

Education and labor in Panama: the Feminist View

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Abstract

In the same way several economical viewpoints criticize the traditional definition of poverty, the gender perspective is against defining this phenomena solely based on income, as it encompasses material as well as symbolic and cultural aspects. From a gender perspective, poverty is fundamentally influenced by relationships of power, as social hierarchies determine people's greater or lesser access to material, social and cultural resources based on their gender. The same applies to the advantages women should gain from education; these are weakened by the social stigma, which still assigns women family duties as their priority task. This extra workload diminishes women's capacity to perform professional duties with the highest possible productivity. The paper here presented describes how the Panamanian education system has failed to empower women in all forms of autonomy in order to overcome inequality.

1. Education has not been enough to empower women

The capabilities approach, introduced by Amartya Sen¹, rejects monetary income as the sole source of well-being. The author emphasizes individual liberties that allow living a life in accordance with their individual capabilities. Poverty is understood as the lack of the necessary resources for people to perform basic activities, which ensure a healthy life, social interactions, access to knowledge, development of individual believes and communication of culture to younger generations. According to this line of thought, fighting for poverty must identify and stimulate people's potential in order to improve their well-being.

On the other hand, a participatory approach defines poverty based on an analysis of their own reality, which means, taking into account all the aspects poor citizens consider relevant. From this point of view poverty can only be overcome by empowering this

¹ Sen, Amartya. 2000. Freedom, Rationality, and Social Choice: The Arrow Lectures and Other Essays.

portion of the population (Ruggeri, Saith y Stewart, 2003; Arriagada, 2003)² and in the process of empowerment, education plays a key role.

More recently, empowering women has gained relevance. Proof of this is that it became the third objective of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG), only topped by reduction of poverty and guaranteeing universal education. This objective touches upon deeply entrained attitudes and convictions that have been considered “natural”. Thus, empowerment of women generates controversy in social, cultural, political and institutional aspects.

Promoting equality between genders can be measured with the following indicators:

- Relationship between the number of men and women at different levels of education
- Proportion of employed women in non-agricultural sectors
- Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments

The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)³ has pointed out the fact that the goals, as well as the three official indicators, are insufficient measures to evaluate the situation of women in Latin America. There are critical topics that are not covered by the official indicators and that motivated a series of “complementary indicators”.

In Panama, women have a high level of education; however, they are still the minority in the job market as the difference in participation with relation to men is higher than 30%. Also, there are higher rates of unemployment among women (6% vs. 3.8% among men) and they represent the minority among those contributing to the Social Security system (three to one in favor of men, INEC 2012). Further, women who work receive only a

² UNDP. Human Development Report.

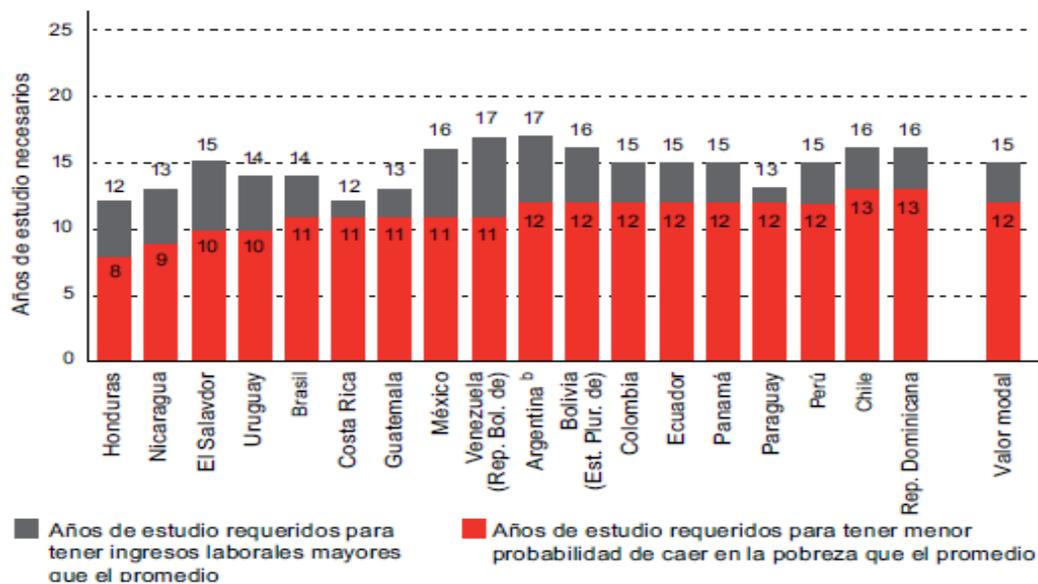
³ ECLAC. “Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio: una mirada desde América Latina y el Caribe (Spanish)”. 2005.

fraction of the male salary, and it has been demonstrated that this gap increases when women have a better education.

It is necessary to note that the State has the primary responsibility of guaranteeing certain level of learning, based on the socio-economic conditions of students. In addition, the State must strive to reduce labor market gaps and potential risks, both through active employment policies as well as public transfers with a clear redistributive effect throughout people’s lives. In Panama, there are no specific employment policies for women in order to reduce the mentioned gap in the labor market.

Although education is a key milestone in the development stages of the life cycle, Latin America has not managed to transform the education system into a powerful mechanism to enable equal opportunities (ECLAC). It has been estimated that to increase the probability of not being poor in Panama, 12 years of schooling are necessary and to reach an income level over the average, it takes 15 years of schooling (Figure N ° 1).

Figure No.1
 LATIN AMERICA (18 COUNTRIES): SCHOOLING YEARS REQUIRED TO HAVE A LOWER PROBABILITY OF LIVING IN POVERTY OR TO ACHIEVE AN INCOME LEVEL ABOVE THE AVERAGE OF EMPLOYED SUBJECTS BETWEEN 20 AND 29 YEARS, 2008
(in years of required schooling years)



Source: ECLAC, Achieving the Millennium Development Goals with equality in Latin America and the Caribbean: Progress and challenges. 2010

The average schooling years attained by the Panamanian population do not meet the above parameters. In fact, education levels are very different in Panama. According to the Household Survey from August 2011 (INEC) the average schooling among non-indigenous and non-farming population is 12.1 years for women, against 10.5 years of schooling of men. The largest differences are observed among the indigenous population, where women have completed primary school (4-6 years) and males complete between 8 and 9 years of schooling, by ethnicity⁴.

According to the World Bank⁵, "Panama still faces the challenge of achieving universal secondary education and improves the overall quality of its education system to boost the productivity of its workforce. Despite remarkable advances in the average educational attainment in the last five decades (the Panamanians who leave the education system currently have an average of 11 years of education), when this education attainment is adjusted for quality we would register an effective average of eight years of education (according to standards of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)). The inequality in educational attainment is an additional challenge, since the difference in years of education between the more and less educated Panamanians, associated with socioeconomic conditions, remains to be about 6 years. "

At the primary level of education the proportion of males (52% in 2010) is higher than that of girls (48% in 2010)⁶. This ratio changes in favor of girls at the secondary level of education, where they represent 51% (year 2010)⁷ and at the top level the proportion of women reaches almost 60% of enrollment (Figure No. 2).

Effectively, female enrollment at the universities of Panama in 2010 was 59.87% of all students, with a completion rate of 64.36%. In three of the five public universities, the enrollment and completion is majorly female. Yet the opposite is true at the Technological University of Panama and the Panama International Maritime University.

⁴ CGR. INEC. "Encuesta de Hogares (Spanish)". August 2011.

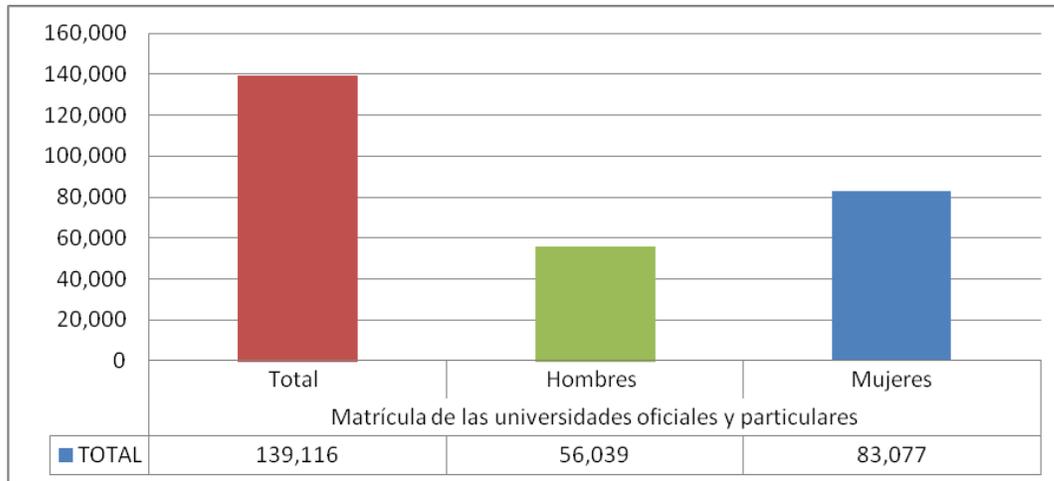
⁵ World Bank. Translated from "Mejores Empleos en Panamá. El Rol del Capital Humano (Spanish)" Panama, July 2012. Page 8.

⁶ CGR. INEC. "Panamá en Cifras (Spanish)". 2007-2011. Cuadro 511-13.

⁷ CGR. INEC. "Panamá en Cifras (Spanish)". 2007-2011. Cuadro 511-22.

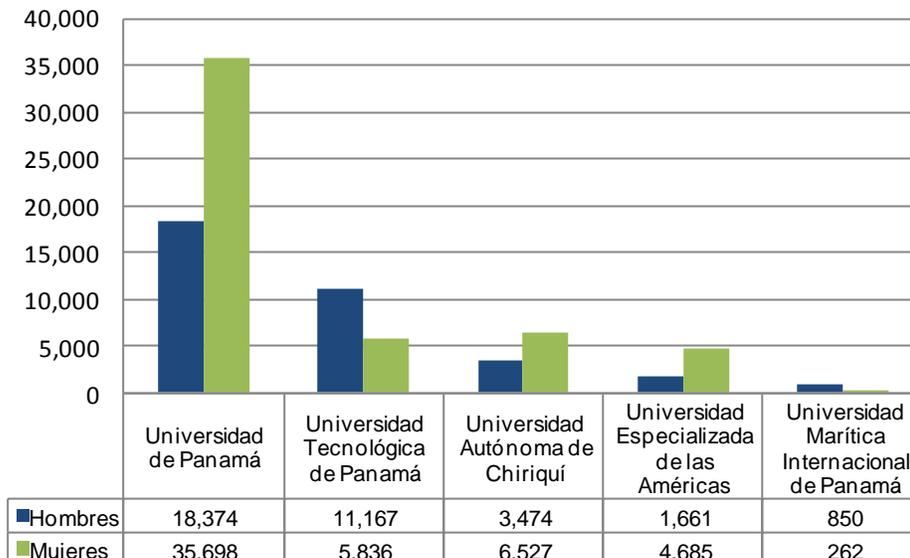
These last two centers offer more prestigious careers that can lead to jobs with better pay (Figures 3 and 4). That is, women are concentrating in more traditional careers such as nursing, education, commerce, accounting and humanities and are mostly employed in the services sector.

Figure No. 2
ENROLMENT BY SEX IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA.
YEAR 2010



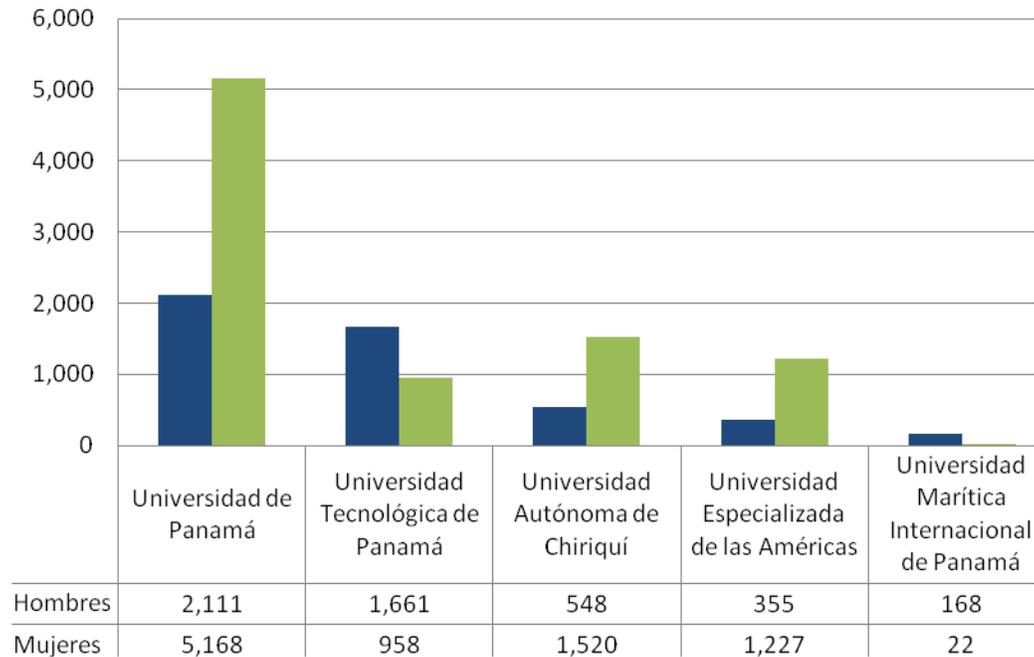
Source: INEC. “Situación Cultural: Educación (Spanish)” 2010 Figure 511-39

Figure No. 3
ENROLMENT BY SEX IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA.
YEAR 2010



Source: INEC. “Situación Cultural: Educación (Spanish)” 2010 Figure 511-39

Figure No. 4
GRADUATES BY SEX IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA.
YEAR, 2010



Source: INEC. “Situación Cultural: Educación (Spanish)” 2010 Figure 511-39

A review of the enrollment by area of study confirms the mentioned bias. Most of the students are concentrated in areas of Business and Management (28.1%) and Sciences and Education (15.5%), and in both areas the majority of the students are females. On the contrary, there is a clear majority of males in computer studies (62%), Engineering (75%), Architecture and Construction (66%), and transportation services (61%)⁸. Even though enrollment and completion are higher amongst females, most of the professors are males⁹. These figures confirm that perpetuation of roles assigned to men and women when deciding what to pursue in higher studies. This trend requires a profound transformation of the school curriculum from early childhood, with the goal of developing non-sexist education. The final objective in this endeavor would be to build a formal and informal education with equity, i.e. without gender discrimination.

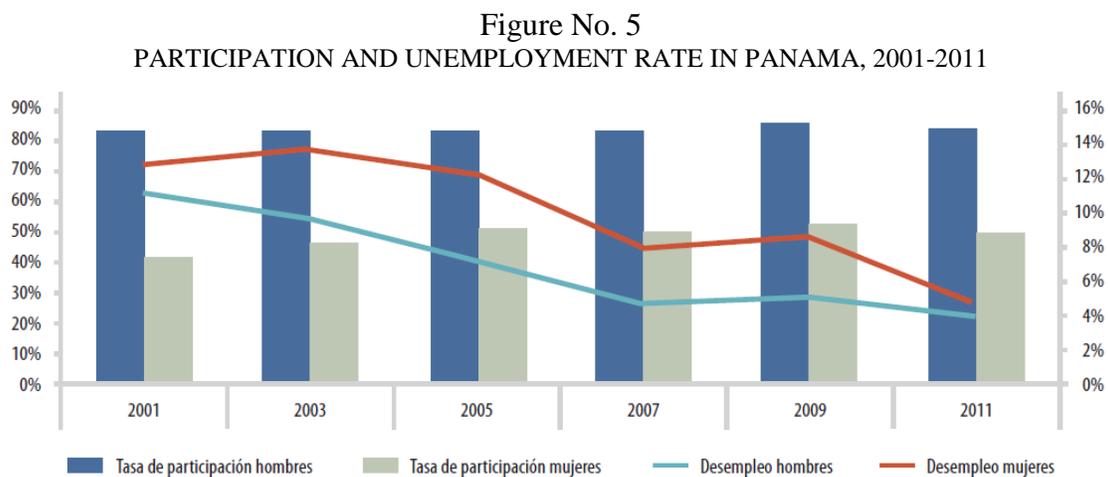
⁸ CGR. INEC. “Panamá en Cifras (Spanish)” 2007-2011. Figure 511-40.

⁹ INEC. “Situación Cultural (Spanish)”: Educación. 2010. Figure 511-39.

2. Education and the Job Market

Gender discrimination is reflected in the labor market through the sexual division of labor. The distribution of opposite roles (for women the responsibility of caring for the family and for men seeking sustenance) has been at the basis of women's positioning towards employment: women have had to give it up or combine it with the domestic work, in a model of "double presence" which explains the multiplicity of roles that women assume today. This requires a splitting of women's time, attention, spaces and energy to make it possible for the house to function as if it was a full-time occupation, resulting in a marked inequity of the use of time and the load distribution.

Even when the gap in the participation of men and women in the labor market has declined over time, it remains above 30% in Panama (Figure No.5). These numbers are very similar to the employment rate by gender. The fact that women's participation in the workforce leads to higher rates of unemployment for women.



Source: World Bank. "Panama - Mejores empleos en Panama : el rol del capital humano (Spanish)", July 2012. Page 21.

With regards to the study levels in the labor market (Table No. 1), almost 57% have no title. At the same time it is noteworthy that although more men find employment holding only secondary education and technical titles, there are more women working with undergraduate, graduate and master degrees. This suggests women had to make an extra

effort to be considered in the labor market. Among the occupied, the proportion of men with doctorates is higher. Except for those not holding a degree, there are more unemployed women at all levels of education. This indicates that there is a negative correlation between the number of women in the labor market and the level of education, that is, as the prestige and hierarchy of the career increases, the number of women in the labor market is reduced.

Table No. 1

POPULATION OF 15 YEARS OF AGE IN THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA, TITLE OBTAINED BY ACTIVITY AND GENDER, AND THE CORRESPONDING LEVEL BASED ON THE 2010 CENSUS

Nivel y Sector de estudio	Total	Población Económicamente activa						No económicamente activa
		Ocupada			Desocupada			
		Total	Hombres	Mujeres	Total	Hombres	Mujeres	
TOTAL	2,388,114	1,306,922	847,363	459,559	100,801	56,533	44,268	980,391
Sin Título	1,354,567	603,556	461,810	141,746	48,776	34,295	14,481	702,235
Secundaria	678,785	424,746	258,237	166,509	37,457	17,376	20,081	216,582
Títulos No Universitarios	18,584	13,631	8,048	5,583	1,001	453	548	3,952
Técnicos Universitarios	40,555	31,473	17,378	14,095	1,986	748	1,238	7,096
Licenciatura	231,308	184,112	78,547	105,565	9,583	2,828	6,755	37,613
Posgrado	12,090	10,403	4,335	6,068	305	98	207	1,382
Maestría	29,669	26,430	11,595	14,835	593	208	385	2,646
Doctorado	2,754	2,176	1,344	832	49	24	25	529
No Especificado	7,364	4,523	2,805	1,718	378	197	181	2,463
No Declarado	12,438	5,872	3,264	2,608	673	306	367	5,893

Fuente: INEC. Censos Nacionales 2010. Volumen II: Características Generales y Educativas.

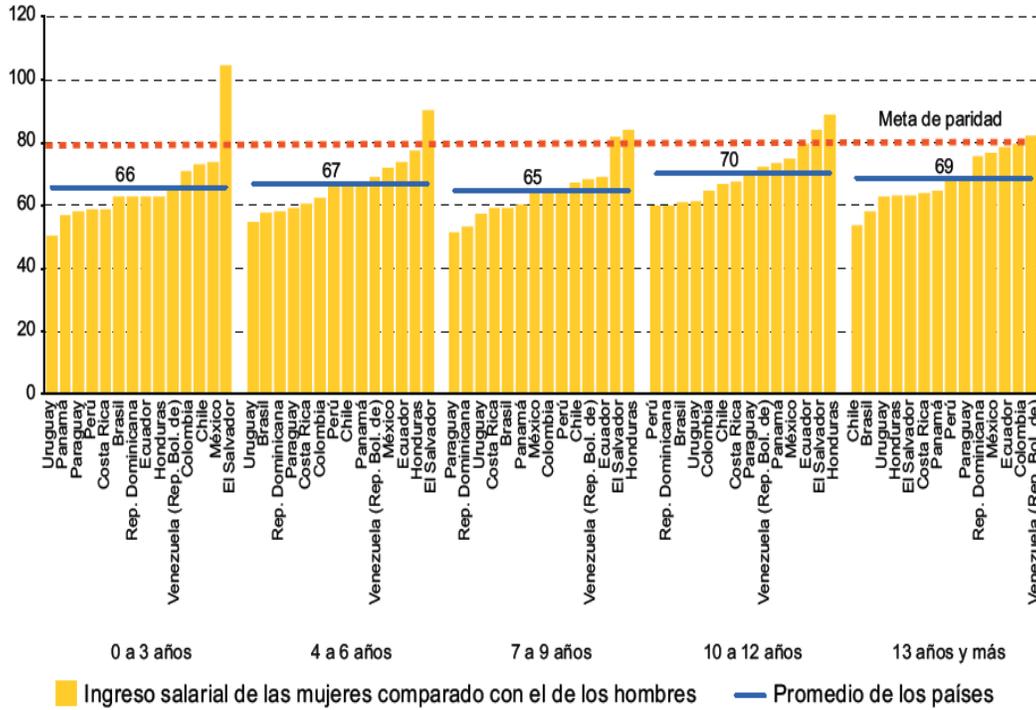
This discrimination is clearly observed in a wage gap between males and females. The patterns allude to the specific roles played by women in society. Male and female roles are envisioned to be completely opposite. Men are providers and women must be dedicated to the family, even if they are highly educated. This is a reflection of the unequal gender relations between men and women.

ECLAC estimates the wage gap for women in relation to their educational level (Figure No. 6). The median income of women does not exceed 70% of male income in Latin America. In the case of Panama, the gap decreases as a function of years of education, but even with 13 years of schooling the average labor income of women is about 65% of male income. We therefore affirm that education is not enough to empower women.

"Much of the debate over wages has always focused on the idea that women face barriers to enter into certain types of fields, and that much of it is due to a subtle discrimination, and sometimes not so subtle, by the employers. Most of the available data relate to the

jobs in which women work, reflecting a series of decisions of the employee and the employer." ¹⁰ This debate also focuses on the fields of study in which men and women get into, and the prestige level of their careers.

Figure No. 6
LATIN AMERICA (14 COUNTRIES): AVERAGE LABOUR INCOME WOMEN
COMPARED WITH THE MEN, BY YEARS OF SCHOOLING.
AROUND 2010



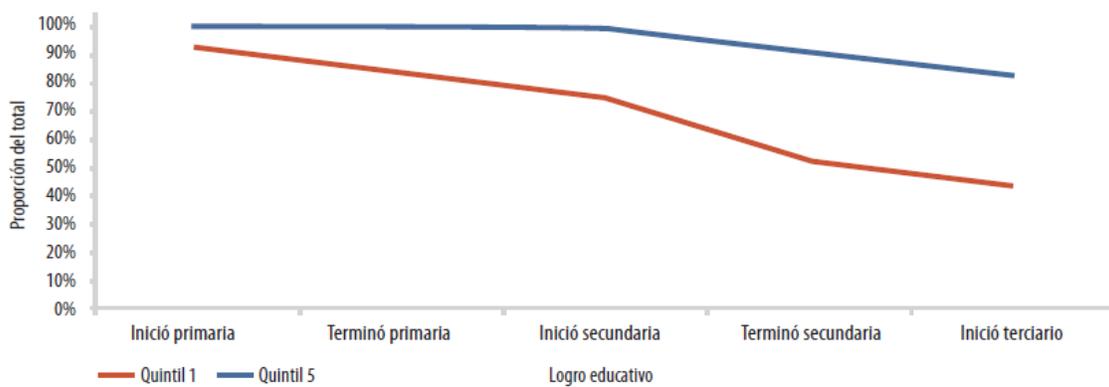
Source: ECLAC, “El estado frente a la autonomía de las mujeres (Spanish)”. 2012. Page 49.

The education system has many challenges, including that all people can access education equally in order to be capable of becoming productive individuals for society. However, obtaining an education does not depend exclusively on the educational system. Success in school also depends on socioeconomic status and educational level of the household, of how people can make use of their existing capabilities, despite discrimination and the characteristic inequality in our society.

¹⁰ <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/papers/download/08012012_orsc.pdf> Matthew Bidwell and Roxana Barbulescu, 2012, McGill University, Montreal.

One can see that the gap in educational attainment between men and women varies according to the level of education of the head of the household. The differences between the two expand with a decreasing education level, to the detriment of poorer students belonging to quintile 1 (Figure No. 7). Socioeconomic conditions largely explain differences in educational attainment, indicating the flaws of the educational system to provide similar opportunities to the general population.

Figure No. 7
EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF
HOUSEHOLDER IN PANAMA, 2011



Source: World Bank. “Panama - Mejores empleos en Panama : el rol del capital humano (Spanish)”, July 2012. Page 29.

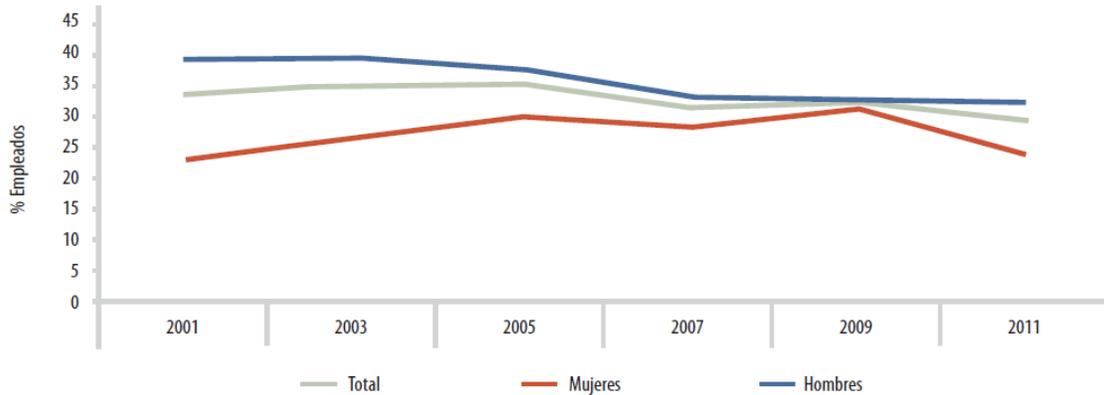
The perception value of schooling by students is another important factor in enrollment decisions. Panama has the highest proportion (9%) of school-age population (15 years old) who believe that school is a waste of time, among the Latin American countries that participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). There are also differences between socioeconomic groups in this topic: 5% of the members of the richest quintile consider school is a waste of time, while 13% have the same opinion in the poorest quintile. Perceptions of the value of schooling clearly reflect long-term constraints in the household and point to the importance of curriculum relevance and socialization of the benefits of education to improve school attendance¹¹.

Overall there is a gap between the education system and the labor market. Informality rates have generally declined, although the informality of women saw an increase in the

¹¹ World Bank. Translated from “Mejores Empleos en Panamá. El Rol del Capital Humano (Spanish)” Panama, July 2012. Page 31.

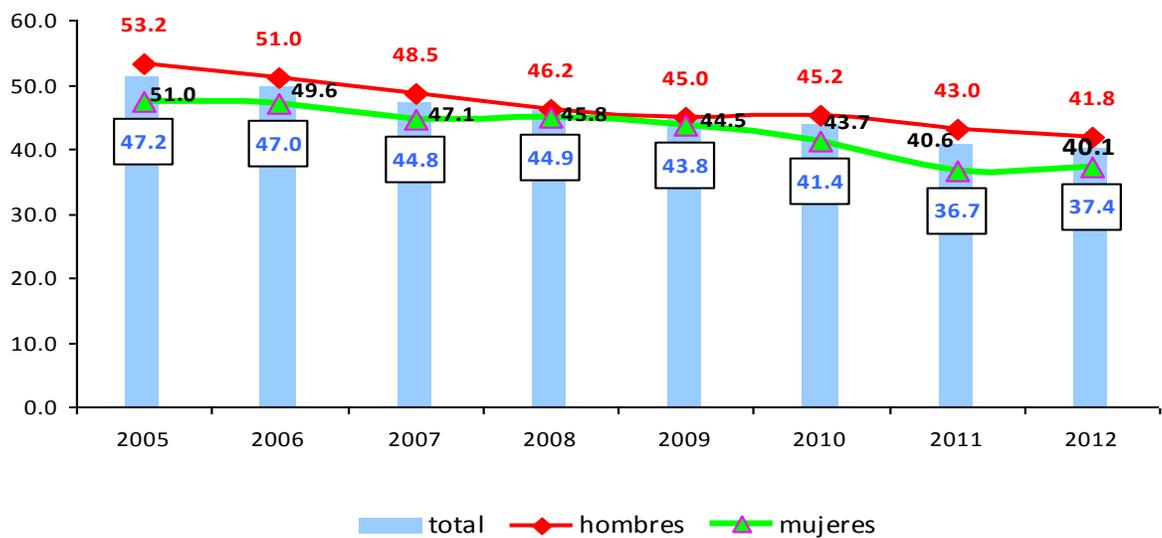
year of the crisis (2009), to recover its level the following year (Figure No.8). It should be noted that female informal employment (8.6%) is higher than male (0.7%) in domestic service, which is the least protected by social security¹².

Figure No. 8
INFORMAL JOBS RATE IN PANAMA, 2001-2011



Source: World Bank. “Panama - Mejores empleos en Panama : el rol del capital humano (Spanish)”, July 2012. Page

Figure No. 9
PANAMA: EMPLOYED POPULATION WHO DO NOT CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIAL SECURITY
DISTRIBUTED BY SEX AMONG THE NON-INDIGENOUS POPULATION (%)



Source: ILO – Panama

A worrying statistic, which reflects the levels of informality, is the large proportion of men (41.8% in 2012) and women (40.1% in 2012) who, although being employed, don't

¹² ILO - Panama

contribute to social security and therefore have no healthcare coverage or right to a pension after retiring (Figure 9). This also leads to an exclusion of social security benefits their families. In general, women are disadvantaged in the labor market, regardless of their level of education.

3. The gaps and the lack of autonomy

In Panama disadvantages for women are perceived the highest in the areas of access to property, credit, decision-making and the exercise of political power. It is likely that this situation is related to the lack of autonomy. Autonomy as a political concept "implies the ability to assume own projects and producing deliberate actions to achieve them, that is subject themselves as subjects. Subjects able to discern their desires and interests and to choose the best actions to realize these elections"¹³

When we speak about gender autonomy we are talking about the degree of freedom that a woman has to act according to her own choice and not that of others. In this sense, there is a close relationship between the acquisition of autonomy by women and the spaces of power they can establish, both individually and collectively. Personal autonomy consists of the ability to generate income and control assets and resources (economic autonomy), control over their body (physical autonomy), and full participation in decisions that affect their lives and their community (autonomy in decision making). Those are the three pillars of gender equality and equal citizenship, which are critical to ensure the exercise of their human rights.

In Panama, according to the Household Survey of March 2012 (INEC), 99.8% of the population not economically active (PNEA), who not looking for jobs because they cannot find anyone who can take care of their children, are women. The 96.5% of the PNEA, not seeking work because they have other family responsibilities, are women. Besides, the logic of the labor market is eminently masculine. The workforce must be available 24 hours a day, every day of the week for work. They do not take into account

¹³ ECLAC – Gender Equality Observatory

family responsibilities. The laws of maternity protection have become an additional problem when recruiting staff.

Traditionally, jobs are only considered productive when they produce income. Unpaid domestic work is not considered productive and has no cost whatsoever, even though the survival, well-being and happiness of the society depend on it. It is also very unevenly distributed by gender, as women are responsible for dependent sectors, such as infants, the elderly, and the sick, adult males. Thus, women can be classified as economically inactive, have no income of their own, even when they work ensuring the welfare of the family and produce goods and services.

This bias affects the ability of women to obtain higher income and access to decision-making positions in the corporate hierarchy and the state. To measure this situation United Nations has developed the Gender Inequality Index (GII)¹⁴. This index is a composite measure reflecting inequality between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and labor market. The GII is designed to reveal the extent to which national human development achievements are eroded by gender inequality. Further, it provides empirical foundations for policy analysis and advocacy efforts.

According to the Human Development Report published by UNDP in 2013, the Human Development Index (HDI) of Panama is 0.780 and the country is ranked 59 in the world. While the HDI value has increased (from 0.770 in 2010 to 0.780 in 2013), the loss of this achievement because of inequality was 28.3% in 2010 and 24.6% in 2013. Panama is the Central American country that loses more positions in the world ranking due to inequality. Perhaps more important is the loss of 49 positions in human development achievement due to gender inequality, to move from place 59 to 108 of a total of 186 countries (Table 2).

¹⁴ UNDP. Human Development Report, 2010

These figures indicate that the gender gap between men and women in Panama is increasing. This is discouraging for a country with a high economical growth (10.7% in 2012) and where the female university enrollment is close to 60%.

Table No. 2
HDI, IHDI y GII for Panama, 2010-2013

Panama	HDI Value ¹⁵	HDI Ranking	IHDI Ranking ¹⁶	Global loss %	GII Ranking ¹⁷
2010	0,770	54	(-20) 74	28.3%	(-27)81
2011	0,776	58	(-15) 73	24.6%	(-37) 95
2013	0,780	59	(-15) 74	24.6%	(-49) 108

Source: Based on the Human Development Report of 2013.

In the case of Panama one of the great losses in gender equality is caused by the low representation of women in parliament. Compared with a regional average of 23%, in Panama the representation of women in the Assembly of Deputies is very low with just an 8% (Figure 10).

Although there is an Equal Opportunities Act and Electoral Quota (minimum 30%), political parties have not yet implemented these. Overcoming this gender gap is what has motivated society to raise the need to institute political and electoral parity.

In the 2009 elections, the OAS observers pointed out that the Panamanian society has a political debt to women. Even the CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women -1979) has expressed its concern to the

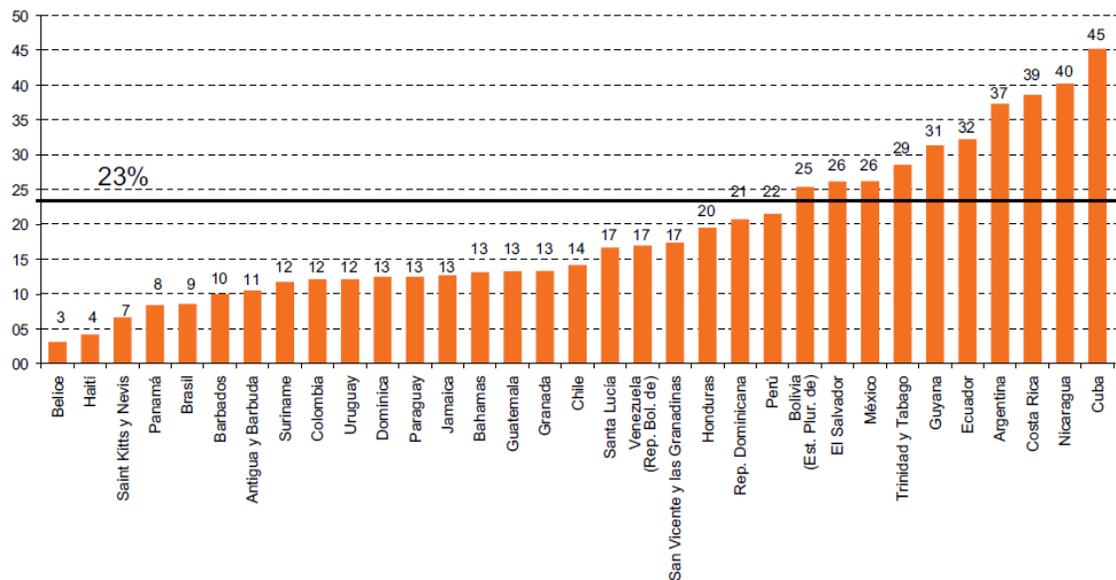
¹⁵ **HDI:** Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite measure of health, education and income, which was presented in the first Human Development Report, published in 1990. It was introduced as alternative to purely economic measurements of national progress, as GDP growth.

¹⁶ The Inequality-adjusted HDI (**IHDI**) is an indicator of the level of human development of the people of a society which takes into account the degree of inequality. In a society with perfect equality, the HDI and IHDI have the same value. When there is inequality in the distribution of health, education and income, the HDI of an average person of any society will be lower than the general HDI. The lower the value of the IHDI (and the greater the difference with the general HDI), the greater the inequality.

¹⁷ **GII:** reflects women's disadvantage in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and labor market for as many countries as data of reasonable quality is available. The index shows human development loss caused by uneven achievements between women and men in these dimensions.

Panamanian State because the adequate measures to ensure that political parties fulfill that quota have not been yet taken¹⁸.

Figure No. 10
LATIN AMERICA (19 COUNTRIES) AND THE CARIBBEAN (14 COUNTRIES):
WOMEN ELECTED TO NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS, SINGLE CHAMBER OR LOWER HOUSE,
2012 (%)



Source: ECLAC. Gender Equality Observatory. Annual Report, 2012.

The reality is that the number of women elected has decreased¹⁹ rather than increased, limiting the possibility for women in Panama to place their practical needs and strategic interests on the public agenda.

4. Women and Poverty

Despite economic growth poverty has not been reduced significantly. According to ECLAC, the concept of poverty has been re-dimensioned from a gender perspective. Among the specific dimensions that explain the disadvantages of women include: the invisibility of unpaid domestic work, time poverty associated with it, the labor and wage

¹⁸ Organization of American States (OAS) - Women's Forum of Political Parties (FONAMUP) – Woman's Institute of the University of Panama (IMUP). "Evolución de la participación política de las mujeres panameñas. Periodo 1990-2010". Page 20.

¹⁹ Organization of American States (OAS) - Women's Forum of Political Parties (FONAMUP) – Woman's Institute of the University of Panama (IMUP). "Evolución de la participación política de las mujeres panameñas. Periodo 1990-2010". Page 13.

discrimination against women, and the importance of family studies from a gender perspective and the challenges to public policy.

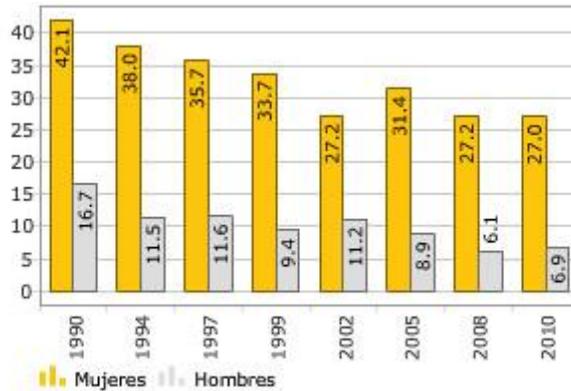
The gender perspective enhances the understanding of how the household works, as it shows the hierarchies and the distribution of resources, and thereby calls into question the idea that resources within the household are distributed equitably and that the needs of its members are equal. It is acknowledged that the family is not an oasis of democracy and equal opportunity does not exist either (consider food distribution, decision making, space, etc.). The gender perspective also points to a multidimensional perspective that considers the multiple roles of men and women in the home, in the labor market and in society, and factors such as class, age and ethnicity that interact with gender.

A fundamental dimension of poverty is related to economic autonomy, that is, people should have their own income that enables them to meet their needs. Unequal opportunities affecting women's access to paid work hinders their chances of achieving financial independence. The most visible aspect of the lack of economic autonomy of women is poverty, which is accompanied by the lack of freedom and time to travel, as well as the exclusion from social protection. This, in turn, makes them the subject of assistance and leaves them with less resource to exercise their rights within the family and community. Most women without income, 73% in Latin America, are excluded from employment together with the unemployed (11%), despite having the potential to join the labor market and receive social protection²⁰. This is the situation of a large number of married women living in both poor and wealthy households, who because of their predominantly domestic activity, are placed in a dependent position in relation to the head of the household.

In Panama, most people over 15 years without income are women. In urban areas 27% of women are in this situation, while only 6.9% of men (Figure 11). In rural areas, 36.3% of women over 15 do not have their own income, compared with 8.3% of men (Figure 12).

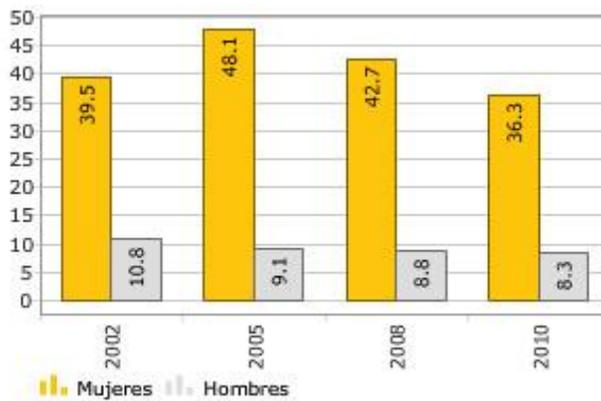
²⁰ CEPAL. “El Estado frente a la autonomía de las mujeres” (Spanish only). 2012. Page 107

Figure No. 11
PERCENT OF THE URBAN POPULATION WITHOUT OWN INCOME



Fuente: CEPAL. Observatorio de Género.

Figure No. 12
RURAL POPULATION WITHOUT INCOME BY PERCENT

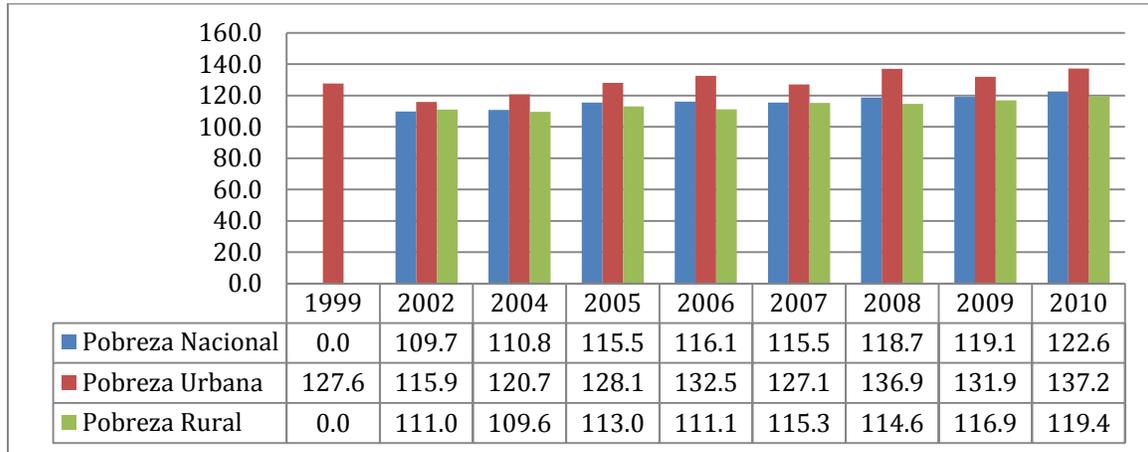


Source: ECLAC - Gender Equality Observatory.

The lack of own income exacerbates a poverty status for women. According to The Femininity Index of Homelessness and Poverty, poverty has increased between 2002 and 2009, both nationally and in urban and rural areas (Figures 13 and 14).

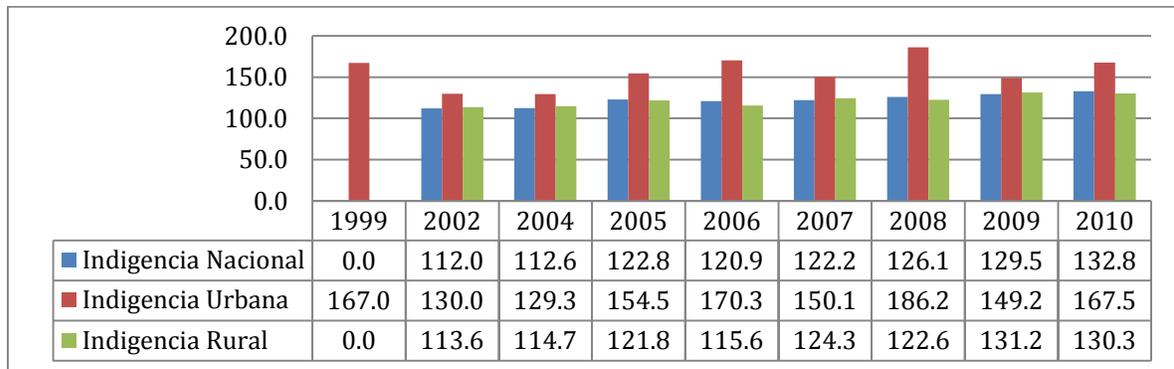
These ECLAC's figures indicate that in Panama there are more women than men in poverty or extreme poverty. These figures state that overall poverty in urban and rural areas has increased in recent years, especially among rural women.

Figure No. 13
FEMININITY INDEX OF POVERTY BY GEOGRAPHIC AREA IN THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA



Source: ECLAC. Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean. 2011. Chart 1.7.4

Figure No. 14
FEMININITY INDEX OF HOMELESSNESS BY GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS



Source: ECLAC. Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean. 2011. Chart 1.7.4

Among the reasons for increased poverty among women is the division of labor by sex. Assigning women the domestic space, determines the "inequality of opportunities they have as a genre to access material and social resources (owned productive capital, paid work, education and training), as well as the opportunity to participate in the making of

major political, economical and social decisions"²¹. The gender perspective has made visible the lack of time for women. They are always busy taking care of the family, even when working away from home.

According to time-use surveys conducted in some countries, the average daily hours dedicated to unpaid work among women ranges from just over four hours in Argentina to more than seven in Guatemala. Among men, time dedicated to unpaid work fails to exceed two hours daily. That is, women have a so-called second shift, when returning home they perform unpaid domestic work.

In Panama the First Time Use Survey found that women work, on average, nine hours more than men each week (INEC, 2012). The women who spend more hours doing domestic work are the ones between 25 and 39 years, in their full productive capacity, which coincides with the breeding age and for some even with higher education. This extra work decreases the possibilities for women to exercise their rights in other areas.

This reduced women's access to resources, due to limited space allocated to them by the sexual division of labor and social hierarchies that are built on the basis of this division, determine a situation of deprivation in different social areas, primarily on three closely related systems, namely: the labor market, the welfare system and households.

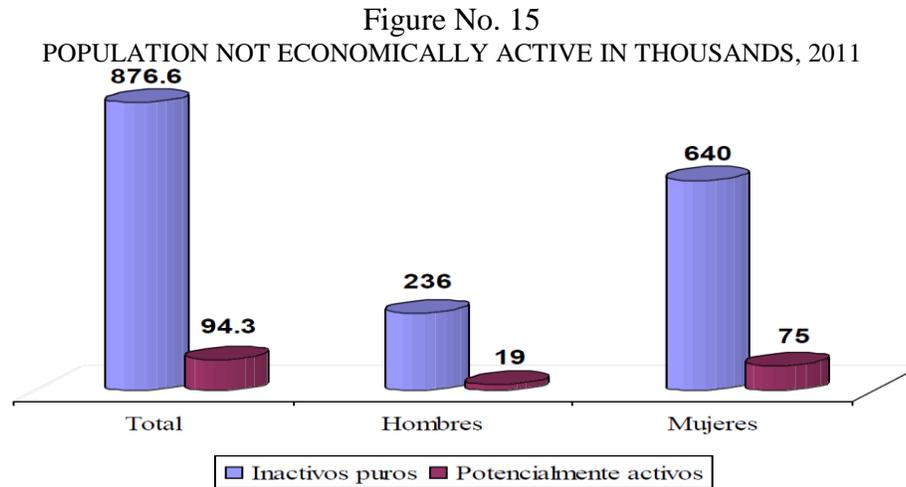
In all the countries of Latin America there are more women in jobs that require lower qualifications, which offer lower pay and have more precarious work conditions, while there are fewer women in salaried and managerial jobs.

Besides stressing that poverty encompasses a lack of material, social and cultural resources, the gender perspective reaffirms its heterogeneous nature, as men and women have different responsibilities and experiences, and thus their interests and needs are different.

The lack of economic autonomy becomes more evident when analyzing the high proportion of women (73%) among the population considered economically inactive in

²¹ Quoted by Batthyány, Karina; Mariana Cabrera, Daniel Macadar. The gender approach in the analysis of poverty. South Magazine - TWN - Third World Network. N ° 159 - January to March 2005. Uruguay.

Panama (Figure 15). It should be noted that, even when women appear as pure inactive in the surveys conducted periodically; it is in reality that the work done by them in their homes is not paid because domestic work is considered unproductive. Feminist Economics has claimed this sexual division of labor as discriminatory to women, because it limits their economic autonomy and thus prevents them from exercising their civil rights.



Source: CGR. INEC. Households Survey, August, 2011.

In Panama, inactive men are primarily retired or students. Instead women say they do not work because they can't find anyone who takes charge of the children and the elderly, and other household responsibilities (99% of women fall in this category - 2011). That is, the social stigma still sees the man as the provider and women as family caregivers. This weighs on the economic empowerment of women.

Being the majority among those considered economically inactive, and the majority among people who have no income of their own, certainly affects the quality of life in adulthood. According to ECLAC in Panama, 61% of women over 65 have no retirement or pension, compared to 49% among men in the same age range²². This inequity occurs even when Panamanian women live on average six years longer than men. This means their vulnerability is greater than that of men in old age. Thus, there is no recognition of

²² ECLAC. Gender Equality Observatory. Annual Report, 2012.

the contribution that women make to the economic system and to the growth of gross domestic product. It is urgent that this contribution is recognized and that the public policies needed to improve the quality of life of women and therefore of society as a whole are created.

5. Conclusion

Once more it is shown that gender relations are unequal power relations between men and women, in all areas of life in society. Even though education is a factor of social mobilization it has not been enough to overcome the gender gap in Panamanian society.

One of the most effective means to achieve equality is education. It is therefore urgent to include non-sexist education as a priority at all levels of the education system in Panama. This effort began some time ago, but it is still not widespread, nor consolidated. For this process to yield the desired results, it requires awareness and political will at the highest levels in government, to generate a concerted effort nationwide.

The center of the development of public policy should be the welfare of human beings, strengthening the family, but not as a sole responsibility of women. Breeding and care of the elderly should be a task of the whole society. Everybody must be incorporated: men, the state, businesses, and the general community.

The gender perspective in the analysis of these processes focuses attention on the existence of a particular set of asymmetric relations within the economy and society based on inequality of opportunity and outcomes, even in the presence of the same capabilities.

The Panamanian government has not developed the necessary and appropriate public policies for equal opportunities to exist between different human groups living in our territory. The central question of every policy is to whom is directed? Who is the intended beneficiary? And what are their different impacts on the population? If we answer these questions, it will become apparent that public policies are not neutral.

Equality is a political decision; it is not the spontaneous result of economic growth. Equal opportunities are the ones that produce sustainable human development, and not vice versa as previously thought.

The gender of people can determine the level of poverty and the risk of suffering it. In short, the gender perspective makes a significant contribution to the analysis of the different opportunities of men and women, since it is conceived in a comprehensive and dynamic way and identifies other dimensions in which the phenomenon is manifested.

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