

Gender and Public Policies

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Abstract: *This paper conducts an analysis of the incorporation of the gender perspective by public policies at the subnational level of government in Brazil. The article begins with a reconstitution of a gender agenda and its relations with the State reform agenda and the public policies reform agenda, since the 1980's. Using as a reference proposals that came from the women's movement and from feminist entities, the article analyzes programs from three sectors – health, violence against women and employment and income generation. The analysis focuses on the adherence of these programs to the gender agenda.*

Key words: *gender, public policy, gender policy, local government, gender agenda.*

1. Introduction

The field of gender studies was consolidated in Brazil in the late 1970's, along with the strengthening of the country's feminist movement.¹ The incorporation of the perspective of gender by public policies is, however, a theme that is still little explored today.

This article intends to contribute to overcoming this void, by “illuminating” relatively recent processes in the country: the incorporation of the gender question by public policies and government programs.

¹ Work based on the studies *Incorporação da questão de gênero pelas políticas públicas na esfera local de governo* [Incorporation of the issue of gender by public policies in the local government sphere] and *Gênero e políticas públicas: iniciativas de governos subnacionais no Brasil* [Gender and public policies: initiatives of subnational governments in Brazil,] financed by the Center for Research and Publications of FGV-EAESP (Marta FARAH, 1998 and 2002). Carolina Schneider and Luis Fujiwara participated in the studies, they are students in the masters program in Public and Government Administration at FGV-EAESP, as well as Thais V. Mesquita, with a CNPq scientific initiation grant and Marlei de Oliveira.

Public policies can be understood as a government course of action, guided by certain objectives, that reflect or translate an interplay of interests.² A government program, in turn, consists in an action of more limited scope, through which a public policy is placed in operation.³

By analyzing public policies and government programs based on a gender perspective, this article intends to go beyond the identification of policies and programs that serve women, although the identification of such policies is a necessary moment of the research. By adopting the concept of gender as a reference for analysis, the paper seeks to call attention to the social and historic construction of the feminine and the masculine and to the social relations between the sexes that are marked by strong asymmetry in our society.

The concept of gender was incorporated by feminism and by academic production about women in the 1970's. Since then, it has been interpreted in distinct forms by different lines of feminism. According to Marília Carvalho,⁴ the most common current use of the concept is that proposed by the feminism of difference. This rejects presumptions of feminism of equality, which affirms that the sole differences that effectively exist between man and women are biological and sexual and that the other observable differences are cultural, derived from the relations of oppression, and therefore, should be eliminated to give place to relations between "equal" beings. For the men and women theorists of difference, the concept of gender refers to feminine cultural traits (or on the opposite pole, male traits) built socially on a biological base. A binary polarization is thus constructed between the genders, in which difference is conceived as the central category of analysis and which is fundamental in the definition of strategies of action.⁵ The differences between men and women are emphasized, establishing a polarity between masculine and feminine, production and reproduction and public and private. For the feminism of difference, power is concentrated in the public sphere, and it is in this polarity that is found the origin of the subordination of women.⁶

² Elisa REIS, 1989, and Robert SALISBURY, 1995. According to Salisbury, the concept of public policy, "refers to the substance of what the government does" (SALISBURY, 1995, p. 34).

³ Sonia DRAIBE, 1991.

⁴ CARVALHO, 1998.

⁵ Maria Gabriela HITTA, 1998.

⁶ CARVALHO, 1998

Meanwhile, the post-structural line highlights the historic character of the differences between the genders and the very social construction of the perception of sexual difference.⁷ This line of thinking calls attention above all to the need to break with the homogenization internal to each of these fields – the feminine and the masculine – recognizing the existence of diversity within each one, which requires that other dimensions of social relations such as race, class and generation be incorporated to the analysis.⁸

The concept of gender, by emphasizing the social relations between the sexes, allows the recognition of inequalities between men and women, which involve inequalities of power as one of its central components.⁹ In Western societies, also marked by other “systems of inequality” as indicated by the post-structuralist approach, it is possible to find, however, that the dominant standard in the gender identities of adults involves a situation of subordination and of domination of women, both in the public as well as the private sphere.¹⁰

By analyzing public policies and government programs based on a gender perspective, this paper intends to verify to what degree government initiatives have contributed, even if in an incipient form, to modifying this standard, which is deeply rooted in Brazilian society.

The analysis at first, involves the identification of initiatives that include women as part of the beneficiary public, either as the specific focus of the government action, or as a segment attended by broader programs, with specific or differentiated attention. Second, having as a reference the agenda of questions and proposals elaborated by social movements and feminist entities and by women’s movements in recent decades in Brazil, it seeks to verify to what degree these initiatives indicate a recognition, by the part of government, of the gender differences and also, if these initiatives incorporate the

⁷ Joan SCOTT, 1994; and CARVALHO, 1998. According to Scott, “Gender is the social organization of sexual difference. Which does not mean that gender reflects or implements fixed and natural physical differences between men and women, but that gender is the knowledge that establishes meanings for the corporal differences. These meanings vary according to cultures, social groups and times, since nothing in the body ... univocally determines how the social division will be established”. (SCOTT, 1994, p. 13, apud CARVALHO, 1998, p. 401).

⁸ Linda NICHOLSON, 1994, apud CARVALHO, 1998.

⁹ Heleieth SAFIOTTI, 1994; and SCOTT, 1995, apud Luis FUJIWARA, 2002.

¹⁰ CARVALHO, 1998.

perspective of gender, understood as an orientation for the reduction of gender inequalities, that is, of the inequalities between men and women (and between boys and girls).¹¹

The paper examines programs and policies developed by state and municipal governments, found in the data base established by the *Public Management and Citizenship Program*, which awards and publicizes innovative initiatives by subnational governments.¹² These initiatives are inserted in the broader field of changes underway in the country since the beginning of the 1980's, which are highlighted by transformations in the profile of government action and of public policies. As part of this process of transformation, new actors came to the public arena and new themes have been integrated to the government agenda.

2. Reform Agenda, democratization and gender

Since the late 1970's, important transformations have taken place in the relations between State and society in Brazil, under the impact of two principal conditioning factors: democratization and the fiscal crisis. Along with the regime change, after more than 20 years of dictatorial regime, the 1980's were also marked by the crisis of the National Developmental State, which had older origins, as well as by changes in public policies established in previous decades.

The changes in the Brazilian State that have been in process since then, have as a reference a reform agenda, constructed with the participation of various actors since the 1970's. Two principal moments can be identified in the evolution of this reform agenda. A first moment emphasized the democratization of decision-making processes and the results of public policies and demanded the broadening of the range of actors involved in decision making and, at the same time, the inclusion of new segments of the Brazilian

¹¹ This agenda reflects debates between different lines of contemporary feminism and between different actors involved in the formulation of public policies that contemplate women. The principal points of divergence include those related to the differences within the very field of "feminine" about the proposal for focusing on women. This article seeks to register this clash and its reflection in the proposals for public policies and in the policies and programs analyzed.

¹² Program developed by FGV-EAESP and by the Ford Foundation, with the support of BNDES. Its data base, available at the site <http://inovando.fgvsp.br>, combines the more than 5 thousand programs registered through the beginning of 2003.

population among the beneficiaries of public policies. The proposals given priority were decentralization and the participation of civil society in the formulation and implementation of public policies.¹³

At first this involved implementing changes not only in the political regime but also at the level of the State in action, in order to overcome essential characteristics of the standard of state intervention that was characteristic of the previous period. These characteristics were: a) financial and decision-making centralization in the federal sphere; b) institutional fragmentation; c) the administration of social policies based on a financial logic, which led to the segmentation of services and the exclusion of broad contingents of the population from access to public services; d) sectoral action; e) penetration of state structures by private interests; f) the enactment of public policies according to a “clientelist” logic; g) a vertical standard of decision making and of management and bureaucratization of procedures; h) the exclusion of civil society from the decision-making processes; i) the opacity and impermeability of policies and state agencies to citizens and users; h) the absence of social control and of evaluation.¹⁴

The constitution of this agenda included the participation of social movements that were organized since the 1970’s around the struggle for democratization of the regime and around the demands linked to access to public services and to the improvement of the quality of life, especially in the urban centers. At this first moment, women and the issue of gender were present.¹⁵ In the first place, by means of the expressive presence of women in the urban social movements. As Elisabeth Souza-Lobo affirmed: “frequently the analyses ignored that the principal actors in the popular movements were, in fact actresses”.¹⁶ The history of these movements is also the history of the constitution of women as a collective subject, in which they leave the private sphere and come to act in public space, making public, themes that until then were confined to the private sphere.¹⁷

The constitution of women as political subjects took place initially through their mobilization around the democratization of the regime and of questions that affect poor

¹³ FARAH, 2001.

¹⁴ FARAH, 2001; and DRAIBE, 1997.

¹⁵ I return here to some of the ideas developed in FARAH, 1999.

¹⁶ SOUZA-LOBO, 1991, p. 247.

urban workers as a whole, such as low salaries, high cost of living and questions related to the nonexistence of urban infrastructure and precarious access to collective services, a “perverse” manifestation in the urban space of the capitalist development model adopted in the country, characterized by the articulation between “growth and poverty”.¹⁸ The urban social movements were organized around questions such as a lack of water and of sanitation in the urban peripheries and around demands for collective facilities such as schools, day care and health clinics.¹⁹

At the same time that they criticized class inequalities, the women’s movements – or the *women in the movements* - also raised themes specific to the issue of women such as the right to daycare, women’s healthcare, sexuality and contraception and violence against women.

In this list of themes linked to the problematic of women, there was a convergence with the feminist movement. Feminism, differentiated from “social movements with participation of women”, had as its central objective the transformation of the situation of women in society, in order to overcome the inequality found in the relations between men and women. The feminist movement – as did the discrimination of issues specific to the experience of women in the urban social movements – contributed to the inclusion of the question of gender on the public agenda, as one of the inequalities to be overcome by the democratic regime. In turn, the discrimination of issues directly linked to women involved both a criticism of the action of the State, as well as - to the degree that democratization advanced – the formulation of proposals for public policies that consider the issue of gender.

Under the impact of these movements, in the 1980’s the first public policies with a gender perspective were implanted.²⁰ This is the case of the creation of the first State Council for the Feminine Condition, in 1983, and of the first Police Precinct for the Defense of Women, in 1985, both in São Paulo State. These institutions were then disseminated throughout the country. The National Women’s Rights Council, an organ of

¹⁷ Cynthia SARTI, 1988; Karen GIFFIN, 1991; and SOUZA-LOBO, 1991.

¹⁸ Lúcio KOVARICK, 1979; and Candido CAMARGO, 1976.

¹⁹ Paul SINGER and Vinícius BRANT, 1980; and José Álvaro MOISÉS et al., 1982.

²⁰ Public policies with a gender angle are public policies that recognize the distinction of gender and, based on this recognition, implement special actions for women. This category, therefore, includes both policies aimed at women – such as pioneer actions from the early 1980’s – as well as specific actions for women in

the Ministry of Justice was also created in 1985.²¹ There was also a mobilization of Women that led to the institution of the Program for Complete Assistance to Women's Health in 1983.²²

The Constitution of 1988 also reflects the mobilization of women. Organized around the issue *A legitimate Constitutional Assembly must include the voice of women*, women prepared proposals for the new Constitution, which were presented to the Constitutional Congress under the title *The Brazilian Women's Charter*. Various proposals presented by the movements – including themes related to health, family, work, violence, discrimination, culture and land ownership – were included in the Constitution.²³

In relation to public policies, the pressure from the movements was aimed at different levels of government, depending on the distribution of the abilities in each field of public policy. Thus for example, the demands in the field of combating violence against women were aimed with priority at the state and municipal levels. The questions related to health, in turn, were aimed, in the first moment, at the federal government. To the degree that the decentralization began, the pressures also suffered a redirection, shifting partially to the state and municipal governments.

3. Reformulation of the agenda

The agenda for State reform suffered an inflection at the end of the 1980's, under the impact of the crises of the State and of its investment capacity, in a context of globalization and productive restructuring.

The agenda that emerges from this process, added to the democratic agenda of the 1980's new ingredients that were aimed at the search for efficiency and effectiveness of government action.²⁴ The reform agenda in this new moment was structured around the following items: a) decentralization, seen as a democratization strategy, but also as a form of guaranteeing the most efficient use of public resources; b) establishment of

initiatives aimed at a broader public.

²¹ SAFFIOTI, 1994.

²² Maria CARRANZA, 1994.

²³ Ana Alice COSTA, 1998.

priorities for action (focalization or selectivity, due to urgent demands associated to the crisis and to the adjustment process; c) new forms of articulation between State and Civil Society, including the democratization of decision-making processes but also the participation of civil-society organizations and the private sector in the provision of public services; and d) new forms of management of public policies and government institutions, in order to guarantee greater efficiency and effectiveness to state action.

This new agenda is marked by a permanent tension between the vector “efficiency” and the vector “democratization of decision-making processes and access to public services”. Thus, although there was a change in the agenda, there was a permanent dispute concerning the emphasis to be given in each of these poles. The popular movements, leftist parties and progressive local governments tended to emphasize the democratization of decision making and social inclusion; while conservative parties and governments and civil society organizations linked to the private sector tended to emphasize an orientation towards efficiency and spending cuts, which in the social field meant privatization, focusing and administrative modernization.

In turn, the gender agenda constituted in the 1970’s²⁵ – integrated to a broader agenda around democratization and the notion of rights – distinguished itself in the late 1980’s and was formulated as a movement that was no longer unitary. Thus, when in the late 1980’s, the agenda of reform for state action was redefined and became more complex, the ties with the gender agenda also became more complex .

In relation to decentralization, the women’s movement and entities continued to support this proposal for a broad set of social policies, emphasizing the democratic dimension of decentralization. In relation to gender policies, there was not, in turn, a centralized and consolidated system and apparatus, the decentralization of which was demanded. But in public policy sectors in which there was a call for the development of programs with a gender focus, such as healthcare and education, to the degree that the decentralization process began to take place, the *locus* of the pressure was increasingly

²⁴ DRAIBE, 1993; and FARAH, 2001.

²⁵ The gender agenda is understood here as the synthesis-agenda of the themes given priority by the various actors (and actresses), which have as a focus gender relations, not to be confused with the agenda of any particular group. They thus combine themes and proposals raised by women participants of popular movements and themes and proposals formulated by different lines of feminism. The gender agenda is one of the sets of themes that can compose what John Kingdon calls the systematic agenda or public agenda.

redirected to the local government level. In healthcare - one of the social policies in which decentralization advanced most²⁶ - this reorientation was clear, although the federal sphere was not abandoned as a formulator of guidelines and programs of national scope.²⁷

Concerning the new forms of articulation with civil society and with the private sector, there was, at first, an emphasis on the maintenance of the autonomy of movements in relation to the State. In the 1980's, this was one of the points around which were established important differences within the women's movement and the feminist movement. While some groups understood that it was necessary to occupy government spaces, within a scenario of a redefinition of public policies, other groups understood that the movement's autonomy should be preserved.²⁸ With the movement divided over different issues, the position against participation in the government sphere developed into the formation of non-governmental organizations, which came to realize gender programs in areas such as healthcare, education and the fight against violence, generation of income and organization of women. Progressively, these organizations also began to dialog with the State, proposing guidelines for action for public policies.²⁹

More recently, there has been a strengthening of the trend towards formulation of proposals for public policies, with this space becoming a privileged space in the struggle to overcome the inequality between men and women in Brazilian society. This trend is illustrated by the Encounter on Gender and Public Policies, promoted by the Instituto Polis, in São Paulo, in November 2000; The National Encounter of Women and Local Government, organized by IBAM, April 13-14, 2000, in Rio de Janeiro; and the Encounter on Gender Indicators, promoted by IBAM, in Rio de Janeiro, in February 2001. Another indication of this emphasis is the project "Gender in administration - challenges for municipal and state governments", organized by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation in 1998-99.³⁰ Publications for municipal administrators, prepared by

(KINGDON, 1995).

²⁶ Maria Hermínia ALMEIDA, 1996.

²⁷ Carmem BARROSO, 1991, p. 135.

²⁸ COSTA, 1998.

²⁹ SARTI, 1988.

³⁰ GÊNERO..., 2000.

AGENDE, a feminist entity, were part of this same movement.³¹ The incorporation of this theme by academic production, in turn, is illustrated by the work of Fujiwara.³²

On one hand, this trend stemmed from the democratization process and the opportunities that this process opened for the development of more inclusive processes. On the other, it was influenced by international feminism, which, in recent years, had fought for the incorporation of a gender perspective in public policies at global meetings and conferences such as ECO-92, on the environment; the World Human Rights Conference in 1993; the Conference on Population and Development in 1994; the World Summit on Social Development in 1995; the World Conference on Women in 1995; and the World Social Forum from 2001- 2003.³³

With the initial resistance to collaboration with government overcome, public policy proposals from feminist movements and entities came to integrate, as one of their fundamental components, the idea of articulation of government and non-government actions for the very formulation of the policies. In addition to the emphasis on the inclusion of women as beneficiaries of these policies, they called for their inclusion among the “actors” that participated in the formulation, implementation and control of public policies.

The theme of the focus, in turn, another element present in the reform agenda, was directly related to the issue of gender, given that women, more specifically poor women – in cities and rural regions – were considered one of the most vulnerable sectors in the population, justifying the promotion of “focused” policies. Various recent studies about poverty in Latin America, intensified in the last decade by the adjustment policies, have called attention to the “feminization of poverty” phenomenon.

About Brazil, the Human Development in Brazil Report of 1996, also highlighted the feminization of poverty in the country, calling attention to the salary disparity (women workers earned an average of 63% of male salaries in 1990) and to the particularly vulnerable position of women heads of households. In 1989, families headed by women with children younger than 14 corresponded to 58% of the families with

³¹ Mireya SUÁREZ et al., 2002.

³² FUJIWARA, 2002.

³³ Ana FALÚ and Liliana RAINERO, 1996.

monthly income less than half the minimum wage per capita.³⁴ Data from 1994 indicate that while male unemployment was 6.7%, female unemployment reached 13.9%.³⁵ The Report adds that a significant portion of the women who enter the labor market go to the informal sector, where they do not have access to labor rights and social security benefits.

Based on the notion of the feminization of poverty,³⁶ organizations such as the World Bank recommend developing a focus for policies to fight poverty. A bank report entitled *Toward Gender Equality*, analyzed the role of public policies in the reduction of gender inequalities, explicitly proposing focusing on women in educational and health policies, rural extension services, rural and urban infrastructure and in areas such as public safety and generation of income and employment. The proposal to target women is based on the argument that this would guarantee greater efficiency in the policies to combat poverty: the special attention to women – either because of their role in the family, or because of their decisive presence in issues linked to housing and neighborhoods, or because of the significant presence of women among the poor population – would have an impact in society as a whole.³⁷

Women's movements and entities in Brazil and abroad also have come to defend the proposal that policies for fighting poverty give priority to women. This proposal was present at the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Based on the diagnosis that women from developing countries were those hardest hit by the intensification of poverty in the 1980's, due to the prolonged recession and structural adjustment policies, the creation of programs to support women was recommended (access to credit and generation of employment and income). Also in Brazil, women's movements and groups recommended that programs to fight poverty give priority to women.

Meanwhile, the thesis of the feminization of poverty or of the pauperization of women is questioned by Lavinas,³⁸ for whom the difference in income between men and women of poor layers of the population has progressively decreased in the country, while

³⁴ RELATÓRIO..., 1996.

³⁵ FALÚ and RAINERO, 1996, p. 6.

³⁶ The feminist movement proposes the adoption of the expression "pauperization of women": "because ...it associates 'feminization' a culturally devalued word, to the word 'poverty' also socially denegrating? Why not speak of ...the 'pauperization of women', a concept that we propose in this Index?" (Cristina BRUSCHINI, Danielle ARDAILLON and Sandra UNBEHAUM, 1998).

³⁷ THE WORLD BANK, 1997.

³⁸ Lena LAVINAS, 1996.

the disparity of income among women (rich and poor) has grown significantly. The author criticizes the focus “on women in general” defending the recognition of the differences among women themselves. She thus proposes a type of “focus within the focus”, to complement the maintenance of universal policies to fight poverty.³⁹

More recently, women’s movements and groups in Brazil have come to recommend positive discrimination of some groups of women, who are hardest hit by exclusion, recommending special attention to black women, single women and to those who are heads of families, because of their greater degree of vulnerability.⁴⁰

In reality, by designing programs directed specifically for women or that involve special attention to women, there is a focusing. But unlike the notion of efficient spending, present in proposals such as those from the World Bank, in the proposals prepared by Brazilian women’s movements, what is emphasized is the need for inclusion in the space of citizenship of a previously invisible segment, which requires, at least in a first moment, specific policies or actions that privilege women within broader policies. This is thus a movement to extend citizenship rights that involves “positive discrimination” a process designated by Norberto Bobbio as “multiplication of rights by specification”.⁴¹

In the debate about focusing, there are therefore, significant differences in the approaches to policies that focus on women. On one hand, there is an emphasis on efficiency and a certain “functionalization” of women, who are seen as a “tool” of development and as a “potentializer” of public policies because of the role they perform in the family. On the other, there is an emphasis on rights, in the constitution of women as subject. Thus, as in the case of the distinct vectors present in the government reform agenda – that of efficiency and democratization – in the gender agenda there is a tension between different perspectives.

The gender agenda in the passage to the 21st century

The current agenda related to the issue of gender has been constituted in Brazil

³⁹ LAVINAS, 2000.

⁴⁰ Leila BARSTED, 1994; and SÃO PAULO (Municipal government), 2002.

with a basis on the action platform that was defined at the World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 and on the trajectory of the women's movement in Brazil - which articulated, as has been shown, the broad changes in the relationship between State-Society that took place in the country in recent decades. This agenda includes various orientations in the field of public policies. These orientations are summarized below.⁴²

1. *Violence* – Creation of programs that serve women who are the victims of domestic and sexual violence, including complete attention (legal, psychological and medical) and the creation of shelters. Formulation of policies that articulate measures in the field of assistance and public safety, including the application of more effective sentencing and preventive measures.
2. *Healthcare* – Effective implementation of the Program for Integral Attention to Women's Health (PAISM) with the development of actions to provide healthcare for all phases of a women's life, including care for mental and occupational health, actions to control sexually transmitted diseases, cancer prevention and family planning, in order to overcome the concentration on maternal and infant care programs.
3. *Children and adolescents* – Recognition of the rights of girls and adolescents, by means of integral care programs, with emphasis on girls and adolescents in situations of personal and social risk, girls who are “in the streets” and those who are victims of sexual exploitation, living in prostitution and who are exposed to drugs.
4. *Generation of employment and income (fighting poverty)* Support for productive projects aimed at training and organization of women, for the creation of permanent jobs for the feminine segment of the population and to bolstering family income. Inclusion of activities aimed at the female population in programs to generate employment and income. Guaranteed access to credit for the creation or sustenance of small businesses and associations. Incorporation by these programs of the perspective of overcoming the sexual division of labor.
5. *Education* – Guaranteed access to education. Reformulation of text books and of curricula in order to eliminate discriminatory references to women and offer an increased

⁴¹ BOBBIO, 1992.

⁴² FARAH, 2002; CARRANZA, 1994; Mara PINTO, 1991; Rosiska OLIVEIRA, no date; Marta SUPLYCY, no date; BARSTED, 1994; LAVINAS, 1997; GÊNERO..., 2000; SAFFIOTI, 1994; GIFFIN, 1991; and Sonia CORRÊA, 1991.

awareness of the rights of women. Training for men and women teachers to include a gender perspective in the educational process. Extension of the provision of day-care centers and pre-schools.

6. *Labor*– Guarantee labor rights and combat discrimination at the various levels of public administration and oversight of the private sector. Recognition of the value of non-remunerated work and minimization of its burden on women, by creating social facilities. Creation of professional training programs.
7. *Urban infrastructure and housing* – Construction of urban facilities that focus on women such as day care and other urban facilities and services such as healthcare clinics, housing and basic sanitation. Women continue to perform a central role in relation to the issues that affect the sphere of reproduction, and their “centrality” in the participation in these areas in the implantation of public policies should be recognized. Guarantee access to housing ownership.
8. *Agrarian Question* – Recognition of the relative rights of women in rural areas, in policies for land distribution, agrarian reform and agricultural credit. Access to land ownership, in land distribution programs. Access to credit in programs to support rural production
9. *Incorporation of the perspective of gender in all public policies (transversality)* demanding the incorporation of a gender perspective by all public policies (in a transversal perspective) and that it be a focus of specific policies, guaranteeing that the problematic of women be considered every time that a policy is formulated and implemented.
10. *Empowerment* – Opening of decision-making spaces to women’s participation to guarantee that they actively influence the formulation and implementation of public policies. Creation of conditions of autonomy for women, so that they come to make decisions about their own lives. This involves changes in power relations in the various spaces in which they are inserted: domestic space, at work etc.

4. Recent Initiatives for municipal governments and the gender question

Using as a reference the gender agenda constituted over recent decades, policies

and programs of state and local governments that include the gender question will be analyzed. The study considered 25 government programs aimed at women and 57 programs that incorporate gender, but that do not focus on women. Eighteen programs with a focus on women were identified among the 629 registered in *Public Management and Citizenship* in 1996, representing 2.9% of the initiatives, and seven programs with these characteristics among those registered in 1997, from a total of 297, representing 2.3% of the government initiatives. The analysis of the incorporation of gender by programs that do not have woman as a focus is based on a smaller set of experiences – those selected each year as semifinalists by a prize-awarding program (100 in 1996 and 100 in 1997), because more detailed information was available about these initiatives. In 1996, 23% of the semifinalists in the *Public Management and Citizenship* program incorporated the dimension of gender, and in 1997, 34%. This means that, among the 100 experiences selected as innovative in 1996, 23% incorporated the gender dimension; the same took place in 1997 with 34% of the innovators.⁴³

The article analyzes three areas of government action: healthcare, violence and generation of employment and income. These areas are among those that stand out because of the presence of programs that include a gender dimension among those analyzed.⁴⁴ These areas, as seen before, are included among those given priority by the gender agenda.

Health programs

The health sector is highlighted both by the presence of programs that focus on women and by the existence of modules aimed at women in programs of a more general character.⁴⁵ Since the 1970's, healthcare has been a consistently important issue among those social movements in Brazil in which women have exercised a central role. The

⁴³ To affirm that these programs incorporate a gender dimension means saying that they recognize that the clientele attended is not homogeneous, and is distinguished by gender, with specific actions in relation to women. This does not mean that the programs respond to a gender agenda and that they incorporate a *gender perspective*, which is guided by a quest to reduce inequality between men and women. The analysis presented below will seek to determine if the programs respond to a gender agenda.

⁴⁴ Among the 82 programs analyzed by this study, 41 correspond to the areas selected for analysis in this article.

⁴⁵ Twenty-five of the 82 programs analyzed by the study.

gender agenda reflects this priority, also emphasizing demands specifically related to women's health. In the development of healthcare policy, the risk groups focused include pregnant women and infant children.

A large portion of the initiatives analyzed correspond to the maternal-infant healthcare programs such as the *Projeto Casulo [The Cocoon Project]*, of São José de Campos (São Paulo), and the *Mãe Canguru [Kangaroo Mother]*, of Pernambuco. These programs serve pregnant women and newborns at risk and aim at decreasing infant mortality. Other initiatives analyzed were modules with this focus within broader programs such as the Family Health Programs of Campina Grande, Paraíba and of Joinville, Santa Catarina, which include actions aimed at pregnant women and newborns. These programs and subprograms involve a focusing of social policies by selecting pregnant women (and their children) as a risk group. From the perspective of the gender agenda, this focused action, although it is justified by Brazil's high levels of maternal and infant mortality,⁴⁶ should be linked to a broader policy, that gives complete attention to women's health, in all phases of life and an expansion of the ranges of issues considered, in order to include those such as sexuality and family planning.

This broader perspective, included in the PAISM, is found in many programs, whether by the explicit inclusion of attention to women in different phases of their life, or by the incorporation of themes such as sexuality, violence against women, family planning etc. Examples include the *Community Health Agents Programs*, of Alcantil, Paraíba, which serves not only pregnant women and nursing mothers, but also women in their fertile years and those entering menopause; the *Program to Serve Elderly Women*, of Londrina, Paraná, which by aiming at this age group expands the customary focus of health programs on risk groups; and the *Center for Integral Attention to Women's Health – Espaço Mulher*, in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, a program to train healthcare professionals to provide integral attention to women's health.

The expansion of the themes is illustrated by the program *A Change in Paradigm in Healthcare*, of Vitória, Espírito Santo, which undertakes actions in fields of sexuality, family planning, cancer prevention and orientation related to menopause, and by the *Family Doctor* program of Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, which also incorporates family

⁴⁶ Brazil has the fifth highest rate of maternal mortality in Latin America (BANCADA..., 2000).

planning, reproductive health, and prevention against cancer and sexually transmitted diseases as a part of an integral health care program.

In other Family Health programs, the focus is on pregnant women and mothers, to combat infant malnutrition. The treatment of the woman as a mother not only indicates the focus on a risk group but also signals a treatment based on her “function” in the family. Thus, although the Family Health programs indicate an important inflection in healthcare policies in Brazil, the incorporation of the integral care “philosophy” to woman’s health, as found in PAISM, is still incipient.

The focus on women in healthcare programs, in most cases, does not reflect the influence of local social movements. The inclusion of actions aimed at women on a local sphere appears to be the result, in the first place, of the influence of national health care policy guidelines and of federal healthcare programs, which are influenced by outside agents, characteristic of the recent actions of multilateral agencies and of supranational health organizations. In this agenda, the woman is considered above all for her potential impacts on family health and the development of the family. This perspective clashes with the universalist agenda of the healthcare movement constituted in Brazil since the 1970’s and with the integral-attention perspective proposed by the gender agenda. It also clashes with the perspective of rights, guided by the empowerment of women. But, as seen, even those who defend the universalization of rights wind up proposing “immediate” actions that focus on women “in situations of risk” as a special short-term focus.

In the health field, the incorporation of actions aimed at women on the local level appears to result, secondly, from demands formulated by women’s movements and entities on a national level, as is the case of the inclusion of issues such as contraception and sexuality. These themes are incorporated to the local agenda via the community health professionals or by feminists linked to political parties and local governments. The involvement of local community entities only takes place, in turn, during the process of implementation of some programs, as in the case of the program in Vitória, Espírito Santo, *A Change in Paradigm in Healthcare*, in which various community entities and workers participate, including administrators at the public health clinic.

But even when incorporated in a passive form, as “clientele attended” in the

initiatives that incorporate the perspectives of PAISM, the programs reveal a potential for empowerment of women, because they come to have the ability to take decisions about their own daily life, even if, initially, in the private sphere. The women served not only receive healthcare, but also access to information that prepares them to take decisions concerning their health, sexuality, contraception and family planning.

Combating violence against women

A second line of action that is highlighted in the programs analyzed is combating violence against women.⁴⁷ The programs in this area are structured as programs for integral attention to women who are victims of domestic and sexual violence, including legal, social and psychological assistance. Most include services in the area of healthcare and education, with an emphasis on training of women served, seeking their social reinsertion. An example of an initiative in this area is the program *Casa Rosa Mulher*, in Rio Branco (Acre), which serves women and girls who are victims of sexual and domestic violence, as part of a policy that combats child prostitution and trafficking of women. Other examples are the *Casa Eliane de Grammont*, of São Paulo, São Paulo, the *Casa Bertha Lutz*, of Volta Redonda, Rio de Janeiro, and the *CIAM – Centro Integrado de Atendimento à Mulher*, of Bauru, São Paulo.

The shelters and communal living spaces established by these programs are designed to be places where women can recuperate their capacity for social insertion, and where they will receive support in their effort to give up their condition as victim, overcome the traumatic experiences of sexual or domestic violence and recover their self-esteem.

The initiatives in the field of combating violence against women reflect the current agenda of the women's movements and organizations and of feminist movements, for whom the struggle against sexual violence is a priority and propose an integral approach.⁴⁸ This approach – highlighted by the programs analyzed – includes emergency services and an emancipative perspective, aimed at the recovery of self-esteem and the

⁴⁷ Seven programs.

⁴⁸ SAFFIOTI, 1994.

social reinsertion of women. In the case of the programs to combat violence, it is possible to affirm, therefore, that a gender perspective is being incorporated into government action (in this specific area) which is aimed at transforming the standard of gender relations, marked by subordination of women.

Unlike that found in the field of healthcare, the inclusion of the combat of violence of gender at the local level in general results from initiatives of local social movements.⁴⁹ For example, the *Casa Rosa Mulher* in Rio Branco, Acre, was implanted after a long process of mobilization initiated in the 1980's with the constitution of a local women's movement. In 1992, this movement formulated a proposal to create a Women's Shelter for victims of violence. In the following year, charges in the local national and international media about trafficking and prostitution of young girls led to the establishment of investigative committees in the Rio Branco City Council and the Acre State Assembly. The creation of the *Casa Rosa Mulher* in 1994 was part of this mobilization strategy, which was highlighted by the presence of women's movements and organizations. With the implantation of the program, continuity was given to the participation of civil society which was involved in the implementation of the program. This included resident associations, unions, political parties, professional associations (in various cases, through women representatives in these entities) and NGOs.

The local initiatives to combat violence against women did not result, therefore, only from a "national" agenda linked to the question of gender, but tend to also reflect local conditions, which are expressed in the mobilization of women in each municipality or region. This mobilization tends to persist after the creation of programs and to influence their implementation.

Programs to generate employment and income and to fight poverty

Programs to generate employment and income are another area where a gender perspective is incorporated in local public policies. The initiatives analyzed in this study

⁴⁹ This incorporation concerns that which is the responsibility of the local government sphere, and includes issues raised by the entities that are the responsibility of the federal sphere, as is the case of the proposal to consider rape as a crime against a person and not as a crime against customs, as determined by Brazil's Criminal Code (UNIÃO..., 1997).

include programs aimed specifically at women such as general programs in which the woman is incorporated as a segment of the clientele attended.⁵⁰

Among the programs studied, there is the emergency *All Clean Project* in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul that engages unemployed people in urban cleaning activities, in exchange for a supply of basic foods. This program, because of its “welfare” character, is distanced from the demands of the movements and entities linked to the gender question, because it does not provide orientation for the emancipation of women from the government or male domination, or that is, for their autonomy and empowerment, based on a recognition of gender inequalities.

The other programs⁵¹ consist in credit and training programs that aim at mounting small businesses and small productive units and to the support for autonomous workers, as well as workers cooperatives. Some focus on women; others serve mostly women, who are the majority of those who request assistance in the establishment of small businesses and production cooperatives (more than 60% of demand for support comes from women, and in some programs as much as 80%).

The expressive presence of women among the clients of these programs has changed their design. *The Fund for the Generation of Employment and Income (Funger)* in Teresina, Piauí, for example, was not originally conceived with a focus on women. But given the growing demand from women, the program came to give priority, by legal recommendation, to women (two thirds of the productive units supported must have women as beneficiaries). In Vitória, where 61% of the clients are composed of women, *The Program for Generation of Employment and Income (Proger)* adapted itself to the needs presented by women: two of the training modules are directed specifically to women (who shred crab meat and sells pots).

Such programs, by stimulating the creation of opportunities for employment and income for women, reflect the gender agenda. Training and access to credit are basic conditions for an autonomous insertion in the labor market, a factor given priority by this agenda, whether in the line that gives privilege to women as multiplying agents, because of her role in the family, or in the line that emphasizes rights. By proving to be eing

⁵⁰ Nine programs.

⁵¹ From Quixadá, Ceará, Betim, Minas Gerais, from Ceará State, from Vitória, Espírito Santo, from

sensitive to the needs of women by redefining of their original design, these programs display that they recognize the diversity of the clients at which they are aimed, breaking with the standard of public policies aimed at an abstract and generic (male) citizen. They thus recognize – even if not explicitly – the existence of differences of gender. The government action, in this case, helps to break barriers that impede women’s access to economic opportunities.

Nevertheless, an opening of new opportunities for women is not found in fields that are not traditionally feminine. The agenda formulated by women’s and feminist movements includes the creation of mechanisms to break with the sexual division of labor, which these programs do not appear to consider.

There are also programs that are aimed at the generation of employment and income in rural areas such as *Pró-Ave Caipira [Pro-poultry]*, in Rio Grande do Norte, and the *Program for the Verticalization of Small Rural Production (PROVE)*, in the Federal District.⁵² These initiatives provide credit and technical assistance to small farmers. Concerning the issue of gender, these programs, on one hand, benefit women who correspond to more than 85% of those responsible for production (in *PROVE*, 90% of the agribusinesses established based on the program were directed by women). Nevertheless, in both cases, the credit is conceded above all to men (80% of the financing is provided to men). In these cases, the standard of the “male head of household” prevails: thus, although a front for productive activity by women is opened, an important component of gender inequality in the field of economic activity persists, by not being able to revert a standard of male control of access to credit, which would be essential for the empowerment of women.

The programs for the generation of employment and income analyzed here are examples of focusing of policies to combat poverty. This focusing appears to stem from different factors: first, from the influence of the current agenda for public policy reform and the trend to focus on policies to fight poverty; second, from the influence on the local level of the agenda formulated by women’s movements and entities that recommend that

Teresina, Piauí and Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul.

⁵² *PROVE* in the Federal District was deactivated with the change of government in 1998. The program continues, however, to be developed in other parts of the country, such as Mato Grosso do Sul. The same is true with some programs that, although interrupted in their place of origin, are spread “horizontally” with

priority be given to serving women in this type of program.

The influence of an agenda formulated at a “supra-local” level takes place by means of outside actors, such as multilateral financing agencies and NGO’s from outside the country, as well as political parties, whose agenda comes to include the creation of opportunities for women. But local actors also have impact on these programs, even if this presence does not take the form of organized pressure groups. To the degree that the credit programs are established, it is noticed that the presence of women is so expressive that it winds up influencing the effective design of the program, which comes to give priority to serving women.

5. Conclusion

The broadening of the role of subnational governments in the formulation and implementation of public policies in recent years has been accompanied by the inclusion of new themes in the field of action of state and local governments. These new themes include the issue of gender. Based on the set of programs considered in this study, it was found that this inclusion has taken place less by means of programs aimed at woman than by the incorporation of the dimension of gender in programs that do not have the woman as their specific focus.

This incorporation does not always mean, however, “adherence” to the agenda of gender or the incorporation of the perspective of gender, understood as an action that promotes the reduction of inequalities between men and women. There are programs that, although they focus on women or those that aim specific modules at them, wind up repeating gender inequalities, reaffirming a protected and subordinate position for women in both public and private space.

Most of the initiatives analyzed show, however, convergences with the gender agenda and with the priorities defined by the women’s and feminist movements in recent decades. In the formation of this agenda, a tension is identified between these two lines. The first considers women, above all, from the perspective of their function in the family, and understands that public policies should “invest” in women for the multiplying effect

local adaptations.

they have on their family and on society as a whole. Among the initiatives analyzed, healthcare programs, focusing on the maternal-infant segment, generally are in this line.

A second line – that is hegemonic in the agenda of the women’s movements in Brazil – is based on the perspective of rights. According to this line, the issue is to guarantee an expansion of the space of citizenship, by extending rights to new segments of the population and by including these new segments in government services. In most cases, initiatives in the health field that adopt the perspective of integral attention and the programs to combat violence against women appear to be tributaries of this perspective.

But the “alignment” of the programs to a line of the gender agenda does not always occur. For example, in the case of programs for the generation of employment and income, the priority on women is defended both by those who emphasize the impact of this support on combating poverty and by those who emphasize the quest for the autonomy of women, who are victims of pauperization.

The inclusion of the issue of gender in the agenda of subnational governments – or its incorporation by policies and government programs, even if not made explicit in the government agenda – occurs by influence of different actors, with variations from field to field.

“Supra-local” actors influence the local agenda by means of programs, guidelines and federal norms that induce and limit the action of subnational governments. This appears to be the case of programs in the health field, in which the focusing trend is defined on a federal level. The influence is also exercised by multilateral agencies and NGO’s that condition the concession of resources to the inclusion of gender considerations in the programs supported by them. The influence also takes place via political parties, state or municipal governments and professionals that act in certain public policy fields. There is also influence from entities and movements on the national level on movements and organizations of a state and local scope.

But democratization also means the opening of spaces for the presence of local and regional actors in the establishment of state and local agendas and in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs. This presence is noticed in the programs studied, above all in the field of combating violence against women, in which the mobilization of women was responsible for the constitution of programs and also

influenced their implementation.

But in all the fields there is a “diffuse” presence that does not come from organized movements and that is realized in the form of a “feminine” demand for access to the services offered by the programs. This presence winds up influencing their development, even in cases in which the question of gender was not a dimension present in the original design of the initiatives. The opening of the process of formulation and implementation of public policies, associated to democratization, appears to favor a greater permeability of state agencies to community needs. Thus, although those which arise as a response to local movements are the minority of the experiences analyzed, (of municipal, state or regional scope) there are various initiatives that show that there is a recognition of the diversity of gender. These initiatives are undertaking actions that attend to the specific and distinct needs of women, under the influence of women from the locality where the program is implemented. This suggests that a previous awareness of the importance of the issue of gender is not the only route for this dimension to be integrated to government programs. Equally important appears to be the effective democratization of the program during its implementation, which makes it permeable to the effective needs of the community to which it is destined.

The policies and programs analyzed appear to suggest that, between the invisibility of woman and their needs and demands and government action resulting from an “awareness of gender”- which incorporates the perspective of gender in a systematic and generalized form - there is an intermediary ground, associated to an incremental process of transformation, in which some themes on the gender agenda and some of the approaches proposed by women’s movements and entities are gradually incorporated, perhaps opening the route for deeper transformations.

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[Received March 2003
and accepted for publication September 2003]

Translated by Jeffrey Holff

Translation from Estudos Feministas, vol.12 n.1, Florianópolis, Abr. 2004 p.47-71