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Women's participation in water policies, Ouro Preto, MG, Brazil

Abstract

Although there is an expressive number of legal norms in order to combat gender inequality in all sectors, inequalities persist, which also occurs in water management. In order to fill this gap, the participation of women in councils and decision-making in relation to water resources is one of the main ways of guaranteeing access to water in a more equal way. Their participation also enables empowerment, providing them with greater possibility of exercising power and citizenship in the public space, as well as greater legitimacy of legal rules and greater effectiveness of public policies. In this work, the case study was carried out with counselors and workers working in water management in Ouro Preto/MG. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed. Data analysis pointed to the need to increase the participation of women in organizations and councils, both in number and in the occupation of positions responsible by decision-making. The struggle to overcome differences is not an exclusive struggle from women, but also from men, co-authors and builders of social transformations.

Keywords: gender, equality, water management, policies, counselors, workers, Ouro Preto / MG

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Introduction

The representations of the roles of men and women have been related to the models of practices, ideals, and cultures that the person has access to. These models have formed the gender ideology that is internalized by each individual and corresponds to its expectations to each sex. This ideology has traditionally referred the role of men to activities related to public life meanwhile the women are relationed to activities related to private life.

The local scale facilitates changes in the construction of gender identity. Public decisions must consider the priorities of both sexes, encompassing social debates and allowing the participation of women on all the themes. The division of roles must be questioned, and experiences and knowledge of both sexes must be valued in decision-making.

When it is observed that organizations have been perspective a differentiated profile, over time, it was noticed that a large part of this transformation could be analyzed from a gender acquiring from the moment that there was a greater female participation in different spaces of the competitive market, which before were essentially strongholds reserved to men.[1] Added to globalization and gender issues, competition has become fiercer and discrimination against women has become more evident.

Since 1977, it´s already commented on the difficulty of women in assuming higher positions in organizations.[2] In the late 1980s, the expression "glass ceiling" emerged, which is defined as a "subtle barrier" that prevents women from reaching positions of power. And[1] considers it as a model of discrimination against women:

The glass ceiling phenomenon proposes a model of discrimination, which assumes that female productivity is lesser than the capacity of men, since they are in full and ready capacity to create and innovate the tasks required by the market. In this way, women are underestimated in the organizational scenario, and they start to fight a battle for their inclusion and permanence in the job market ([1], p.1).[3]

Over the years, the literature shows this presented analysis from a gender perspective: the divisions between the sexes are reproduced, and are increasingly accentuated, in the world of work, both at the level of cultural symbols and at the level of personal identities. Thus, through the process of social construction, the roles of each sex are defined, generating normative concepts, institutional structures that articulate them in a web of power relations.[4]

Women who manage to stand out and reach high positions in organizations, in general, sacrifice the personal side to the detriment of the professional, not getting married or not having children.[5] The influence of social relations produced by interactions between the sexes might favor some domination and submission. The vision of women as emotional beings and men as rational ones might generate alliances or exclusions that give some legitimacy to hierarchy in organizations.[6]

The higher the sphere of power, prestige, and remuneration understand, the lower the female presence and the seeking to the reason to this fact is due to the greater female responsibility by caring the family and the children, and, to male models that underlie the highest positions, which are incompatible with more flexible working hours, for example.[7,8]

Gender relations have symbols and representations that explain gender divisions in organizations.[9] Several classes of approaches are relationed to inequalities: those centered on individual reasons, those centered on situations, and those centered on "sexualization". The first assumes that men and women are different, given that they go through a different socialization process. In this way, women would have been socialized towards femininity, thus having personality traits and behaviors that prevent them from progressing in their careers. The second approach highlights the characteristics of the situations, these relate to women's difficulties in having access to informal networks that allow progression. Thus, the author states that differences in positions of power are not related to the sex/gender variable, but rather the lack of access to these networks. The last questions,

neutrality in organizational structures approach and gender, emphasize the importance of diagnostic studies to the factors that prevent women from reaching managerial or decision-making positions.[10]

Regional sociocultural contexts, as well as their gender relationships and roles, must be considered in policy implementation and local decisions so that gender issues are considered in water resources management.[11] In this sense, the objective of this study is to analyze the perception of water managers in the municipality of Ouro Preto/MG regarding the participation of women in management, also observing the level of representation that they have assumed in the studied bodies and councils. In the municipal bodies are the salaried workers and, in the councils, of the appointed representatives.

Literature review

The conquest of rights by women

Human rights, enshrined in international treaties, must be considered to all people, as they are based on the principle of human dignity and are indivisible, universal and interdependent. During a long time, the laws themselves reinforced inequalities between the sexes, given that they gave to men a higher legal status than to women. The hierarchy in social relations stemmed from the law, as it established unequal rights and duties to both sexes. The norms justified legal discrimination against women, causing people to see certain discriminations as 'natural' and therefore not susceptible to change.[12]

Feminism originated with the Enlightenment thought of the 18th and 19th centuries and emerged with the formulation of the notions of Universal Rights, through precepts arising within the French Revolution and the American Revolution.[13] During a long time, the ideals of "liberty, equality, fraternity" did not extend to all citizens, as they excluded women. Only men were considered equal and could exercise citizenship, women were considered as inferior being by their nature. The theories that emerged in the 19th century, such as Darwin's evolutionary theories and Comte's positivism, did not contribute to an improvement in the female situation, considering that, based on the naturalistic context, arguments were developed regarding sexual differences, which emphasized inferiority.to the women, an argument that even at the present time justifies inequalities.[14] Feminism was originated when women started fighting for equality. In the 1960s, there were radical struggles, with Friedman, in the United States, carrying out the burning of bras in the public square. These struggles paved the way to other movements in the 1980s. In the 20th century, it was created the existentialist feminism which claims that "patriarchy is the universal constant in all political and economic systems", in the page 123 of the study.[15] The author also challenged naturalist arguments by claiming that "No one is born a woman: becomes a woman" ([16], p. 9). Thus, she sought to explain that female behavior was socially constructed and reinforced by culture.

The first struggles of women, occurred between the 19th and 20th centuries were by the right to vote, encouraged by democratic liberalism that preached the right to freedom and equality. In the 1980s and 1990s, the rejection of biological justifications and the naturalization of inequalities was advocated, and there was an emphasis on the cultural causes of female subordination. There was a struggle to recognition of the process of oppression and discrimination suffered by women, both in public and private spaces.

The concept of gender started to be differentiated from the concept of sex, based on the understanding that behaviors, gestures, and attitudes are socially learned, and that female and male actions are not determined by anatomical characteristics. According ([17], p. 1):

Therefore, the concept of gender confirms that biology is not destiny, no one is naturally male or female, male or female, as these meanings are socially constructed through the educational process that shapes sex and gender identities. Consequently, the construction and expressions of masculinity and femininity are variable and plural in space (according to social class, religion, ethnicity, region) and in time (according to the historical period and phase of individual life) ([17], p. 01).

Modernity requires women have participated in social life, but, at the same time, rejects and excludes them.[18] With the help of the feminism, women are increasingly present in the public space, and have been achieving the important achievements in terms of civil, political, and social rights. Currently, they are present in various sectors of society, including those that require deliberative decisions, such as water resources policy management. Several social practices have changed, and it is no longer seen as 'natural' to women to live in function of the family and, consequently, of the men. However, despite the progress, our indicators and our daily lives still demonstrate the existence of social roles and expectations based on the sexual division. In this sense, much has also remained unchanged. Women increasingly participate in the labor market and share the economic burden of the family with men; however, they continue to assume most of the responsibility by household chores and childcare.[19]

Gender, culture, and organizational relations

Based on the assumption that culture is learned, it is possible to say that the subordination of women has been reproduced by the educational process:[20] Gender relations are the product of a pedagogical process that begins at birth and continues throughout life, reinforcing the existing inequality between men and women, especially around four axes: sexuality, reproduction, the sexual division of work, and the public sphere/citizenship ([21], p. 142).

Human identity is not born with the individual, it is built and rebuilt during its life. Due to its mutable character, identity is reconfigured through socialization processes.[22] This concept of identity is reinforced, it's a metamorphosis, which encompasses an articulation of several characters, constituting and constituting by a personal history.[23] The construction of identity has been influenced by the socialization process, as it is a process of transmitting values and beliefs. They explain that, in organizations, individuals reproduce what has been internalized in the spheres of their private life. Thus, the identity of the organization influences the identity of the individual, and vice versa.[24]

The construction of identities has been still influenced by different contexts and spaces, in which individuals interact and that involves social structures, culture, and the history of individuals' relationships. The relations of domination among social classes are governed by the dominant ideology and are reproduced via institutions and organizations.[25] In 1982,[26] already argued that ideology, regarding the issue of gender, has transformed, for example, the sexual division of labor into a natural division, related to the biology of each sex, and contributions to justifying the fact of a woman is paid less than a man, even when performing similar tasks.

The changes in demographic variables (such as higher life expectancy, drop-in fertility rates, reduction in family size), combined with changes in cultural patterns and values regarding the social role of women, have altered the feminine identity that is increasingly focused on productive work. However, the dominant ideology still reinforces and reproduces female inferiority and relies on it in order to justify hierical, patriarchal conservative structures. In the discourse

produced, the relations of power and domination existing between men and women are veiled. This idea kept during generations had created a situation of inferiority to women.[27]

In laboral organizations, the culture created, maintained, and practiced by its members is called organizational culture, which is defined as a set of values, present in symbolic elements and in organizational practices, which can assign meanings and build organizational identity. These values serve bothto communication and consensus, as they express and instrumentalize relations of domination.[28] The individualization of each one must be considered, and what people understand about the "appropriate" behavior of a man or woman in an organization has led to the choice of work, clothing, language, according to the sexual category the person identifies itself with. Thus, it might prevail in the cognition of some people that the woman has a greater capacity to do conflict resolution while the man would do better in giving instructions. In this way, the representations of gender in the conception of workers can be determined by stereotyped socialization processes that establish different roles and functions to men and women.[29]

In water management bodies there are unequal positions and roles between women and men, which preserve the hierarchical position by valueing differently the work of men and women.[30] The importance of women's participation has been expressed on the third principle of the Dublin Declaration on Water and Sustainable Development, which took place in Dublin in 1992:

Principle #3 — Women play a leading role in the provision, management and protection of water. This pivotal role, which women play as providers and users of water and guardians of the daily environment, has not been reflected in the institutional framework to the development and management of water resources. Acceptance and implementation of this principle requires positive policies to address the specific needs of women by equipping and enabling them to participate at all levels of water resources programs, including decision-making and implementation in the way they define. Many authors defend the need of expanding women's participation beyond the domestic sphere in water management.[3,31,32] Women are considered key actors in the identification of water and sanitation needs, therefore, they should be central elements in the planning of sanitation programs,[31,32] and their importance of including in the design of sanitation programs have been noted.[33]

Methodology

In order to describe the perception of the gender relationship based on the discourse of men and women who work in sectors of environmental services or public bodies, so-called workers and the so-called counselors too, who are representative in water management councils in the municipality of Ouro Preto/MG, an analysis of the ideological constructions was made and power relations established. In order to achieve the objective, a questionnaire was applied to 118 people, between November 2018 and August 2019. The study universe was composed of workers and counselors who work in management. The sample was randomical, and everyone volunteered to answer it. Aiming at a better understanding of gender relations, it was decided to work with people of both sexes. Employees from SEMMA – PMMOP (Municipal Environment Department of Ouro Preto/MG from Ouro Preto/MG City Hall), SEMAE (Municipal Water and Sewage Service), and the advisers of COMUSA (Municipal Sanitation Council), CODEMA (Municipal Environmental Development Council), and the River Basin Committee - Nascentes, were questioned, with the following representation: 72 men and 46 women. Data confidentiality and anonymity were protected. All these data were tabulated and analyzed. In this research, respondents are represented by the letter E, and coded by a superscript numeral.

Results and discussions

Regarding the results obtained and during data analysis, it was found that the surveyed bodies and councils are composed of a bigger number of men: 183 men and 64 women. Power relations are asymmetrical, given that managerial positions are also held mostly by men.

Regarding to participation in decision-making processes, the counselors pointed out that the main difficulties to their participation are related to information restrictions as well as to hierarchy, due to the priority of participation to those who assume managerial positions. In the bodies, most women cite some political interference and argue that meetings are usually only among managers.

The male counselors, in turn, mention that the difficulties are more related to personal issues such as lack of engagement, commitment, interest, and information; few of them commented on the existence of little space to women`s participation. In the bodies, men reported that the meetings are more focused on solving the demands of individual processes than on the institution's strategic planning, but they recognize the existence of hierarchy, and the priority of participation by those who assume managerial positions. They also argue that the limit on the number of representatives is a factor that creates difficulties to this participation. Thus, men, especially among counselors, mostly project the responsibility by any differences in work onto the person himself. This might be a practice that seeks to camouflage gender differences.

In committees and councils, members represent entities/organizations, and are also appointed. Thus, this member is empowered to make decisions on behalf of a segment or organization. Its function is to represent the interests of a group and,, at the same time, to think about the collective interest that, in the case under study, is the sustainable use of water. In this sense, the active participation of representatives can enhance the integrated, sustainable, and egalitarian management. However, there must be space to the participation of both sexes so that participation is more representative one.

In the studie institutions, persons who assume managerial positions have had some priority of participation in decision-making processes. Thus, in the present case, it appears that the management of water in the city is commanded by the male figure, since men occupy the largest number of leadership positions and they are also appointed as counselors, mainly incumbent counselor. Women report some difficulty in participating, because they aren`t on managerial positions.

Women, when asked about the main difficulties they face in order to take on managerial positions in the workplace; like counselors,they had reported the existence of internal disputes, some difficulty in achieving metrics to reach new hierarchical positions, some lack of time as well as of ambition, existence of indications, mainly politics (to management positions). In the organs, they answered: the qualification, that the positions are occupied by political appointment that comes from the hierarchy, limited number of women; macho culture in the public service; and gender discrimination.

Among the counselors, were evidenced the lack of clear criteria on competence; the responsibility that the position needs, and the people do not have, and the need of political appointment. In the organs, the men reported some lack of opportunity, lean team, internal dispute, and reported the need of political appointment. One worker quoted: "Like any place, the positions that are by appointment depend on approaching the top manager of the institution verry strongly".

There is some difference in the career development of men and women to the process of co-option.[34] According to the author, male ascension tends to be more linear, because the process of co-option is recurrent. Women already evolve in a non-linear way and the invitation to act as a specialist or running companies by acquaintances is rarer. In this sense, they also argued that male professional ascension occurs through the invitation of peers, something common in the managerial universe. However, in the female career, the practice of co-optation seems to be a unique event, understood as a kindness.[8] Thus, the most of them cited that the need of political indication or of people who occupy a higher hierarchical level is the factor that prevents people from taking on managerial positions among the interviewees, what might justify the observed gender inequalities, in view of the predominance of men in the highest positions . They registered that the appointment of peers is more common among them.

Only women mentioned time-related difficulties, which can be related to the double shift they take on. Senior positions require bigger availability of time to both sexes; however, in their case, domestic activities and caring for the family and children continue being an obstacle to advancement. It is assumed that in order to women dedicate more to work and participation in public spaces, it often means that they must give up their personal fulfillment, with marriage and children.

The inclusion of women in the employment system takes place under conditions of inequality. There is some discrimination, in the sense that the job market is still governed by a male pattern, which presupposes full availability to professional life, which competes with the availability to tasks inherent to the care of the family and domestic space, carried out still in mostly by them.

The fact is that at present time, the man naturally no longer has that role as the sole provider, but continues to performing work activities and still does not share household and childcare tasks significantly. The assumption of professional work by women is considered "natural", but it translates into an imbalance in the sharing of tasks and responsibilities.

The need of qualification was also mentioned only by women; this fact might be seen as a gender differential, since constant proof of ability is not required of men. In addition, difficulties related to career plans were cited, when promotions must occur by criteria considered to be the same. In the case under study, the interviewees' reports indicate that there is some lack of clear criteria regarding the requirements to promotions and that there is a lot of internal disputes.

It was also assumed that, in the studied bodies and councils, schooling or level of education isn't a differential that represents better opportunities. These results reinforce two studies,[35,36] developed among others, which claim that, despite the various achievements, such as entry into the job market, high level of education, factors excluding women in the market work, have persisted, when compared to men.

Another difficulty often cited among respondents was the existence of moral harassment in the workplace, given that 42.7% of respondents reported that they have/had suffered from this type of harassment. When they were asked about what kind of moral harassment is, the most used words by women were: prolonged, persecution, retaliation, humiliation, embarrassment, superior, lack of ethics. Among men they were authority, exposure, abuse, intimidation, situations, humiliating, embarrassing, expose, superior.

Bullying is a frequently repeated attitude that makes the person's permanence in the job unsustainable. In one of the studied bodies,

the report of a woman who occupies a managerial position was very expressive; she said that she constantly suffered from jokes that she considered dull, which were carried out precisely because of the position she assumed. Other women reported the existence of a sexist culture and gender discrimination. These interconnected facts can also justify the difficulty in accessing women to managerial positions.

Thus, despite the existence of legislation that guarantees equal treatment to both sexes, inequality is observed and, in relation to the discourse of men and women regarding their perceptions regarding women's participation in water decisions, this is permeated with contradictions and divergences:

Among women, the perception was unanimous that men and women do not participate in water decisions in the same way. They believe that men participate more:

"Unfortunately, I believe that when it comes to water decisions, it is man who reigns. This is because most decisions are made in political spheres, they are public entities and people, and the vast majority in this environment are still composed by men. An issue that can be changed through a lot of struggles, so that we women can conquer our space in politics". (E², Counselor). In the female discourse, it is also clear that in the view of the councilors and workers of municipal bodies, that decision-making is commanded by the male figure, due to be in bigger numbers in leadership positions and in politics, which ends up giving them power and autonomy to dictate the norms and rules:

"As most decision-making positions are taken by men, most do not take women's opinion into account" (E⁶⁷, Worker).

"The bodies that control water decisions have many more men than women. And the leadership, in general, is also male" (E³⁴, Worker).

Historical, cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors also influence this underrepresentation. The time invested in family life is very asymmetrical and penalizes the participation of women in the public sphere. This traditional division of roles is one of the main obstacles: "The sexual division of labor adopted in the water decision-making process has valued men, as the roles they assume place them in positions of authority to the detriment of the roles assigned to women"[37] (sp).

In the present study, women also report gender-related prejudices:

"There is a structural prejudice in public spaces with the historical domination of men" (E ¹¹¹, Worker).

Discrimination hasn´t been seen like always clear or direct. It is often indirect, that is, "generated by norms or practices that, under the guise of formal neutrality, cause much more serious results in a group of women than men" (¹², p. 104). This perception is confirmed by studies reporting that there is an unequal "status" in society, with differences in rights and opportunities, lack of access to services, and the exclusion of women from the decision-making process that affects their lives and development.[38] Still, it appears that the woman, when occupying a management position, sometimes needs to assume a masculine posture, to be heard and respected:

"Men occupy public spaces much more "naturally", since women are responsible by the private space of households. It is common to see women in decision-making who need, in order to be respected, to assume masculine postures" (E ⁸⁷, Counselor).

This report extracts the conception that the public space is masculine, as opposed to the private and feminine space. There are also reports in the literature of the need of women to adopt masculine

characteristics when exercising managerial positions: it's observed companies that emphasize the need of women to internalize masculine aspects in order to obtain professional advancement,[39] and many women who assume management positions are faced with the need of incorporating managerial identity traits, which are influenced by masculine values, since, traditionally, the managerial function was performed by men.[40] It's mentioned that in regions with a humbler population, especially in rural areas, many women fail to participate in public meetings because they do not consider it appropriate to speak in front of male elders.[41,50]

Women's access to higher positions leads to the construction of a new identity. The author cites that the confrontation between feminine traits and patterns of masculine behavior, required by organizations, is common. From these analyzes it can be inferred that taking on a managerial position can lead to positive changes in women's identity:[40] "Even in the minority on the committee, during the interviews, many representatives present a strong position, a propositional posture and a challenging speech. Political experience and technical knowledge on the water theme reinforce their abilities to negotiate agreements between their peers in the committees" ([19], p. 04).

The fact that women must assume masculine traits in managerial positions demonstrates gender inequality, as they are devaluing themselves by assuming that characteristics considered more masculine would be more suitable to people who assume managerial positions. It is noticed that it is currently widespread that women are experiencing conditions of equality. However, statements like these lead to the assumption that women who wish to occupy a higher hierarchical position must give up their identity and even assume masculine characteristics.

In this sense, assuming the managerial identity can represent the denial of personal and professional identity traits, in order to favor the managerial identity construction. However, it is also important that the understanding of participatory public spaces and the work environment considers that men and women are different, and these differences need to be respected so that the plurality of each one can be enhanced, without neglecting their uniqueness.

The men's responses were more divergent regarding the role of women in decisions about water. Some believe that men participate more in decisions:

"In decision-making environments, both public and private, spaces, in general, are controlled by men. Thus, participation ends up reflecting the position of men" (E[32], Counselor).

"Unfortunately, we have that a good part of the positions and decisions are still with men, and there is no fair proportionality" (E[21], Worker)"

Some claim that women participate more in the private space of decisions about water and men participate more in the public space:

"In the domestic sphere, it is the woman, at the level of hydrographic basins, it is the man who participates in the moments of location and decision-making" (E[2], Counselor).

"Generally, men take decisions related to the implementation of services and women only make decisions about their use at home (E[92], Worker)"

These reports were also identified in the literature, as scholars have already pointed out the problems of men participating more in the development of programs and policies to the implementation of services. Many projects that address water-related problems have

a technical vision, aiming to increase their coverage, but which disregard other specific needs of women.[42]

Some male respondents argued that women are a minority, but have an effective participation:

"Women are not a minority in councils and politics, but even so, they tend to have very active representatives" (E[10], Counselor).

"Women nowadays have weight in their decisions" (E[56], Worker).

"Perhaps there is a slight predominance in the number of men in secretariats and committees. But, in the committee that I participate, women are very active and decisive in decisions" (E[9], Worker).

Such reports agree with the comment despite the numerical disadvantage, women take a stand on the sustainable management of water resources.[37] The existence of female leaders in the basin committee is an achievement by women in terms of their participation in the public space of male power. Such inclusion is an opportunity to women to move in this sphere, and which enables learning to both parties.[19]

Some men also stated that they believe that participation in decisions does not depend on gender, but on other factors:

"Gender does not interfere, competence does" (E[32], Counselor).

"There is no way to separate by gender, today's society seeks sustainability" (E[66], Counselor).

"If the decisions are related to the public power, I consider that they are independent of the gender" (E[19], Worker).

"It's not related to gender. Evidently the sectors that consume the most water are politically stronger, they decide more" (E[118], Worker).

"If it is mostly economic, it is the man, perhaps quality and availability is the woman" (E[74], Worker).

These reports may again represent a practice that seeks to camouflage gender differences. According to the literature, the asymmetrical participation between the sexes in the management and decision-making regarding water resources is a socioeconomic problem, considering that this asymmetry does not result from the absence of necessary competence criteria, but due to the social construction of relationships between the sexes.[43]

Access to water is determined by economic, political, and social factors, including gender differences.[44] When analyzing the female problem, one must consider not only gender, but issues of class, ethnicity, religion, and other aspects that require consideration of their specificity.[45]

Women, due to their situation of greater vulnerability, end up being less qualified from an economic and educational point of view.[46] In this context, two authors cite the importance of empowerment to greater involvement of women in organizations and institutions responsible by creating projects related to water resources.[47,48]

There are also those who recognize the role of man in changing social representations to reduce inequalities:

"More and more women are participating in water decisions. This concern and promotion have been encouraged from international meetings since the 1990s. I agree with this perspective by informing myself and appointing female colleagues to take on responsibilities, even without me. However, every day I (and the man in general) must reflect on the subject, so that he does not commit this type of gender injustice" (E[3], Counselor).

This report is important, considering that the struggle to overcome differences is not an exclusive struggle of women, but also of men, as they are co-authors and builders of social transformations. The change in society is portrayed by the change in social representations, which occurs complementary and simultaneously, at the individual and collective levels.[49]

Awareness of equality is personal; it translates into questioning 'evidence' and questioning 'normality'. It is necessary to make visible what has always been ignored. Social organization needs to be based on the equal social value of men and women, leading to a structural change, only possible with conscious and participating citizens, with new behaviors and attitudes.[12]

The community level can affect gender roles, just as changes in domestic practices can affect female representation in the community. The work environment and public decision-making places are spaces that produce social representations and, above all, constitute meanings to both sexes[11]

Final considerations

When analyzing the perception of water managers in the municipality of Ouro Preto/MG, regarding the participation of women in management, it was observed that the level of female representation in the studied bodies and councils is considered lower one. This smaller number of female representatives demonstrates gender inequalities, given the difficulty of women's greater performance in this public space. The inequalities of positions assumed have preserved the hierarchy and the marginalization of women in the decision-making processes about water, which compromises their participation in decisions that affect their lives.

The relationship between gender and water must be analyzed with a focus on power and policies, given that technical interventions are not enough to solve unequal power relations, but, surely, policies that encompass the differences in social relations in public and private spaces and in their interference in access to water and in women's participation in decision-making

These facts demonstrate the need of a policy that promotes democratic legitimacy and the inclusion of women, as their participation in water management is necessary, not only with a greater presence of women, but also with a greater capacity to decision-making within these organizations, bodies and councils. The participation of women is essential if gender aspects are to be effectively addressed in the management of water resources.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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