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Document for discussion session: Leaving No One Behind: A Panama Case Study¹ to reflect on Indigenous Peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean

¹ This paper was prepared by Carolina Azevedo and George Gray Molina based on the following publications UNDP Panama: “Diagnóstico Situación de las mujeres indígenas de Panamá”. Panamá 2016 and UNDP Panama: “Atlas de Desarrollo Humano Local: Áreas indígenas”, Panamá 2016. It was prepared for the X Ministerial Forum on Development in Latin America and the Caribbean “Partnerships to Reduce Inequality in the SDG Agenda”, Panama City, September 12-13, 2018.
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1. Introduction

With the 2030 Agenda, all 193 UN Member States pledged, “to leave no one behind and “endeavor to reach the furthest behind first”\(^2\). In practice, this means taking explicit action to curb inequalities, end discrimination, and prioritize fast-track action for the furthest behind countries, communities and peoples. In Latin America and the Caribbean indigenous peoples are among the populations historically lagging behind in the social, economic and political spheres\(^3\). In these three realms, indigenous women lag furthest behind, also being victims of violence and discrimination in public and private\(^4\). Based on UNDP’s framework to act strategically on the leave no one behind pledge\(^5\), this paper assesses the case of indigenous peoples in Panama based on previous literature as well as the Government’s response through the comprehensive Indigenous Peoples’ Development Plan.

Indigenous peoples have sought recognition of their identities, way of life and their right to traditional lands, territories and natural resources for years, yet throughout history, their rights have always been violated. Indigenous peoples today, are arguably among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of people in the world. The international community now recognizes that special measures are required to protect their rights and maintain their distinct cultures and way of life.

The UN System agenda on indigenous peoples’ rights has built upon a number of landmark events, forums, congresses and declarations. Some of the most recent initiatives are anchored in the 1989 ILO Convention 169, the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2000 (UNFPII), the establishment of a Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2001, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples of 2014 and the 10th Anniversary of the UN Declaration of 2017.

Context of Indigenous Peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean

The 2030 Agenda contains six direct references to indigenous peoples. It is vital that, in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples be fully respected and incorporated into the normative framework. The Declaration constitutes a framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, well-

\(^3\)http://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/en/home/ourwork/democratic-governance/political-participation-and-inclusion/citizen-democracy--analysis---advocacy-.html
being and rights of the world’s indigenous peoples and provides guidance on incorporating the rights and priorities of indigenous peoples into the development paradigm.

Map 1: Distribution of Indigenous Population in LAC, circa 2010, census data
According to the last round of censuses, from 2010, there are approximately 42 million indigenous people in Latin America and the Caribbean, close to 7.8% of the total population. Mexico, Peru, Guatemala and Bolivia have the highest absolute and relative shares of indigenous population, comprising 80% of the total—or approximately 34 million people. El Salvador, Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay, Costa Rica and Venezuela have the smallest proportions of indigenous population, of which El Salvador and Costa Rica have the smallest absolute number—14,000 and 104,000 respectively.⁶

Latin American and Caribbean countries have increasingly adopted self-identification as the main criterion for statistical recording. The use of native languages as a criterion in collecting demographic data is in decline, inasmuch as it can create fixed divides on fluid and evolving social identities. The loss of indigenous languages is generally associated with poverty, social exclusion and lack of political participation—this trend is accelerating with urbanization and globalization, particularly among economically vulnerable communities.⁷

**Why People are Left Behind: Addressing Key Factors**

*Leaving no one behind* is a recurring and overarching objective of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs—and a crucial pillar for Latin America and the Caribbean, with 10 of the 15 most unequal countries in the world⁸. Implementing the pledge, therefore, does not imply a separate course of action but rather the effort required to achieve the goals and targets that aim to close gaps in opportunities and outcomes and enable all to participate in and benefit from development. Everywhere, the left behind are likely to include more than just the income-poor⁹. Leaving no one behind demands countries to go beyond narrow, single monetary-metrics to consider the severity and distribution of multiple deprivations and disadvantages.

Across countries, women and girls, people in rural areas, indigenous peoples, ethnic and linguistic minorities, people with disabilities, migrants, gender and sexual minorities, youth and older persons are all disproportionately among the left behind.¹⁰ In all societies, the furthest behind tend to endure multiple, often intersecting disadvantages and deprivations.

Women from poor households, for example, who live in remote communities and identify as ethnic minorities, often face reinforcing sources of discrimination, resulting in exclusion from services

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⁹ What does it mean to leave no one behind? Draft 14 March 2018

and opportunities available to others. They are also more likely to be subject to violence (including domestic abuse); be disproportionately burdened with unpaid work; and are most affected by illnesses, disasters & shocks. The result aggravates the disadvantages and deprivations due to poverty and isolation, hindering the capacity to live to their fullest capacity, improving the lives of their families.

Increasingly stark inequalities, exclusion and discrimination, entrench and perpetuate the disadvantages and deprivations that leave people behind, by undermining their ability to gain influence or get ahead; exacerbating social tensions; shrinking the space for political solutions & compromise; eroding social trust and meritocracy. Governments have the primary responsibility to break this cycle.

Available data across 16 countries found that those most likely to be left behind are women and girls in rural areas who are born to poor families and belong to a minority ethnic group11.

UNDP’s paper “What Does it Mean to Leave No One Behind” argues for a holistic response that considers five intersecting factors essential to understanding who is being left behind and why to formulating appropriate initiatives and policies to drive action.12

In line with this concept, through an assessment indigenous peoples in Panama, this paper argues that the five intersecting factors—Discrimination, Shocks and Fragility, Governance, Socio-Economic Status and Geographic Location—are determinants to assess key reasons for women, men and children lagging behind, crucial for a group that has been historically marginalized in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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12 The operational approach suggested in this paper strives to be consistent with the Guidelines for UN Development Assistance Frameworks, the UN CEB Framework for action on Inequalities and Non-Discrimination, the UNDG Operational Guide on Leaving No-One Behind, and UNDP’s Social and Environmental Programming Standards
People are left behind due to:

**DISCRIMINATION:** Experiencing disadvantage, discrimination or exclusion in laws, policies, access to public services and social practices based on their identity, including gender, age, income, ethnicity, cast, religion, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, and indigenous or migratory status.

**GEOGRAPHY:** Being denied social and economic opportunities and/or access to public services such as access to justice and equal protection under the law, decent infrastructure and access to technology due to their geographic location and/or physical isolation.

**GOVERNANCE:** Experiencing global, national and/or sub-national governance systems that are ineffective, unjust, discriminatory, exclusive, non-participatory, corrupt, unaccountable and/or unresponsive.

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS:** Becoming trapped in poverty in all its dimensions and/or lack of health, education or other capabilities to earn an adequate income, accumulate wealth or benefit from social protection.

**SHOCKS AND FRAGILITY:** Being vulnerable to risks related to violence, conflict, displacement, large movements of migrants, environmental degradation, natural hazard induced disasters and other types of climate events, or health shocks, such as epidemic outbreaks.

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13 Physical isolation may be chosen or “forced” by inability to move and/or access to technologies etc.

14 Leave no one behind discussion paper
2. A Panamanian Case Study

Panama has one of the highest per capita incomes in the region: between US$5,000 and 8,690/year, according to World Bank estimates (2008). However, indigenous people live in conditions of extreme poverty, with per capita incomes hardly surpassing $500/year, and in the case of ngöbe-buglés not reaching $150/year. Beyond the monetary aspect, indigenous peoples are affected by child malnutrition, tuberculosis, with a higher mortality rate and lower life expectancy than non-indigenous people. The indigenous infant mortality rate is three times higher than that of non-indigenous children. Moreover, the indigenous population has been the least favored by the increase in the educational offer in the country\textsuperscript{15}.

Panama has seven recognized and identified indigenous peoples, each with their own cultural diversity, located in territories across the Republic of Panama: Ngäbe, Buglé, Naso Tjërdi, Bri-Bri, Kuna or Guna, Emberá and Wounaan.

The Ngäbe, Buglé, Naso Tjërdi, Bri-Bri are mainly found in the west of the country, while the Kunas, Emberá and Wounaan mostly in the east. Each of these peoples is distinguished by its own cultures and history, social and political organization, economic and productive structure, worldview, spirituality and ways of relating to the environment.

According to the latest national Census (2010), the indigenous population that inhabits the five counties (comarcas) amounts to 196,059. The rest of the indigenous peoples, who number 221,500, live in other parts of the country. According to the 2010 data, the provinces that have the largest indigenous population are Bocas del Toro (79,819), Panama (75,725) and Chiriquí (37,092).

The maximum expression of inequality in Panama has the face of an indigenous woman. They face triple discrimination: being poor, being indigenous and being women\textsuperscript{16}. On the one hand their situation is made invisible in practically all the public policies implemented by different institutions, with the corresponding lack of adequate response to their needs. On the other hand, there is a conception of indigenous peoples as vulnerable populations not as subjects of law, as if they were not able to take control of their destiny and with practices and strategic interests\textsuperscript{17}.

Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, Panama included, states have historically lacked comprehensive development policies for indigenous peoples. Considered as ethnic minorities, an object of integration in the rest of the country and not as peoples with their own identity, actions of the State often aimed at "civilizing" them, losing sight of the fact that they have their own

\textsuperscript{15} Plan de Desarrollo
\textsuperscript{16} Diagnostico Situacion de las mujeres indigenas en Panama, 2016
\textsuperscript{17} National Development Plan for Indigenous Peoples, Panama.
autonomous institutions. “Indigenous affairs have been treated by the State in a segmented, dispersed manner and with specific, improvised and conjunctural actions, without a State strategy to deal with the development of indigenous peoples and the exercise of their rights in an integral manner,” as stated in Panama’s National Development Plan for Indigenous Peoples.

Among the most pressing problems affecting the full development of the indigenous peoples of Panama are the high poverty rates due to poor income distribution, marginalization and social exclusion; lack of opportunities to generate income and jobs, unequal coverage of basic services and infrastructure that result in alarming rates of malnutrition, infant mortality and illiteracy; precarious housing conditions, among others.

2.1. Discrimination – Indigenous Peoples in Panama

Despite the progress in promoting indigenous peoples’ participation in policymaking and the political sphere, they have been largely left out of the region’s social and economic strides of recent decades. These populations remain among the least healthy and educated populations and suffer disproportionately more from the effects of climate change and natural catastrophes.

In spite of many challenges, Latin America has gone through an unprecedented mobilization of indigenous peoples in the past 25 years, but their political participation, particularly among women, is still low, according to a UNDP report which assesses the six countries with highest percentage of indigenous peoples and greatest progress in political participation—Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru.

However, indigenous women’s political inclusion has been a major challenge, particularly in view of the "triple discrimination". Beyond women’s usual difficulties in breaking the glass ceiling in politics, indigenous customary law further hinders women’s political participation in the region.

In Panama, qualitative research in UNDP’s Diagnostics of the Situation of Indigenous Women (2016) reveals that women of a range of ethnic groups experience discrimination in several realms.

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18 National Development Plan for Indigenous Peoples, Panama.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid
22 "Intercultural Citizenship: Contributions from the political participation of indigenous peoples in Latin America" (available in Spanish)
23 Ibid
of public and private lives, on the streets, at home, in accessing health services and also in prisons (correction facilities).

Throughout the region, domestic employment and its prevalence among indigenous women is a determining issue in the analysis of the gender and ethnic inequalities that affect indigenous women. "In Chile, for example, according to the socioeconomic characterization survey (CASEN) of 2000, the average income of Chilean indigenous domestic workers was 71% of the income of non-indigenous domestic service, and in Peru, the gender gap it shows in the salary of the indigenous woman is 31% of the salary of a male, while the indigenous woman makes only 30% of what the non-indigenous earns."\textsuperscript{24}

Qualitative research among the indigenous women participating in the discussion group in prisons in Panama shows a widespread perception of discrimination due to their indigenous status in a range of circumstances ranging from the distribution of meals and the attention of the administration officers to the treatment by doctors and in the judicial officers. In prison and beyond, there is a widespread perception that their indigenous worldviews are not considered or valued in medicine, food or even clothing. The study shows that many of the imprisoned indigenous women are worried that prison facility authorities will put obstacles for their mothers to visit them due to the traditional dress they wear (mola for the case of the gunas, and nagua for the ngäbes).

"The molas take a long time to put on and cannot be removed easily and when they [the mothers] come to visit us, they do not want to let them in wearing their molas [traditional dresses]" (Woman guna, CEFERE). They added that, in the past, they forbade visitors, especially women, from wearing the traditional dress and forced them, like everyone else, to wear a red shirt. After a representative of an indigenous women's organization who regularly went to visit an internal family member at that time, claimed the right to cultural diversity, that rule was changed.

**Being young is an additional element of discrimination.** The indigenous population in Latin America is characterized by being young, more than the non-indigenous population. In the region, Panama and Colombia have the youngest indigenous populations, "they do not show clear signs of aging and they keep the typical structure of a triangular shape [demographic pyramid], with a sustained growth of the group of children under 15 years of age" (ECLAC/CELADE). An ECLAC study refers to the notable contrasts of Panama, whose non-indigenous population shows a significant level of aging\textsuperscript{25}.

The young indigenous population faces multiple challenges in this second decade of the 21st century, to escape poverty. School dropout rates peaked to 227 in 2012, a stark rise from 33 in 2010. Moreover, there were 10 cases of teenage pregnancy registered in 2010, while in 2012 the

\textsuperscript{24} Diagnostico de Mujeres Indigenas, p. 106 
number rocketed to 46. In addition to the aforementioned evidence, it is worth mentioning the difficult insertion in the labor market, however, the indigenous youth of the regions have a greater presence in activities such as agriculture, livestock, hunting, forestry and fishing, with low and unequal salaries.

When analyzing indigenous women’s fertility rate trends, UNDP’s report stresses that the differences are related to social, economic and investment conditions destined to the rural and indigenous areas; to policies that exclude indigenous peoples’ worldview, generating situations of precariousness, with a fragile health system; to women who live without access to income and with a low family income26.

Within this context, unfriendly public services may reinforce such structures that contribute to indigenous women lagging behind. For example, the conditional subsidies provided to indigenous women reinforce their assigned gender roles by society without promoting indigenous women’s exercise of citizenship and collective rights, nor encouraging more balanced chore distribution at home, with external effects in the public sphere, in the economic and social realms.27

2.2. Geography and Migration as key factors for lagging behind

Indigenous peoples in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced an intense and growing process of urbanization: "The indigenous presence is growing in urban areas and capital cities of different countries, whether these have a numerically majority or minority indigenous population,” according to a 2014 ECLAC report.28

The political division of the Republic of Panama includes 9 provinces, 75 districts or municipalities, 5 indigenous districts and 620 corregimientos. The five administrative geopolitical regions called Comarcas, are based on the ethnic and territorial roots of a people and involves maintaining the characteristics of these communities, which are emanated from their history and identity. The region "is an indigenous territory with semi-autonomous political organization under the jurisdiction of the national government. Although it is, at the same time, a geopolitical division and an administrative system with geographical limits and internal regulations, it is not independent of the State.”29

26 Diagnostico
27 Diagnostico
28 Mujeres Indigenas, nuevas protagonistas para nuevas politicas, CEPAL 2014
Based on Panama’s 2010 census, the indigenous population living in urban areas comprises close to 50 percent of the total indigenous population\textsuperscript{30}. Almost one in three indigenous people in Panama live in cities, with illiteracy rates among the urban indigenous population being four times higher than those of the non-indigenous city inhabitants. Moreover, indigenous peoples living in cities leave school long before their non-indigenous counterparts to seek employment. This causes a low-paid work modality and low-skilled jobs. Half of the indigenous population earns between 150 and 300 balboas (roughly US$150-300 per month), while the urban indigenous population usually lives in substandard housing. Also, more than a third of the homes in Panama City consist of just one room and there are a greater proportion of indigenous homes that contain asbestos (16.1 per cent compared to 9 percent of households belonging to non-indigenous people).

The urban-rural divide among indigenous peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean varies widely between countries. Panama however has one of the highest rates of indigenous people living in rural areas and the highest rate of women living in rural areas, especially in indigenous territories and counties\textsuperscript{31}.

Panama is also the country in the region with highest numbers of indigenous women migrants: "... in Panama, 7.1\% (of indigenous women) changed their residence from their place of origin to another province between 2005 and 2010, followed by Uruguay and Costa Rica.” About 25\% of

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid
\textsuperscript{31} ECLAC
the indigenous population lives in a different place than the one they were born. Of this total migrant, 53% are men and 47% are women.

In the case of Panama, studies show that material poverty and income generating opportunities in indigenous territories generate high levels of female migration towards other provinces of the country.\textsuperscript{32}

**BOX – FAST FACTS**
- Panama is the country with the largest indigenous migrant population in relative terms, both male (8.13%) and female (7.08%).
- Indigenous migration is more significant than non-indigenous (Indigenous: M-8.13% and F-7.08%, Non-Indigenous: M-5.07% and F-4.96%), a situation contrary to the general trend in the region, where pre - dominates non-indigenous internal migration in each of the countries.
- Internal indigenous migration is mainly male (8.13%), although female migration is the highest in the region (7.08%)

In the case of the indigenous peoples in Panama, geographic location, migration and/or physical isolation influence social and economic opportunities and/or access to public services.

Previous studies in the country on indigenous internal migration indicate that the majority of those who migrate permanently do so in search of education, work and health care. In particular, the search for paid work is one of the main motivations for this phenomenon, considering the few

\textsuperscript{32} Diagnostico de Mujeres Indigenas
possibilities they have to generate income in their territories of origin, as well as the growing need for them. "Emigration, for the indigenous sector, is essentially a survival mechanism, given the deteriorated living conditions that exist in their places of origin".

Migratory tendencies of indigenous women either in family or alone reveal three main push factors: access to education services, search for (better) income, and, to a lesser extent, access to health services. In the analyzed trends, access to education is one of the main reasons for female migration: they migrate to continue their studies themselves (young women) or migrate so that their children can study (the older ones).

"There are three types of women: those who have migrated here - Panama City -; those who have studied and have returned; and those who have gotten work and have not been able to return to their town. But there are other cases of women who have been looking for a better life, young women who have come to Panama as domestic workers, but there are others who also travel with their family without having a work obligation. Each one has their characteristics. Migrate to Panama (City) for employment, studies and family ... If they are not married, women themselves come first; but with marriage, [the] man comes first," (Female leader of Wounaan).

"Emigration, for the indigenous sector, is essentially a survival mechanism, given the deteriorated living conditions that exist in their places of origin". Testimonies from interviewed indigenous women confirm this: "There are few employment opportunities which give us a basic salary ... that’s what makes people migrate. In the community when they are harvesting and sowing and when the sow, they get discouraged when there’s nothing or little to harvest... that makes people migrate to the city "(Emberá woman).

Just as there are different migratory itineraries by ethnicity, the greater or lesser incidence of some of these causal factors indicated for each of the indigenous ethnic groups of the country can be differentiated. The same study indicates that the Ngäbes migrate in search of work, and for their part, the Gunas and Emberá, without discarding the labor needs, they do it, above all, for education and health.

The causes in each case generate diverse migratory dynamics by ethnic groups: family or individual migration (men or women alone), temporary or permanent migration, rural-rural or rural-urban migration, among others.

"I believe that Ngäbes are different; people travel with their families, they are young and they go to find money with their family, the education is given if the family remains living in the city, but the young people go out and educate themselves, it is not en masse or it is in a group it is in a couple because they are young or individual couples ... In Guna Yala, men migrate first; once he

33 Blas Quintero “La emigración indígena en Panamá”
34 Diagnostico
is there, he brings the family, first he establishes himself ... then when he already has a job ... he sends for his family "(CONAMUIP).

Qualitative research in Panama showed that migrant women are perceived as potentially having more access to services than non-migrants. One woman in the town of Santiago considered that there is “more conscience” among women migrants, because they go to health centers and receive information and knowledge about their health. In Changuinola, migrant indigenous women “have more children than the non-indigenous women because they have access to health services and educate themselves more.”

This shows that the fact that indigenous women live in urban areas does not guarantee changes unless they receive stipends/income to support their family.

Although a high proportion of indigenous women reside in rural areas, when both women and men migrate they do not necessarily move to urban areas. Often they move to other indigenous territories, also in rural settings.

If we analyze the territorial distribution of indigenous women in Panama, we find that "the largest proportion of indigenous women reside in the Ngäbe-Buglé territory (Comarca) (37.2%) and the province of Bocas del Toro (18.8%). In addition, 18% of the total resides in the province of Panama". The countries where indigenous women have greater mobility among the Major Administrative Division (DAM) have been, in descending order, Panama, Uruguay and Costa Rica.

### 2.3. Governance

#### Participation in Politics

The study "Intercultural Citizenship: Contributions from the Political Participation of the Latin American Indigenous Peoples" (UNDP, 2013), reveals the special difficulties that indigenous women face in their political insertion in the countries of the region, specifically referring to the "triple discrimination of being a woman, indigenous and poor. "Although Latin American women have access to vote and, in several countries, with affirmative policies such as quotas in parties and public offices, in the specific case of indigenous women, the issues of political participation, along with sexual and reproductive health issues, they are the ones mostly lagging behind in the region "(UNDP, 2013: 51).

In Panama, in the 2014 elections, 13 deputies were elected, which corresponded to 18.3% of the National Assembly. This represented approximately one woman deputy for every six deputies. In

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36 Ibid
that group is Mrs. Crescencia Prado, the only indigenous woman deputy in Panama, who was elected for a first term in 2009.

The presence of Prado implied that indigenous women in that Assembly represented 1.4% of the total. Regarding her re-election, a ngäbe woman leader interviewed for this study, said that "she has played a different role than men, she made the difference ... she worked with young people ... she did gender workshops and ... she dedicated herself a lot to them and women. It helped to train people, to train and has contributed to the defense of natural resources ".

In an interview to Panama’s newspaper La Estrella\(^ {37} \), Crescencia Prado recalled that in her home in the County of Nibra, district of Múna, former San Felix she was the only girl, living with her six brothers. Her mother abandoned them when Crescencia was six months old. “If I had been raised by both parents, maybe I wouldn’t have become a Member of Parliament. My mom had said that at 12 women had to get married,” she told La Estrella. Her father was her first leader and taught her to defend herself. Education was hard enough, and he did not want young Crescencia Prado to go to school, according to the news story.

"I must have been five years old when I saw that [General] Torrijos started distributing uniforms and I told him that I wanted to study. He came over and asked me why and went to talk to my father. The general told him that the only thing he could give me was education, and my father paid attention to him. '"

She may have learned to read and write in school, but formal education erased all indigenous traces in Crescencia Prado, the news piece highlights. 'There the teacher forbade us to speak in our language and to dress traditionally’—to such an extent that she forgot her mother tongue. 'I finished primary school and I said I was going to high school. The representative of the corregimiento (county) told me that he could give me a scholarship and I escaped.' By the age of 15 she moved to Panama City and earned money as a domestic worker, studying at night.

**Sexual division of political and civil positions**

There is a marked division of positions between indigenous men and women, very widespread for all the indigenous peoples of the country. In non-indigenous communities there is a similar situation. Women, by the sexual division of positions in community organizations, usually occupy management or decision-making positions in school committees, health, in local meetings where there are no economic resources.

"*When there is no money involved ... The divisions within the community decision-making entities are led by women. Men, according to them, are in top positions when there is money involved... *"; "*Here we have the president of health institution, she is a woman; I am the communal board, I am...*"

\(^ {37} \) http://laestrella.com.pa/panama/nacional/crescencia-prado-cuenta-necesitaban-comarca/23487039
Many women recognize that the challenge is, above all, in the negotiation with their own partner. In this sense, they talk about the "permission" that they should request from their husbands, as well as the difficulty of "giving it to them" in order to participate in this type of activity.

Others refer to the lack of support from their partners when they decide to apply for political representation, something that does not happen when they are the ones who apply. "I have to ask the men for permission to attend ... some women have had terrible experience; all the compañeras (colleagues) have had some difficulties with their partner" (Female ngäbe leader).

In view of this situation, a great majority of the women who occupy or have occupied a political office do not have a husband; is single, widowed or separated. "They are usually separated women ... I cannot say that politics was the cause because that had happened much earlier" (Female Embera leader).

Moreover, the absence of public policies or programmes that enforce the political rights of women in the communities, allows men to concentrate political power and political violence.

The first limitations refer to their domestic and family burdens related to the sexual division of labor, typical of the male-centered society. Also to the productive loads related to agricultural work in rural contexts. This type of workloads and tasks traditionally developed by women, leave little space for participation in other spaces, outside the home, such as public and political participation.

Older indigenous women and men sometimes perceive youth as having more opportunity, being less attached to the cultural and traditional gender order. This constitutes an opportunity for change that translates, finally, into greater levels of equity in access to political power. "The young girls are those who dare to stop and talk to ask ... they have no regret" (Female Embera leader).

### 2.4. Socio-Economic Status

**Overview**

When assessing key indicators of human development, education, health, income, indigenous peoples lag behind in comparison to other ethnic groups in Panama. In addition to income discrepancies mentioned previously, the average life expectancy of indigenous peoples of Panama is 64 years, compared to 74 years for the rest of the population in the country. Health provisions in indigenous territories has been traditionally characterized by limited human resources and limited economic, health geographical, cultural provisions, compared to the rest of the population.\(^38\)

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\(^{38}\) Plan de Desarrollo de Pueblos Indígenas
For the indigenous population, access to health services is difficult due to many factors. Research on indigenous populations’ access to health services indicate that 11.3% did not seek health service for cost-related reasons; 64.2% due to long distances; 44% due to lack of means of transportation; and, among other causes, due to mistreatment by health workers.

Moreover, on the other hand, cultural differences and language barriers limit efforts around health education. It is remarkable that only 20% of the indigenous population is affiliated or is a beneficiary of health insurance, compared to more than 50% of the non-indigenous population. Moreover, in general, the indigenous population does not seek health services when suffering from an illness or injury39.

Indigenous children malnutrition rates remain a dire public health issue, with 61% of children aged 0-5 facing chronic malnutrition (weight and size), also affecting their mental and physical health, their cognitive development and school, and eventually labour, productivity. Among school-aged children the numbers are even more striking: 72% of chronic malnutrition.

UNDP’s Atlas of Local Human Development 2015 contributed to the discussion on the challenges faced by three indigenous regions: Guna Yala, Emberá Wounaan and Ngäbe Buglé; and served as an instrument for development planning with an inclusive and sustainable approach, based on the condition of these communities. However, the report did not include information about other indigenous regions, nor about the other indigenous peoples, due to lack of disaggregated data. The difficulty in accessing information that shows the reality of these communities also showcases the difficulty to tailor public policies to address needs and effectively ensure that key populations are not left behind.

The study showed the main factors that affect the development of the Emberá Wounaan, Ngäbe Buglé districts and Guna Yala. Through indicators, it also revealed structural conditions, variables and assets of each zone. Migration, lack of access to education and health services (and discrimination in access to health services), violence, were pinpointed as key challenges.

The Emberá Wounaan, Guna Yala and Ngäbe Buglé counties belong to the group of high youth dependency, where the age segment of 0-14 years represented, in 2015, between 38% and 44% of the indigenous population and, by 2020, it is expected that the age group continues above 35% of total population. Variations in population structures are not only due to birth and death rates; there are other influential phenomena such as migration. In the Guna Yala region, which presents an imbalance in its population pyramid, a loss of women due to migration is evident. In addition, men around 25 years of age often face the need to migrate to provinces with better employment opportunities.40

39 Atlas
40 Atlas
The educational dimension of the Panama Human Development Index includes indicators of literacy, school attendance and years of schooling. With regard to literacy, the rate exceeds 90% by 2014 in most provinces, with the exception of Bocas del Toro and Darién, while the regions are under 80% literacy: Emberá Wounaan with 79%, Guna Yala with 74.1% and Ngäbe Buglé with 68.6%.

School attendance has a national average of 75% and the regions are in the average value, such as Emberá Wounaan with 75.3%, or below, such as Ngäbe Buglé with 72.5% and Guna Yala with 69.6%.

Despite the fact that since 2001 there has been an increase in the average years of schooling, the indigenous regions continue to lag behind in education and their results are the lowest in the whole country, without taking into account the quality problems of Education pending to be resolved.\(^{41}\) In terms of Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)\(^ {42}\), the indigenous population in Panama is the most affected by the Multidimensional Poverty, with a figure that exceeds 60%. When adding the group that is close to being classified as “multidimensionally poor”, referred to as “living in vulnerability”, the indigenous counties’ Multidimensional Poverty would spike to 98 percent (Ngäbe Buglé), 90 percent (Guna Yala), 80 percent (Emberá Wounaan).\(^ {43}\)

The participation of indigenous women in economic activity, as seen from the census data (2010) is quite varied. In the case of Panama, it is shown that only "19% of indigenous women are active, while in Ecuador more than half are part of the labor market (54.6%)" (ECLAC, 2013: 94), the low rates of economic participation among indigenous peoples are considered as a systematic pattern. The exceptions are Ecuador and Uruguay (53.4%), where rates exceed those of non-indigenous women.

Economic Participation (2003-2013)\(^ {44}\):

- The labor supply has increased in indigenous women significantly from 38.1% to 67.9%;
- a slight decrease is observed in indigenous men;
- non-indigenous rural women have lower participation rates than those in indigenous districts

\(^{41}\) National Development Plan
\(^{42}\) The MPI was first calculated in Panama using the 2010 Census figures, which enabled assessing 9 of 10 indicators, including education, health, and quality of life including access to energy/electricity, type of housing, access to sanitation and home assets. (Indigenous Atlas 2015, UNDP)

\(^{43}\) Atlas
\(^{44}\) The rate of economic participation measures the degree of participation of the population in the labor market, whether working or looking for work of 15 years and more, comparing 2003 with 2013, according to the INEC Labor Market Survey.
Indigenous peoples present conditions of greater vulnerability and violation of their human rights. According to the new methodology adopted by the Ministry of Economics and Finance (CEPAL-MEF, 2011), poverty at the national level was estimated at 26.5% in 2012, reducing to 25.8% two years later, while extreme poverty remained at 11% (MEF, 2014: 7).

**Indigenous women in domestic service**

Studies corroborate that the labor insertion of the indigenous population is marked by discrimination—including ethnic and gender-related—and marginalization. This places indigenous women in the most vulnerable situations and working conditions at the regional level. In general, there is a low insertion in paid occupations, low wages—even below the minimum wage in each country—, long working hours, lack of legal protection and social security, and exploitation conditions, presenting a significant gap in the implementation of rights, accentuated between indigenous and non-indigenous women, as well as between indigenous women and men.

Domestic employment and its prevalence among indigenous women represent a determining issue in the analysis of the gender and ethnic inequalities affecting indigenous women. "In Chile, for example, according to the socioeconomic characterization survey (CASEN) of 2000, the average income of Chilean indigenous domestic workers was 71% of the income of non-indigenous domestic service, and in Peru, the gender gap it shows in the salary of the indigenous woman that
represents 31% of the salary of the male, being the gain of the indigenous woman 30% in relation to the non-indigenous."

**BOX**

*When data can drive change:* Stark realities revealed by data can also spark change. In 2000, public findings in Mexico and Peru revealed that the proportion of births attended by a health professional was 38 and 45 percent lower, respectively, for indigenous women than non-indigenous women. This glaring disparity violated societal norms and people’s sense of fairness, generating demands for better information and policies in both countries (DESA, 2014/2015). Steps were subsequently taken to make health care more rights-based and consistent with the practices and values of indigenous populations. By 2012, over 80 percent of births by indigenous women in both countries were attended by health professionals. In the 2010 census, more Latin American countries [17 of 20] gathered specific information on indigenous people. (DESA, 2014/2015)

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) expressed its concern to the Panamanian State regarding the lack of statistical data disaggregated by sex on the situation of women, in particular on the situation of indigenous women in all realms covered by the Convention.

For example, according to Panama’s Ministry of Health (2012) maternal mortality data, the mortality rate is not only high in the Ngäbe Buglé co-brand, but has increased over the last five years. The same source indicates that the maternal mortality rate was 274,346, and in 2008, it was about 230 per 100,000 live births (MINSA, 2014).

For the rest of the indigenous districts, the data do not reflect a high maternal mortality rate. In a somewhat disconcerting way, they rather indicate that there are no maternal deaths. In Emberá-Wounaan there are no reports on this subject; however, for Darién, the maternal mortality rate is the highest after that of Ngäbe Buglé. This may mean that most records of maternal deaths from the region are made in the health facilities of the Darien region, mainly in hospitals, since much of it comes to these facilities, even if it is too late.

**Education** – Over 15% of the indigenous population aged 10 years and over (63,610 people) cannot read or write, with respect to the total indigenous population (411592). 40,020 correspond to women and 23,690 to men (INEC, 2010 Census).

Women, traditionally because of gender assignments, are excluded from formal education. It is common among those we interviewed, their continuity in high school and others, after having had children, or having separated from their spouse.
Education among indigenous women is seen as both positive and negative good; positive, because it opens the doors to a better economic situation, but not so much when it goes against their customs.

Another key aspect of well-being is access to energy, which is an essential prerequisite for development, and universal access to sustainable energy is aligned with one of the key principles of the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind. Universal energy access will contribute to poverty eradication, education and gender equality, access to quality medical care, reduced infant mortality, and environmental sustainability. In Panama and other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean access to clean energy exposes inequalities between social and ethnic groups, often reinforcing the rural-urban divide.

The use of firewood as fuel continues to be important in indigenous county areas, generating household smoke and increasing incidence of respiratory ailments. This is the main source of fuel in Ngäbe Buglé, where more than 90% of people reported using it. They are followed by Guna Yala with 52% and Emberá Wounaan with 27%. On average, in rural areas, 34.7% of the population depends on this resource. 45

Access to social security among different ethnic groups is another evidence of inequalities within Panama. The highest level of coverage of occurs in the county of Panama, exceeding 60%; while that of the Guna Yala and Emberá Wounaan counties does not exceed 7%, being even lower for

the Ngäbe Buglé, which barely has 4.5% of its population covered. These figures pose a stark warning about the informality of employment and the need to offer options for pension savings programs for workers, according to UNDP Panama’s Indigenous people’s Atlas.

**Sexuality and reproduction among indigenous women**

The high fertility rates, prevalent among indigenous women, respond to problems of access to contraceptives and sexual reproductive health services, as well as to a masculinity that maintains control over the female body. In addition, the condition of abandonment of a large number of children calls to guarantee the rights of access in matters of sexual and reproductive health throughout the country.

"My husband left me. I consider that, as a woman, I can move forward. I studied, my daughters are studying. I took his name to the courthouse [for not supporting his daughters], I still worked. They hired me to cook, I'm always doing something. I do not want a husband anymore. After all that I’ve been through with the first ... Now I do what I want. I sleep, I decide what I want, under my responsibility, "

Many women are abandoned by their partners. One of them said: "I was 15 years old, he was 50, he was from Talamanca, he went to work in Costa Rica, he lasted a month and he came back to visit, until one year he did not come back. And he hasn’t since. He has a 23-year-old son, a 17-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter. (qualitative research with Naso Tijer-di women)

**Barriers to access to health**

To address this issue, it is necessary to present a brief outline of the factors that hinder women's access and attention to health services in indigenous communities, and that cause maternal and neonatal deaths when they do not arrive on time. These components were identified by Maine in their theoretical approach to the three delays in delivery care, and verified by numerous studies developed in order to improve and ensure maternal health: a) late recognition of danger signals; b) delays in making decisions to take the woman or newborn to a health facility; and, c) time of the woman's transfer to the health facility, including the time to receive care.

When comparing the theoretical data on maternal deaths and the results of the interviews, it is highlighted that there are still problems in the access of pregnant women to the health facility at the time of delivery. This is confirmed by some of the testimonies extracted from the workshops of the study:

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46 Diagnostico mujer indigena Panama
"Distance causes women not to go down to give birth and give birth in the house. With the midwife "(Ngäbe woman); "There are no qualified personnel to attend the birth, the deliveries are done in the houses, mostly" (Emberá woman).

"... If you have to go look for health care on the Panamanian side, between distance and poor attention increases the risks. We want the government to have permanent medical staff, at least, for first aid" (Bribri Woman).

Others pointed out the following:

- "Discrimination influences that they will not receive health care." (Female ngäbe leader).
- "In the clinic they do not attend to them when they are dressed in indigenous clothes" (Mujer guna).

The way in which these women live and the treatment in their care, require a process of intercultural dialogue promoted by health providers and community leaders.

Depending on their location, some women travel to Costa Rica to receive better quality health care.

2.5. Shocks and Fragility

Being vulnerable to risks related to violence, conflict, displacement, large movements of migrants, environmental degradation, natural hazard induced disasters and other types of climate events, or health shocks, such as epidemic outbreaks. 48

Violence - The indigenous leaders of Latin America agree that among the difficulties in accessing justice is the "structural and institutional violence exerted by the State itself.49"

Poverty is a condition that affects access to justice services for indigenous women, marginalizes them and condemns them to situations of violence for a good part of their lives. The lags in education, the persistence of illiteracy and the lack of knowledge about their human rights make them vulnerable to the exercise of their legal and citizens' rights.

Structural violence is caused by factors that remain in society and generate a type of violence related to poverty and social exclusion. These two realities affect in a very particular way the indigenous peoples that over the years continue to maintain the highest levels of poverty and extreme poverty in the country.

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48 Leave no one behind discussion paper
49 National Strategy PENDING
This structural violence, which is expressed through racism and discrimination against indigenous populations, has a greater impact on the lives of indigenous women and their sons and daughters.

Most of the women whose interviews are depicted in the study Diagnostics of Indigenous Women in Panama (UNDP 2015) convey the belief that governments, over the years, have not had the political will to comprehensively solve the problems of indigenous territories and populations.

In counties and territories with police presence of National Border Service (SENAFRONT, in the Spanish acronym) there were women who expressed that members of the security entity exert violence against them and adolescents, some even leave them pregnant.

In several interviews with indigenous women police are perceived as an aggressive security entity for the population, which does not care for or protect women, especially when they are victims of violence. On very few occasions they act to prevent them from being attacked.

**Patrimonial and psychological violence** – Interviewed women perceive their abandonment and of their children by their partners as an act of violence that affects all spheres of their lives, mainly the economic one. This situation becomes one of the main problems that indigenous women have, since, on many occasions, they are left with more than five children and without any support from their father.

Behind all these arguments, there is the valuation that the patriarchal culture makes of women an object of men, which entails a relationship of unequal power in the private and public spheres. Men are perceived to exercise control and power of decisions, and women must obey in a submissive manner this established order, often reinforced by the community.

**Panama’s Indigenous Peoples’ Development Plan**

As a result of conflicts and struggles arising from the adoption of various laws that affected the interests and rights of the indigenous peoples of Panama, which suffered from an adequate process of prior consultation and participation of traditional authorities, a process was carried out of dialogue between the State and the representatives of the Ngäbe Buglé territory (comarca) between the months of January and March 2012 with the participation of the Catholic Church, UNDP and sister UN agencies.

The National Indigenous Development Board held its first session on May 11, 2012 seeking to create a Development Plan for the indigenous peoples of Panama that would become a State policy of execution by the governments of the day. The Board (Mesa) was integrated by representatives of the National Government (Minister of Government, Secretary of the National Development (Consertacion Nacional), National Directorate of Indigenous Policy, National Assembly) and the

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50 Diagnostics of Indigenous Women in Panama
Traditional Authorities of the indigenous peoples of Panama, which through their congresses have assigned to their respective technical teams and advisors that represent them with their respective programs and particular needs of each region and collective territory, as well as other indigenous territories in the process of recognition.

Such integrated board had four main pillars of work:

1) Elaborate a Comprehensive Development Plan for Indigenous Peoples of the Republic of Panama;
2) Design and put in practice a permanent space for political exchanges and to gather proposals concerning indigenous issues among indigenous representatives and the national government;
3) Build capacities among different actors (government, civil society, indigenous peoples as well as news outlets) to implement the processes of consultation, political dialogue and international instruments and agreements and
4) Disseminate findings and the parties’ agreements to public opinion, including in different indigenous languages.

Altogether there were 94 consultations in which communities from different traditional territories took part in, located in strategic geographic locations to enable a higher number of indigenous peoples’ participation.

The Indigenous Peoples’ Development Plan is divided in three pillars: political/judicial, economic and social.

**Political/Judicial:** The plan seeks to strengthen traditional structures and authorities to consolidate dialogue with state institutions and national society, guarantee territorial governance, move towards legal pluralism, strengthening traditional practices of the indigenous justice administration. It also aims to consolidate consultation procedures and full and effective participation of indigenous peoples consistent with international standards, paying special attention to the leadership of indigenous women and youth.

The **Economic pillar** of the national plan seeks to boost social and economic indicators while ensuring environmental protection. It includes capacity building sessions for farmers seeking to improve productivity, centers of capacity building, ensuring that native knowledge is valued and shared, as well as organic farming.

This also seeks to boost food safety, reducing dependency on external products while recovering traditional productive systems.

Another component of the economic pillar is creating tourism companies led by indigenous peoples from each territory, while boosting the production and trading of handicrafts.
Special emphasis is placed on granting access to women and young indigenous peoples of economic and productive activities through training, investments and financing to women and young entrepreneurs.

The Social Pillar seeks to improve well-being and living conditions of Panamanian people, with the implementation of specific programmes to improve education, culture, health, living standards and infrastructure in indigenous territories, according to each territory’s plan. In the education front, this includes improving secondary and tertiary education, focusing on youth and women, as well as boosting bilingual and intercultural education, valuing ancestral knowledge and cultural identity.

Health is also a key focus. The plan seeks to improve infrastructure and attention conditions for comprehensive health attention in indigenous territories, with a special focus on children, youth and women (particularly pre-natal attention). It also seeks to improve the emergency attention for indigenous territories. At the same time, the plan seeks to improve traditional indigenous medicine with state financial support. This entails officially recognizing the knowledge over plants and traditional medicine, promoting its usage in child labour, orthopedic therapy, preventive medicine, and others.

A National Board for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Panama will support the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Development Plan. Such Board will be facilitated by UNDP in Panama, which will also support with technical assistance required to implement the Plan, with an external evaluation every two years.

**3. Challenges and Issues to Consider**

Over the past twelve months, both the Permanent Forum and the General Assembly have made recommendations for 2030 Agenda follow-up on Indigenous Peoples. The Permanent Forum, at its sixteenth session in April 2018 meeting, made a number of recommendations regarding the 2030 Agenda.51

The main concerns expressed in the Permanent Forum on the 2030 Agenda included “the implementation gap between the progress made in institutional, legislative and policy frameworks within the region and the effective measures taken by the Governments; the criminalization of protest and the persecution and killings of defenders of the collective rights of indigenous peoples; the lack of consultations to obtain the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples, especially in the context of disputes over land rights, the expansion of extractive industries and agroindustry; and the alarming levels of violence against indigenous women, youth and children, 51 https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/06/Report-on-ForumEnglish.pdf
including sexual abuse of indigenous children in educational contexts and increased femicide in the region.”

The Permanent Forum also emphasized that the 2030 Agenda and the upcoming 2020 census round, as well as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, are opportunities to achieve progress on the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These processes can the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples at all levels. The Permanent Forum recognizes the need to enhance the participation of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, including indigenous women and youth.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 72/155 of December 2017, addressed several issues regarding the 2030 Agenda and indigenous peoples. The General Assembly:

- Encouraged Member States to give due consideration to all the rights of indigenous peoples in fulfilling the commitments undertaken in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the elaboration of national programmes (para. 14).

- Encouraged States to consider including in their voluntary national reviews for the high-level political forum on sustainable development and their national and global reports information related to indigenous peoples on the progress made and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, bearing in mind paragraphs 78 and 79 of the 2030 Agenda, and also encouraged States to compile disaggregated data to measure progress and to ensure that no one is left behind (para. 15).

- Encouraged the Secretary-General to include information pertinent to indigenous peoples in the forthcoming annual reports on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (para. 16).

- Stressed the need to strengthen the commitment of States and the entities of the United Nations system to mainstreaming the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples into development policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels, and encouraged them to give due consideration to the rights of indigenous peoples in achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda (para. 17).

- Also stressed the need for indigenous peoples of all regions to contribute to the high-level political forum on sustainable development and encouraged States to engage with indigenous peoples at the local, national and regional levels in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (para. 18).

- Invited the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples to give due

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52 Idem.
53 https://undocs.org/A/RES/72/155
consideration, within their mandates, to the rights of indigenous peoples as related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (para. 19).

- Encouraged the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to continue to provide inputs on indigenous issues to the high-level political forum on sustainable development for consideration in its thematic reviews (para. 20).

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