments' diminishing relevance and international politics' importance as an interconnection between actors and phenomena. The second concept is based on the principle that society should have the power to decide on complex issues currently controlled by the market (Lima, 2014). For our purposes, global governance is a model for interpreting actual events to provide more effective responses to issues beyond states' ability to solve.

Global governance is not just a project inspired by normative principles. On the contrary, it is an emerging reality that acts as a driver of balance, where the State has its legitimate role. However, it is necessary to generate interdependent interactions. Interconnected among the numerous international actors (Buchanan & Keohane, 2006). Admitting the existence of governance at the global level, even if incipient, implies recognizing that sovereign States are currently immersed in a vast web of international organizations, institutions, and regimes that exercise authority and regulate a series of activities, also involving several actors, among which civil society, non-governmental organizations, and multinational corporations stand out due to their relative novelty.

This new panorama shows a new organizational principle that does not have a territorial basis in the State, a grouping with several levels of interaction and without a defined hierarchy, based on circles of competence independent of State power. Moreover, non-state actors are essential in causing and solving transnational problems. Since they are not within State jurisdiction, the legitimacy of these organizations is validated by their action on specific issues (specialization). As in democratic countries, decisions for regulating specific issues are commonly delegated to non-majoritarian government institutions (Kardam, 2004).

Another relevant point about governance is the misunderstanding of the term governability. Governability refers to the extent of the State's power and how this power is executed in the political system, the form of government, and the relations between the powers (Gonçalves, 2022). Governance seeks a balance between the powers, aiming not to create a divergence between state governability and the IOs but rather an alignment between internal and external demands.

In the context of the three levels that structure the world order, governance is included in the third level, the political level. At this level, institutions and regimes focused on coordination execute the policies related to the first two levels – behavioral and ideational. This range of activity represents the most structured dimension of world order, encompassing institutions and regimes established by the various actors in the system, such as the UN, the IMF, and the World Bank. By reflecting these actors' aspirations, these organizations shape the understandings through which global politics develop (Lavall & Olsson, 2019). Thus, the concept of global governance is closely related to the existence of international organizations. From the point of view of its intrinsic value, it can be inferred that it is associated with the attempt to solve the collective problems generated by the challenges of the contemporary era.

In response to these challenges, in 2015, the United Nations General Assembly approved 17 goals and 169 targets as part of the 2030 Global Agenda for post-2015 development. This initiative represents an innovative approach characterized by broad public participation during its elaboration process, including contributions from at least 70 countries and several civil society representatives, including women's rights defenders (Razavi, 2016). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were formulated to integrate

the goals into the core of global governance. Therefore, the SDGs operate in an integrated and indivisible manner, covering the planet in its entirety and, as the 2030 Agenda asserts, intending to leave no one behind (UN, 2015).

Goal 5, composed of nine targets and 14 indicators, portrays achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. For Mariano and Molari (2022), this SDG represents a more ambitious and direct look at gender equality goals. It shows a leap in gender transversality since goals associated with gender equality were identified in all 17 SDG goals. According to Razavi (2016), there are three main justifications for including a stand-alone goal related to gender equality in the 2030 Agenda. First, gender-based inequalities and injustices are omnipresent in all societies. Second, gender equality acts as a catalyst for the achievement of human development, sustainability, and governance. Finally, the visibility of gender equality in the agenda can ensure that governments are held accountable for progress in this area.

While the SDG goals and targets seem promising for women's rights and gender equality, their effectiveness depends on the political struggles waged at various levels and the positioning of women's movements in these conflicts, especially considering the contradictions between human rights principles and hegemonic models of economic growth in an era of neoliberal globalization (Esquivel & Sweetman, 2016). There are discrepancies between ambition and the generality of the stipulated goals. This becomes evident when we see a disadvantage in making a political commitment whose goals are not quantifiable, or, when they are, they prove to be unattainable. Paradoxically, according to Fukuda-Parr (2016), Goal 5 expands the promises to achieve gender equality but does so on bases that are difficult to demand from the signatory states. This pact affirms a finalist political value, which is desirable and not a result to be measured.

### **The Female Gender in the World Economy and Politics**

The crisis-ridden new millennium has led to an increasing focus on feminist studies in the context of development and the global political economy. As a result, feminist ideas have become part of economic and political agendas, including those of multinational corporations, the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and major foundations such as the Gates and Clinton Foundations. This movement has given

feminist perspectives unprecedented visibility in international political circles (Prügl & Tickner, 2018).

Feminist approaches to global governance institutions have mainly developed through analyses of political engagements at the state level. Over the years, these growing demands for legitimacy have been followed by different debates not only between the State and civil society but also between international institutions, seeking social justice, equity, integrity, and other values of global governance (Bernstein, 2011).

However, according to Rai (2004), this is not always true. Over the years, groups of women and feminist activists questioned whether any form of engagement with the State linked to global governance institutions was the best strategy for changing policy since external influences could undermine the proposals defended. This path has always been questioned because, even with changes in global agreements, to allow States greater dynamism and political action on this issue, it might not be appropriate since, in some countries, economic, political, and social distortions would be capable of exacerbating these inequalities (Hannah, Roberts & Trommer, 2021).

A portion of feminist research and work has been dedicated to critiquing the neo-liberalization of feminism, which involves promoting orthodox economic policy as beneficial to women and investing in women as a driver of economic growth. These market-oriented economic policies may increase participation in the women's labor force. Still, the more significant market freedom afforded by these policies is unlikely to result in increased respect for women's economic rights. On the contrary, market-supportive policies tend to be associated with higher levels of gender-based economic discrimination (Peksen, 2019).

This impulse has tended to obscure the underlying structural causes of inequality while celebrating an essentialist vision of women's empowerment. As a result, there has been decreased accountability for women and feminist movements in corporate social responsibility initiatives and public-private partnerships (Calkin, 2015; Roberts, 2015).

One of the main foundations of feminist neoliberalism is the growing role of corporations in promoting projects justified by the gendered business argument, as well as the creation of specific market-oriented and business-oriented solutions based on gender relations. For



Roberts (2015), the central point is that corporations have contributed to promoting a political-economic project known as transnational corporate feminism (TNF). Based on a feminist historical materialist perspective, it is argued that TNF helps to legitimize and reproduce the same neoliberal macroeconomic framework that has generated and sustained gender inequalities and oppressions through the global feminization of labor, the reduction of support for social reproduction, and the separation of feminist critiques from corporate neoliberal capitalism.

However, there are also initiatives aimed at rescuing progressive feminist politics from the often-stifling critique of co-optation, exploring the gaps in the spaces of neoliberalism, and reclaiming the diversity of feminist movement politics. This recent approach proposes research programs that investigate co-optation through interdisciplinary studies, expanding the concept and developing pertinent research questions (De Jong & Kimm, 2017; Eschle & Maiguashca, 2014). In other words, focusing on the multiple ways women face disadvantages is crucial. This recognition must be grounded in the understanding that structural inequalities, class inequalities, the division between capital and labor, and an unequal international system shape gender inequality. We must go beyond the simple dichotomy between men and women.

There is a need for gender studies to be a critical element in the achievement of global economic policy, as it enables a broader vision. However, this theme is persistently rejected within the theoretical global governance discussion (Griffin, 2015). Recognizing the historical integration of feminist politics in the context of neoliberal capitalism opens up new and broad research agendas to investigate the intersection of feminism with capitalist power. Furthermore, it invites us to identify contradictions, tensions, and potential subversion within these discourses. From this perspective, it is relevant to consider the expansion of emerging economic activities focused on sharing and responsible household management, often referred to as the social and solidarity economy (Verschuur, Guérin & Hillenkamp, 2017).

Within this context, an EPI perspective becomes necessary to clarify the structures of power and gender relations shaped by political, economic, and social relations. Therefore, EPI inserted from a female gender perspective is vital in identifying the structural inequalities present in the global political economy model, highlighting which aspects of

gender and existing power relations influence the participation or non-participation of agents in global governance (Elias & Roberts, 2016; Hannah, Roberts & Trommer, 2021).

### **3. Methodology**

This article adopts methodological typology criteria about objectives, data, information collection procedures, and approach. The methodology used is to understand the insertion of the female perspective within international organizations and the incorporation of feminist agendas in global governance.

The research is classified as descriptive because it analyzes and describes the implementation of gender equality policies in multilateral organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Its function is to explain the characteristics of the subject studied, relating variables through observation and analysis, so as not to manipulate data and information (Marion, Dias, Traldi & Marion, 2010). Regarding collection procedures, this is bibliographic research based on the review of academic literature and institutional documents. Scientific articles, reports from international organizations, and scholarly publications that discuss the relationship between gender and global governance were analyzed.

Finally, regarding the approach, the research follows a qualitative pattern based on interpreting texts, discourses, and institutional policies. In Gil's view (2010), interpreting phenomena and attributing meanings are fundamental in qualitative research and do not require statistical methods and techniques. In this case, it allows us to understand how feminist agendas have been incorporated into the context of international organizations and whether these changes are practical or merely symbolic.

The articles analyzed in the research were selected between March and May 2024 through the Scielo and Scopus databases, totaling 15 articles, 7 addressing the World Bank and 8 on the IMF, the selection was based on the following criteria:

- Thematic relevance: Studies that address the role of women in international institutions, the influence of gender equality policies, and the neo-liberalization of feminism in the context of global governance were considered.

- **Keywords:** The research used terms such as "feminism", "global governance", "international institutions", "gender equality", "feminist neoliberalism," and "gender politics" to select relevant materials.
- **Academic and institutional sources:** Priority was given to articles published in scientific journals and documents from organizations such as the UN, the World Bank, and the IMF.
- **Publication Period:** Recent studies, published mainly from the 2000s onward, were analyzed to capture contemporary advances and challenges on the subject.

#### **4. Analysis and Discussion of Female Participation in International Institutions**

In this topic, we go beyond the discourse promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on gender equality, investigating to what extent and in what way their statements and incentives have contributed to the effective promotion of gender equality. We also analyze whether such statements have resulted in implementing programs aimed at this end.

The World Bank has made progress in implementing its gender equality agenda through private sector initiatives promoted by its International Finance Corporation (IFC), encouraging companies to develop programs supported, in some cases, with the help of public resources. According to Prügl and Lustgarten (2006), these business programs aim to empower women, providing them with access to resources and opportunities while expanding the market for their products or ensuring sustainable access to women's labor rights in their supply chains. In addition, such initiatives strengthen the corporate brand's reputation. These projects exemplify the neo-liberalization of feminism and align with the recent feminist inclusion position adopted by the World Bank (Berik, 2017).

However, analyzing the gender dimension in infrastructure projects addresses the challenges of integrating this issue into a predominantly technical sector. Traditionally, gender issues have been discussed in the context of social development, health, education, and poverty reduction, with little attention given to the equality agenda and a focus on the technically complex activities of infrastructure projects. According to Ferguson and Harman (2015), this partly results in the exclusion of technical gender experts and a lack of addressing the technical dimensions of gender, preventing effective communication

between the two domains. These gaps largely ignore the complexity of gender issues involved in infrastructure projects and the impacts that these projects may intentionally or inadvertently produce. It is, therefore, crucial to rethink how gender considerations are integrated into World Bank projects.

According to a study by Kenny and O'Donnell (2016) on gender mainstreaming in World Bank-financed projects between July 2009 and June 2014. They analyzed the results of 41 of the 70 projects that included gender equality indicators or published results. Evidence shows that the targets for these indicators in the Bank's evaluation system are often limited to setting a specific proportion of female beneficiaries or requiring the disaggregation of results by gender. Thus, focusing on completed projects that had gender indicators and results in data available, their analysis revealed that 52.9% of projects met or exceeded their targets. In comparison, 10.6% did not meet their results, and 36.5% did not have targets set for the identified indicators. They conclude that gender mainstreaming in World Bank projects has been limited, highlighting the need to address the issue with varied methods to improve women's inclusion in development projects. It is imperative to transcend restricted conceptions of gender, adopting more comprehensive and integrated approaches.

Power's work (2020) shows that the World Bank has made progress in incorporating gender equity into its policies, but several obstacles limit its effective implementation. The study shows that the obstacles to implementing gender equity are interconnected and stem from an approach that prioritizes economic impact over structural transformation. The focus on female participation in the labor market is not accompanied by institutional reforms that remove systemic barriers, such as the lack of infrastructure for childcare or discrimination in credit. Another aspect is the lack of active participation of feminist organizations in formulating strategies, which limits the effectiveness of policies, making them disconnected from local needs. Finally, the assessment based on quantitative metrics ignores qualitative aspects, such as job security and stability, making it difficult to measure the actual impact on gender equity. These factors combined mean that World Bank policies advance female inclusion but do not guarantee lasting structural changes.

The study developed by Scott and Olivius (2023) deserves special mention because it discusses how gender expertise is gathered and used within international organizations,

focusing on the World Bank's Gender Innovation Labs (GILs). The article aims to explore the practical work involved in the production, maintenance, and dissemination of knowledge on gender inequality. GILs adopt several practices to promote effective, evidence-based interventions on gender equity. One of their main strategies is identifying suitable interventions and selecting projects that benefit from rigorous evaluations. In addition, they organize workshops and collaborative consultations, allowing stakeholders to align priorities and research methodologies. Another essential practice is building relationships with professionals from ministries and organizations, ensuring that the knowledge generated is customized to local needs.

In addition, they strengthen their performance by activating repertoires of expertise and integrating knowledge from different areas to build robust impact evaluation methodologies. This diversified approach increases the credibility of the research and facilitates its acceptance by decision-makers. Finally, they emphasize the production of actionable knowledge, providing clear and practical insights into what works to promote gender equity. These practices ensure that research advances academic debate and results in effective and sustainable public policies.

Finally, Heinzl, Weaver, and Jorgensen (2025) examine how women's representation in international organizations impacts the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies. The study focuses on the World Bank, using data from 2,076 projects, an instrumental variable strategy, and a survey experiment. The lackluster implementation of gender mainstreaming policies at the World Bank results from institutional constraints, government resistance, and lack of expertise. Organizational culture often prioritizes project approval over deep gender mainstreaming, leading to a superficial approach that meets only formal requirements. Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women on staff limits genuine commitment to these policies, while the lack of gender expertise impedes effective implementation. External pressure from resistant client governments also constrains the depth of gender mainstreaming, forcing staff to make compromises that dilute the effectiveness of initiatives.

Another critical factor is risk aversion and a lack of structural incentives for action. Many teams prioritize minimum compliance with project approval criteria, avoiding more innovative measures that could strengthen gender equity. Furthermore, without clear

incentives or an organizational culture that values genuine gender integration, individual efforts tend to remain superficial. This scenario highlights that, although formal guidelines for gender equity exist, the lack of structural commitment, technical capacity, and institutional support prevents these policies from translating into concrete changes.

As far as the IMF is concerned, its approach and sensitivity to gender have been limited until at least 2016, as evidenced by a limited number of policy and working papers produced by its staff. Research by Elson and Warnecke (2011) suggests that IMF lending programs, such as the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, do not incorporate gender considerations meaningfully. Furthermore, despite the IMF's claims to have introduced greater flexibility and policy space for low-income countries after the global financial crisis, studies by Van Waeyenberge, Bargawi, and McKinley (2013) and Kentikelenis, Stubbs, and King (2016) related to IMF loans show that its orthodox macroeconomic stance remains essentially unchanged on this issue. While neither study explicitly takes a gendered approach when examining the IMF's policy record, their findings are cause for concern for feminists. The IMF's rhetorical shift to recognize the importance of gender equality is not reflected in policy practice, which effectively undermines opportunities and outcomes for a more equal society.

Bringing other works to the table, we see that the Coburn study (2019) assesses the role of gender equity in the International Monetary Fund and explores the complexities of incorporating feminist perspectives into global capitalism. The contradictions in the IMF's approach to gender mainstreaming reflect a dilemma between moral principles, economic goals, and a reductionist view of women. The organization oscillates between justifying gender equity as a moral imperative and treating it as a tool for economic growth, which can weaken the depth of its policies. Furthermore, by treating women as a homogeneous category without considering differences in race, class, and social context, the IMF ignores structural inequalities that could be addressed with more specific policies. This simplification is also reflected in the duality of the "feminine economic", where women are simultaneously seen as productive market agents and altruistic caregivers, without there being any real questioning of how these functions are sustained within the current economic system.

Another fundamental contradiction arises between the promise of gradual progress through market inclusion and the lack of concrete actions to eliminate structural inequalities. The idea that integrating women into the economy will automatically bring widespread benefits may serve to justify neoliberal policies more than to ensure fundamental transformations in gender equality. Furthermore, the IMF's instrumentalism focuses on the economic value of women for global growth, leaving aside the promotion of female empowerment as an end in itself. These tensions reveal that, although the IMF incorporates gender equality into its discourse, its implementation often reinforces existing inequalities rather than meaningfully addressing them.

A milestone in the history of the IMF is the arrival of Christine Lagarde, the first female managing director of the organization. Following this important event, Blackmon's (2021) research focuses on identifying policy changes related to gender equity and economic opportunities for women. The study will examine two main areas: gender equity among IMF staff and policies to boost female participation in the workforce. The results show that the challenges to increasing gender diversity at the IMF are deeply rooted in institutional and cultural norms perpetuating structural inequalities. Informal norms and gender stereotypes create invisible barriers to female advancement, especially in traditionally male fields such as macroeconomics and finance. This organizational culture favors the maintenance of a masculinized environment, making it difficult to both recruit and promote women to senior positions. Even when there are advances in diversity at lower levels, female representation in leadership and high-paying positions remains limited, revealing that the problem is not only entry into the IMF but also career advancement.

Furthermore, the impact of previous leadership and negative perceptions of organizational culture compound these challenges. Scandals such as that involving Dominique Strauss-Kahn have reinforced the image of the IMF as an unwelcoming environment for women, reducing female interest in positions at the institution. Despite efforts by subsequent leadership, such as those of Christine Lagarde, progress on gender diversity has been slow. This demonstrates that cultural change requires more than formal measures—it requires sustained effort to transform entrenched norms and create a truly inclusive environment for women in positions of power.



The same author is conducting complementary research, but this paper explores Christine Lagarde's strategies to promote gender equality during her leadership at the IMF and the European Central Bank (ECB). Blackmon's (2024) article focuses on two aspects: a comparison of her policies at both institutions and female leaders' challenges in promoting gender equality. During her tenure at the IMF, Lagarde implemented several initiatives to promote gender equality. She advocated for female participation in the workforce as an essential factor for economic growth, emphasizing that gender equality was a moral issue and a macroeconomic strategy. In addition, the IMF, under her leadership, began to incorporate a gender-sensitive approach into its economic surveillance, considering specific policies that impact women, such as affordable transportation and childcare. Lagarde also actively participated in international panels, such as at the UN, where she committed to the IMF's strengthening of its policy advice on gender inequalities.

At the ECB, Lagarde continued to promote gender equality, albeit more indirectly, given the limitations of the institution's mandate. She highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and advocated for the implementation of measures to mitigate gender inequalities. The ECB also adopted a Diversity Action Plan to increase the presence of women in leadership positions within the institution. In addition, Lagarde used economic forums to highlight how economic policies can disproportionately affect women, encouraging member states to adopt more inclusive approaches.

Overall, Lagarde has pursued two distinct strategies at each institution. At the IMF, she has implemented structural changes that have integrated gender equity into global economic policymaking. At the same time, at the ECB, she has adopted a more advocacy-based approach to promoting diversity within the organization. This difference reflects the different roles of each institution—the IMF focuses more directly on global economic policymaking, and the ECB focuses more on the financial and monetary stability of the eurozone.

Analyzing the various IMF programs and their impact on gender policies, the work of Kern, Reinsberg, and Lee (2024) shows that IMF programs often impose austerity measures that disproportionately impact women, exacerbating structural inequalities. Cuts in public spending reduce essential services such as health, education, and social assistance, increasing the unpaid workload of women, who traditionally assume these



responsibilities. In addition, labor reforms promoted by the IMF often make the labor market more flexible, resulting in greater informality and precariousness in sectors where women are already more vulnerable. The lack of access to credit and entrepreneurship further aggravates economic exclusion, as the financial liberalization promoted by the IMF does not necessarily improve opportunities for women, who face discrimination in the banking sector and difficulties in economic sectors dominated by men.

These factors are interconnected, creating a cycle of inequality. With less access to formal employment and reduced social benefits, women are forced to accept informal and low-paid work, perpetuating their economic dependence. The lack of social infrastructure, such as accessible childcare and healthcare, limits their participation in the labor market. At the same time, the absence of inclusive policies in the financial sector impedes their economic advancement. In this way, IMF policies, by prioritizing fiscal stability without considering the gender impact, end up reinforcing structural barriers that hinder women's equity and social mobility.

This issue of the impact of IMF programs and the policies they target on men and women is also demonstrated in the article by Reinsberg, Kern, Heinzl, and Metinsoy (2024), where austerity policies, often implemented in response to fiscal crises, disproportionately impact men and women, deepening gender inequalities. Since the public sector is one of the main targets of budget cuts and employs many women, they are the most affected by unemployment and job insecurity. In addition, sectors such as health, education, and social assistance, where women predominate, suffer severe reductions in funding, compromising both the services provided to the population and the working conditions of female employees. At the same time, the decrease in investments in social policies, such as daycare and subsidies for low-income families, further burdens women, who end up assuming greater domestic and care responsibilities, reducing their participation in the formal labor market.

While men tend to be more protected in sectors less affected by austerity, such as industry and technology, women face more significant difficulties in maintaining or re-entering the labor market after crises. Limited resources for gender equality policies also exacerbate the problem, making it difficult for women to rise to leadership positions and implement strategies to mitigate negative impacts. As a result, austerity policies reinforce

structural inequalities, weakening advances achieved in terms of inclusion and gender equality and requiring more responsive responses to women's needs in future economic policies.

Analyzing the effects of neoliberal market policies is crucial for formulating specific incentive policies. The global economic system exerts significant influence through robust mechanisms in the IMF, the World Bank, and major developed countries, often imposing policy recommendations or loan conditions on developing countries promoting free market economies. Research by Gaddis and Pieters (2017) indicates that market liberalization can promote greater economic efficiency and growth, potentially empowering women through increased access to education and new employment opportunities. However, some studies demonstrate that neoliberal policies can intensify economic and other forms of discrimination against women (Detraz & Peksen, 2016).

## **5. Conclusion**

The principles of international governance presuppose a plural perspective, with the active and balanced participation of different actors, so that discourses become more comprehensive and, consequently, facilitate the resolution of problems in a global context. Therefore, analyzing the history of female participation in this governance is essential, and identifying the obstacles that explain the observable imbalance in this participation is critical. In addition, it is necessary to highlight the advantages of gender equality as a contribution to transforming the current scenario towards more significant equity and harmony.

The research findings suggest that market-oriented policies and projects are associated with higher female participation in the workforce but lower respect for women's rights. A relevant implication of these findings is that, although women may assume a more active role in the workforce and occupy leadership positions in international organizations, this does not necessarily translate into improving women's economic status in more liberal economies. On the contrary, neoliberal market-oriented economic policies tend to result in lower protection of gender economic rights.

This study enriches and expands the literature on women's participation in international institutions. It concisely analyzes the impact of projects developed and financed by the

World Bank and the IMF on gender issues. It examines how neoliberal policies generally divert attention from gender inclusion. It also expands the discussion on the design and implementation of policies to support and combat gender discrimination, aiming to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the relationship between neoliberal policies and women's demands.

Finally, exposing and identifying contradictions invites us to bring this topic to the surface to encourage debates and overcome theoretical limits in an attempt to conquer women's space in the workforce, the economy, and society.

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