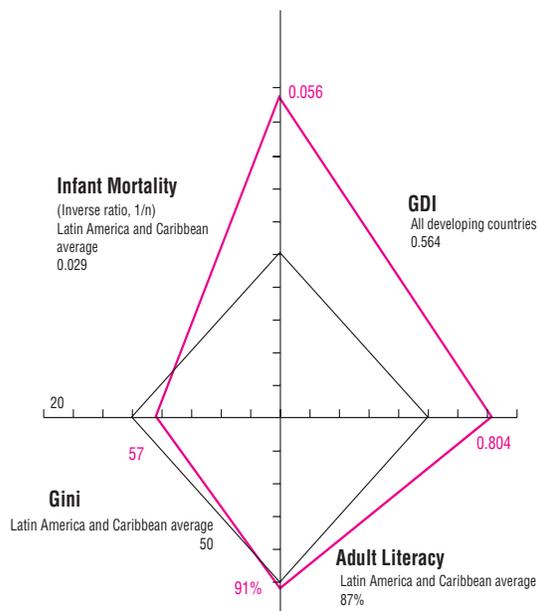


• ANGÉLICA MAYTÍN JUSTINIANI



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.
Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

THE ROAD TO TRAVEL IS LONGER THAN THE ROAD TRAVELLED

The current system of government in the Republic of Panama is submerged in a «partycracy» that prevents citizens from fully enjoying their rights. Outside the party context, political participation is full of obstacles. Programmes are needed to foster self-management and participatory democracy, characteristics that are non-existent in Panamanian society.

With no effective mechanisms to make government ministers and their high level subordinates accountable for their actions, full democracy in Panama is impossible.

Freedom of expression is restricted by the following laws: Law 11 (February 19th 1978), which establishes parameters for the publication of newspapers; Law 67 (September 19th 1978), known to many as the «Gag Law», which regulates the exercise of journalism; and Law 68 (September 19th 1978), which grants the government the power to set up a technical board to license journalists.

Dr. Lina Vega Abad, executive vice-chairperson of the Foundation for the Development of Citizen Freedom, the Panamanian chapter of Transparency International since 1996, stated that the Foundation has undertaken a variety of activities to control corruption. Among them is the project «National Dialogue for Citizen Education and Control of Corruption», which resulted from an agreement between the General Comptroller of the Republic and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed March 10th 1997. The project concluded May 15th 1998.

Ms. Vega Abad mentioned that the Panamanian government ratified the Inter-American Convention against Corruption in July 1998. She added, however, that there is an urgent need to adjust national legislation to deal with transnational bribery, illicit enrichment and declaration of property by public officials.

SO FAR, THERE ARE ONLY PROGRAMMES

The government has designed a proposal called «New Strategic Approach to Poverty», which contains a matrix of programmes, projects and actions to be implemented in 1998–2003. The objective of this new strategic approach is to increase participation of the poor population, particularly the most vulnerable groups, in order to achieve economic growth and social progress.

According to an analysis by the University of Panama's Insti-

Government officials—responsible for design and administration of development projects—are not subject to public scrutiny. This makes follow-up of specific projects impossible, as well as its adequate development and resolution. Development programmes are of little use if they are not accompanied by monitoring systems that enable the public to measure their effectiveness.

tute for National Studies (IDEN), the official document «Social policy documents: 1994–1997» prepared by the social cabinet includes actions to lower the level of poverty. These actions are to be implemented through the promotion of productive employment, better distribution of wealth, and better use and exploitation of natural resources. Among the proposed activities is support for small and medium-sized enterprises through credit programmes, technology transfer and training. The document emphasizes that training and specialization of human resources is essential to the improvement of people's living conditions.

HUMAN RIGHTS, WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Law 7 of February 5th 1997 on «Establishing the Institution of a People's Defender in the Republic of Panama», defines an institutional forum for the protection of human rights in the country. On February 12th 1998, when Panama's Supreme Court of Justice established the institution's scope, it placed the activities of the judiciary outside that scope. This has prevented investigation into a particularly sensitive area for the enforcement of human rights, that of the administration of justice. Despite this and the elimination of immunity for the People's Defender, this institution still has a broad and important role to play in the country.

A representative of the Woman and Development Forum, Ms. Margarita Muñoz, said that after the Women's Conference in Beijing, social development initiatives incorporate men and women without discrimination. The Woman and Development Forum was set up to: provide a forum for the national coordination of women to increase their influence on public policy; prepare a common proposal for negotiation with government and political parties; train a critical mass of political and social leaders in theory and approach; and place women's issues on the public agendas of the various sectors.

Implementation of the «Woman and Development 1994–2000 Action Plan», launched only in 1996, has made it clear that tasks beyond this programme are pending. Hence two major fora for women's organizations—the Woman and Development Forum and the Coordination of Organizations for the Integrated Development of Women—joined to implement another training-based project. This «gender training» project (FORGEN) ended October 1998 and its results will serve as inputs for a new project, «Strengthening the women's movement and civil society support for fulfilment of the Woman and Development Action Plan».

With the changes that have taken place in humanity's social

and political customs over time, worldwide feminist and women's movements have achieved fundamental changes in the legal condition of women.

In Panama, progress is marked by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare's Executive Decree No. 70 —«whereby the National Women's Council is set up as a consultative and advisory body for promotion and development in the country's political, social and economic life»—. Its Technical Secretariat was created in 1995 by presidential decree. Sectoral mechanisms, such as the women's offices in various ministries, the Women's Institute and others were also created. Each of these structures has specific functions according to its scope.

Other important achievements include the Women's Health and Development Programme of the Ministry of Health. It includes an Institutional Plan for Care and Prevention of Violence and Promotion of Ways of Living Together in Solidarity, aimed specifically at the struggle against family violence. The Institute for Professional Training incorporated the Dual Professional Training System, which includes training for women in non-traditional trades. In 1997 the Panamanian Special Rehabilitation Institute founded the Woman's Office to advise on promotion and development of handicapped women.

Despite efforts by civil society and the government's commitments to achieve fundamental changes to benefit women, Ms. Muñoz still sees a contradiction: **women's greater access to education is not reflected in better jobs or better salaries.** Women's development in the labour market is hindered by the prevailing inequality within the nuclear family and the fact that women continue to take on most of the responsibility for the care of children and senior members of the family.

According to Ms. Muñoz, issues remain that have not been openly dealt with such as abortion as a matter of public health: «There are demands set out in the National Plan mentioned earlier on, but actions for their monitoring and fulfilment and that of the laws and decrees on the issue of gender equity depend on the women's movement.»

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