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# Best Practices Database

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## Affirmative Action for Women's Economic Independence, Para Brazil

Good Practice

New for 2002

- Categories:**
- Gender Equity and Equality:
    - access to resources
    - control of resources
  - Economic Development:
    - capital formation
    - enterprise development (formal and informal sectors)
    - entrepreneurship
  - Civic Engagement and Cultural Vitality:
    - community participation
    - social and cultural vitality

**Level of Activity:** Provincial/State

**Ecosystem:** Tropical/Sub-Tropical

### Summary

Instances of social exclusion and poverty among women of Brazilian Amazon region that were prevalent before 1996 gave rise to social and economic empowerment initiatives. These initiatives by feminist organisation from Belem were important in the implementation of the popular democratic government's first management experience in the largest city in the Amazon State - Belem.

This management practice created affirmative action programmes in economic, social and cultural areas that were nominated by the Central Commercialization of Products and services of the women of Belem. The Lilas Space programme allowed them to progressively expand public space and include economic, cultural and social aspects into various decision making spheres in the city

### Narrative

#### SITUATION BEFORE THE INITIATIVE BEGAN

Brazil is a country with a lot of history. It has an area of 8,547,403.5 km<sup>2</sup> and is the 5th largest country in the world. Currently 80% of its inhabitants live in the large urban centers while the other 20% are distributed in the rural districts. Although Brazil is one of the fifteen richest countries in the world it is characterized by unequal income distribution.

Belem city is a typical commercial city and has 1.6 million inhabitants. It is situated in the delta area of the Amazon river and the Atlantic ocean. The Peninsula's neighborhoods make up 30% of the municipal territory where 95% of the city's inhabitants live and the other 5% are dispersed in an

archipelago of 43 islands. The islands make up 70% of the municipal territory.

Belem is the largest city in the Amazon state that accounts for up to 45% of the country's total area and is home to the largest hydrographic basin in the world. The basin consists of the Amazon river and its tributary streams but it is dangerously subject to negative environmental impacts from poorly planned cities.

The introduction of industrial developments without adequate environmental planning brought "prosperity" to some traditional families from the region. However, an unprecedented environmental and social imbalance prevailed. This imbalance had a negative impact on Belem, which became the target of migratory pressure without adequate infrastructure to support the needs of the migrants. The migrants settled in the outskirts of the city where living conditions were deplorable and social exclusion persisted.

Belem was unable to create new employment opportunities for its residents and revenue collection was inefficient. 50% of the workforce was employed in the informal economy that promoted gender inequality and exposure to dangerous work conditions.

According to DIESSE- Interstate Department of Statistics and Social Economic Studies and the DCPV- Department of Commerce and Advertising, more than 21% of women in Belem were the heads of households. However despite this significant fraction of female-headed families, the proportion of women in the workforce was alarmingly low.

There were specific economic programs carried out by the Popular Democratic Management of the People's Government aimed at revitalization of the city. This was the first government to establish a program that addresses issues related to women empowerment. In order to understand the needs of the women it was necessary to initiate dynamic awareness campaigns for and by the women.

## PROCESS

Lilas Space was one of the action plans initiated to increase the economic independence of women and influence Belem's Policy structure. This programme was initiated in 1997 by the centre for commercialization where women can engage in structured and organized production processes to improve their economic well being. It is based on inclusion and solidarity in generating income, environmental protection and social cohesion.

The initiative involved more than a hundred women and up to 100 commercial spaces organized in the following manner:

- 1) Baptist Field Square- 50 spaces
- 2) Brazil Square- 50 spaces
- 3) Other areas were for the ongoing Itinerant Fair.

The areas were open on Fridays from 16:00-21:00 and on Saturdays and Sundays from 8:00-18:00.

The production and commercialization areas of the Lilas Space were used for display of readymade articles and accessories and of recycled handicrafts and other artifacts.

The women's initiative to create partnership with the diverse municipal organizations did not wholly assist in finding solutions to the poor living conditions of women of Belem. Their dedication together with the involvement of their families and closest friends assisted them in solving their problems and boost their self-esteem.

## RESULTS ACHIEVED

The partnership between the Municipal Departments of Economy, Women's Affairs and Legal Affairs has revealed the need to assess impact in the following areas:

- 1) Health: There was increased participation of women in decision making in the municipal

management that created the reference centre of women's health which attends to about 10,000 patients a month.

## 2) Organizations

a) The partner organizations were strengthened

The Council can improve its infrastructure by establishing headquarters, buying equipment such as computers, fax, and telephone. Its importance has grown as an organization respected not only by women but also by other institutions.

b) Creation of Lilas Space (commercial center of products and services by women of Belem). This initiative has achieved permanence in the Belem's institutional fabric with women taking leading roles.

c) Involvement of various organizations in awareness campaigns promoted by the council.

## 3) The area of services

a) Attending to women and their families. There has been a 42% increase in the number of domestic violence cases reported to the police due to the fact that Lilas Space not only is concerned with economic empowerment but social mobilization as well.

b) Introducing a customized product at the people's bank that finances women's enterprises and creates job opportunities.

c) Increased women participation in governance through representation in councils and referendums.

d) Increased number of vacancies for women candidates of members of parliament. There are about 1 to 3 slots in the Chamber of Congress, 0 to 3 in the State Legislative Assembly. There was also an increase in women candidates including those holding key positions in their respective political parties.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The women's actions resulted in a policy change in the people's bank regulation by making provision for women to obtain credit at lower interest rates than the prevailing market rates. The "Ver o Sol" Fund is simultaneously administrated with the people's bank to guarantee access to financial resources by women who wish to expand their business. These loans are repaid back over an agreed period of time.

Provision of systematic training courses in basic accounting concepts, business management skills and group dynamics has afforded women of Lilas Space security in running their business which includes monitoring the market, setting out costs and prices, commercialization and post-sales services.

The initiatives of the Lilas Space women's group have also been featured in a local commercial fair where 89.65% of the enterprise's products and brands have realized improved visibility in the market. Close to 65.53% of the women were able to sell more than 50% of their products and services in this fair. Indices show a growth of 40% to 60% in revenue. This has motivated more women to initiate similar projects.

Courses and seminars on transferring the project have played a crucial role in assisting women's organizations expand autonomously. Women organizations have since embarked on expanding their capacities by seeking out new partners. They have managed to reduce the dependency to 7-8% on government services in fulfilling their financial obligations. This is very low considering private financial institutions in Brazil reach 18-20%.

## Contact

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**Type of Organization:** Local Authority

## Nominating Organization

Municipal Government of Belem  
Edmilson Brito Rodrigues  
Palacio Antonio Lemos  
Belem, Para, Brasil  
55-09131-2241964  
**Type of Organization:** Local Authority

## Partners

Municipal Council on Women's Affairs  
Maria de Fatima Matos Silva  size=60 > Type of Organisation:  
 55-09131- 2252176

**Type of Organization:** Local Authority  
**Type of Partner Support:** Technical Support

Municipal Secretary of Legal Matters  
EgãfÁdio Sales Fi  
55-09131 - 2122410

**Type of Organization:** Local Authority  
**Type of Partner Support:** Administrative Support



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