

THE OVERVIEW OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND THE FEMALE LOOK IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Resumo

The concept of global governance has recently developed and has become widely used in various areas of scientific knowledge, although many doubts and uncertainties remain about its meaning. Governance cannot be confused with the act of governing, and it represents an instrument of analysis and action that goes far beyond the limits of national states. These are also essential actors who participate in their processes and activities. However, there has been a small share of female voices and a low trend regarding gender-social relations as a predominant factor. 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. The same applies to women's choice as leaders of the World Bank, the IMF, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and other international institutions. There is still a question as to whether some issues of gender equality have become visible at the highest levels of global economic and political governance or whether these changes are simply a facade for neoliberalism with a feminist face. Taking gender issues seriously in social, economic, and political discussions at the 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. Therefore, the objective is to elucidate how gender policies in different contexts of institutional bodies were implemented and to provide an overview of the main barriers to advancing the inclusion of the female gender. The first definition of governance 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 must have the power to decide on complex matters currently controlled by the market. Global governance is a model for interpreting actual events to bring more effective responses to issues beyond states' ability to resolve. Admitting the existence of governance at the international level 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 different actors, among which, due to their relative newness, civil society, non-governmental organizations, and multinational corporations stand out. In response to these challenges, the UN 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 preparation process, including contributions from at least 70 countries and several civil society representatives, including defenders of women's rights. In general terms, three main justifications exist for including an autonomous objective related to gender equality. Firstly, gender-based inequalities and injustices are omnipresent in all societies. Second, gender equality acts as a catalyst for realizing human development, sustainability, and governance. Finally, the visibility of gender equality on the agenda can ensure that governments are held

accountable for progress in this area. The new millennium, marked by crises, has driven an increasing focus on feminist studies in development and global political economy. As a result, feminist ideas have entered economic and political agendas, including those of multinational corporations, the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and major foundations. This movement has given unprecedented visibility to feminist perspectives in international political circles. A portion of feminist research and work has been dedicated to a critique of the neo-liberalization of feminism, which involves the promotion of an orthodox economic policy as beneficial to women and investment in women as a driver of economic growth. These market-oriented economic policies may increase participation in the women's labor force. However, the more significant market freedom these policies provide will unlikely result in expanded respect for women's economic rights. On the contrary, market support policies tend to be associated with higher levels of economic gender discrimination. This tended to obscure the underlying structural causes of inequality while celebrating an essentialist vision of female empowerment. As a result, there has been decreased accountability towards women and feminist movements in corporate social responsibility initiatives promoted by companies and in public-private partnerships. The discourse promoted by the World Bank and the IMF regarding gender equality investigates to what extent and how their statements and incentives contributed to the effective promotion of gender equality. We also analyzed whether such pronouncements concretely resulted in implementing programs for this purpose. Incorporating gender perspectives in projects financed by the World Bank shows that the targets for these indicators in the Bank's evaluation system are generally limited to establishing a specific proportion of female beneficiaries or requiring disaggregation of results by gender. So, by focusing on completed projects with gender indicators and results data available, their analysis revealed that 52.9% of projects met or exceeded their objectives. In comparison, 10.6% did not meet their results, and 36.5% had no targets. Regarding the IMF, its gender approach and sensitivity have been limited until at least 2016, as evidenced by a limited number of policy and working documents produced by its staff. The records indicate that IMF loan programs, such as the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, do not significantly incorporate gender considerations. Furthermore, despite the IMF's claims to have introduced greater flexibility and policy space to low-income countries following the global financial crisis, studies related to loans show that its orthodox macroeconomic stance remains unchanged. The research conclusions suggest that market-oriented policies and projects are associated with greater female participation in the workforce and less respect for women's rights. A relevant implication is that although women take on a more active role in the workforce and hold 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 economic measures tend to result in less protection of gender economic rights.

Palavras Chave

Global Governance, Gender Equality, International Organizations

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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, such 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 on the State and Market as global actors and give voice to citizens and their organizations in civil society. These constitute new role relationships different from those carried out based on the State or Market's interests.

Global governance has boosted the role of international organizations (IOs) in recent decades. It encompasses fundamental aspects such as authority and hierarchy, which allow certain groups to present critical issues at the center of international debate. In addition, governance goes beyond borders and personifies IOs independently regarding their objectives (TALLBERG; ZÜRN, 2019).

In recent decades, there has been growing interest within the international political economy (IPE) about 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 economics and politics are enacted and executed locally, by new international actors, and through various cultural practices. However, there has been a small share of female voices and a low trend regarding gender 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. For the hypothesis of this research, it is understood that since global problems require solutions to the same extent, international governance becomes increasingly necessary and crucial. In this context of 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 were implemented and to provide an overview of the main barriers to advancing the inclusion of the female gender.

This research is justified by the fact that few studies discuss the relevance of female presence in global economic governance (GEG) institutions and what mechanisms actors use to guarantee a gender equality agenda in GEG institutions (HOLMES *et al.*, 2019; WAYLEN, 2022).

2. RATIONALE AND DISCUSSION

2.1 The Role of Global Governance

The term governance has a very deep-rooted meaning apart from 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 Co-operation 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 machine) or good business practices, as it is noted that it has a comprehensive definition and can be practiced by different institutions.

Governance refers to economic restructuring, corporate governance, debt management, financial liberalization, etc. 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.

Global governance is not just a project inspired by normative principles. On the contrary, it is an emerging reality acting as a driver of balance, where the State has its legitimate role. However, it is necessary to generate interdependent interactions between numerous international actors (BUCHANAN; KEOHANE, 2006).

This new panorama shows that there is a new organizational principle that does not have a territorial base in the State, that is, a grouping with several levels of interaction and without a defined hierarchy, based on circles of competence independent of state power. Furthermore, in which non-state actors have an essential role in causing and solving transnational problems. As they are not within state jurisdiction, the legitimacy of these organizations is validated by their action on specific topics (specialization). According to democratic countries, decisions are commonly delegated to non-majority government institutions to regulate certain matters (KARDAM, 2004). Thus, the conception 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 preparation process, including contributions from at least 70 countries and several civil society representatives, including defenders of women's rights. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were formulated to integrate 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).

Objective 5, made up of nine goals and 14 indicators, aims to achieve gender equality and empower 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, as goals associated with gender equality were identified in all 17 SDG objectives.

If, on the one hand, the objectives and targets of the SDGs seem promising for women's rights and gender equality, on the other hand, their effectiveness depends on the political struggles waged at various levels and the positioning of women's movements in these conflicts, especially considering there are contradictions between the principles of human rights and hegemonic models of economic growth in a time of neoliberal globalization (ESQUIVEL; SWEETMAN, 2016). It is noted that there are discrepancies between ambition and the majority of stipulated goals. This becomes evident when we see a disadvantage in making a political commitment whose goals are not quantifiable or when they are proven to be unachievable. Paradoxically, according to Fukuda-Parr (2016), objective 5 expands promises to achieve gender equality but does so because it is difficult to demand from signatory states. This pact affirms a final political value, which is desirable and not a result to be measured.

2.2 The Female Gender within the World Economy and Politics

Feminist approaches to global governance institutions have mainly developed through analyses of political engagements at the state level. These growing demands for the legitimacy

of the topic have continued over the years in different forms of debates not only between the State and civil society but also with international institutions, aiming for social justice, equity, integrity, and other values of global governance (BERNSTEIN, 2011).

However, according to RAI (2004), it was not always this way; 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 to change policy since that external influences could undermine the proposals defended. This path has always been questioned because, even with changes in global agreements, allowing States greater dynamism and political action on this issue, it may not be appropriate since, in some countries, economic, political, and social distortions would be capable of enhancing these inequalities (HANNAH; ROBERTS; TROMMER, 2021).

A portion of feminist research and work has been dedicated to a critique of the neoliberalization of feminism, which involves the promotion of an orthodox economic policy as beneficial to women and investment in women as a driver of economic growth. These market-oriented economic policies may increase participation in the women's labor force. However, the more significant market freedom these policies provide will unlikely result in expanded respect for women's economic rights. On the contrary, market support policies tend to be associated with higher levels of economic gender discrimination (PEKSEN, 2019).

One of the main bases of feminine neoliberalism is the increasing role of companies in promoting projects justified by the gender business argument, in addition to creating specific market- and business-oriented solutions based on gender relations. The central point is that companies have contributed to promoting a political-economic project known as transnational business feminism (TBF). Drawing on a feminist historical materialist perspective, it is argued that TBF helps legitimize and reproduce the neoliberal macroeconomic framework that has generated and sustained gender inequalities and oppression through the global feminization of work, diminished 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 suffocating critique of co-optation, exploring the gaps in the spaces of neoliberalism, and rescuing the diversity of feminist movement politics. This more recent approach proposes research programs that investigate co-option through interdisciplinary studies, expanding the concept and developing pertinent research questions (DE JONG; KIMM, 2017; ESCHLE; MAIGUASHCA, 2014). 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.

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 and capitalist power. Furthermore, it invites us to identify contradictions, tensions, and potential spaces of subversion within these discourses.

Within this context, an IPE perspective becomes necessary to clarify the structures of power and gender relations shaped by political, economic, and social relations. Therefore, ECE inserted from a female perspective is essential to identify the structural inequalities present in the global political economy model, highlighting which aspects of gender and existing power relations influence the participation or not of agents in global governance (ELIAS; ROBERTS, 2016).

2.3 Promoting Female Participation through Programs of International Institutions

In this topic, we go beyond the discourse promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund regarding gender equality, investigating to what extent and how

their statements and incentives contributed to the effective promotion of gender equality. We also analyzed whether such pronouncements concretely resulted in implementing programs for this purpose.

The World Bank has advanced in implementing its gender equality agenda through initiatives in the private sector, promoted by its International Finance Corporation (IFC), encouraging companies to develop programs supported, on some occasions, 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 labor rights for women in their supply chains. Furthermore, such initiatives contribute to strengthening the reputation of the corporate brand. These projects exemplify the neo-liberalization of feminism and align with the recent position of feminist inclusion adopted by the World Bank (BERIK, 2017).

However, analyzing the gender dimension in infrastructure projects addresses the challenges of integrating this issue in a predominantly technical sector. Traditionally, gender issues have been discussed in the context of social development — health, education, poverty reduction — with little attention given to the equality agenda and a focus on the technically complex activities of infrastructure projects. In Ferguson and Harman's (2015) understanding, this partly results in the exclusion of technical experts on gender and a lack of approach to technical dimensions related to gender, preventing effective communication between the two domains. In many ways, these gaps ignore the complexity of the gender issues involved in infrastructure projects and the impacts that these projects can intentionally or inadvertently produce. Therefore, it is crucial to rethink how gender considerations are integrated into World Bank projects.

According to a study by Kenny and O'Donnell (2016) on the incorporation of gender perspectives in projects financed by the World Bank in the period between July 2009 and June 2014. They analyzed the results of 41 of the 70 projects that included gender equality indicators or results published. Evidence shows that the targets for these indicators in the Bank's evaluation system are generally limited to establishing a specific proportion of female beneficiaries or requiring disaggregation of results by gender. So, by focusing on completed projects with gender indicators and results data available, their analysis revealed that 52.9% of projects met or exceeded their objectives. In comparison, 10.6% did not meet their results, and 36.5% had no targets. They were defined for the identified indicators. It is concluded that the incorporation of gender considerations in World Bank projects has been limited, highlighting the need to address the issue with varied methods to improve the inclusion of women in development projects. It is imperative to transcend restricted conceptions of gender by adopting more comprehensive and integrated approaches.

Regarding the IMF, its gender approach and sensitivity have been limited until at least 2016, as evidenced by a limited number of policy and working documents produced by its staff. In research by Elson and Warnecke (2011), records indicate that IMF loan programs, such as the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, do not significantly incorporate gender considerations. Furthermore, despite the IMF's claims to have introduced greater flexibility and policy space to low-income countries following 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. Although none of the studies explicitly adopts a gendered approach when examining the IMF's political history, their conclusions are a cause for concern for feminists. The IMF's rhetorical change to recognize the importance of gender equality is not reflected in political practice, which effectively compromises opportunities and results for a more equal society.

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, 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 expanded access to education and new employment opportunities. However, some studies demonstrate that neoliberal policies can intensify economic discrimination and other forms of discrimination against women (DETRAZ; PEKSEN, 2016).

3. 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, it is essential to analyze the history of female participation in this governance and identify the obstacles that explain the observable imbalance in this participation. Furthermore, 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 conclusions suggest that market-oriented policies and projects are associated with greater female participation in the workforce and less respect for women's rights. A relevant implication of these findings is that, although women are taking on a more active role in the workforce and holding 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 economic measures tend to result in less protection of gender economic rights.

This paper enriches and expands the literature on women's participation in international institutions. It offers a concise analysis of the impact of projects developed and financed by the World Bank and the IMF on gender issues. It examines how neoliberal policy generally shifts the focus away from gender inclusion. Furthermore, it expands the discussion on developing and implementing policies to support and combat gender discrimination, aiming to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the relationship between neoliberal policies and female demands.

Finally, exposing and identifying the contradictions invites us to bring this topic to light to encourage debates and overcome theoretical limits to achieve, in a practical way, the conquest of women's space in the workforce, in the economy, and society.

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