PANAMA (Country Practice)

[Panama]
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A. Background

1. Which UNCT members have collaborated on this case study?
   - UNDP
   - FAO
   - UNFPA
   - UNESCO

2. Which national partners (governmental and non-governmental) were involved in developing this case study and how?
   - Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MIRE) – Selina Baños (International Cooperation Director) sbanos@mire.gob.pa
   - Ministry of Interior (MINGOB) – Carlos Blandon (Planning and International Cooperation Director) cblandon@mingob.gob.pa
   - Global Brigades Panama – Pablo Garron (International Program Officer) pablo@globalbrigades.org

Other partners working with indigenous communities and/or supporting implementation of the Integral Development Plan for Indigenous People in the Republic of Panama (not involved in drafting of this study)

   - Vice Minister of Indigenous Affairs (MINGOB)
   - National Council for the Integral Development of Indigenous Peoples
   - Advisory Committee of Indigenous Women of the National Council for the Integral Development of Indigenous Peoples

3. Does the case study illustrate one or several phases or levels?
   - ☐ Adapting SDG 16
   - ☐ Implementing SDG 16
   - ☐ Monitoring & Reporting on SDG 16
   - ☐ National level
   - ☐ Regional level
   - ☐ Local level

B. Case Study

OPTION 1 (pre-structured)

4. Country context for the achievement of SDG 16

The population of the Republic of Panama is 3,405,813 inhabitants\(^1\) of which 12.3% (417,559 people) belong to the seven indigenous people of the country: Bri-Bri, Bugle, Embera, Guna, Naso Tjërdi, Ngäbe and Wounaan. The regions and indigenous territories represent more than 22% of the national territory and in them there is a great biodiversity and sources of natural resources. The seven indigenous people have a governance system organized in 12 indigenous

\(^1\) XI National Population Census and Housing VII of 2010
Despite Panama’s sustained economic growth, the country has one of the highest rates of ethnic inequality in the region:

- Poverty and extreme poverty rates are 6.5 % and 2.5 % in urban areas, and 26.6 % and 10.2 % in non-indigenous rural areas, but in indigenous territories 86 % of population lives in poverty situation and 66 %, in extreme poverty.
- According to the Multidimensional Poverty index report (2017), in the Guna Yala, Embera, Ngäbe Bugle regions, the percentage of multidimensional poor for 2018 was 93.8%, 70.8% and 91.0%, respectively.
- The average daily salary of an indigenous person is USD 3 while non-indigenous people in rural areas receive an average daily wage of USD 10 per day and in urban areas, USD 17.
- Chronic malnutrition affects 19% of children under 5 years old in Panama, although this figure reaches almost 62% in indigenous territories (FAO, OPS, WFP and UNICEF, 2018).
- 61% of indigenous peoples have access to drinking water in contrast to 95% of non-indigenous people.
- 18.1% of indigenous people have access to sanitation services, in contrast to 63.9% of non-indigenous.
- The enrollment rate of indigenous children is almost 10 percentage points lower than that of non-indigenous.
- 63.6% of indigenous women do not have elementary education, compared to 55.3% of Indigenous men.
- The infant mortality rate for indigenous children under 5 years old is double that of non-indigenous children of the same age range: 38 compared to 19 per 1000 live births (UNFPA)
- Maternal mortality among indigenous women is four times higher than that of non-indigenous women: 462 per 100 000 live births versus 92 per 100 000 live births (UNFPA)

There are four factors that reinforce the inequalities between the non-indigenous Panamanian population and the people who belong to the 7 ethnic groups and live in the indigenous territories of Panama:

a) **Remote location, with limited and dispersed access of indigenous communities**

b) **Lack of local staff offering quality and culturally relevant services**: local capacities have not been created to offer health, education and adapted quality services.

c) **Low levels of public investment in indigenous territories**: between 2014 and 2015 only 2.3% of the central Government total investments (USD 89.4 million out of USD 3.9 billion) went to indigenous territories, despite the fact that they are home to 5.7% of the population and half of the people living in extreme poverty.

d) **Low government capacity to plan and coordinate with a multicultural approach**: only 3 out of 12 territories have standardized disaggregated data, which hinders the planning and evaluation of development investments. The Ministry of Government of Panama (MINGOB) has a mandate to promote and coordinate public policies for indigenous people, but historically has not had funds or enough trained personnel in multicultural issues.

### 5. Efforts to achieve SDG 16

In this challenging context and as a result of various conflicts and struggles arising from the adoption of several laws and actions that affected interests and rights of the indigenous people of Panama and that were carried out without an adequate prior consultation process and participation of the traditional authorities, a **National Dialogue Table** was formed in 2012 under **democratic dialogue** methodology whose coordination and facilitation was in charge of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). This dialogical approach was a key tool for the transformation of conflicting and polarized relationships that allowed redirecting social capital towards the path of peace, democracy, sustainable development and full respect for human rights.

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This table counted with the participation of 12 Indigenous Congresses and councils, which represents the 7 indigenous peoples of the country. Together with the National Government, the result was the design of the **Integral Development Plan for Indigenous People**, whose main focus was the strengthening of democratic governance within the frame of inclusion, citizenship and recognition of the cultural and collective rights of the indigenous people of Panama (SDG 16.6, 16.7). The process was deeply participative and carried out more than 90 consultations, coordinated by 12 instances of indigenous governance, with more than 10 thousand members of indigenous men and women consulted, attending to the multicultural mechanisms of participation and decision making (SDG 16.7). The main result of this Dialogue table was the **Integral Development Plan for Indigenous People of Panama**, a consensus document, written in a participatory and inclusive way that contains three main axes: 1) political and legal; 2) economic and 3) social. The specific areas of intervention have a Sustainable Human development approach, so that their components aim at institutional strengthening, increase the governance capacity of the indigenous authorities and the national government, in addition to improving quality and cultural relevance in the provision of education, health, water and sanitation services in the country’s indigenous territories.

The collective and highly participative construction of the **Integral Development Plan for Indigenous People of Panama**, as well as its implementation and follow up, points directly to SDGs 16.6, 16.7 and 16.10 (16.10.b), 10.2, 5.5, 17.3 and 17.9.

### 6. Results so far and Way Forward

As a result of this process and the elaboration of a Plan, an institutional and governance platform was created in order to promote a more productive dialogue, improved coordination and more effective and efficient investments in indigenous territories. This space, the National Council for Development of Indigenous People, was created to inform and monitor the implementation of the Plan, and also constitutes the inter-institutional coordination space that promotes intercultural dialogue between government institution and representatives of the country’s indigenous people what allows to strengthen governance, the capacity of national democratic response for their demands of inclusion, citizenship and recognition of their cultural and collective rights.

This process has involved actions to strengthen the traditional authorities, contributing to the reduction of internal political conflicts of representation, according to mechanisms of consultation and approaching with each people, specially promoting the political leadership of young people and indigenous women, and improving coexistence among justice systems, recognizing even the application of traditional justice within their territories (SDG 16.3, 16.6, 16.7, 10.2 & 5.5).

In the framework of the design of the Plan, UNDP prepared a **Diagnosis of the Situation of Indigenous women** with broad participation of women and youth of indigenous people, in order to generate public information about their situation to protect their fundamental freedoms in a documented manner, with a gender focus (SDG 5.1 & 16.10). Along the same line, the **Advisory Committee of Indigenous Women**, has been created, composed of 12 women representing the different traditional governance structures, which are part of the Council of Indigenous People (SDG 5.5 & 16.7).

In the framework of implementation of economic axis of the Integral development plan for indigenous people, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Development Program (PNUD) support the Ministry of Government (MINGOB) and the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MIDA), in the implementation of a project to revitalize the indigenous productive systems in ten indigenous communities of the Bribri, Ngäbe, Embera, Guna, Naso and Wounaan people, in order to guarantee their food security (SDG 2.3) and increase their income (SDG 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 8.6), paying special attention to the inclusion of women and young people in productive activities, marketing and decision making (SDG 5.5, 5.A, 10.1). Indigenous producers complement their traditions with the learning of new techniques and strengthen their capacities for crop management and the conservation and sustainable management of water and soil (SDG 6.4). To date 624 indigenous families have already begun the installation of agricultural plots, which add **72 hectares of crops of prioritized areas**. This project promotes efforts to strengthen the intersectional articulations between the National Indigenous Council, MINGOB, MIDA, the
Within the framework of the Maternal Mortality Reduction Program of the Ngäbe Bugle region (Comarca), the Ministry of Health, with the support of UNFPA is promoting the construction of the Maternal Homes, which are used as shelters by pregnant women who live far from Health Centers, in order to wait for the date to give birth. This strategy has improved the indicator of births attended by qualified personnel in the Comarca. According to the National Survey of Sexual and Reproductive Health of 2009 (ENASSER), only 43.1% of births in the Comarca were attended by health personnel, however, ENASSER 2015 registers that this indicator went up to 88.0% (SDG 5.6).

Within the framework of implementation of the financial inclusion program in indigenous communities, the 20 Community Banks of Panama developed by Global Brigades have shown a remarkable impact of financial inclusion in the associated communities, while at the same time they have achieved impressive performance standards. The capital contributed by the 546 associates (90% women) represents 30% of the net worth of community banks, while the contribution of Global Brigades is 48% achieving a 22% capital gain to date. Progressively, in 4 years 2,167 loans worth USD 646,141.50 have been granted, while delinquency rates remain below 1% due to methodology implemented. The total in saving accounts has reached $ 66,000 with an average of $130 per account compared to 2014 when none of the women had savings. The average amount of the loans of the Community Banks is $325, what shows the dedication to help the marginalized population that cannot access traditional financial services (SDG 5.5, 5.A. 8.3).

Within the framework of interventions with multilateral organizations for the development of the economic axis of the Plan, MINGOB is negotiating with the Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (BID) (Inter-American Development Bank) a Program for financial inclusion and indigenous entrepreneurship to contribute to the financial inclusion of indigenous peoples, infrastructure and capacity building.

In 2018, recognizing the methodology of the elaboration of the Plan, the legitimacy and representativeness of the Indigenous Council and the political commitment of the Panamanian State, the Banco Mundial (World Bank) granted a loan of 80 million dollars for the implementation of the Plan. Based on the above, in 2019 a period of vital importance for this process begins, since it implies the implementation of some of the main activities of the Integral Development Plan for Indigenous people.

The challenges of this process are to continue with close technical support, in order to guarantee that decisions on the implementation of the Plan are made through participatory methodologies, inclusive and appropriate to the needs, culture and traditions of Indigenous groups and facing sustainable development objectives. To this end, the Development Council of Indigenous People in partnership with the national government and the accompaniment of the United Nations System and other cooperation agencies in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the plan and in measuring its impact on the indigenous territories of the Republic of Panama.

7. Lessons Learned

The process through which the Integral Development Plan for Indigenous People was developed constitutes a good practice. In this sense, the methodology of democratic dialogue used in our case study responds to goal 16.1 which refers to reducing the forms of social violence. The dialogical approach is a key tool for the transformation of conflicting and polarized relationships, very specific in our region and in our case allowed:

- The participation of those involved and affected in the public policy instances and jointly with the government and the cooperation agencies, to think together about solutions and strategies

• The technical empowerment of indigenous groups to generate interlocution capacities and strengthen their representation before indigenous and non-indigenous institutions and bodies
• Promote that agreements are established at legal or policy level, as specified in goal 16.10.b. In this sense, the consolidation by Executive Decree of the National Development Council of the Indigenous People of Panama in 2018 creates a permanent legal space to guarantee its implementation
• The Council’s periodic meetings facilitate and reduce political conflicts and consolidate traditional authorities through internal dialogues and conflict resolution processes, with the recognition and respect of indigenous justice systems according to their internal structures and mechanisms.
• The application of Free, Prior and Informed consent (CLPI), as a right recognized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and established by Law Nº 37 of 2016 in Panama, constitutes a mechanism to strengthen the community governance and guarantees that the development of the projects will not negatively affect the culture or means of governance and subsistence of the indigenous territories. Likewise, the process contributes to the appropriation of activities by the communities and is a conflict resolution and monitoring tool.

Attachments:
• Integral Development Plan for the indigenous people of Panama
• Systematization of the process of creation of the Plan
• Diagnosis of the Situation of Indigenous Women
• Vision Panama 2030
• Atlas of Local Human Development - Indigenous Areas. UNDP Panama 2015

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