

Gender perspective in infrastructure projects

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When we think of infrastructure, we generally think of large-scale projects, like airports, highways, and hydropower, whose users do not have gender, race, sexual orientation, religion or any other distinguishing feature, as if all people benefit equally from every project.

The reality is that although "classic" infrastructure projects can impact the lives of many people, that impact can be heightened if the project model takes into account the needs of certain socially and economically vulnerable groups.

A good example is women and girls who do not have public transportation or basic sanitation close to their homes, which means that they have to travel significant distances, usually on foot, just to obtain access to services such as schools and potable water.

The scarcity of basic infrastructure where these women live reduces the time they have for other activities, such as investing in their own education, working, and seeking financial independence. The phenomenon is known as time poverty.

Adding a gender perspective in the development of infrastructure projects has the potential to alleviate this problem and help women to achieve better social and economic conditions in their lives.

In addition, including gender considerations when developing infrastructure projects gives women the status of active, participating agents in their communities, as entrepreneurs, managers, collaborators, leaders and users of services (World Bank Group, 2019), which generates benefits for society as a whole.

To illustrate some of these far-reaching impacts, a study by the McKinsey consulting group indicates that women holding a greater share of positions of power in the work market could increase the global GDP by 26% by 2025 (McKinsey apud Woetzel *et al.* 2015). Along the same line, studies cited by the World Bank suggest that eliminating the salary difference between men and women could result in a 9% increase Brazil's net GDP.

Although most infrastructure policies are still indifferent or neutral with respect to gender, some countries have projects that take into account the specific needs of girls and women.

In Brazil, the issue has been gaining visibility over the last few years, and on March 8th of this year, the publication of Decree 11.430/2023 marked a significant step forward, by providing for "the requirement, in public contracts, for a minimum percentage of the workforce be composed of women who were victims of domestic violence, and the use, as a criterion in

breaking ties between bidders, of the bidders' development of actions for fair treatment of men and women in the workplace, in contracting by the federal government, federal agencies and federal foundations."^[1]

Although its focus is not infrastructure projects, there is no denying that the Decree represents an advance that has the potential to influence such projects. And as the positive impacts of Brazilian projects that incorporate gender are identified and become known by infrastructure policy-makers, planners and users, the incentive to take women's needs into consideration will grow, bringing Brazil into line with international trends.

>>> *This article belongs to BMA Review 79. [Click here](#) to read more articles.*

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[1] Preamble to Decree 11.430/2023. Our translation.