

PANAMA

**REPUBLIC OF PANAMA
MINISTRY OF YOUTH, WOMEN, CHILDHOOD AND THE FAMILY
NATIONAL DIRECTORATE FOR WOMEN**

NATIONAL REPORT

**MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS AND OBSTACLES IN
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION
NINTH REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN (ECLAC)**

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INTRODUCTION

The State of Panama is committed nationally and internationally to the promotion of activities aimed at highlighting women's contributions to national development in order to support efforts to achieve gender equality and equity.

Under the presidency of Her Excellency Ms. Mireya Moscoso, the Government, through the Ministry of Youth, Women, Childhood and the Family (MINJUMNFA), the National Council for Women (CONAMU) and the National Directorate for Women (DINAMU), has undertaken with genuine interest the task of formulating and carrying out public policies from a gender perspective to implement and follow up the Beijing Platform for Action.

It is hoped that the information provided will contribute to the analysis of major improvements achieved and obstacles encountered by Panama in recent years in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE COUNTRY

The 2000 Population and Housing Census of the Republic of Panama showed that the country had a population of 2,839,177, consisting of 1,406,611 women and 1,432,566 men.

The majority of the population lived in urban areas: rural residents (1,250,880 persons, including 657,873 men and 593,000 women) accounted for 43.3 percent of the population. The total indigenous population of 285,231 consisted of 146,122 men and 139,109 women.

Panama, a multicultural and multiethnic country, has an area of 75,517 sq km and comprises nine provinces and eight indigenous regions. Its official language is Spanish.

Panama's illiteracy rate, down to 7.8 percent in 2000 from 10.7 percent in 1990, is 8.2 percent for women and 7.1 percent for men.

In Panama, as in the other Central American countries, education has achieved substantial overall progress in respect of literacy. According to the review on Central America carried out under the Puebla-Panama Plan, Panama has the highest literacy rate (91 percent) after Costa Rica.

The gender-related development index of the 2002 Human Development Report shows that Panama is making progress in narrowing gaps between women and men, especially in education. Panamanian women receive more education and stay longer in the education system.

The Panamanian nation is organized as a sovereign and independent State. Its government is unitary, republican and democratic. Article 2 of the current Constitution, adopted in 1972 and revised in 1978 and 1983, provides for three branches of government, the executive, the legislative and the judiciary, which operate independently but in harmonious cooperation.

NINTH REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

REPORT BY PANAMA ON MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS AND OBSTACLES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

I. OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF WOMEN

The State of Panama, having participated in international conferences and signed international conventions that guarantee equal rights and human dignity for women and men, has made great efforts, particularly in the last ten years, to implement and follow up the Beijing Platform for Action by formulating public policies that include Panamanian women in national development plans.

MINJUMNFA, CONAMU and DINAMU constitute the national mechanism for mainstreaming gender equality and equity in the economic, political, social and cultural development of the country. In pursuing their goals, they coordinate their activities with the network of national mechanisms for promoting equal opportunities, the network of public and civil bodies producing and using statistical information with a view to mainstreaming the gender approach in national statistics, the national system for gender-related training, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations.

The State of Panama endeavours to create the necessary conditions for strengthening the role of women in society by removing obstacles to their active participation on an equal-opportunity basis in all areas of public and private life. To that end it has promoted the approval of various legal instruments and international conventions designed to eliminate gender inequality and ensure protection of women's human rights in Panama, such as:

- Executive Decree No. 53 of 25 June 2002 stipulating rules for the implementation of Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 instituting equal opportunities for women;
- Act No. 68 of 19 December 2001 establishing joint ownership deeds as a form of land acquisition and amending articles of the land code;
- Act No. 38 of 10 July 2001 reforming and expanding the criminal and judicial code on domestic violence and ill-treatment of children and teenagers, repealing some articles of Act No. 27 of 1995 and stipulating other provisions;
- Act No. 17 of 28 March 2001 approving the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- Act No. 6 of 4 May 2000 providing for the compulsory use of gender-sensitive language, content and illustrations in school textbooks and publications;

- Executive Decree No. 33 of 24 April 2000 declaring the month of March Women's Month for the conduct of activities to mark the International Women's Day;
- Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 instituting equal opportunities for women;
- Act No. 54 of 7 December 1999 reforming the voluntary insurance system of the Social Security Fund (CSS) to cover persons dedicated to caring for their family;
- Act No. 22 of 14 June 1997 reforming the electoral code and introducing other measures (including the electoral gender quota ensuring a 30 percent participation by women);
- Act No. 12 of 20 April 1995 ratifying the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belem Do Para Convention)
- Act No. 44 of 12 August 1995 stipulating rules for standardizing and modernizing industrial relations (inclusion of the offence of sexual harassment as fair ground for individual dismissal, thus forbidding employers to engage in such conduct and introducing standards favourable to women, for instance in Articles 14, 16, 18 and 28);
- Act No. 50 of 23 November 1995 protecting and encouraging breastfeeding;
- Act No. 3 of 17 May 1994 adopting the family code;
- Act No. 9 of 20 June 1994 establishing and regulating careers in the administration (inclusion of the offence of sexual harassment as fair ground for immediate dismissal and protecting pregnant workers);
- Act No. 22 of 7 December 1990 permitting women to choose whether or not to use their spouse's name.

The following measures constitute further major advances in the area of public policies aimed at ensuring equal opportunities at the national level:

1. Institutionalization of the gender approach in public policies: dissemination, implementation and follow-up of the plan for equal opportunities for women in Panama (PIOM II - 2002-2006).
2. Establishment and coordination of the network of government mechanisms for promoting equal opportunities for women in Panama.
3. Increase and strengthening of the women's bureaux in government bodies (there are currently 44 such units).
4. Advancement of women: awareness raising, training and dissemination in order to promote equal opportunities in Panama.

5. Women's human rights: dissemination and follow-up to national and international laws, agreements, conventions and decrees.
6. Establishment of the database for the Panama gender-indicators system (SIEGPA); enactment and publication of Decree No. 89 of 13 November 2002 establishing the network of public and civil bodies producing and using information; establishment on 23 May 2003 of the network of public and civil bodies producing and using statistical information; and coordination for the updating of the SIEGPA database in 2003-2004.
7. Strengthening of local management to prevent and deal with intrafamily violence (IFV) in the pilot municipalities of Soná and San Miguelito.
8. Drafting of the National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence and a Policy for a Well-Ordered Society.
9. Drafting, publication and presentation of the third Clara González national report on the status of women in Panama, 2000-2001.
10. Organization of training and awareness-raising seminars on public policies with a gender perspective for a total of 1,000 women from the region comprising Azuero, Veraguas, Coclé, Bocas del Toro, Darién, Colón and Panamá. The subjects addressed were: women's human rights, self-esteem, introduction to the gender approach, domestic violence, Act No. 4 instituting equal opportunities for women and the rules stipulated for its implementation in Executive Decree No. 53 of 25 June 2002, Act No. 38 on domestic violence, and the dissemination of PIOM II.
11. Conclusion of the business management training agreement entitled "Education and training: the key to poverty eradication", designed to empower 2,300 women nationwide to plan, manage and attain better standards of living as women, mothers and citizens.

Other significant developments were: the implementation of macroeconomic policies that take account of women's needs by supporting women's poverty reduction efforts, revising laws and administrative practices to ensure that Panamanian women have access to financial resources through savings and credit; provision for equal access to education through the allocation of resources for educational reforms and the monitoring of the implementation of those reforms; the increase of education and employment opportunities for disabled women; the strengthening of preventive health programmes for women; the promotion of the Ministry of Health's programmes on research and on the dissemination of information on women's health, by ensuring the collection, analysis and presentation of health data; and support for identifying safe, efficient, feasible and acceptable planning methods that respect the users' points of view and gender differences.

As regards the prevention and elimination of violence against women, activities undertaken have allowed the gender perspective to cut across laws, policies and State programmes and projects, while women's human rights have been promoted and protected through the implementation of

international human rights instruments, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

As is generally the case with State-wide processes, obstacles have been encountered in the implementation of the Platform for Action since 1995. They widen social gaps and deprive Panamanians of equal opportunities. Arduous efforts are under way to put in place State and community safety nets to support impoverished women and ensure that Panama's specific needs are taken into account in international assistance programmes. A relevant theoretical basis is being laid for mainstreaming the gender perspective in economic policies and for devising indices that reflect women's work in the non-remunerated sector and at home as an input to the national economy.

Panama, a participant in the Millennium Summit, pursues the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), seeking in particular to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. In that connection, Panama has in recent years made significant progress in eliminating persisting gender inequalities, *inter alia* in the area of education, in which it seems that the goal of universal provision of primary education by 2015 might be attained. Conditions are favourable for investing in education, as there is growing awareness of its importance to social development. (1)

As part of efforts to ensure equal opportunities through support for particularly vulnerable groups, the Government endeavours to redress the family's role as the primary unit of Panamanian society by strengthening the sense of ethics, morality and parental and filial responsibility. (2) The same means is used to promote and encourage greater community participation by decentralizing social programmes and reducing their bureaucratic aspects.

In the last few decades, Panama's development process, although not problem-free, has led to significant poverty reduction and has gradually improved the quality of life of the major population sectors. Poverty, which according to some estimates affected approximately half (46 percent) of the Panamanian population around 1983, decreased to 37 percent by 1997. (3) It has also been reported that extreme poverty fell in the same period from 28 to 19 percent of the population. Despite this progress, however, the existing level of poverty, compounded by serious regional and cultural disparities, is too high for a country such as Panama.

Panama's main social and economic policy challenge consists in finding ways to integrate into a single thrust processes that have hitherto been separate and mutually exclusive. To that effect, efforts are under way to transform the most dynamic foreign-exchange and income-generating economic activities into sources of productive employment for the growing work force, to expand the social investment of recent decades to excluded population sectors, effectively giving them too access to production, and to ensure that heretofore informal or traditional activities are linked to the needs and the potential of the more dynamic sectors. A holistic approach to social and economic policy is therefore considered an effective means of further reducing gender inequality in Panama.

II. PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN IMPLEMENTING ISSUES OF MAJOR CONCERN UNDER THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION AND NEW INITIATIVES AND MEASURES HIGHLIGHTED AT THE TWENTY-FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

All of the social forces of Panama are committed to the cause of mainstreaming equal opportunities for women in State policies for improving the status of women in all sectors nationwide.

That commitment and all of the country's international commitments under, inter alia, the Declaration of Human Rights, the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Optional Protocol to that Convention are major items on the State's agenda.

As a result, areas of government responsibility have been identified to address public policy issues from a gender perspective, such as DINAMU (in MINJUMNFA) and CONAMU, with a view to strengthening the role of women in national development, ensuring the full exercise of their rights and enabling them to share access to power and decision-making along with responsibilities at home and in the community with men. The public policies formulated in that light show substantial political will to integrate Panamanian women into development.

Some of the effective measures adopted to address issues of major concern under the Beijing Platform for Action are listed hereunder.

A. WOMEN, ECONOMY AND POVERTY

Panama is one of the countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean region whose people have substantial opportunities to enjoy a high to medium standard of quality of life. Historically, its economy has been open to international trade and investment. Nevertheless, according to the Human Development Report 2002, poverty affects 40.5 percent of the population of Panama.

The poverty divide coefficient in Panama, which at national level was 32.8 percent in 1990 and 24.0 percent in 2000, is much higher in rural areas (46.2 percent, almost twice the national level) than in urban areas (10.7 percent). Redressing that situation requires specific policies and strategies targeting the rural population. (4)

The above figures show the urgent need to formulate and implement economic and social public policies at the macro-, medium- and micro-level from a gender perspective in order to facilitate women's participation in production and other economic activities under conditions of equality.

Aware that poverty mainly affects women, Panama plans to pursue poverty-eradication policies as an urgent task of the State. Accordingly, pursuant to legal provisions and international guidelines, specific activities have been launched under the 2002-2004 social policy and strategy to tackle poverty and its consequences.

One positive policy development has been the adoption of Act No. 68 of 19 December 2001, establishing joint ownership deeds as a form of land acquisition and amending articles of the land code. The implementation of that law constitutes a significant step forward in promoting women's access to land by stipulating that spouses or members of a de facto union of persons legally empowered to contract matrimony may legitimately acquire land and requiring the State to promote joint land ownership and to develop, through the National Directorate of Agrarian Reform, mechanisms to extend the legalization of land tenure to other forms of acquisition and award, including property rights. The elimination of the head of family designation and of petitions for land and the possibility of granting land to both spouses or members of a de facto union have afforded Panamanian women the opportunity to accede to land ownership.

Accordingly, the General Accounting Office of the Republic, through the Statistics and Census Directorate, has published the Sixth National Gender-Specific Agricultural Census (the first agricultural census in that form), with gender-disaggregated and comparative figures in the areas surveyed, such as access to land (see Graph 1).

In the agricultural sector, land ownership is important as security for loans and/or funding. In evaluating credit applicants, funding bodies require collateral, provided in the form of property or by a guarantor, as the case may be, to guarantee reimbursement of capital lent or payment of credit extended. Land owners therefore have access to credit.

Graph 1
Agricultural producers with access to land, by gender

180,000		
	164,312	
160,000		
140,000		
120,000		
100,000		
80,000		
	68,152	
60,000		
40,000		
20,000		
0		
	Men	Women

Source: Sixth National Agricultural Gender-Specific Census, April 2001

In farming year 2000-01, 7,830 men and women producers (only 3 percent of the total) received credit or financial assistance, 93 percent of which went to men and 7 percent to women (see Graph 2). Furthermore, such assistance was received by 1 percent of women producers and by 4 percent of men producers, and was provided by various funding sources, such as public and private banks, cooperative bodies and similar bodies.

Graph 2
Agricultural producers who received loans or credit, by gender

8,000		
	7,304	
6,000		
4,000		
3,000		
2,000		
		526
0		
	Men	Women

Source: Sixth National Agricultural Gender-Specific Census, April 2001

An example of progress made is PIOM II, a plan based on the following principles: an integrated approach; cooperation and coordination between the government sector and civil society; and a cross-cutting strategy designed to boost the impact of measures promoting gender equality and equity, ensure constructive participation, involve all stakeholders - men and women - in the process and identify and develop affirmative action to reduce discrimination and inequality.

The areas covered are: education, culture and sports, health, economic issues and poverty, employment, family, housing, power and participation, social communication, environmental issues, and institutional mechanisms for promoting legal and social equity for women. Cross-cutting categories include indigenous, black, and rural women, female children, female teenagers, female adults, disabled women and other disadvantaged women's groups.

The National Gender-Specific Training System is of vital importance. It provides and enhances knowledge in all State institutions and NGOs with a view to developing leadership in awareness-raising and decision-making, with special emphasis on rural areas.

B. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN

Education is an area of major public investment in Panama. Consequently, according to the indicators, boys and girls have comparable access to primary education given the higher female enrolment and retention rates in the last years (UNDP, 2002, p. 79). In secondary education, female enrolment increased between 1990 and 2000 and is higher. The gender gap widened considerably in favour of women in tertiary education. At the State University of Panama, the female enrolment and graduation rates are twice and three times as high as the male rates respectively. (5)

Activities carried out to promote gender equity and equality in educational institutions include the following:

- Setting up the education-in-equality network (*Red de Educar en Igualdad*)
- Organizing awareness-raising days and seminars on gender issues and disseminating gender-based public educational policies

- Establishing various mechanisms to contribute to the dissemination of the gender perspective
- Implementing adult literacy programmes for indigenous women of the Gnobe Buglé, Kuna and Emberá ethnic groups in order to:
 - identify the interests and problems of indigenous women belonging to the above groups
 - draft handbooks for Tara Dirieka Jie Ngweanka teachers
 - draft handbooks for Sawa buru ebera bed eara jaradiad'I teachers (Emberá language)
 - address the Ebera Bedéa Búkavad'i
- Gender mainstreaming in general basic education projects
- Formulating public education policies with a view to:
 - paving the way for the institutionalization of gender-based educational policies
 - ensuring intersectoral coordination with organizations that promote gender balance in human development
 - providing training at the national level through the national gender-based training system in educational centres that belong to the education-in-equality network
 - publishing texts, findings and laws drafted from a gender perspective.

Literacy in the 15-24 age group of the population rose from 94.8 percent in 1990 to 96.1 percent in 2000. However, analysis by region reveals imbalances between urban and rural areas. In 2000, while the national literacy rate was 96.1 percent, literacy rates in urban and rural areas were 99.0 and 90.8 percent respectively. Universal provision of primary education is of great importance, since inadequate learning, induced by poverty, breeds social exclusion and low labour capacity.

The ratio of female and male literacy rates among 15-24 year olds was 0.99 in 2000 (see Graph 3 for comparative 1990 and 2000 figures).

Graph 3
Female and male literacy rates among 15-24 year olds

Table 1
Level of education of Panamanian indigenous women and girls above 10 by indigenous group
(2000 Census)

Level of instruction	Total	Kuna	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	Undeclared
TOTAL	93,087	22,664	53,070	6,242	1,079	318	7,322	2,207	1,003	154
Without diploma	36,476	7,983	23,021	2,175	190	119	2,294	614	64	16
Incomplete primary education	27,434	4,613	16,971	1,563	357	84	2,782	906	136	22
Complete primary education	14,418	3,731	7,719	844	301	52	1,209	375	167	20
Unspecified primary education	39	27	3	1	0	0	4	3	0	1
Subtotal	41,891	8,371	24,693	2,408	658	136	3,895	1,284	303	43
Incomplete secondary education	10,175	4,171	4,089	491	150	42	761	203	243	25
Complete secondary education	2,458	1,156	790	89	42	8	113	60	176	24
Unspecified secondary education	12	8	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0
Subtotal	12,645	6,336	4,879	580	192	60	877	263	420	49

Up to 3 years at university	651	335	158	21	9	4	32	11	74	7
4 or more years at university	451	198	104	13	12	2	19	7	81	15
Unspecified university education	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Subtotal	1,105	636	262	34	21	6	51	18	156	22
Postgraduate	28	11	3	0	2		4	0	8	0
Master's	17	10	0	0	1	0	1	0	5	0
Higher non-university education	142	71	39	6	2	0	5	4	14	0
Vocational training	462	204	133	26	9	5	43	14	26	2
Special education	101	50	20	5	3	0	15	4	3	1
Not specified	190	94	20	8	1	0	36	6	4	21

Source: General Accounting Office of the Republic, *Population and Housing Census*, 2000.

Gender-based education and training is a priority area. It is promoted within the family and in the schools and encouraged through the teaching approach, textbooks and other means.

C. WOMEN AND HEALTH

In Panama, the approach to health care seeks to combine promotion, prevention, therapy and rehabilitation activities to ensure a healthy life for men and women and empower them, on the basis of ever more egalitarian relations, to strengthen their autonomy and self-determination. Accordingly, MINSA endeavours to provide public health services to the entire population without discrimination and without any gender distinctions and to ensure universal access to a health care system designed to address health issues of all levels of complexity.

Pursuant to the Constitution of Panama, under which health is a right and an obligation, Act No. 4 of 1999 on equal opportunities for women specifically enshrines women's right to health and requires that policies be reformulated from a gender perspective. Some relevant examples are listed below.

a. Reproductive health norms and standards

The norms of the comprehensive health programme for women and the comprehensive health standards for the population provide general indicators on the monitoring of pregnancies. The goal is to ensure 100 percent coverage of pregnant women and 80 percent coverage of women in the first term of pregnancy.

- Women with a high-risk pregnancy must be monitored by the most qualified personnel available or referred to a higher health care level, since such pregnancies entail a greater probability of illness, death or side effects before or after birth.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the pregnancy must be based systematically on perinatal clinical history.
- Low-risk pregnancies may be monitored in any term by qualified health personnel and in remote areas by health assistants and trained traditional midwives.
- Counselling on sexual health and reproductive rights has become part of medical consultations with a view to eliminating discrimination against women. Such advice

helps women to make decisions and to deal with myths, taboos and false beliefs, promotes gender equality and facilitates the resumption of constructive activities.

b. Women's mental health

MINSA policies and strategies for 2000-04 contain measures related to mental health issues. As part of the general health policy (designed to promote and protect primary health care for the entire population and to enhance MINSA's standard-setting and regulatory role), the mental health policy aims specifically to develop mental health activities.

c. The elderly and health

Geriatric programmes are implemented in health centres, such as hospitals, long-term care centres and Homes of Hope, in which health services are provided directly to those who qualify for them, in addition to financial benefits granted under programmes for the elderly.

d. Access to health benefits

Everyone has free access to health services without any gender-based distinction or discrimination. MINSA has made great investments to improve the quality of health care and modernize health services.

A Medical Commission in MINSA's General Directorate of Population Health Care carries out activities on foeticide and maternal deaths. There are also procedures for investigating cases of violence against pregnant women.

Panama's maternal mortality rate - around 0.6 per 1000 live births - has been stable since the 1980s (0.5 and 0.6 per 1000 live births in 1990 and 2000 respectively).

Eighty percent of maternal deaths are due directly to gynaecological causes, mainly haemorrhage, hypertension during pregnancy, abortions and puerperal complications. In 2000, the average maternal mortality rate in urban and rural areas was 0.3 and 0.9 per 1000 live births respectively (see Graph 4).

Graph 4
National maternal mortality rate, by area, 1990 and 2000

Total
Urban
Rural

Rate per 1000 live births. Deaths due to pregnancy, birth and puerperal complications.

Source: General Accounting Office of the Republic, *Vital Statistics*.

Furthermore, professional care was provided for 90.5 percent of births in Panama in 2000, 90.3 percent of which occurred in a health institution. Birth care coverage increased from 86.3 percent in 1990 to 90.5 percent in 2000. The increase was greater in the rural areas (from 75.4 to 81.3 percent in the same period).

Graph 5 shows births per 10,000 inhabitants which occurred in health institutions or were assisted by a home-health professional: a physician, obstetric nurse, infirmary assistant or health assistant.

Graph 5
Percentage of births with care provided by qualified personnel

Total
Urban
Rural

Source: General Accounting Office of the Republic, *Vital Statistics*.

Efforts are under way to attain roughly 100 percent coverage of births by professionals. In areas with high maternal mortality rates, a high percentage of home births, a dispersed rural population and an indigenous population, training and monitoring programmes for traditional midwives can contribute to the enhancement of timely patient referrals and to the improvement of practices to ensure smooth and safe births.

e. Women and HIV/AIDS

Between 1990 and 2000, 184 cases of women with HIV/AIDS, aged 15-24, were reported in Panama, 79 of whom died in the same period (MINSA, 2001). According to the integrated development index system, Panama's HIV/AIDS mortality rate in 2000 was 6.3, and 550 new HIV cases were reported in 2000.

An analysis of the figures shows a significant change in relative risk since the epidemic began. The man/woman ratio declined from 5 to 1 in the early period (1984-1991) to 3 to 1 in 2000. Moreover, the man/woman ratio among young people (aged 15-24) is 1.35, while in the next age bracket (25-44) it is 2.75, which indicates that the gap is closing. The incidence of the epidemic among the young is a more serious threat, since it may moreover promote vertical transmission to recently born boys and girls.

Progress in this area includes new Panamanian legislation, enacted in 2000: Act No. 3 of 5 January 2000 on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). It establishes a national programme for STD and HIV/AIDS information, prevention, training, research and holistic health care activities and lays down the rights and obligations of patients and carriers.

The law deals in particular with perinatal transmission, providing for appropriate diagnostic tests and the specific treatment of Rh-positive pregnant women in accordance with

established standards (Article 24). As regards STD and VIH patients and carriers, the law stipulates that the competent executive authority, through MINSA and in coordination with other sectors, will manage the financial resources required for comprehensive care (Article 25). CSS covers triple therapy for those insured.

Stemming and reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS by 2015 is a challenge that Panama is trying to meet, *inter alia*, by conducting awareness campaigns and providing information material for the population at large and women in particular.

* **ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE HEALTH SECTOR**

1. Standards and procedures are in place and training has been provided in the 14 health districts.
2. Measures have been taken for the intersectoral coordination of the various actors (National Committee on Criminal Statistical Analysis (CONADEC), MINSA, Institute of Forensic Medicine and Technical Judicial Police (PTJ)) with a view to compiling information based on common variables related to domestic violence.
3. Training activities aimed at the various actors: MINSA's primary health care workers, CSS and the NGOs.
4. Community networks have been set up throughout the country. Their local plans of action are being implemented (12 networks) or formulated (11 networks).
5. Panama participated in the 2001 Symposium on Gender Violence, Health and Rights in the Americas, at which it presented the Juan Díaz community project. The Juan Díaz Support Network against Domestic Violence was recognized as a successful Latin American community experiment (PAHO/WHO).
6. A plan for gender-based health-care training has been drawn up for consideration by MINSA's Training Directorate.
7. Educational support material on the various aspects of gender and health, gender-related violence and self-medication, posters and research publications have been produced and distributed.
8. In cooperation with DINAMU of MINJUMNFA, the sector participated in the drafting of rules for the implementation of Act No. 4 of 1999 instituting equal opportunities for women and in the working groups on health, gender and violence indicators set up to draft PIOM II.

* **PLANNED HEALTH SECTOR ACTIVITIES**

1. Monitoring the cross-cutting processes of gender and domestic violence analysis as part of institutional policies, community network promotion and research on the status of women.
2. Promoting synergy among health authorities with a view to effective gender-based registration and analysis at the local, regional and national levels.
3. Promoting coordination strategies aimed at the institutional strengthening of the women, gender, health and development programme.
4. Technical and active contribution to the drafting and implementation of the National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence and a Policy for a Well-Ordered Society.

D. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Progress in the implementation of the Platform for Action in the last few years includes significant advances in quantifying violence at all levels of Panamanian society, launching prevention, promotion and detection campaigns and taking measures to care for and rehabilitate victims. Accordingly, Act No. 38 of 10 July 2001, amending Act No. 27 of 16 June 1995, contains further provisions for protecting children and teenagers of both sexes from the various forms of domestic violence and ill-treatment.

The formulation of the National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence and a Policy for a Well-Ordered Society, aimed at decreasing the growing daily violence experienced by Panamanian society, is another positive policy measure. That plan seeks to remove sociocultural, institutional and legal obstacles in order to address the many forms that domestic violence takes. It also covers activities to provide the population with specialized human resources and adequate services to ensure delivery of holistic, timely quality care provided with warmth.

It is a comprehensive plan, characterized mainly by the promotion of human rights, the gender perspective, social equity and national solidarity. It also includes protecting victims of violence, punishing the perpetrators of IFV, promoting the rights of Panamanian women, disseminating relevant information and undertaking concerted action to combat and eliminate domestic violence against women.

Meeting the challenges of implementing Act No. 38 of July 2001 has required coordinated efforts by the women's rights movement and organizations and the competent government bodies. Only such coordination can ensure progress in eradicating violence in the life of the population in Panama, pursuant to the various agreements and conventions ratified by the country with a view to eliminating the discrimination of women and children and promoting equal opportunities in the Panamanian society, thereby enabling it to attain the quality of life needed to strengthen democracy.

Under local pilot plans formulated in the communities of Soná and San Miguelito, a local model for IFV prevention and care has been proposed and the managerial, administrative and operative staff of the competent bodies have built the necessary technical capacities for its implementation in the health, justice and education sectors in regard to activities such as strategic planning, evaluation and monitoring of social projects for IFV prevention and care.

The collection of statistical information on gender violence is complex. In 2000, DINAMU set up SIEGPA, a database that compiles a series of indicators in the following areas of gender violence:

- * GENDER VIOLENCE
- Intrafamily violence (IFV)
 - IFV cases reported to health bodies
 - IFV cases denounced through to the technical judicial police
 - Legal implications of IFV
- Sexual violence

- Rape
- Incest
- Sexual harassment
- Prostitution
- Institutional violence

Most of the data are recorded by the health and police authorities. In 2003, the Ministry of Health, through the Directorate of Health Policies, referred to a total of 1,206 cases in its report on suspected IFV and ill-treatment of a minor, of which 876 were perpetrated against women, mainly in the 20-49 age group.

In 2003, the Santo Tomas Hospital's records of cases of suspected violence showed a proportion of 168 men to 532 women victims of domestic violence, with the main incidence in the 35-49 age group.

Similarly, in 2002 the technical judicial police recorded 1,920 denunciations of domestic violence and 10 violent domestic homicides involving women victims.

E. WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICTS

Governments are aware that, to improve the status of women, they must eliminate all forms of discrimination against them and ensure that they are represented in economic, political, social and cultural decision-making processes nationwide, as established at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994.

Chapter X of PIOM II, which has been formulated as part of public policies to contribute to the promotion of women, addresses the problems of violence and armed conflict.

Through access to information, laws and institutional mechanisms for the prevention of, protection from and punishment of violence, Panama has managed to improve the care - based on collaboration between government bodies and NGOs - provided to the population, especially women and children victims of armed conflict, who are displaced or refugees in the Eastern Border region (on the Panama-Columbia boundary). The cooperation of the National Office for Refugees (ONPAR) and the participation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (OHCR) have been of great importance.

As regards violence due to armed conflicts, care was provided in Panama, in the Eastern Border region, in the first quarter of 2003, to 935 male and female refugees and displaced persons by the Panama Red Cross and, in the second quarter, to 39 Colombians with refugee status and 25 indigenous people with the status of displaced persons. Furthermore, the Panama Red Cross, under its humanitarian assistance programme for displaced persons and refugees, particularly those of school age, attended to 600 Panamanian and Colombian children.

F. WOMEN, POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

In the area of governance, Panama undertook at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 to contribute to the eradication of all forms of discrimination and all obstacles to the full development of women in conditions of equality with men.

Accordingly, Panama's public policies have been formulated with a view to guaranteeing equal opportunities for men and women in economic, political, social and cultural areas by mainstreaming the gender perspective, ensuring genuine equality for Panamanian women and girls and eradicating discrimination.

The Government is aware that equality, development and peace can be achieved if women participate fully in all areas of society and that the consolidation of democracy and governance requires equal rights and opportunities for men and women.

Women's participation in the executive is highlighted by the fact that, for the first time in its history, a woman, Her Excellency Ms. Mireya Moscoso, is President of the Republic of Panama (1999-2004).

The number of women holding high positions in the management of public affairs has increased. Currently, four of Panama's thirteen ministries - the Ministries of Education, the Presidency, Youth, Women, Children and the Family (MINJUMNFA) and Agricultural Development - are headed by women who, as a result, account for 31 percent of the executive at that level. There are four women vice ministers, of Public Works, MINJUMNFA, Foreign Relations and Labour and Manpower Development, here too accounting for 31 percent of that executive level. Of the total of 27 cabinet posts, 29.6 percent are held by women (see Table 2).

The highest rate of women's participation in government is in the judiciary. Of a total of 278 posts of judges, magistrates and court counsels, an area of activity traditionally dominated by men, 129 posts (46.4 percent) are held by women.

According to data on the Legislative Assembly, of a total of 71 legislators, eight are women (3.8%) (see Table 2).

Table 2
Men's and women's participation in government, 2003

Offices	Panama		
	Gender		Total
	Men	Women	
The Executive			
Total	19	8	27
Ministers	9	4	13
Vice ministers	10	4	14
The Legislature			
Total	181	32	213
Legislators	63	8	71

Deputies	118	24	142
The Judiciary			
Judges, magistrates, counsels	149	129	278

Sources: Ministry of the Presidency for the executive; General Secretariat of the Legislative Assembly for the legislature; and Centre of Statistics on Justice for the judiciary.

Mention must be made of important legal instruments that may have contributed to progress toward equality, such as:

- Act No. 22 of 14 June 1997 reforming the electoral code and introducing other measures, such as the electoral gender quota under which 30 percent of a political party's candidates standing for election to party or public offices must be women
- Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 instituting equal opportunities for women
- Executive Decree No. 53 of 25 June 2002 stipulating rules for the implementation of Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 instituting equal opportunities for women.

Those rules, established by the Government, in particular MINJUMNFA, aim to ensure effective implementation of Act No. 4 and must be observed by all State bodies. Chapter II provides for the following measures and activities, among others:

- * provision by township community councils of space and infrastructure for an independent training school for women leaders with a view to enabling women to participate in politics and fulfil their role of citizens;
- * establishment by MINJUMNFA of a monitoring mechanism to ensure that the rate of women's participation in all decision-making and public-policy negotiation bodies is at least 50 percent. The communication media, indigenous and African Panamanian congresses, unions, associations and community groups must be governed by the principle of equal representation and recourse to such a joint mechanism must be possible to denounce cases of non-compliance.

G. HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Women must be guaranteed full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms as the inalienable heritage of any human being.

Legal provisions have been enacted in Panama to protect the human rights of women and everyone, men and women, as part of society, is required to promote the equal participation of women in all areas of social and political life.

Public policies and legislative reforms formulated to attain that objective include:

- Executive Decree No. 53 of 25 June 2002 stipulating rules for the implementation of Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 instituting equal opportunities for women
- Act No. 38 of 10 July 2001 revising and expanding the criminal and judicial code on domestic violence and ill-treatment of children and teenagers, repealing certain articles of Act No. 27 of 1995 and stipulating other provisions

- Act No. 17 of 28 March 2001 approving the optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Strategies and activities implemented in pursuit of the objectives set include mainstreaming the gender perspective in public investment projects, which are reviewed by the women's bureau of each government body before being incorporated into the public investment system (SINIP).

Women subjected to judicial processes are ensured fair and equal treatment under Act No. 55 of 30 July 2003 which provides for the exercise of women detainees' rights in conjunction with the Ombudsman's Office, the Prison Fellowship, lawyers officially appointed by the court or the public prosecutor, NGOs with a section for women detainees and the European Union, among others.

Cross-cutting gender-perspective training programmes have been developed to raise awareness and follow up all sectors involved in the administration of justice. Institutions have been set up to provide care for victims of violence and it has been proposed that officials from the Ministry of Justice, especially forensic scientists, be appointed to rural areas.

H. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Men and women relate to the environment in different ways, and their contributions to environmental degradation and preservation vary. Awareness of each gender's particular attitude to the environment strengthens a government's capacity to formulate viable projects and make suitable investments in environmental preservation.

SIEGPA provides information on development, poverty and the environment and an indicator of access to credit and land is used under the subheading "sustainable development" as a specific factor of poverty and environmental measurement (see Graphs 1 and 2). (6)

The National Environment Strategy (ENA), an approved document providing guidelines for environmental policies, comprises the following four activities targeting women and the environment and designed to mainstream the gender perspective:

1. In-depth consideration of the gender perspective in government bodies.
2. Establishment of awareness-raising and training programmes for family women with a view to promoting environmental values in the culture of children and teenagers.
3. Design and implementation of environmental initiatives of a productive character to ensure that women have access to natural resources for use in environment-friendly craft activities and in the provision of services that promote preservation and biodiversity.
4. Research on the effect of agrochemicals on the health of indigenous and other rural women who gather and package agricultural products for export.

ENA is based on the Gender Equity Policy Declaration and provides for its implementation (Resolution 4G-0020 2-99). It is a formal and official document drawn up by the National Environment Authority (ANAM) on the basis of public meetings with the sectors involved. After that policy was adopted, the gender and environment programme was drafted and entrusted to

ANAM's Directorate of Support for Environment Culture, the body responsible for mainstreaming the gender perspective in the authority's projects and programmes through the Gender and Environment Unit.

Moreover, the 2001-2004 Panamanian Rural Plan addresses rural environment issues. It provides special attention for women, teenagers and the family under a novel conception of the agricultural sector and, accordingly, contains guidelines for agricultural development and rural-environment strategies.

The primordial component of that plan is the concept of the crop and food security system (SSA). SSA simply consists of all activities involved in producing and distributing agricultural goods and food, thereby fulfilling the role of providing food to a given society. The concept is based on an integrated economic model and can be applied to various productive sectors. That approach allows for the participation of all stakeholders in primary and industrial production, transport, marketing, distribution and consumption. In the case of food production, both women and men participate in that chain nationwide.

III. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT (INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS AND ARRANGEMENTS SET UP TO SUPPORT THE FOLLOW-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLATFORM FOR ACTION)

With the momentum gained through Panama's participation in the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, CONAMU and DINAMU were set up and placed in the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare as a national technical mechanism for discussion, planning, assessment, promotion and implementation of activities, projects and programmes to promote women's participation in the country's public, cultural, economic, ethical and legal affairs. MINJUMNFA was set up in 1997 and the above two units were placed in the new ministry.

In that context, new institutional arrangements were made to implement public policies promoting equal opportunities for women. The network of national mechanisms for the promotion of equal opportunities, under which 42 public bodies participate through women's or gender bureaux, liaison units or programmes for women, had been set up by 2001.

The following measures were taken to establish those mechanisms:

- Executive Decree No. 53 of 25 June 2002, stipulating rules for the implementation of Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 instituting equal opportunities for women, laid down the relevant operational procedures, organizational forms and professional profiles.
- Executive Decree No. 89 of 13 November 2002, instituting the network of public and civil bodies producing and using statistical information with a view to mainstreaming the gender approach in national statistics, assigned specific coordination and operational functions to those bodies at the national level.
- Executive Decree No. 31 of 16 April 2001, instituting the national gender training system, provided for the conduct of activities to coordinate and plan institutional training.
- Activities to build capacities for following up institutional, operational, monitoring and gender-based public policies were launched under PIOM II.
- Awareness-raising and training programmes for men and women in the mechanism network are implemented from a gender perspective in the areas of planning, project formulation and evaluation, public policies, human rights, IFV and domestic violence

MINJUMNFA, through DINAMU and the National Gender Training System, in coordination with the women's bureaux of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance (MEF) and SINIP, coordinated the implementation of training projects for that governmental body's experts in the following areas:

- project formulation, implementation and evaluation from a gender perspective, and
- planning of gender-based public and budgetary policies.

As a result of those training activities, the gender perspective has been mainstreamed in the SINIP standards and procedures manual, a tool to be used in project formulation by all State bodies as from 2004.

A total of 9,982 persons, comprising 3,407 men and 6,575 women, have benefited from 290 training activities organized nationwide through the National Gender Training System pursuant

to public policies designed to create appropriate conditions for mainstreaming the gender perspective as an analysis tool in national activities.

In accordance with the PIOM II monitoring and evaluation strategy, the first evaluation phase was one of dissemination, covering 75 percent of ministers and general and operational directors of institutions, provincial councils, technical boards and civil society organizations.

Despite progress in implementing policies to strengthen governmental mechanisms for improving the status of women, some of those mechanisms are still at an incipient stage. That situation may be due to a lack of understanding of the advisability of some measures and of the nature of some mechanisms.

Strengthening institutional mechanisms for women is a long term process, requiring political resolve on the part of governments and clarity in policies designed to overcome existing inequalities between men and women.

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women in Panama are set up by the following institutions: Autonomous Panamanian Cooperative (IPACOOP), Institute of Farm Trade (IMA), National Institute of Culture (INAC), Canal Ministry, Office of the Government Solicitor (PA), Technical Judicial Police (PTJ), the Judiciary, Panamanian Tourism Institute, Panamanian Maritime Authority (MA), National Water Works Company (IDAAN), Ministry of Public Works, National Welfare Lottery, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Panamanian Institute of Special Education (IPHE), Office of the Superintendent of Banks, Transit Authority, Ministry of the Interior, National Savings Bank, National Mortgage Bank, Electoral Tribunal, Directorate of Customs, National Sports Institute, Municipality of Panama City, Panama Canal Authority, Institute for Human Resources Training and Development, National Institute of Vocational Training, Ministry of Government and Justice, Office of the First Lady, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health (MINSA), Ministry of the Economy and Finance (MEF), Social Security Fund (CSS), Ministry of Agricultural Development, Panamanian Institute for Labour Studies (IPEL), Panamanian National Police, Ministry of Housing, National Environment Authority (ANAM), Ministry of Foreign Relations, Legislative Assembly, Ministry of Labour and Manpower Development, Institute for Women, University of Panama, National Science and Technology Secretariat (SENACYT), National Council for Women (CONAMU), Ministry of Youth, Women, Childhood and the Family (MINJUMNFA) and National Directorate for Women (DINAMU).

IV. MAIN PROBLEMS AND MEASURES FOR TACKLING THEM: AREAS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

Despite Panama's economic development, deep social inequalities persist in the country. In recent years, Panama has implemented a variety of effective measures and practices to promote equal opportunities. As a result, a formal and well-founded commitment to attain gender equality is possible.

Against the backdrop of progress achieved, it is possible to provide a description of the main obstacles encountered by women in gaining access to the benefits of sustainable development in Panama.

WOMEN AND POVERTY

There are various vulnerable groups in Panama. It is therefore impossible to draw a single portrait of a poor person. The National Human Development Report 2002 identifies the following particularly vulnerable groups: peasants and agricultural labourers in the rural areas; the urban poor, including the African Panamanian population; and the indigenous poor.

Poverty mainly affects women: as a result of a marked gender-based division of labour unfavourable to them, women are found mainly in low-status and low-paid jobs. Income analysis by level of education shows definite gender discrimination in remunerated work.

Indeed, as regards the attainment of an acceptable standard of living, the National Human Development Report 2002, drawn up for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), shows substantial gender inequalities, mainly to the detriment of women, despite their rising level of education and training.

Panama is one of the Latin American and Caribbean countries whose population largely has the potential to enjoy a medium-to-high standard of living. As mentioned above, the Panamanian economy has historically been open to trade and international investment. In contrast, the country ranks fourth in social inequality based on income distribution, while there are many signs of rural and urban poverty and related shortcomings, significantly including little access to basic services, production resources, employment, and production and transport infrastructure; limited health equipment and human resources; and a shortage of schools and teachers in remote areas.

To remedy that situation, given the urgent need to attain equity between men and women, significant advances have been made in the standard-setting texts drawn up to ensure equal opportunities, such as Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 and Executive Decree No. 53 of 25 June 2002 stipulating rules for the implementation of Act No. 4, especially Chapter V, which establishes governmental mechanisms for extending anti-discriminatory policies in that area and mainstreams the gender perspective in investment projects.

Furthermore PIOM II undertakes to frame public policies to guarantee equal opportunities for men and women in economic, political, social and cultural areas and aims to ensure effective participation and contribution by women in the sustainable development of the country.

As regards statistical information, the General Accounting Office of the Republic, is the body responsible, through the Statistics and Census Directorate, for compiling national statistics and conducting the National Population and Housing Census and the Agricultural Census. Various tools developed in recent years - such as SIEGPA, the development indicators system, CONADEC and the Sixth Agricultural Census - are used in the analyses on which the formulation of public policies to attain equal opportunities is based.

Considerable opportunities for participation are thus being gradually opened up in the country, giving rise to valuable experiences involving dialogue and coordinated action, which no doubt contribute to the improvement of the democratic system and the strengthening of its institutions.

WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The educational system has succeeded in expanding its services to cover the entire national territory. It provides free basic education to the entire school age population and has raised the years of free enrolment to include the ninth grade.

However, urban residents have greater education opportunities than residents in rural and indigenous areas. For instance, according to the UNDP's National Human Development Report, total school attendance is about 9.5 grades for the non-poor and 5.2 grades for the poor.

Educational gaps affect women in particular, and it has been shown that there is a direct relation between the educational level and the quality of life of women and their children.

Measures taken to address those problems include:

- Act No. 6 of 4 May 2000 providing for the compulsory use of gender-sensitive language, content and illustrations in school textbooks and publications
- Executive Decree No. 443 of 5 November 2001 guaranteeing that pregnant minors may continue and complete their studies in all education centres
- Activities planned in the written and spoken communication media as part of the education-in-equality week (Resolution No. 872)
- Implementation of literacy programmes for adults, addressing indigenous women of the Gnobe Buglé, Kuna and Emberá ethnic groups
- Seminars and training activities organized by the Ministry of Education since 2000 for the dissemination of legal standards concerning violence against women
- Awareness-raising days, seminars and workshops for the educational community ensuring adequate responses and providing training on gender-based public policies
- Training in business management provided to more than 2,300 rural women from the interior of the country and the capital and sponsored by MINJUMNFA in cooperation with the Micro Finance Institute of Multi-Credit Bank.

There is therefore evidence that, despite significant educational advances increasingly favourable to women, problems persist in some areas of education and there are still shortcomings in rural areas. It is therefore necessary to further close the gender gap by guaranteeing that new generations will develop in an environment of equity in education, culture and sport.

WOMEN AND HEALTH

One of the unfinished tasks in regard to gender equity in the health sector is the need for an updated diagnostic appraisal of the health of women and men at the various stages of the life cycle in order to take action to meet their specific needs.

Another issue is that, despite falling fertility levels, demographic information is still needed on aspects of sexual and reproductive health. The prevalence of and unmet demand for condoms are undocumented.

Anti-cancer campaigns must be stepped up and the coverage of the Papanicolaou test, mammographies and prostate antigen testing must be improved to combat the most prevalent malignant tumours.

On the basis of current socio-demographic indicators, Panama has a middle-ranking position in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Panama, as in other countries of the region, the health sector, against the backdrop of State reform and organization in view of globalization, has succeeded in:

- raising the levels of health, well-being and quality of life of the entire population;
- integrating health considerations into all areas of action aimed at sustainable human development;
- supporting the social production of comprehensive health;
- reducing major disparities in health and access to health care;
- modernizing the technical, administrative and financial management of the population at high risk;
- reducing the population's risks of illness and death by meeting the social demand of health as a good; and
- proposing a new health care model, with emphasis on the reorganization of primary health care, which caters for most of the population's health problems.

Measures taken to improve gender equity in health are based on thematic issues concerning the level of access to and use of quality health services, health care financing and participation in its development. Activities are undertaken to ensure that the population has better access to decision-making in those areas, since such access is considered a prerequisite for attaining gender equity in health.

HEALTH ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

1. The strategy promoted under the national health policies includes violence as a health problem and highlights the sustainable development of equal opportunities in health programmes and services (Health Policies and Strategies 2000-2004).

2. A model of comprehensive care for women affected by IFV has been institutionalized. It comprises promotion, prevention and care standards, and IFV variables and indicators based on records regarding victims and offenders.
3. Participation in discussions on and amendment to the law on IFV (Act No. 38 of 10 July 2001 on domestic violence)
4. Contributions have been made to strengthen partnerships with government sectors and NGOs at various levels.
5. Research has been conducted and publications have been issued on local social action for women affected by IFV in the township of Barrio Sur in Colón and the Antón District in Coclé. Similar activities on child prostitution and self-medication have been supported ("Helping to Help" (*Ayudando a Quien Ayuda*)).
6. Support has been provided for launching a campaign against the sexual abuse of children, publishing a trainers' guide on abuse and training instructors for educational, health and NGO units.
7. Coordination has been provided for gender-based health programmes on the issues of nutrition, gender and insecticide use, and gender and mental health.
8. Act No. 38 of 10 July 2001 on domestic violence, teaching materials in support of training and posters, books and leaflets on gender, health and domestic violence issues have been reproduced and disseminated.
9. Networks have been set up in the various health districts to promote social solidarity and prevent violence.
10. Awareness-raising, training and mobilization events were held on International Women's Day (28 March), International Day of Action for Women's Health (28 May) and International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November).

WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICTS

Violence in its many forms, types of conduct characterized by abuse of power, intimidation and coercion, feature among Panama's major social problems. Criminal, intrafamily and social violence are the forms most frequently encountered in Panamanian society.

As regards violence due to armed conflicts in 1999, the Panama Red Cross provided care to 628 refugees from Colombia and Darién, including 485 women. Lines of action identified to meet the current challenges of growing violence, which affects women directly, include:

- Promoting access to information and laws and through institutional mechanisms for the prevention of, protection from and punishment of violence.

- Promoting, through awareness-raising and training, respect for the human rights of women in the police force, social protection agencies, paramedical units, naval training and other similar activities.
- Reaffirming the right of all peoples to self-determination.
- Encouraging the entire international community to condemn all forms of terrorism.

WOMEN, POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

The exercise of power and decision-making are areas in which gender inequalities are glaring. In the 100 years of Panama's existence as a Republic, it was not until the 1999-2004 quinquennium that a woman - Her Excellency Ms. Mireya Moscoso - was elected President of the Republic for the very first time.

For the same five-year period, seven women were elected to the Legislative Assembly (they account for 9.9 percent of its members).

Under Act No. 22 of 14 June 1997, revising the electoral code and introducing other measures, the National Forum of Women in Political Parties secured the establishment of electoral gender quota requiring 30 percent of a political party's candidates standing for election to party or public offices to be women.

To correct existing inequalities, activities were undertaken to:

- promote changes in political party statutes in order to streamline the gender perspective, ensure equity in men's and women's participation and monitor the implementation of such provisions;
- devise awareness-raising strategies and mechanisms to encourage party leaders to promote equal participation of women in the upper party echelons;
- provide for conditions favourable to the principle of equal participation, ensure that women's participation in the decision-making bodies of labour, professional, cultural and other organizations is not lower than 50 percent, and provide information on the inclusion and promotion of women in every public institution in the annual report on the status and social position of women; and
- promote participation in community activities by rural women, both indigenous and non-indigenous, African Panamanian women and women with disabilities in all age groups.

WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENT

The link between the issues of rural women and the environment must be established in the relevant analyses and plans of action. Hardly any sex-disaggregated statistical information is available and, as a result, the visibility of the work of various categories of rural women is low. Also, the results of the land ownership and registration programmes undertaken in the last years will be of vital importance since they are a great advantage to women to whom they provide legal security in the form of land. Furthermore, greater emphasis should be placed on assessing the impact of environmental degradation on women and on the relationship between poverty and environment, which merits further analysis.

ENA and Act No. 4 of 29 January 1999 instituting equal opportunities for women established general frameworks for public policies to strengthen the gender perspective in the plans and programmes of the bodies responsible for environmental development.

The measures taken include the following:

- Implementing projects to train and involve women in environmental preservation.
- Stressing the design and dissemination of new technologies that address women's needs.
- Developing environmental education programmes for women.
- Promoting agricultural systems compatible with the natural environment and support for food production.
- Strengthening the gender perspective in government bodies.
- Establishing awareness-raising and training programmes for family women with a view to promoting environmental values in the culture of children and teenagers.
- Designing and implementing environmental initiatives of a productive character to ensure that women have access to natural resources for use in environment-friendly craft activities and in the provision of services that promote preservation and biodiversity.
- Conducting research on the effect of agrochemicals on the health of indigenous and other rural women who gather and package agricultural products for export.

The regulatory provisions described above have opened opportunities - at the level of public discussion or decision-making - for social participation in the management of the environment of the country. The 2001-2004 Panamanian Rural Plan addresses rural environmental issues. It provides special attention for women, teenagers and the family under a novel conception of the agricultural sector and contains guidelines for appropriate strategies for the agricultural sector.

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- (1) Social Policy Support Group of the Republic of Panama, *Millennium Development Goals*, p. 18.
 - (2) "Unión por Panamá" Association, *Commitment to Change*, p. 41.
 - (3) World Bank, Latin America and the Caribbean Region, Human Development Department, *Poverty Survey - Priorities for Poverty Reduction*, Vol. ???
 - (4) General Accounting Office of the Republic, *Population and Housing Census*, 1990 and 2000.
 - (5) Social Policy Support Group of the Republic of Panama.
 - (6) See p. 8 above.