

BRAZIL

When dismantling democracy becomes a government priority

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Currently, to evaluate Brazil's progress in 2018 is a somber exercise. In a country that strained the Rule of Law in the impeachment of president Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and suffered the impact of neoliberal policies and austerity enforced from 2017, the situation was alarming enough.

One of the contributions to Brazil's Spotlight Report from 2018 - [The Unreality of Promoting the SDGs Without a Sufficient Budget](#) - clearly showed the deterioration for human rights guarantees brought by the lack of proper funding. It pointed out that the meaningful progress Brazil had in tackling poverty from 2000-2013 was being dismantled by *"a series of harmful and severe austerity measures"* that *"While aimed at tackling fiscal deficits, these initiatives are increasing socioeconomic inequalities in Brazilian society, with particularly disproportionate impacts on those already disadvantaged."*

This stark austerity measure called the attention of a group of seven UN Special Rapporteurs and Experts worried that the actions in course would significantly damage the capacity of Brazil to fulfill its duties and commitments, including *"implementing Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 11 (target 11.1)."*¹

INESC, alongside partners Oxfam Brazil and CESR, conducted an [analysis](#) in early 2018 that was showed that the social spending cap, introduced by the Constitutional Amendment No 95 in 2016, was affecting

disproportionally Afro-Brazilian women, youth and those living in poverty. In force since 2017, the measure known as the Expenditure Ceiling, froze real public spending for 20 years, by constitutionalizing austerity; future elected governments will only be able to adjust investments in human rights, beyond inflation rates, with an absolute majority in Congress. Negative impacts of this freeze continue to be recorded and each year that goes by, it compromises even further the realization of public policies needed to comply with the 2030 Agenda commitments.

But nothing prepared civil society for the kind of backlash it is experiencing with the new government that took seat in January 2019. Not only Jair Bolsonaro, his cabinet and allies are investing in the anti-rights undemocratic discourses that got him elected, but they are paving the way for the destruction of human rights protections achieved through mobilization and engagement with the civil society.

Before being elected, the Brazilian president attacked NGOs and social movements when he vowed to extinguish activism in Brazil. His inflammatory discourse prompted a [joint response from over three thousand groups](#) and reaffirmed the concern that civil society would become a target of intense scrutiny, but also unfair criticism and aggressions. As a result, since the electoral period, there have been records of trade union offices being repeatedly invaded in cities around the country and of the increase of human rights

¹ Communication Report to the Brazilian government from UN Special Rapporteurs, May 2018.
<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Development/IEDebt/OL-BRA-4-2018.pdf>

defenders at risk². And a strengthening of the narrative that social organizations and movements are involved in corruption schemes and exist only to profit from the state that fosters distrust of the public opinion in the benefits of having an active and vigilant civil society to democracy. This situation has contributed in the past few years for the lack of public support when civil society is attacked. For example, criminal laws were and continue being used to target activists, such as the [Criminal Organizations Law](#) (2013) and the [Antiterrorism Law](#) (2016)³, with little to no scrutiny. Both have been used in accusations against land rights defenders.

In response to his own discourse, in his first day in office, Bolsonaro authorized, via [provisional measure](#) (MP 870/2019), government oversight of domestic and international NGOs as part of the duties of the General Secretariat of his Cabinet, led by Army General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz. From the ICNL's Brazil analysis for its [Civic Freedom Monitor](#): *“Provisional Measure No. 870 establishes that the Secretariat of Government has the authority to “supervise, coordinate, monitor and accompany the activities and actions of international organizations and non-governmental organizations [NGOs] on national territory.” (Art. 5.II) This single sentence, filled with vague terms, has raised significant concerns within Brazil’s NGO community, particularly given Bolsonaro’s [public record](#) questioning the legitimacy of the NGO sector.”*

Another hindrance for civil society took place as part of the 100 days in office celebration, in March 2019. In it, Bolsonaro revoked several decrees, including one that [created](#) the Brazilian Social Participation Policy in 2014, a civil society claim and victory. With one signature (Decree [9759/2019](#)), the president curtailed [participation in decision-making processes](#) and placed [at risk](#) important

2 Including several high profile academics and activist, such as former Congressman Jean Wyllys who [abandoned his term and the country](#) after having received countless death threats.

3 The Antiterrorism Law was heavily criticized by Brazilian and international civil society, corroborated by the [analysis of UN Special Rapporteurs](#) that point is broad terms as a threat to fundamental freedoms.

policy debates and monitoring spaces such as the Council for Drug Policies, Council on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Council for the Eradication of Forced Labor, Commission for Biodiversity, and many more. Councils established by law are not subject to this measure, but still a dramatic reduction of the number of councils was announced - from around 700 to 50.

As a justification for this authoritarian decision, blaming civil society, it was declared that this was being done to avoid misuse of funds and harm to the state. But this measure's main outcome is the legal confusion and insecurity of what will be lost or not, in practice dismantling several arenas of policy making - in which the councils, with or without civil society participation, are a key element of decision-making. Not to mention that, participation is a constitutional guarantee and cannot be erased.

Civil society has been responding strongly to those measures taken by Bolsonaro. To counter the Decree 9759/2019, the Brazilian Association of NGOs - [Abong is appealing](#) to the Parliamentary Front in Defense of Democracy and Human Rights, established under the request and in alliance with 47 strong organizations and social movements to create a platform of dialogue in defense of democracy within the current legislature. The Congressmen and women will help challenge the constitutional validity of this presidential decree. There are also several ongoing campaigns being sponsored to increase public awareness on the dangers of attacking civil society. [“Free Society”](#) is trying to show that democracy is incomplete when civil society is not free, diverse and active and that one of the first measures of any authoritarian government is to repress and intimidate organized groups. Activists and civil society leaders are creating networks to connect struggles and investing in research and sharing of information, including [op-eds](#), more than ever.

It is known that, on top of all the lasting impacts those governmental actions will have, the current *modus operandi* will heavily impair the fulfillment of commitments taken by Brazil under the 2030 Agenda and other aspects of international human rights guarantees undersigned by the country. A sample of

that was given in the lack of respect shown in face of important international articulations, developed and maintained by Brazil, by [withdrawing from the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#), by [refusing to host the COP-25](#), and declaring that the Bible will guide the country's future UN votes. Combining this government's disregard for civil society and for the international development and human rights agendas, despite the prior [commitment made](#) to present a Voluntary National Report at the upcoming [High Level Political Forum](#), it was announced to civil society leaders with the [Brazilian Civil Society Working Group for the 2030 Agenda](#) that this pledge would not be met.

The country has advanced in creating national mechanisms for monitoring SDGs, with the establishment of an [award](#) in 2018 to collect best practices, an online [platform](#) with available data on the international targets and indicators, and a large effort to [interpret the 2030 Agenda to the national context](#). At the local level, there have been [good experiences](#), [collaborative efforts](#) from different stakeholders, but with initiatives that are being developed independently and not as part of a wider movement. The agenda is seen as an opportunity for public policy planning at the local level, but not everywhere and still relies massively on the federal government. But all information regarding SDG efforts, at the national level under the responsibility of its main motor - the federal government, ends abruptly in December 2018.

It is likely that monitoring data would be available and ready to be presented at the HLPF, and would help to pave important multistakeholder plans to advance the Agenda 2030 in Brazil.

But the current government also recognizes that the reality of a few months ago cannot portray what is being developed in Brazil currently and in store for the coming months and years. The break between December 2018 and January 2019 brought not only a change in the calendar, but also a destruction of policies and structures with very little clues of what would replace it. In a matter of weeks, Brazil has been split into two very different countries that do not dialogue with each other. Any forecast for the future of the country, in the medium

and long term, is difficult to present amid such an effort to foster the chaos and destruction as the main policy direction.

The SDGs situation and upcoming risks

Taking the current situation into account, and the fact that the government, despite its previous commitment, will not present a Voluntary National Report at the [upcoming HLPF](#), this document will comment on the SDGs in focus at the Forum, to contribute to the framework in discussion but also to raise alerts to the risks regarding the progress of the 2030 Agenda and other human rights commitments made by Brazil.

SDG 4 and Brazil - education under attack⁴

Since the 1996 approval of the [Education Guidelines and Framework Law](#), the mandatory stage of basic education in Brazil includes elementary and secondary education. And since then, significant progress has been made in the first stage of education, which almost universalized vacancies, but the country still has a long way to meet targets for secondary education, and achieving the SDG 4 targets. In 2014, one year before the launch of the 2030 Agenda, Brazil approved a 10-year National Education Plan (PNE), up to 2024, with several targets that are more ambitious than the targets agreed in the SDG 4. If compared to Brazilian plans, the 2030 Agenda is a downgrade in terms of human rights demands in education, which can be said of the several of the economical, social and cultural aspects of the overall SDGs.

But the implementation of a plan, national or international always presents its challenges. While universalization of education is important, also is the quality of the learning. Brazil has created mechanisms for improving the investment per student and ensures fair funding on all levels of education, from nursery to high school. But those parameters, considered a good

⁴ A full analysis of Brazil's performance on SDG4 was developed by Education expert and Political advisor at INESC, Dr. Cleo Manhas, PhD. For the full document, visit: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/18E8tCO76pcAjtKXO3b2t4-EF5ojGRD8lzn9kfTdwGdg/edit?usp=sharing>

practice developed with the support from civil society, are at risk. The lack of transparency and the current dismantling of monitoring mechanisms by the government obstruct a proper accompaniment of what is being planned in an area that still requires important contributions to achieve its goals - nationally and internationally.

And if the scenario was already grim from decades and worsened by the austerity measures and increased opacity in decision-making, a recent governmental decision could mask the rate in universalization of children and adolescents enrolled at school, with no control over the quality of education and well-being. Brazil has a terrible record of impunity in the very large number of gender based violence and domestic abuse cases. But in response to the evangelical churches lobby, home schooling is being prepared to be allowed in Brazil. This is another example of what the numbers and statistics can mask - if universalization of education is achieved with this modality of out of school learning, it will certainly not mean an improvement in the protection of the rights of children and adolescents in Brazil.

All targets related to this SDG present challenges, but in the current scenario, target 4.7⁵ is, more than others, [under threat](#) since it clashes with the current official discourse. The recognition of the need for policies to address inequalities and encourage access to schools and universities by the black population, the fight against institutional racism and LGBT phobia are being thrown out the window. Being discussed and implemented are proposals such as: Schools Without Political Parties to supposedly fight in-school communist indoctrination, militarization of public schools⁶, defunding universities

5 Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

6 In the Federal District, 4 schools adopted already and 36 others are preparing to adopt a pedagogical approach based on the enforcement of a rigid discipline code.

that are not censoring its programs to align with the official discourse and abandonment of programs for continuity of education. Not to mention the multiple teachers [being harassed](#) in classrooms for discussing human rights and science.

At risk are not only the national PNE and the targets envisioned for SDG 4 but the gains brought by the educational system rebuilt after the end of the dictatorship.

SDG 8 and Brazil - Labor Reform reduces rights

In 2018, Brazil's GDP kept the growth rate of 2017, increasing 1.1%. IMF's forecast for the country was higher at 1.9%, still not enough to recover the losses from 2015 and 2016, with combined GDP decreases of over 7%⁷. But banking institutions continued to break profit records, as it is becoming a norm in the country. In 2018, profits grew 17% for banks, to BRL 98.5 billion, the highest since 1994; and for 2019, the forecasts are also beneficial to the sector. However, those gains are not translating into sustainable growth and employment for the majority of Brazilians.

The need to focus on the economic recovery was the justification for a labor reform approved in 2017 and that is impacting the country's most poor and vulnerable. The recovery was also the justification for the current government not to raise the minimum wage⁸ over the inflation rate⁹.

Between 2003 and 2014, the minimum wage increased 76% in real terms, being one of the foundations of the social improvement Brazil experienced. Although the country is currently the 8th largest economy in the

https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/cidades/2019/02/12/interna_cidadesdf.736879/projeto-de-militarizacao-de-esc-olas-pode-ser-estendido-a-36-unidades.shtml

7 2015: GDP decreased 3.5% and in 2016, decreased 3.6%, according to IBGE

8 According to DIEESE, an academic research institute linked to trade unions, the appropriate minimum wage in Brazil, to attend to basic needs, should be of BRL 3,928.73, four times higher than the current amount.

9 The current government set the minimum wage at BRL 1,040 for 2020, an increase of mere BRL 42.00 from 2019 (around US\$ 10, in exchange rates of April 2019).

world, around 50% of the population lives with [less than the minimum salary](#). With reduced income, comes reduced consumption, which will impact the country's GDP growth, making clear that the discourse does not match the real interest of this reform: to increase profits for business at the expense of workers.

Besides not valuing a recognized policy for poverty and inequality reduction in salaries, the labor reform brought also the dismantling of the Brazilian labor laws that guaranteed rights for workers with formal contracts. One year after the labor reform approval, the average unemployment rate in 2018 was the highest in seven years for 13 of the 27 State capitals in the country and a national average of 12.3%, according to IBGE data, from 12.7% in 2017. In 2019, the scenario is maintained and in the trimester ending in March, [unemployment increased](#) totaling 12.7% - 13.4 million Brazilians. For young people the scenario is even worse, the unemployment rate tends to be around twice as the national average. Race and gender also impacts employment data. Over 60% of the unemployed are black or mixed race and around 51% are women. And even when employed, women still make [20.5% less than men](#) while having the same role and responsibilities at work.

Prior to the labor reform, the Brazilian legislation would forbid outsourcing tasks that were central to a business. Once this protection was removed, the number of people hired with temporary, outsourcing and intermittent contracts increased and trade unions were weakened, since their revenues - a percentage in each formal contract - fell 86%. As consequence, the number of lawsuits regarding labor malpractice was dramatically reduced, not meaning that businesses were not violating labor rights, but pursuing rights in Court or with the support of a trade union became much harder.

Child labor is still a challenge for Brazil, as in the world, with the trend of growth shown in surveys since 2013. The latest data, from 2016 IBGE's household survey, shows 2.7 million children and young people from 5 to 17 years old working irregularly - 5% of the population in that age group. The same with

contemporary forms of slavery, with 1.700 cases unveiled throughout Brazil in 2018. Since 1995, the country has developed important policies, recognized internationally, to curb the number of workers subject to degrading and forced labor. But in 2017, an [urgent appeal](#) to UN Special Rapporteurs was required to reverse attacks on the Brazilian system to identify and fight this form of undignified labor. UN and civil society successfully pressured the government to maintain the publication of the "Dirty List" of employers, with a Supreme Court decision. This important policy tool will continue to be listed¹⁰ every six months, but with the signature of decree 9759/2019, curtailing participation, this area of policy will also be deeply affected. The Conatrae - National Commission for the Eradication of Slave Labor, responsible for monitoring the government execution of policies to fight contemporary forms of slavery, might be extinct.

The destruction of the participation schemes along with the growing attack on statistics bodies will make it even harder to accompany this vast area of policies that have direct impact on poverty reduction and inequality.

SDG 10 and Brazil - Gains Against Inequality are Lost

In a short period of time, Brazil is witnessing the important inequality reduction, achieved between 2003 and 2015, vanish in the air.

Since December of 2016, a cap on social spending was enforced by the Constitutional Amendment 95, freezing federal expenditures for 20 years, adding only the inflation rate correction. *"Three years on, it is clear that these austerity policies are not succeeding. In 2018, GDP was 5% lower than in 2014, and unemployment has increased from 4.8% in 2014 to 12.3% in 2018. Despite steep budget cuts, the fiscal deficit and the public debt have increased due to the decline of economic activity and tax receipts. As a result, data indicates that the austerity measures introduced by the government have been*

¹⁰ The Slave Labor Dirty List of Employers was [last published](#) in April 2019.

counterproductive.”¹¹ As a result, income inequality reduction was interrupted in 2017, for the first time in 15 years¹².

At the end of 2017, Brazil became the 9th most unequal country in the world - with income of the top 1% of the population being 72 times larger than the 50% poorest. And with 7.2% of the population, 15 million people, living under extreme poverty¹³. It was the third consecutive year of growth in poverty¹⁴ and evidence that the richer are getting richer and the poorest are getting poorer. Not to mention that, for the first time in 23 years, the income of women was reduced, if compared to men, from 72% to 70% and the salary differences between white and Afro-Brazilians increasing, with the later getting an average 53% of the income of whites, against 57% in 2016.

Civil society has been recommending tax reforms¹⁵ as the answer¹⁶ to change the structural inequalities for years, since the Brazilian system is extremely regressive. But instead of reforming the tax structure, a social

11 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/why-brazils-permanent-austerity-policy-harming-its-economic-future/>

12 According to Oxfam Brazil's study - <https://www.oxfam.org.br/pais-estagnado>.

13 Using the World Bank's International Poverty Line of USD 1.90 a day, and reference for extreme poverty. Since 2017, for middle income countries, the poverty line is considered to be USD 5.50 a day.

14 <https://g1.globo.com/natureza/blog/amelia-gonzalez/post/2018/09/03/nos-ultimos-tres-anos-mais-seis-milhoes-na-extrema-pobr-eza-e-mais-desigualdade.ghtml>

15 Read INESC's analysis in <https://www.inesc.org.br/en/as-implicacoes-do-sistema-tributarios-brasileiro-nas-desigualdades-de-renda/>, <https://www.inesc.org.br/en/news/2017/march/7-reasons-why-we-need-taxjustice-for-women2019s-rights> and <https://www.inesc.org.br/en/news/2016/february/taxes-on-trial-how-trade-deals-threaten-tax-justice> and their contributions to the Tax Justice Network <https://www.taxjustice.net>

16 Brazil has a terrible tax scheme in which consumption is taxed and therefore, the rich end up paying much less taxes proportionally. Among the OECD countries, Brazil is the one that taxes its citizens the lowest, in terms of income and property. While each BRL 1.00 collected, BRL 0.22 comes from income and property taxes, in average the other countries in the organization get BRL 0.40, and for comparison, in the US, 59.4% of collection comes from income and property taxation.

security reform is being negotiated in the Parliament. The proposal, prepared by the current ultra-liberal Finance minister, with ample support from the business and financial sector, will substantially reduce the protection for the most poor and vulnerable. In a country with high levels of informality and an aging population, the increased demands for pensions will reduce the number of workers eligible to retire and will impact especially poor women.

Another relevant setback is the increased anti-migrants rhetoric and actions to follow. In 2017, Brazil took an important step forward approving a new migration law ([13.445/2017](#)) that had ample participation of civil society and migrants groups to help shape a regulation build on the protection of human rights. Because of that and its traditional cooperative role at multilateral fora, Brazil was also very active in the construction of the [UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#), process finalized in December of 2018. The agreement contains non-binding commitments to advance humanitarian and human rights agendas, such as providing basic services to migrants, and to address issues of great benefit to Brazilian communities living abroad¹⁷, such as promoting faster, safer and cheaper remittances and generating mechanisms to ensure the portability of social security rights and benefits.

Ignoring the existing legal framework in the country and the benefit to Brazilians living abroad, president Bolsonaro announced in January 2019 that Brazil would withdraw from the UN Pact with false accusations that it would damage the country's sovereignty. If he looked at the data and had read the UN document, he would know that being part of the Pact would not bring risks since there is legislation in place that regulates the entry and establishment of foreigners in the national territory, and the Global Compact never authorizes indiscriminate migration, but coordinates local policies and

17 Currently, there are little over 3 million Brazilians residing abroad, according to estimates by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and about 0.5% of the country's population is made up of immigrants and refugees residing in Brazil (1.2 million foreigners).

international guidelines, which affect migratory flows that go beyond national territories and competences.

SDG 13 and Brazil - Not doing its part in a global crisis

Brazil has come a long way from the country that hosted the [Earth Summit](#) of 1992¹⁸, [Rio+20](#) and planted the seeds for the 2030 Agenda development and commitments. In November 2018, the country announced it [would host](#) the 2019 UN Climate Change Conference - COP 25, only to, mere days later, have then president-elect Jair Bolsonaro cancel the commitment blaming it on budgetary constraints¹⁹. During his campaign, Bolsonaro threatened to withdraw from the Paris Agreement and picked as Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo, who has declared repeatedly that climate change is a left-wing dogma. Not only that, his Environment Minister is not an expert and, during his term at the Environment Office at the Sao Paulo State government, was engulfed in corruption charges for facilitating environmental licenses for businesses. With its cabinet member's selection, threats to the most important international agreement regarding climate change and by giving up on hosting a COP, Brazil retracts from a role it had built for itself in decades, as a leader in discussions regarding sustainable development.

Nevertheless, what seemed indifference is showing to be something else. To respond to the interests of agribusiness, the mining and energy sector, construction sector and loggers, to name a few, is that the environmental protection schemes are being torn apart. Besides neglecting international commitments, Bolsonaro also arranged its Environmental Ministry in coordination with the Agriculture Minister, [transferring](#) the Brazilian Forestry Service to the later, as well as the

18 The [Earth Summit](#) of 1992 generated the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and 20 years later, the UN Conference - United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development - or Rio+20.

19 At the time, there were no apparent budgetary constraints. However, in May 2019, the Environment Minister blocked 95% of the resources that were dedicated to climate issues in the ministry.

<https://oglobo.globo.com/sociedade/ministerio-do-meio-ambiente-bloqueia-95-da-verba-para-clima-23646502>

decisions on indigenous land titling²⁰. In the first few months of government, his Senator son presented a [bill](#) to suppress the need to preserve native vegetation in rural property, essential part of the embattled [Forestry Code](#), and his other allies in Congress have presented 25 bills stripping indigenous peoples of their rights²¹ and have often attacked indigenous rights as privilege and an obstacle for progress and growth. The same claim is made often of environmental groups, critiquing and trying to hold back indiscriminate mining and agriculture.

But [deforestation ended 2018 on the rise](#), on the highest level in 10 years - 7,900 square kilometers for the year ending July 31, 2018, according to the Brazilian Space Research Institute - INPE, an increase of 14% over the same period in 2017, and 41% above the official deforestation target. Given the disrespect for science and favoritism to agriculture and mining lobbies, it is very likely that this number grows even higher in 2019 and following years. A sample is the data regarding conservation areas - part of Brazil's commitment to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), that were stripped from the internet and are not available for public consultation anymore and will affect land zoning and titling.

The problem with this rhetoric and actions regarding the environment is that it justifies the attacks on those who defend land rights. Attacks related to [land conflicts have risen already in 2019](#) and if the numbers for 2018 are an indication of what is to come, the future is discouraging.

According to the Pastoral Land Commission in its [annual report](#), regarding 2018, "960,630 people were involved in conflicts compared to 708,520 people in 2017, a significant increase of 35.6%." and it continues: "2018 had a substantial drop in the number of murders. A decline from 71, in 2017, when there were 5 massacres, to 28 in 2018. The CPT has observed that electoral years

20 The Indigenous Affairs Agency Funai was allocated at the Human Rights Ministry, but with no power.

21 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/24/brazil-indigenous-people-bolsonaro-protest>

tend to have a decrease in this type of violence. However, 2019 already indicates a rise in the number of murders. The total recorded so far already represents 40% of the deaths registered in 2018.”

Brazil possesses the scientific evidence, the legal and political infrastructure, the active civil society and the people-centered proposals to correct mistakes of the past and develop in a sustainable and lasting way. But the current government pretends those resources don't exist and prefers to cling to outdated ideas that will have terrible consequences for the future generations.

SDG 16 and Brazil - Moving away from justice, peace and accountability

During 2018, Brazil ratified the [Arms Trade Treaty](#) and signed the [Escazú Agreement](#) on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, still requiring ratification. In 2017, the country had undergone its 3rd Review at the UN Human Rights Council ([UPR](#)), accepting but 4 of the 246 recommendations, many of them related to security and the full ratification of human rights commitments. In this area of policies, as in all SDGs areas, the budgetary cuts and the [austerity measures](#) have taken its toll.

But to add to the historic challenges Brazil faces in security, new president Jair Bolsonaro [anti-rights rhetoric](#) reinforces threats²² to policies related to the SDG 16. Brazil already has the [homicides world record](#)²³ - a number 30 times larger than Europe, and against experts advice, to fulfill a campaign promise, in January 2019 the president loosened [gun control laws](#), which will likely increase this terrible homicide record. The trend has been captured already in the first few months of 2019 with an increase in [killings](#) and femicides²⁴.

22 <https://www.inesc.org.br/en/direitos-humanos-para-humanos-direitos-a-construcao-de-inimigos-e-a-legitimacao-da-violencia-estatal/>

23 63,880 people murdered in 2017, according to the [Brazilian Forum of Public Security](#)

24 Between January and March this year alone, there were a staggering [435 cases](#), prompting the [Interamerican Human Rights](#) to urge the government

And instead of generating public policies that [curb police brutality](#) and impunity, as suggested by civil society and academics, or that can reduce mass incarceration, since Brazil already has the [3rd largest prison population in the world](#), the government decided to go on the opposite direction. It is investing in an [anticrime package](#) doomed to fail and to increase racial inequality, since those [killed](#) and [incarcerated](#) are in majority black or multiracial.

This anticrime package does very little to curb another area in which Brazil is doing terribly: fight corruption. Currently, the country ranks 105, among 180 countries analyzed by the [Corruption Perceptions Index](#). And not only that, but again, against expert advice, there have been attempts to shut down social control efforts, increasing opacity and secrecy surrounding governmental decision-making processes.

The Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) from 2011 established that only the president, vice-president, state ministers, Armed Forces commanders and heads of permanent diplomatic missions had the power to classify documents for periods of 15 or 25 years. In January 2019, a measure tried to [restrict the law](#) granting over 200 civil servants the opportunity to restrict access to public documents. It was quickly withdrawn after public outcry, but what academics and journalists that have tried to use the FoIA are reporting is that no responses are being given, because - among other things - the government did not update cabinet members information in electronic systems and therefore, transparency in ministers schedules is not being enforced. Many important meetings are being disclosed via media, not information that should have been made available publicly by the government itself.

To make matters even worse for whoever wants to monitor what the government is doing, with a single decree - [9759/2019](#) - the National Participation Policy was extinguished putting at risk participation schemes

to “strengthen prevention and protection mechanisms to eradicate violence and discrimination against women at the national level, in a coordinated manner and with sufficient institutional and financial resources.”

set up since the early 90s. [Those](#) are not only [spaces where civil society](#) can dialogue with the government formally, but many are key aspects of decision-making arrangements, composed or not with civil society representatives. The main outcome of this authoritarian decision²⁵ is a general insecurity on how the constitutional right of participation will be implemented, but also, how will main policy areas be carried out with missing parts of the puzzle left out.

Civil society and civil servants are still trying to understand the full impact of the dismantling of participation schemes²⁶, combined with the constant attacks to the press, public information being removed from the internet and increasing attacks on data generating bodies such as the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, responsible for the Census, Household Surveys and the SDG related data. The undemocratic character of those measures will certainly affect all areas of SDG 16 implementation - in its enabler role - the full 2030 Agenda and beyond.

SDG 17 and Brazil - One step forward, twenty steps back²⁷

In terms of international cooperation, Brazil maintained good relationships with IMF, G-20 and OECD, besides WTO and support to the terms of its Doha Round. As part of the engagement with the other BRICS countries, Brazil signed [an agreement](#) in July 2018 to host a regional office of the New Development Bank (NDB) in São Paulo and helped to drive the push for the UN General Assembly to [grant observer status](#) to NDB. At the end of 2018, [Cobradi](#) - a report on the International Cooperation in Brazil prepared by Ipea, showed Brazil had increased the volume of contributions to cooperation for development. But data refers to the 2014-2016 period and

25 <https://www.inesc.org.br/extincao-de-conselhos-reforca-ideia-de-estado-autoritario-e-nao-publico/>

26 Two opposition political parties (PT and PSOL) have both filled requests to the Judiciary to annul the Decree 9759/2019 and consider this measure illegal (<https://ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/politica/2019-04-15/pt-e-psol-entram-com-acao-contra-decreto-de-bolsonaro-que-extingue-conselhos.html>).

27 With information from the analysis published at the report The Reality of Aid 2018 - <https://bit.ly/2RoUSlo>

it has not been analyzed yet for the period of 2016-2018. Probably no dramatic changes will be shown, despite being a different cabinet under president Michel Temer. The main challenge is that, despite mobilizing over 500 spheres within the Brazilian government and being part of 180 international organizations and commissions, the international cooperation developed by the country has never had its terms defined in law. And once priorities change, the impact can be enormous and unmeasurable, as we are experiencing in 2019.

The improvement of social-economic indexes brought new roles in aid for LAC countries. Countless articles and panels discussed Brazil's adjustment to the role of recipient and donor, including the path to reach this status as a global player alongside its [BRICS](#) peers. Its claim to this space was legitimate with its strong foreign policy based on South-South relations, defense of multilateralism and, domestically, important achievements through social inclusion programs. But this space, one that Brazil craved, was built on an unstable foundation. It depended on economic success based on high commodities prices, with a significant portion of the funds originating in the Brazilian Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES). It was strongly linked to the popular and trusted Brazilian leader, President Lula, and there was no real alternative leadership after his term ended. During this period, Brazilian civil society actively monitored the foreign policy and harshly criticized its lack of transparency in aid practices as well as the many contradictions²⁸ between domestic and international policies.

28 One example of this was seen in the embattled ProSavana project in Mozambique, a triangular initiative with Japan, where the development rhetoric and its practice did not match. The long term program (30 years) was built on the assumption that big agribusiness and family agricultural models could coexist, something that has not been possible in Brazil and has been a historic source of conflicts in rural areas. This unequal and failed model, which causes Brazil to be a leader in the assassination of land rights defenders and use of pesticides, was exported to Mozambique, with consequences as bad as foreseen by the Brazilian and Mozambican civil societies, such as [farmer's struggle to keep their land](#).

While the government tested its new roles in foreign assistance, as a result of entering the growth cycle²⁹ of the 2000s, Brazilian civil society suffered from funding cuts from the international cooperation. While the dependency in foreign funding has been enormously reduced, the relationship of social movements and organizations with international cooperation still plays an important multifaceted support role that is beyond financial, it is also technical and political. The reduction or departure of those strategic partners from Brazil weakened the organized civil society - who had been responsible for the majority of the cultural and political capacity building and actions that provoked the return to democracy after the dictatorship period.

What the Brazilian example shows is that social inclusion achievements are fragile. They require substantial, vigilant protection by governments and civil society. In 2012, Brazil was being celebrated for having the sixth largest economy in the world. In 2014, its name was removed from the UN Hunger Map for the first time. And since 2016, it is battling not to be inserted back at the Hunger Map and is dealing with a sharp decline in all its social indicators, once celebrated worldwide. Sadly, this trend is evident throughout Latin America³⁰. Over 2.7 million people returned to poverty during the period of 2014-16. A decade ago, foreign aid declared most of the region wealthy enough to see a reduction in partnerships. But without the pressure provided through those partnerships, human rights have been compromised by governments and parliaments, especially for the most vulnerable groups: women, youth, LGBTI, Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples, and conversely, fundamentalisms have been strengthened. That trend contributed, alongside other factors, to the election of Bolsonaro as president in 2018.

While his hateful discourse attacks activists and attempts to dismantle participation schemes, any debate on lasting

29 Brazil surpassed the UK as the 6th largest economy in the world in 2012, which made it harder to justify European cooperation to the country, both with the government but also with civil society actors.

30 <https://www.elespectador.com/economia/cepal-advierde-que-america-latina-incumplira-agenda-de-desarrollo-de-la-onu-articulo-852076>

development and a sustainable future, requires civil society involvement. Especially because, with the new government, new priorities will come and at this time, more than ever, a watchdog will be needed.

Before even taking seat, Bolsonaro declared the desire for Brazil to cut off its tie with the UN, considered by him to be useless. But except for contempt for globalism and the UN and for civil society, not much is known for the future of international cooperation for Brazil, other than its declared automatic alignment with the US. And that position has already shown a price; to pay for the US support to Brazil's ambition to become a member of the OECD, a long time claim of Brazilian diplomacy, the government will give up its [special treatment status at the WTO](#) granted to developing countries. Details of those changes are still undefined and to be observed. And the same will probably happen with Brazil's special status with the European Union.

In April 2019, the country also announced to be [leaving the treaty](#) that created [Unasur](#) - The Union of South American nations, formalized in 2008.

Aside from the neglect to cooperation and commitments previously arranged, another policy area will heavily impact Brazil's aptitude to fulfill commitments regarding this SDG 17 and the overall 2030 Agenda: the attack on data production. The Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in particular has been loudly criticized by the president and his cabinet since taking office in January 2019. Claims are being made that the body's work is ideological and made to damage the government. A dangerous precedent is being set in Brazil. *"The production of data and information about a country is one of the primary targets of authoritarian, extremist or generally undemocratic governments; governments that do not coexist with the contradictory."*³¹ Data produced by Brazilian institutions is recognized for its quality and consistency in historical series, and help to monitor public policies and international commitments. Instead of improving the measurement

31 <https://www.cartamaior.com.br/?/Editoria/Politica/Erasing-a-country/4/43480>

of progress made, this government will discredit and probably hide data that would show its rhetoric and accompanying actions are not helping, but worsening the lives of Brazilians.

Final Remarks

Never has civil society mobilization proved to be so crucial. Several of the recent setbacks were blocked due to intense protests from organizations and social movements, and it has been historically. The reconstruction process after the dictatorship period (1964-1985) was led by the Brazilian vibrant and diverse civil society, provenance of most of the good practices and policies that ended up protecting human rights in the last thirty years.

Not surprisingly, the former Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were considered a regression at its time, with the contraction of development in just eight goals, if compared to the wealth of rights being discussed and policies being proposed by social movements and organizations in Brazil. The 2030 Agenda was considered a step up for its much wider scope and the fact that it increased the level of commitment from UN Member States, leading to the *“construction of consensus by Nation States around some civilizational values and the protection of rights, which cannot be disregarded.”*³² But already at the outset of SDGs implementation, it was identified that Brazil was likely not going to be able to fulfill the agreed commitments. The difference is that, two or three years ago, it was simply a matter of lack of adequate funding and political will to change the fiscal and economic policies not prioritizing the guarantee of rights. Today, we continue to affirm that Brazil will likely not be able to deliver the commitments regarding the SDGs, but added to the lack of proper funding, it is a much larger issue: the destruction of its institutions.

In a short period of time, the government that is currently seated since January 1st, 2019, has not measured any effort to dismantle democratic arrangements. Even in discourses, by option or a Freudian slip, the president

has affirmed that his government has to *“deconstruct, undo many things before we can even start”* and proudly, completed: *“I’m happy to be the turning point.”*³³

By taking on the role of the deconstructor and encouraging his cabinet to destroy what was in place before, this government is throwing away important gains and rights achieved with civil society mobilization. Acting as if those rights were linked to party politics or to a certain ideology, Bolsonaro strips the society of the opportunity to offer a life with dignity for more Brazilians. By investing in hate speech, he is also deepening the divide in our society, something similar to what was present when the military dictatorship started in the country.

Brazil is at a terrible intersection and apparently, Bolsonaro and his supporters are getting the road back to the past, instead of taking the steps to move forward to a sustainable future. Therefore, there is no path to the 2030 Agenda fulfillment, but to go back to fighting for very simple assumptions that civil society thought were guaranteed: that human rights are inherent to all human beings - regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status, and that we are all seen as humans and not only as enemies. And since this is the government of the deconstruction, and participation and transparency procedures are being taken away, there is a lot of uncertainty on what the future holds for Brazilians in the next few months and years. One aspect of it is certain: ample international solidarity will be needed, maybe more than ever.

³² <http://www.socialwatch.org/sites/default/files/2017-SR-BRAZIL-eng.pdf>

³³ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-18/bolsonaro-calls-for-an-end-to-communism-on-visit-to-washington>