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# Opinion – Sou Ciência: Gender equality and the role of universities

In the week of March 8, International Women's Day, we highlight the contribution of universities to the promotion of gender equality, an essential objective in building a better present and future.

If, on the one hand, women have conquered more and more space in various economic activities, in the production of science, technology and innovation, and strengthened their professional and academic training, on the other hand, these changes have not necessarily reverberated in the high positions of command of companies. and universities. The careers of professionals, researchers and academics are usually shorter and have lower remuneration, due to the conciliation they need to make between the demands of their work and those of private life, where, unfortunately, gender equality still does not prevail.

It is interesting to note that, in the last 3 years, the Times Higher Education (THE), a leading English magazine in the field of education, has developed a ranking that uses the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as parameters. to measure the quality of universities. This new method, essential for measuring the quality of institutions, included an indicator of gender equality.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was approved in 2015 and its main objective is to promote economic, social and environmental sustainability around the globe. To this end, the agenda values ??and encourages the involvement of all social sectors to achieve the SDGs, with emphasis on the performance of higher education institutions.

Through their teaching, research and extension activities, which allow the exchange of knowledge and innovation with society, universities have become fundamental in the implementation of sustainable objectives. Above all, to promote the reduction of inequalities, the right to quality education and health, to cities and citizenship, to inclusion, racial and gender equality and other rights.

With regard to gender equality, specifically, the THE methodology included surveys on the production of research that address the theme, institutional policies that promote this equality, the commitment to hiring and professional promotion of women, the proportion of students female gender, the proportion of women who hold command positions, among other elements.

The 2021 data, referring to the third edition of the ranking, show that the road is still long. Only five South American universities were among the top 100 on the gender equality indicator (SDG number 5). They are: the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (83rd place), the Andrés Bello University – Chile (86th place), the Federal University of São Paulo – Brazil (89th place), the Universidad del Desarrollo – Chile (92nd place) and the State University of Londrina – Brazil (94th place).

With regard to Brazil, there is also much to advance in this regard. An example of this is the very low number of women who occupy top positions (rector and vice-rector). Currently, of the 68 federal universities, only 12 of them (18%) have women as top directors and few with a majority of women in the top administrative hierarchy (eg pro-rectors and directors). In the state universities of São Paulo, we currently have 3 vice-presidents who currently occupy these high positions, but only USP has had a woman dean in its nearly 90-year history.

And there are many challenges faced by Brazilian deans, especially in large universities. In addition to budget issues and ideological clashes, it is not uncommon to report situations of embarrassment or intimidation due to the fact that they are women. Not to mention the doubt that seems permanent about the ability to govern a university with thousands of people and millions of reais. However, what we have seen is that women's management has been very successful, with transparency, strong involvement in the multiplicity of tasks, always with intelligence and, most of the time, a lot of empathy.

Currently, women account for 54% of the national science and technology system. As mentioned in a previous article, only a small number assume leadership positions. The higher the ranks, the fewer women are seen. This is a debate that we need to continue and intensify. Build paths so that women can actually take their places not only in universities, but wherever they wish. In this sense, the 2030 Agenda makes us seek actions and policies that aim, among other factors, at gender equality. Thus, an innovation like the one we see in a university ranking like THE certainly contributes to inducing and valuing behavior changes in our institutions.

Within the classroom and in research, women also face multiple difficulties. And it is up to universities to think of strategies that can welcome girls and women mothers, for example, as well as encourage the full participation of women in science. All strategies that stimulate policies and ensure that our work is not only technical, but also includes the social and

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inclusive aspect, which favors gender parity in academic work and in university management, must be implemented.

Throughout the month of March, we will continue to discuss the issue of gender and the role of higher education institutions. For this, SoU_Ciência will carry out some activities, the first of which will be a virtual debate that will be held on the 16/03th, at 18 pm, where the deans of several universities will tell their stories and challenges.

It is necessary to continue changing the scenario of inequality and this will be possible through clear conversation on the subject, as well as public policies that allow for a paradigm shift.

Universities can and must take an important step, setting themselves as an example to follow, overcoming this and other inequalities, thus contributing to the development of fair, democratic and egalitarian societies.

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