

## Case Study on Strengthening Women's Leadership



*Effective experiences that promote gender equality in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS); on the basis of lessons learned developed by the Panama Joint Program in the Bisira and Kankintu Communities, Ngabe Bugle semi-autonomous indigenous region.*



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## **Presentation**

Gender statistics, especially in the indigenous areas, have indicated there is a high level of discrimination toward women in comparison to men. That, coupled with their ancestral roots and the traditional lack of income and access to basic health services, safe water, sanitation, and especially to education, are elements that have contributed to the problem.

The Governance Joint Program (JP) is a corporate structure aimed at strengthening equity by reducing gaps in safe water and sanitation public services by empowering citizens in excluded rural and indigenous areas. This was the flagship project that allowed the indigenous communities of Bisira and Kankintu in the Ngabe Bugle semi-autonomous indigenous region to improve their quality of life, in large part by reducing the morbidity indicators of these vulnerable populations.

The JP provided access to safe water and sanitation systems (environmental sanitation) that allowed men, women and children the opportunity to improve their living standards and conditions through the active participation of leaders, youth groups, traditional groups and the general community to be not just beneficiaries but also active participants in the benefits offered to these groups; providing them with tools and supplies for the development of their communities.

One of those tools was the "**empowerment of women**", which gave both men and women, especially women, the opportunity to understand and value themselves, of being educated, trained, equipped on an equal status with men, creating a largely participatory society where woman have rights and duties, a voice and a vote and are not left behind at the whim of their companions.

This demonstrated that when there is greater balance of power in the relations between women and men, combined with the *water-women* pairing, access to health services, water and sanitation, it is possible to save the lives of these vulnerable groups.

This "case study", developed in the Joint Program's framework of cooperation, in collaboration with the National Government and with the support of the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), has as its objective the strengthening of women's leadership in socially excluded and vulnerable communities. Bisira and Kankintu were the pilot experiences women's empowerment during the development of this program, which aimed to contributed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in order to reduce existing disparities in these communities.

These experiences are also expected to serve as a tool to promote and develop intervention actions, which would allow women of these communities to enjoy better living conditions, a more proactive participation and effective community development alongside men.

## ***Executive Summary***

Bisira and Kankintu women from the Ngabe Bugle Region, Republic of Panama represent the link between the past and the future of these communities. It is thanks to the development and implementation of the Governance Joint Program (JP), which has allowed them the opportunity to be heard, valued and represented; as well as develop confidence and security in themselves; achieving support for equity and gender equality.

This case study details the experience of how women and men of these communities were fundamental pieces in the achievement of the JP objectives. Very valuable and important results were reached both personally and structurally.

The study contains a situational analysis of the role of women in the JP development, taking into account a conceptual overview of the geographical scope of these communities; the historic role of ngabe women in the development of their communities, of the participatory approach and assimilation that women and men had in the implementation of the program and how this changed their lives; creating spaces for community participation at all levels, strengthening the role of women in the development of their local environment; thereby improving the quality of life of these groups.

Women's empowerment began with them realizing that they were equal to men, that they have the same rights and duties as their partners and that they are capable of performing tasks that traditionally were assigned exclusively to men. This led to women waking up from that dream in which they had been kept from generation to generation, for many years due to the indigenous world view, and achieving an important position in both the traditional society of their respective communities as well as in other parts of the region.

The JP found that the participation of men and women at an equal status would be a key element for the success of the program. This was evident in the different activities that took place both in the organizational training and strengthening of local structures, as well as in the execution of the infrastructure projects where women played a proactive and key role.

All the initiatives integrated in the implementation of the program allowed the "empowerment of women" to be most significant to the women themselves, since they could contribute and be next to the men as equals for the benefit of the community.

Implementation of the JP broke paradigms, leaving paths and results that exceeded its original scope, creating and strengthening existing local structures and developing capacities both in the fields of institution and community, making women not just beneficiaries but also active participants of the benefits of this initiative.

## Chapter 1

### Case study description and groundwork

#### 1.1 Conceptual Framework.

Indigenous peoples represent the lowest standard of living in the country, according to the 2008<sup>1</sup> standard of living survey 96% of the indigenous population lives in poverty, and of these 41.8 % live in extreme poverty. The Ngabe Bugle remains the representative group with 78.4 % of the indigenous population of the country; with a poverty rate of 0.519<sup>2</sup> and a human development index of 0.641<sup>3</sup>.

These figures tell us that despite the fact there have been countless efforts to reduce these differences, there is a marked variance between people living in urban areas to those living in rural areas, and there is an even further increase in indigenous areas. It highlights the inequities of the system and between these groups of people. Women, who in spite of having the best education indicators at present, are among the poorest of the poor and the most discriminated against.

The Bisira and Kankintu communities have been the models to be followed by the Governance Joint Program (JP); upon which the strengthening of feminine leadership is based. Although they were not defined in the initial objectives of the program, many of the women assumed challenges and major commitments to help in the development of their respective communities alongside the men and in the same conditions as their fellow citizens.

Source: <http://cdn.soymapas.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/mapa-Ngabe-Bugle.jpg>

**Mapa1: Comunidades objeto del estudio, Bisira y Kankintú, Comarca Ngäbe Buglé**



<sup>1</sup> 2008 Standard of living survey, General Audit Office of the Republic, Ministry of Economy and Finance.

<sup>2</sup> Incidence of poverty, Gini =Gini coefficient, World Bank, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Human Development Index, UNDP, 2010.



*Bisira women washing clothes/Photo: Rafael Bonilla, 2012*

The Bisira community is located on the banks of the Cricamola River and belongs to the Kankintu district, Ñokribo Region, Ngabe Bugle semi-autonomous indigenous region, Republic of Panama; founded in 1972. Its name comes from the once abundant small bird similar to a toucan that the Ngabe called BISI.

While the community of Kankintu represents one of the more developed populations of this region, and like Bisira belongs to the Ñokribo Region, located on the banks of the Cricamola River; it is

born from a social initiative of the "Mission of the Augustinian Fathers" who built the schools that had an impact on the population in creating this community; thus improving living conditions and quality of life of these people so far removed from the rest of the country. Its name comes from the mackerel fish which in the Ngabe language is "Kangui" and "Tu" that means hill or mountain.

## 1.2 Living conditions for Ngabe Bugle women in Bisira and Kankintu.



*Bamboo and palm frond homes in Bisira and Kankintu/  
Photo: Rafael Bonilla, 2012*

Women are the most vulnerable group when it comes to the labor market, and the majority of their work, in addition to the household chores that they do, receives no remuneration.

The majority of the indigenous peoples of the Kankintu District live in houses made of bamboo with palm frond roofs (dry palm branches) and do not have electricity, except for the few that have gasoline-run generators and solar panels. Thanks to the JP, many have safe drinking water and health services (Bisira community), and in the Kankintu community have

benefited from the access to safe drinking water that comes from the SUBRURI (water inlet).

According to the 2010 census, the health service levels of Bisira and Kankintu inhabitants were inadequate; more than 85% of the population lacked them. This has changed with the implementation of the JP, which provided a health service of 69 septic tanks which benefit 252 homes in the Bisira community.

Living conditions are precarious and difficult. Even though both communities have health services, these often lack the necessary medicines for these indigenous areas. Likewise, there are both primary and secondary level schools, and in Kankintu there is an extension of the University of Panama and night school which are supported by the Augustinian Fathers and by the Ministry of Education.

**Table 1. Socio-demographic indicators for the Bisira and Kankintu communities, 2010**

District	Total inhabitants	Percentage (%)			
		Women	Men	Not active economically	Illiterate
Bisira (Head)	3,200	<b>51.09</b>	<b>48.91</b>	<b>50.87</b>	<b>20.47</b>
Kankintu	5,009	<b>50.29</b>	<b>49.71</b>	<b>50.23</b>	<b>18.73</b>

Source: National Population and Housing Census, General Audit Office of the Republic, 2010.

The Bisira community has a population of approximately 3,200 inhabitants made up of 48.9% men and 51.09% women, distributed amongst 474 wooden homes with palm frond roofs; while the Kankintu community accounts for 5,009 inhabitants composed of 50.29% women and 49.71% men, distributed amongst 800 predominantly wooden homes with zinc roofs; women are mostly prevalent. This contrasts with the population of the country which has 3,405,814 inhabitants made up of 49.7% women and 50.3% men.

**Table 2. Characteristics of principal services at national and local levels (Bisira and Kankintu), 2010**

District	Total Homes	Percentage (%)			National Level			
		Without drinking water	Without health services	Without Electricity	Total Homes	Percentage (%)		
						Without drinking water	Without health services	Without Electricity
Bisira (Head)	<b>474</b>	<b>76.16</b>	<b>86.71</b>	<b>95.15</b>	<b>896,050</b>	<b>7.18%</b>	<b>5.49%</b>	<b>8%</b>
Kankintu	<b>800</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>85.75</b>	<b>92.37</b>				

Source: National Population and Housing Census, General Audit Office of the Republic, 2010.

According to living standards reports by the General Audit Office of the Republic for 2010 shown in table 2, it was identified that more than 75% of homes in Bisira had no drinking water, 86.7% lacked health services and 95.15% did not have electricity. The same reference showed that in Kankintu 56% of homes have no drinking water, 85.75% lack health services and 92.37% have no electricity, in comparison with national level, as shown in table 2.

The significant progress and impact in these indigenous communities was the installation of a potable water system by the Joint Program; and that it unites the Sirain, Kankintu and Bisira communities, as well as the recent installation of 69 septic tank systems in Bisira which has improved the health service of this community. Although they had latrines, they were not fully accepted by the community, and many times were used for other purposes such as storage. A large part of the community was still using the river for their personal needs.

Ngabe indigenous women have for years maintained an important role in the social and economic development of their families, such as production and oversight of the family income, thus demonstrating the ability to organize and lead working groups in order to achieve income generation for a common good. However, such capacity is limited when factors such as: education, income, health, low productivity, self-esteem, cultural patterns, among others restrict to some extent the growth potential that Ngabe women can develop.



The ability to engage in a particular economic activity has been demonstrated by the Ngabe women, who over the years have been witness to the development of organizations and the feasibility of income-generation and reduction of their poverty level. However, many factors, as mentioned above, decrease that potential. It is important that these limiting factors truly be identified and that strategic guidelines that enable them to comply with the aim of the organizations be established.

In 2010 it was identified that more than 18% of the Bisira and Kankintu population are illiterate, and women are the most affected by education problems. More than 50% of women are illiterate in comparison to men which are less than 40%<sup>4</sup>.

The participation of women in the Ngabe Bugle elected congresses has no precedent in the region, or in the general elections that are held every 5 years. For the General Congress 22.7% of the candidates were women; in the Regional Congresses, 29% and in the 7 local Congresses, 27%, which indicates great interest of indigenous females in the district's government<sup>5</sup>.

On September 11, 2011, the representation of women in popular election posts was significant. For the first time in the history of these indigenous groups, a woman, Mrs. Silvia Carrera, was chosen as General Chief of the Region, and Mrs. Elena Beker was chosen as Local Kankintu Chief, giving the women of the region an important place in the development of these communities.

### 1.3 Socio-economic aspects.

Indigenous areas are among the most vulnerable populations in the country and their standard of living is the lowest; according to the standard of living survey<sup>6</sup>. According to this survey, 91% of the Ngäbe Bugle people carry out agriculture activities, livestock breeding, fishing, hunting, forestry and crafts; combined with the multiple deficiencies present in these groups. Bisira and Kankintu do not escape this reality and the level of per capita income for these communities is less than the basic food basket necessary for families.

The majority of its inhabitants burn their trash, others throw it in the underbrush, and in Bisira an important number use it to make compost, according to the baseline study for the Kankintu and Kusapin districts, executed and driven by the JP.

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<sup>4</sup>National Population and Housing Census, General Audit Office of the Republic, 2010.

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.tribunal-electoral.gob.pa/html/fileadmin/user\\_upload/publicaciones/revista/memoria.pdf](http://www.tribunal-electoral.gob.pa/html/fileadmin/user_upload/publicaciones/revista/memoria.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> 2008 Standard of living survey, Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF).

**Table 3: Different water sources used for human consumption in the homes of Kankintu and Bisira communities, 2010**

Communities	Total Homes	Percentage (%) by water source				
		Aqueduct	River/Stream	Rainwater	Waterhole	Other sources
<b>Bisira</b>	270	25.55	7.41	62.96	3.33	1.11
<b>Kankintu</b>	250	82.8	11.6	9.2	0	0

Source: JP baseline study for the Kusapin and Kankintu districts in the Ngabe Bugle Region, September 2010.

In view of this situation, a number of inequalities were identified for this indigenous population, demonstrating the large existing inequities in these communities. See table 3.

**Table 4: Inequalities of the Ngabe Bugle Population**

Ngabe Bugle Region		National Level (Country)
Indicator	Percentage	Percentage
<b>Poverty</b>	96 and 92% extreme poverty	37.3%
<b>Life expectancy</b>	63 years	74 years
<b>Child malnutrition</b>	35 to 63%	24%
<b>Maternal mortality rate</b>	200 for every 100 live births	100 for every 100 live births
<b>Mortality of children under 5 years</b>	39.1 for every 1000 live births	19.9 for every 1000 live births
<b>Water service</b>	Less than 40%	90%
<b>Sanitation</b>	40%	94%

Source: Health Report for the Ngabe Bugle Region, Dr. Debora Goddard, 2012.

#### 1.4 Health aspects.

Although the Ministry of Health (MINSa by its Spanish acronym, or MOH in English) recognizes that the health care system has low coverage in the indigenous territories and regions; based on a non-indigenous model of care, and coupled with the low presence of health care, services are still provided expeditiously and coverage is free of charge despite the existing constraints.

In Bisira and Kankintu the conditions and infrastructure of health services are not the most optimal, although they do have medical clinics, nurses, nutritional facilities, a pharmacy, statistics, a delivery room, and hospitalization and emergency rooms. The fact that the care is carried out in difficult, basic and limited conditions, does not belittle the optimum performance of all health care personnel toward the people of these communities.

Even when health services are available, access to those services in much of the country are met with educational and cultural barriers that are even more significant for poor and indigenous women. A few examples are: mothers prefer to use traditional medicines rather than seek treatment at a health center or healthcare system, health centers are often far away and there is limited access from schools, boys receive preference when treatment is needed, and girls are often left without treatment.



According to reports from the Ministry of Health, the three main causes of death in the Ngabe Bugle region are respiratory diseases, tuberculosis (with or without complications) and diarrheal syndrome. The primary diseases have also been identified for the region and can be seen in the following table as compared to the national level.

**Table 5: Leading causes of morbidity among women in Panama, 2012**

Ngabe Bugle Region	National Level (Country)
Respiratory diseases	Upper respiratory tract infections
Diarrheal syndrome	Influenza/flu
Pyodermitis	Skin and subcutaneous tissue infections
Malnutrition	Diarrhea
Intestinal Parasites	Urinary tract infections
Tuberculosis	Acute pharyngitis and tonsillitis
	Mycosis
	Anemia
	Hypertension
	Infectious and parasitic diseases

Source: Health Report for the Ngabe Bugle Region, Dr. Debora Goddard, 2012.

### 1.5 General objective of the Joint Program (JP).

The main goal of this joint program has been to ensure the access and the provision of efficient water services and sanitation to the most excluded populations in the Ngäbe Bugle Region through an intercultural approach and the empowerment of the population. As evidenced by the beneficiaries, the program and its objectives were completed in a satisfactory manner.

Reducing existing inequities in the communities and benefitting this vulnerable population through access to safe water and sanitation services was achieved by empowering citizens, including women, in different activities at the level of education, training and organization of the communities and also by constructing infrastructure such as the rural aqueduct system (Bisira and Kankintu); as well as the health care system (Bisira).



Kankintu treasurer collecting water quota payments/  
Photo: Rafael Bonilla, 2012

Through the participation of national institutions such as the Ministry of Health (MOH) and United Nations agencies such as the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labor Organization (ILO), through funds granted by the UNDP Spain-Fund for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG-F or MDGF), the participation of women and men was incorporated equally in the different program actions and activities; with the aim of contributing to gender equality and the empowerment of women, as part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS).

### *Case Study on Strengthening Women's Leadership*

This case study will show the empowerment and leadership among women in the Bisira and Kankintu communities promoted by the JP through understanding and analysis of the problem and intervention in the target communities. It will also demonstrate how the lives of women were changed, thereby becoming lessons learned.

#### 1.6 Justification.

Community participation, along with national and local governments, emphasized the incorporation of an intercultural approach taking into account the traditional social organization and the ancestral knowledge of indigenous peoples. This intercultural approach was the strategic focal point for the intervention model for the communities, and it has contributed to the strengthening of national and local capacities as a platform for the Governance Joint Program.



*Group of men and women during the community consultations and interviews/Photo: Rafael Bonilla, 2012*

The proposed achieved results<sup>7</sup> were the improvement of health through the empowerment of the target population to expand the coverage of and access to water and sanitation services; and the strengthening of the sustainability of water resources through local and institutional actions by incorporating a cross-cutting approach to gender in the different activities carried out by the program.

Likewise, the program developed and strengthened human and social resources, for example, for women through training; strengthening the productive ties between markets and work within the indigenous communities (the poorest); promoting the rational use and conservation of natural resources; and promoting a balanced approach to gender in all activities.

The presence of the JP had an impact on reducing the high rates of morbidity and mortality among children, present in these communities because of the use of water for human consumption, without any type of treatment, causing diarrhea, stomach pains, vomiting and even death in children in these vulnerable communities. Indigenous women are responsible for the care and well-being of the "chi" (meaning "boys and girls" in the Ngabe language).

As part of this program, community organization played an important role in the scope of objectives, especially in the collective actions defined by the inhabitants of the Bisira and Kankintu communities.

#### 1.7 Overview of the JP intervention.

Gender equality contributes to poverty reduction. It results in higher levels of human capital for future generations, and improves the effectiveness in the development of public investment.

Studies in Latin America and the Caribbean have shown that an increase in female participation in the workforce can lead to per capita growth and poverty reduction. It has been shown that

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<sup>7</sup> JP Document, 2009.

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women spend a greater percentage of their income on education, health and nutrition for the home, thereby reducing the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Despite the fact gender equality was not one of the proposed objectives of the PC, as it was not outlined in a direct or concrete manner, the program coordinator gave momentum to the participation and empowerment of women through the various activities and products achieved, in a transversal and purposeful way, thereby achieving an active integration and participation of the program's recipients and users.

From that perspective, the participation of women from the community in the program was significantly represented in the achieved results; since all women, in particular Ngabe women, were empowered by their participation; due to this natural and culturally defined relationship between "water-women". Women use the water to perform their housework, for drinking and to perform their primary needs, among others. The link established characterizes the role of women with water.



*Ngabe women are dedicated to caring for their children/  
Photo: Rafael Bonilla, 2012*

The teamwork executed by community forces for the common welfare and improvement of their community was a defining characteristic of this project; i.e. men and women actively working for their interests. However, the participation of women is low in indigenous areas and particularly defined by ancestral traditions, where the women are engaged in household chores and the care of their partner and children, while the man searches for daily sustenance.

#### 1.8 Methodology used to develop the case study.

The process for the development of the case study as part of the initial assessment of the results achieved by the JP in communities, took into consideration the following aspects:

- a) The local leadership and management developed by both men and women was taken into consideration; as was the empowerment demonstrated by women of Bisira and Kankintu.
- b) It was constructed using the recipients and leaders of these communities as a basic reference. In that regard a workshop was held with two face-to-face sessions that included participation from men and women leaders and community leaders, traditional authorities, employers, JAAR representatives and the education sector. Different work groups were assigned, in addition to interactive interviews with participants.
- c) Documents related to the topic were reviewed: field works, the 2010 national census, local surveys of the studied area, quantitative and qualitative information. Within the workshop framework a participatory interview was conducted with study participants.
- d) The successful experiences achieved by women and men in the community, both personally and collectively, were integrated into the final product.

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- e) Field visits were made to representatives of local authorities, MOH counterparts at the national level, and representatives of local organizations such as the JAAR.
- f) Research and development of the following principles of UNICEF proposals were considered:
  - Identify a policy, program and/or project where from their fields of relevance a "Women's empowerment program and access to safe water" is implemented.
  - Identify the problem that led to this intervention, the beneficiary population and the main lines of action implemented.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Principal strategies defined by the JP to address gender equality**

To establish the gender equity in the beneficiary communities, the JP established the need to incorporate both men and women in the different activities defined in the program, taking into account the roles identified in terms of notification, participation, provision, personal needs and implementation of infrastructure thus respecting gender interests. In other words, those benefits that both men and women can develop by virtue of their position within the community through gender.

In the Ngabe population, it is tradition that leadership positions are occupied by men. However, through the JP women have been progressing to the point of reaching 50% participation of all the activities carried out by the program. Nonetheless the participation of women during the development of the program was crucial to the scope of the objectives, while always respecting the responsibilities that they defined for themselves.

Through the JP, women have had the opportunity to participate in training activities such as: seminars, workshops and infrastructure works (both in the construction of the water and sanitation systems; especially in the Bisira community), thereby promoting entrepreneurship and self-sustainability of women in the region.

These activities were carried out by UNICEF, with seminars and workshops on the rights of women and children, leadership, gender and domestic violence. PAHO/WHO, through the MOH, promoted and implemented sanitation and environmental health seminars, with the purpose of teaching women to learn to better care for their children, keep the community clean and protect the environment in which they live. ILO promoted training activities defined by empowerment, the strengthening of communities, self-subsistence and human development and improving opportunities for these vulnerable groups.

The expertise developed by groups of enterprising women allowed an increase in their participation in local community organizations; occupying leadership and elected positions for the first time, as was the case for Miss Mitzi Castle as the first President of the JAAR Bisira and Ms. Elena Beker, local Bisira and Kankintu Chief.

Currently, it is common to find women as heads of neighborhoods in their community, in the water committees or water administration boards, and taking on the responsibility of working as health promoters in their respective communities. They also participate in artisan groups, are entrepreneurs of small businesses such as small shops, restaurants, bread sales. They rent rooms for teachers, and work as mason assistants and helpers.

Access to knowledge and education allowed women to know their rights in the region by creating respect, recognition and placing high value on the impact the participation of women has on the life of these communities.

## 2.1 Gender equality analysis within the JP framework.

Gender analysis identified more specific areas of intervention than were initially raised by the program; prevailing traditional cultural patterns, the gender divisions of labor, decision-making patterns, the access and control of economic resources, and their benefits marked the "roadmap" to set gender equity and the empowerment of women during the development of the program.

It was necessary to strengthen and develop some basic social skills that heavily conditioned the access of women to the natural life of the community (Bisira and Kankintu) and break with the paradigm "that such things were for men and such things were for women", thus promoting the joint work of both the "brade" ("man" in the Ngabe language) and the "meri" ("women" in the Ngabe language).

*"The JP allowed me to socialize within the community. Through the JAAR, we are the ones that are taking care of the systems being offered. The majority of women are the principal water users, and we are the ones that guarantee the aqueduct's sustainability. We are nobody without water. We no longer want to drink water from the river."*

**Mrs. Mitzy Elena Castillo/ JAAR President in Bisira.**



Key strategies used by the JP to address the problems encountered were prioritized by:

- Community education and training.
- Infrastructure construction such as the water system (Sirain, Kankintu and Bisira) as well as the sanitation system in the Bisira community.
- Water system sustainability through the strengthening of the Rural Aqueduct Administration Boards (JAAR); the participation of local governments and other traditional community-based organizations such as: health, cleaning and beautification committees, neighborhood organizations; among others.



*Women cleaning the area, Bisira Community/  
Photo: Clara Vargas, 2011.*

All of these strategies are coordinated and carried out jointly between the JP coordination along with the MOH regional and local institutional counterparts.

In this way both personal and institutional capacities were developed and strengthened, as were the abilities and skills of women with the aim of improving their achievement, facilitating their access to and retention in the labor market and improving their living conditions and quality of life.



It is necessary to emphasize that 100% of the interviewees replied that attitudes towards the projects were changed because of the trainings provided by national and international organizations. That is to say the trainings were determinants.

*"The culture of women has been limited by cultural aspects and traditions. The access to education plays an important role for the development of women. Men have always thought that only men should be educated, especially in the mountain area, but in the area where there is access to education, women's participation improves."*

**Mr. Maximo Quintero, Kankintu JAAR Spokesperson.**



However in spite of today's existing natural and cultural limitations and barriers, the participation of women in these communities is more proactive and purposeful, leaving a precedent of equality and rights for all.

Currently, the women of these communities seek to improve their situation on their own initiative, raising options or alternatives for solutions to their problems and primary needs.

## 2.2 Barriers and limitations.

The barriers observed were the dispersion of population, population mobility, lack of training in some members of the Bisira and Kankintu population; as well as the lack of participation of women in training activities because they do not have anyone to take care of their children.

In addition, women had to perform their household duties, which many times prevented them from participating in both training and infrastructure activities.

*"In order to sustain the aqueduct, both men and women must be responsible and pay the quotas. We are aware of this, but there are still families who are not aware of gender equality. It **is hard** to handle our people, which is why it requires the dissemination of materials and teaching us women how we will work to benefit our communities. "*

**Mrs. Susana Becker, Community Leader and entrepreneur in Ulikron-Bisira**



It is important to note that during the development of the JP certain barriers and obstacles were identified that limited the Ngabe women's empowerment. These barriers and obstacles are a result of the multiple factors identified in the following section.

### a) Physical-geographic conditions.

**Difficult to access area:** Both Bisira and Kankintu communities are located in remote areas of the country, characterized by their location on the banks of the Cricamola River, 2 hours from the nearest community via boat or canoe (part by sea and part by river).

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- **Lack of basic services:** The lack of electricity, the difficulty in communications via mobile phone and fixed telephones (there is only a satellite phone in the health center for emergencies), the lack of sufficient means of transport, both aquatic and land-based (currently there are two trucks that make the trip from Bisira to Kankintu) are limiting factors that do not allow the development of these communities and much less for women.
  - **Climactic factors:** More than 80% of these communities receive rainfall almost throughout the year, thus increasing their vulnerability to floods and delays both in infrastructure works and in training activities.
- b) JP structure.
- **Traditions and customs:** In the past, women were subject to men and were responsible for the care of their home and children; while the man was engaged in the search of the daily sustenance for his home. This caused women to live in anonymity for many years; as did the rejection of female empowerment by men.
  - **Community rejection:** At the start of the program, there was resistance from the Sirain community inhabitants because they did not want to participate in the process of constructing the water system infrastructure; as well as its maintenance.
  - **Community resistance:** The community showed resistance in believing in the program because state authorities and politicians had previously made promises of projects that were then never fulfilled. This increased their distrust in the JP.
  - **Negative influence by men:** No irregularities were reported in the development of the study, but it is known that at the start of the program many men did not allow the participation of women in the program development.
- c) Socio-cultural.
- **Lack of qualified human resources:** The lack of skilled labor, the lack of specialized preparation and difficulty in attending or completing school has limited both men and women, and in particular women in achieving their human and community development. For this reason, trainings are very important; because through them a significant breakthrough in the performance of women within the district society and of the local community has been achieved.
  - **Establishing strategic alliances:** If there had not been a direct communication with the local chief and had she not been persuaded of the JP's importance and benefit for these communities, the expected results would not have been reached. The advancements and achievements reached during the program would not have been possible without the indispensable incorporation of the MOH District Office along with the designation of a local counterpart.
  - **Gradual community acceptance:** The community began to believe more in what the JP proposed as the activities and initiatives of the program were developed and when concrete results were visible.

The strengthening of human relations between all the players was important in increasing confidence among all, which made it possible for both communities to commit themselves to the

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sustainability of the program. Currently, the communities request that national and international organizations take them into account before designing a project in their communities.

Any strategy that proposes the removal of barriers to establish more equitable social relations should consider that gender is produced and reproduced in all of these spaces and that an intervention from one of them will mobilize reactions or find limitations from the other.

## Chapter 3

### Changes towards gender equality and empowerment achieved

#### 3.1 Principles for empowerment.

According to UN Women, equality is good business, and some basic principles have been established that were considered organic in these communities, without necessarily taking into account that recommendations and strategies established by entities dedicated to the subject existed:

- Promote gender equality from management to the highest level.
- Treat all men and women equally in the workplace - respect and defend human rights and non-discrimination.
- Ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers.
- Promote education, training and career development for women.
- Carry out business development practices, supply chain and marketing in favor of strengthening women.
- Promote equality through community initiatives and lobbying.
- Evaluate and disseminate the progress made in favor of gender equality.

#### 3.2 Gender impact.

Gender empowerment driven within the framework of the JP allowed processes of change for women, increasing their participation in both traditional and community society. From this perspective, empowerment meant:

- Women's self-confidence and the internalization that they have the same rights as men.
- Autonomy to make decisions about their own lives.
- Identification of their interests, priorities and transformation of their relationships, structures and institutions that had limited them.

This does not imply the domination or supremacy of the other (as often happened naturally in the past on the part of men toward Ngabe women), but the acquisition of resources, awareness and skills to put an end to the unequal situation that women in the region have lived with.

*"The ngabe society is a sexist society that has been changing in modern times. Being a woman is to be discriminated against. Today, they see me as the doctor without regarding my gender. The JP highlighted the role of women within the community; women have more relation to water than men. The participation of women is more representative, this has led to the empowerment of women. Women have been given great opportunities, and I will keep joining together to strengthen and promote them. "*

**Dr. Debora Goddard/General practitioner and  
Director of the Bisira Health Center.**



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Although empowerment processes have been given in many oppressed or disadvantaged groups, their major development has occurred in relation to women. The role of women was the determinant of the scope of the JP objectives because women demonstrated that they were highly responsible, committed and dedicated to the tasks entrusted to them, such as in the technical work assistance that demanded greater physical effort or "strength" as Bisira and Kankintu men indicated during interviews.

The participation of women in the JP accounted for one of the challenges that were overcome, especially in a "macho" culture such as the Ngabe Bugle where ancestral culture implies that the female figure was intended to care for the children and the home and the man to the search for sustenance, often forgetting women in its context.

*"Women in Kankintu have been recognized. They have the same rights as men. Women are good at planning and administering money, they look to the future and are dedicated to caring for their children. Today, more women are being educated and are receiving training more frequently. Women have forged ahead and have had the interest to participate and be trained; it is important to note this difference."*

**Mr. Ramiro Santos, Kankintu Community Leader.**



All the initiatives integrated in the implementation of the program allowed the "empowerment of women" to be most significant for the women themselves, awakening in them the opportunity to be heard and valued as human beings, that they could contribute as equally as men for the benefit of the community.

### 3.3 Experiences and results achieved.

Due to the implementation of the Governance Joint Program, Bisira and Kankintu women were taken into account and considered in the different activities and projects that the JP had planned to develop; giving them the opportunity to meet their basic needs; both economic and sociocultural. This program consolidated efforts that other initiatives (Ngabe Bugle Project) had developed on gender equity and community work, giving women their rightful value.

The worldview of the indigenous communities that were subject of this study were respected; taking into account the role that women in current times should have on the basis of equal rights for men and women; as well as the obligations and responsibilities of each in comparison with the mutual benefit that access to safe drinking water (Bisira, Kankintu) and environmental sanitation through the septic tank system would bring.

*"Women are near water, we must watch it; we must care for and teach children about caring for water. Women play an important role in the empowerment of the water because they are closest to the family and also to this resource".*

**Mrs. Elena Beker, Bisira and Kankintu Local Chief.**



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The JP broke the traditional paradigm by giving the women the opportunity to develop their capabilities and by creating opportunities for participation with gender equity in different training, preparation, self-esteem activities; as well as in the development of construction works defined exclusively for men, where women played a very important role in the success achieved.

At the same time, the program has provided women with the necessary tools, guides and manuals for them to get organized within the community, creating the necessary spaces such as "women artisans". As a result groups of women have been able to help and support themselves to analyze, discuss and seek a solution to their main problems; thereby improving their living conditions.

The experiences in the Bisira and Kankintu communities have the potential to be replicated in other communities benefiting from the JP, which began to gather in order to share their experiences and knowledge about problems faced, thus launching their leadership skills.

During the development of the workshop and in consultation with the community, what both men and women felt were each other's roles before the JP, after having executed the various activities of the JP, and how past conceptions changed were identified and are described in Table 6.



*Sexist attitudes are changing in Ngabe men. They now care for their children where before only women did/Photo: Rafael Bonilla, 2012*

**Table 6: Roles of men and women, according to community interviews**

Interviewee number		Men's Responses		Women's responses		
		Male Roles	Female Roles	Male Roles	Female Roles	
1	BISIRA	Responsible for the home and caring for the children	Responsible for the home and caring for the children	They have the same responsibility to do housework as women, as well as caring for the children	Housewife, caring for the home and the children	
2		Have the right to work, education, opinions, health, nutrition, housing and decision making	Have the right to opinions, to work, to live amongst society, health, nutrition, housing and decision making	The right to educate and be educated. Responsible for nutrition in the home and decision making	The right to an education, equal healthcare for all (mestizos) and in decision making	
3		Participate in elections	Participate in elections	Participate in elections	Participate in elections and in traditional titles such as Chief.	
4		Contribute to community participation and planning (meetings, work, potlucks).	Participate in various organizations	Responsible and respectful in an organization and follow their guidelines	Have the right to participate in community activities on the same level as men	
5		To be monogamous.	Ability to procreate.	They are polygamist, sexist and are the only ones that can perform heavy labor.	Women can't do heavy labor, only technical	
6		To be supportive in solving problems		Think that only men can be community leaders	Can be leaders of organizations and be valued by society	
7		Exchange knowledge and skills with women		Work with women as a team and share economic resources	Work as a team and interact with the community, replicate the lessons learned in other communities and share economic resources	
8		Kankintu	Build the homes	Opportunity for training and getting organized	Think that they are the only ones that can perform all types of work	Have equal opportunities to perform other types of work such as engineers, contractors, auditors, etc.
9			They are responsible for training, organizing and directing the community	Right to academic training	That their opinions hold value and count	Be community leaders
10			Agricultural production	Agricultural production		Increased participation in seminars
11			Aspire to take on political and traditional roles	Aspire to take on political and traditional roles		
12				Responsible for cleaning the house, giving birth and breastfeeding children		Be a homemaker

Source: Prepared by the consultant at the Bisira and Kankintu workshop, 2012.

Table 6 highlights the importance both men and women have in the care and responsibility of children, as well as their own basic needs. At the same time, it was identified that both men and women have rights and duties, with men recognizing the right that women have to be educated, prepared and be active members that make decisions in the community and in the home.

Some of the aspects found in the consultations with the community were that women are demanding greater opportunities to be taken into consideration, both by their own ethnic groups

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as well as in the various programs and projects that develop in their communities, highlighting the value of Ngabe women in both mestizo (non-indigenous) and indigenous societies.

Another of the judgments found was the view that the ngabe have of women; highlighting the role of women as homemakers, wives, mothers and community leaders while the men have been linked to the search of economic resources to meet the vital needs of the home, among others.

In dealing with the subject of women's empowerment, it is essential to consider multiple dimensions, such as close relations (family), collective (organization, community and region) and personal (the women themselves).

In personal dimensions, it was noted that power is "to do"; it means having more knowledge and learning more ways to work, to help others and solve problems; having power is the ability to decide, do things, move forward, progress. The "power to" means justice, namely demanding, and defending their rights, equality of rights. In other words women have the same rights and power as men.

In that regard, the empowerment of women is represented with respect to their actions and decisions; to be informed, to have access to learning, education and to attend school; to be heard, for their needs and demands to be taken into account, to participate in meetings and trainings, to be respected by doctors, to have special programs for women and to have the freedom to decide what they want freely, among others.

On the basis of the consultation workshop held with leaders of the Bisira and Kankintu communities, as shown in table 7, the following achievements for the empowerment of women through the JP, and how these have changed their lives were identified.



*Groups of men and women have been strengthened by the JP, Workshop 2012/Photo: Rafael Bonilla.*



**Table 7: Empowering women in Bisira and Kankintu through the JP, 2009-2012**

Communities	Before the JP	Community impact after the JP	Effect on Women
<b>Bisira and Kankintu</b>	Women were subjected to the decisions of their partners.	Women share with their partners and problems are resolved together.	They are self-confident and are secure in making their own life decisions.
	Were responsible for taking care of the children and the housework.	Partnerships are strengthened and responsibilities and the caring for children are shared amongst the family.	The family is encouraged to be the first line of education for children.
	Women had little or no participation in community or economic activities, elections, and in decision making.	Women have been elected as JAAR and neighborhood presidents, they are entrepreneurs (they own restaurants and hostels, sell arts & crafts, etc.), have been chosen as Regional Chief, and are treasurers for local organizations.	Women have strengthened both in education and participation, are more proactive and entrepreneurial, have increased their leadership in their communities. Those who manage the water system are women.
	Unawareness and no application of gender equality.	Community groups were strengthened through UNICEF and ILO, especially female entrepreneurs. Gender equality. The rights and duties of women are respected.	Women have more opportunities to be heard, to participate in decision-making and be self-sufficient. Women are leaders.
	Little or insufficient training and education for women.	Increased training activities in the field for women by UNICEF, PAHO / WHO, and ILO. The Ministry of Health promotes more health activities.	They have access to knowledge, education, to participate in meetings with both traditional and community authorities.
	Lack of safe drinking water and sanitation.	As of 2012, it has a water system that links the Sirain, Kankintu and Bisira communities. Bisira has 67 septic systems, giving 99% of the population a solution to sanitation problems.	It has improved their quality of life; they live better, have better health, and have determined their future towards the development of their community.
	An increase in the number of cases of diarrhea and skin problems in infants under 5.	A decrease in the number of cases of diarrhea and skin problems in infants under 5.	The health of children and mothers has improved. Children have healthier living conditions.
	Weak organization and administration of the JAAR.	Strengthened JAAR organization through water safety programs and local training activities on behalf of the MOH and PAHO / WHO.	Implementation of the Water Safety Program (PSA) as a support system to the JAAR, and an improvement in health outreach and advancement systems.
	Economy based on subsistence activities.	Micro entrepreneurs, construction helpers, and informal jobs were created, and female leaders from both communities were strengthened.	Their economic status, quality of life, personal education and self-esteem and confidence have improved.
	Little or no participation in local events that occur outside of their immediate environment.	Women and men representing in local, regional, national and international events, thus multiplying the experiences of these communities.	They have been heard outside of their local environment, and have shared the lessons learned from the JP. Women have changed their view of the future.

Source: Prepared by the consultant at the Bisira and Kankintu workshop, 2012.

In Table 7, how the empowerment of Bisira and Kankintu women evolved over the course of the joint program was determined:

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- Power in the *sense of greater confidence* in one's own ability to successfully undertake some form of action.
- Power in terms of *strengthening the relationships* that the population establishes with other organizations.
- Power as a result of *increasing access to economic resources* such as credit and supplies, among others.

It was observed that the job of constructing the water system, and the company responsible for carrying out the work, took into account women's participation in the implementation of the aqueduct, creating informal jobs where men and women could meet their basic needs. This was also reflected in the implementation of the septic tank system in Bisira, where women's participation was crucial and decisive in the results achieved. Women's participation led to the improvement of the economy in the home during that time, and both men and women contributed to the administration and maintenance of their homes.

It should be noted, according to the assessment that men have given in these communities, that women manage economic resources better and more efficiently, so that the collection, operation and maintenance of the water system by women has not been an impediment to the smooth operation of the Administrative Boards of Rural Aqueducts (JAAR).

A discovery found in field consultations was that in both Bisira and Kankintu 100% of answers were practically the same or coinciding, which is an indicator that the training activities have been fruitful, thus improving the participation of men and women in the development of their community.



*Groups of men and women have been strengthened by the JP through training activities, 2009-2012/  
Photo: Rafael Bonilla*

Both men and women were surveyed equally in this exercise, thereby providing an accurate reflection of responses, and thus allowing a more clear valuation on gender equality after having been trained on the subject.

We can infer that the main results achieved after the valuation began are:

- a) Currently, the active participation of women in the future of their communities is maintained. A vivid example of this is the JAAR, where men and women work on equal terms.
- b) The Bisira and Kankintu communities have benefitted from access to safe drinking water, and Bisira of sanitation services, providing both men and women a better quality of life and health conditions.
- c) Rules and regulations have been established about access to safe drinking water and sanitation, taking into account the resolutions and decrees of the Ministry of Health in which both men and women abide by and follow their guidelines. Many men were reluctant at first because they are not accustomed to this type of legislation, which has made great strides towards the respect of rights and duties of men and women.
- d) Other results of a qualitative and quantitative nature show that the work carried out in both communities has produced successful results in line with the JP, thanks to the use of the investments allocated and the results achieved in both men and women.
- e) The community has better access to information; and is more receptive to changes that contribute to improving quality of life, especially for children.
- f) The community populations that were object of the study have shifted radically in both their ancestral customs and improving the quality of their life. They celebrate the access to water and today in Bisira they are grateful to have sanitation services in their humble homes, since without the JP they would still be taking care of their needs in the Cricamola River.

### 3.4 Factors that contribute to the success of the experience.

There are a series of elements and factors that that contributed to reaching the JP objectives and to the empowerment of women in the development of this program, and include the following:

- *Coordination, planning and participation of different organizations such as the United Nations and national counterparts:* Working in coordination with three agencies in the System (UNICEF, ILO, and PAHO), under the coordination and supervision of the PAHO/WHO was not easy; as each agency has its own working mechanisms. However, it proved that working together as a team can produce successful results. In addition, there was combined participation from the Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Economy and Finance as national counterparts, as well as participation by the Ministry of Education (MEDUCA) in health education activities at the school level.
- *Equal gender participation in development trainings:* This was a strategy and an internal factor of the program, and a decisive factor in achieving community acceptance and participation. This kept men and women informed on the coverage, benefit and scope of the project; involving leaders and members of the community.
- *Strengthening action plans:* The community organizations' capacities were strengthened for efficient management, operation, maintenance, monitoring and evaluation of the water and sanitation services; giving local community organizations the facilities to plan and prioritize investments through participatory processes for the sustainability of their own organization.

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- *Execution and advancement of joint work:* The program activities were implemented jointly with local governments, the autonomous traditional authorities and community beneficiaries. Both men and women collaborated on the various infrastructure works, such as in the technical and training activities.
- *Defining tasks for the United Nations Agencies:* The United Nations, in conjunction with the MDG Fund, provided funds for the implementation of this program, determining their level of responsibility:
  - a) UNICEF participated in the implementation of the program for municipal water and environmental sanitation, integrating participation from different social players, both men and women, offering women priority representation.
  - b) PAHO/WHO provided the technical expertise for addressing the integral factors that impact health and quality of life. It was the agency that coordinated, planned, supervised and monitored the program together with MINSa; particularly those actions corresponding to water and sanitation; and that incorporated women and men in the development and execution of the different infrastructure projects. It informed different construction chiefs that women needed to be trained and educated to support in the construction. Through this it was identified that women had the potential to be masons and mason assistants.
  - c) ILO took charge of strengthening the communities; in the construction, maintenance and management of infrastructure and public services; as well as the creation of the Integral Planning of Rural Access Program (PIAR) for training the public sector, giving women proactive participation by creating a group of women entrepreneurs, and by providing the necessary training to form their own businesses, among others.

These factors contributed to making sure the empowerment of the community in the implementation of the JP and, in particular, the role assumed by women, would provide a positive impact in breaking the paradigm that indigenous women only serve to bear children and care for the home. Through the program women, and particularly women from vulnerable communities often excluded from any gender involvement, demonstrated that they have potential and a desire to improve.

#### 3.5 Actions and results that reach beyond joint programs.

The JP implementation carried out in the selected communities left results and impacts that went beyond that originally expected, creating and strengthening local structures and capabilities both in institutional and community fields. Likewise, it represented strengthening women from these communities, arousing greater confidence and security in them; thus improving their quality of life and general conditions, celebrating access to water and health systems in their homes.

These results were not isolated to the Bisira and Kankintu communities but rather have been demonstrative models for other communities, for example:

- *Strengthening the Administrative Boards of Rural Aqueducts (JAAR):* The main mechanism that ensures the continuity of JP activities and results. Accounts for female empowerment, a fact which is highlighted in this study because women maintain greater permanence in the community, spend more time at home and are at the head of their families.

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- *Recognizing Bisira and Kankintu women's identity:* It is more common to see a woman taking the children to the health center; however, currently things have taken on another meaning. Women are an integral part in the search for their own identity, after the training they showed that they can be involved in development and produce solutions for both for their family group as well as integrally for the community.
- *Strengthening of community training activities:* It is necessary to continue training in all areas of human development, in order to continue assisting the communities in developing comprehensive solutions to their problems, strengthening the participation of women and supporting traditional authorities and the different organizations.
- *Strengthening existing human resources in the area:* To replicate this experience communities can receive support from the human resource previously trained for this project. Belonging to the same ethnic group helps ensure that new projects will have more success in less time, and they can be advised by the same technicians that are part of the JAAR.
- *Formation of small community businesses (microbusinesses):* Some small businesses run by women and supported by the community are small eateries, small grocery stores, housing rental for teachers, the brick factory in Bisira, and artisanal bread sales. These should be replicated in other indigenous communities.
- *The design and distribution of educational materials, advocacy and outreach for the proper use of water, the rights and duties of women, community handbooks, educational videos:* These are tools that can be used by communities in the system and benefited by the JP, but may also be replicated in other indigenous communities as promotional material.
- *Proper use of the Case Study:* The National Government, the United Nations System and International Organisms such as the SIWI can use the study results in order to evaluate qualitative aspects and quantitative results of the JP benefits, and then replicate them in other regions. It can also be used as support to monitoring and follow-up for the execution of this type of project

Based on the consultations, it is recommended that the JP experience and successes achieved be shared and expanded to other communities that have similar conditions and problems such as those that existed three years ago in Bisira and Kankintu; taking into account the opinions and judgments of the host communities.

In addition this document stresses, particularly to government planners and international agencies, that women in general and, specifically, other women's groups that have not received such training must be given opportunities to participate in education and training processes.

#### 3.6 Analysis of strengths and weaknesses within the JP framework, with a gender focus.

As part of the case study a workshop and interviews with system users, as well as with institutional and local counterparts from the Bisira and Kankintu, took place. From that the strengths and weaknesses that the JP had with regards to the role of women and gender equity were identified, and include:

**Table 8: Analysis of strengths and weaknesses within the JP framework, with a gender focus**

Community	Strengths	Community	Weaknesses
BISIRA	Beneficiary communities participating without political affiliation and without gender discrimination, everyone equally.	KANKINTU	At first some residents resisted the development of the program due to lack of information and awareness on the subject. This was especially true in the Sirain and Kankintu communities.
BISIRA and KANKINTU	Coordination of the program that took into account women's participation in the activities developed by the different agencies of the United Nations system.	BISIRA and KANKINTU	Only the Ministry of Health took ownership of the program. It was a success despite the lack of personnel.
BISIRA	Creation of other organizations such as groups of entrepreneurs, promoters volunteers, local promoters, water Safety Program supported by the JP.	BISIRA	They are not permanent and will depend on the degree of ownership in the community to continue to be strengthened.
BISIRA and KANKINTU	Participation of men and women equitably in the development of training activities for students, teachers, entrepreneurs, JAAR, women's organization; promoters of rural sanitation, organized by UNICEF, ILO, and PAHO/WHO.	BISIRA and KANKINTU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ That the courses did not last long, and were not consistent and permanent during the execution of the program.</li> <li>▪ Must give more time to the participants in their contributions and preparation for when truthful and accurate information are required.</li> </ul>
BISIRA	Development of specialized training in food safety, risk management, community organization, on the potable water system and environmental sanitation.	BISIRA	Some of the exhibitors were not involved with the community. They did their jobs and left the community but did not commit themselves to the population.
BISIRA	Increase in income especially in women generating community jobs through the works and activities developed in targeted communities.	BISIRA	They are not permanent, once the program concluded they had to consolidate their skills and experiences strengthened.
BISIRA and KANKINTU	There is a rural aqueduct or a water system that caters to three communities, built with local labor between men and women of the area.	KANKINTU	The distance between the water source (SUBRURI) and the three communities in the system.
BISIRA	A septic tank system was implemented in the Bisira community to ensure health services to all households in this community, also using local labor between men and women.	KANKINTU	This system needs to be implemented in Sirain and Kankintu.
BISIRA	Qualified men and women and local laborers.	KANKINTU	Need to promote more specialized human resources.
		BISIRA and KANKINTU	Climate conditions, because they are areas of difficult access, and lack of community economic resources were limitations and barriers for the program.
KANKINTU	Support from local institutions such as the Ministry of Health, local organizations, and traditional authorities.	KANKINTU	There was lack of support and participation from the Ministry of Education through schools, local government authorities; as well as traditional regional and general authorities and part of the private companies and merchants in the area.
BISIRA	Planning Works and established budgets.	BISIRA	Short amounts of time to finish projects; limited budgets

Source: Prepared by the consultant at the Bisira and Kankintu workshop, 2012.

## Chapter 4

### Lessons Learned and Best Practices

The JP allowed female leadership to flourish and strengthen in the indigenous communities of Bisira and Kankintu, largely dominated by traditional machismo. It allowed the inclusion and participation of women in the whole process of implementation.

#### Lessons Learned:

- The involvement of women in the whole process of program implementation from its start, thus ensuring the empowerment of these groups of human beings.
- Women are deemed necessary and have confidence in themselves because they are recognized for work traditionally performed by men and are seen as equals.
- Local organizations are currently represented by both men and women and the Administrative Boards of Rural Aqueducts, the JAAR in Bisira has been chaired by a woman for the last two years.
- Identified skilled labor between men and women, which today can be replicated in other communities.
- Men appreciate and recognize the participation and leadership of women, thus improving their basic skills.

#### Best Practices:

- The integration of men taking part in housework as support to their partners facilitated the incorporation of women in all the JP activities they were involved in.
- Due to the construction of infrastructure in the Kankintu and Bisira communities, economic potential that generated income was identified, giving women the opportunity to benefit in equal conditions as men.
- Women, as well as men, have been actively involved in the implementation of infrastructure projects both in the rural aqueduct system and the healthcare system.
- Women have earned their place within Ngabe society that was traditionally ruled by men. Today they are recognized as leaders and entrepreneurs.



*Men in Bisira and Kankintu currently recognize that they can care for children the same as women do/Photo: Rafael Bonilla, 2012*

#### 4.1 Sustainability

The mechanism that will be able to sustain the results achieved JP are the people of Bisira and Kankintu themselves. They will become the evaluators and process monitors, and will be the ones that demand continued support and collaboration from institutional counterparts and international organizations in order to conserve the work carried out. They will ensure that the systems are provided with proper maintenance and that the process of empowerment of women initiated in these communities does not get dismissed.

It is important to recognize that the sustainability of the program and the empowerment of women was possible thanks to the active involvement and commitment of all the social and institutional players (families, indigenous communities, municipalities, public institutions, traditional authorities). In this sense each one has an important role to play and in trying to draw the indigenous communities in Panama out of their abyss.

This is the only way results will be sustained over time, and that the empowerment of these vulnerable communities will be achieved and have a lasting effect.

Finally, a precedent must be marked by the institutional counterpart at the local level, in this case the MOH, in order to safeguard the results achieved by the JP and so that the institution does not lose interest or relevance in the continued joint work with the system users.

*"I will support the JP follow-up, for the benefit of my community. At the beginning of the JP, there were limitations to integrate women, but each UN agency took a piece of the work; UNICEF achieved the goal of integrating them into the JP activities, the JP strengthened the leadership of the women, especially those engaged in small businesses, in the decision-making and their work or activities. Men and women have equal rights and equal duties. ILO formed women entrepreneurs and PAHO/WHO recognized and identified the leaders."*

**Mr. Carlos Becker, Bisira and Kankintu Community Advocate.**



#### 4.2 Possible replication in other communities

On the basis of the results achieved by the JP, the process of empowerment of women has good and high potential to be replicated in other communities in areas such as:

- The establishment of groups of women entrepreneurs and small business owners through volunteers and community advocates.
- Training processes aimed at strengthening the gender equity and women's self-esteem, with the purpose of generating self-confidence and security.
- The opportunity that was offered to women in these communities to learn a trade and to perform tasks or jobs previously reserved exclusively for men.
- Processes of coordination with local authorities, traditional and institutional, from the central to the local level.



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- The incorporation of gender equity in the processes of organization, participation and implementation of the infrastructure works and local development.

#### 4.3 Main challenges

Main challenges in achieving the empowerment of women in the region include:

- The main challenge is the indigenous worldview or indigenous traditions, which makes it more complicated for more women to have the right and the access to education or training activities that strengthen their self-esteem and integrity as women.
- The location of these communities; they are difficult to reach areas and there are few professionals who are willing to risk their lives to share with and train these groups. Therefore it is important to strengthen local capacities and not depend on others.
- Still persistent in the minds of men is the figure of "machismo" making it difficult to break the paradigm, and there are women who feel subject to men, particularly those that have not had the opportunity to be educated or to go to school.
- That national and local governmental institutions do not give necessary follow-up and sustainability to the results achieved by the JP.
- That communities where this type of experience can be replicated successfully will resist or refuse to improve their quality of life because of a lack of strategies and mechanisms for the promotion of joint programs.



*"A challenge for the future is to strengthen the role of Ngabe Bugle women in traditional society"/Photo: Rafael Bonilla, 2012.*



*"Strengthening of feminine leadership has been the choice of Chief Silvia Carrera, as General Chief of all the Ngabe people" /Photo: La Prensa newspaper, 2012.*

## **Conclusions**

1. The women of the Kankintu and Bisira communities are empowered in their role as active elements of change in the JP framework, breaking the paradigm to be dependent on men.
2. The administration, coordination and direction of the JP on the basis of integrating women in its process of development and execution were successful and met their proposed objectives.
3. Only women with access to levels of education and training have the opportunity to improve their quality of life and their personal and familial well-being.
4. Cultural, traditional, economic and personal factors are determinants in empowerment and gender equality.
5. The approach to gender and women's leadership has been able to be consolidated through the joint program. Now women efficiently run local organizations and small businesses.
6. The large disparities in living conditions and the equitable access to economic benefits have been elements that limited the empowerment of women in the past. At present, the participation of women in the development of their communities is more representative and determinant.
7. The permanent follow-up and monitoring established by the JP through their institutional counterparts and the installed capacity of the local community was successful, and effective for achieving the objectives of the program.
8. The participation of the different United Nations System agencies, working in coordination with their institutional, national, and local counterparts allowed the program objectives to be achieved. This allowed empowerment and leadership of women to be more clear and permanent and paved the way for achieving self-respect and to contributing to the development of their communities.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are presented on the basis of the findings that can be taken into account and used as a frame of reference in the design of policies that promote gender equality in the region:

1. Strengthen the empowerment of women in order to consolidate the gender equity in these communities, since the results achieved have been proven to be successful and of great benefit to the community.
2. Incorporate the gender approach explicitly and not transversely in local development programs in indigenous areas. Often there is no participation of women and men in the development of local programs and projects, and it is assumed that roles are implicit.
3. It is essential that the State continue to strengthen the processes of poverty reduction, particularly in indigenous areas, thus promoting access to education for indigenous peoples. In this way, the gap between men and women can be reduced, and it will be easier to talk about gender equity.
4. Involve other institutional strategic partners in the development of community programs to build alliances and work together, as this will benefit the most vulnerable communities in indigenous and rural areas.
5. Promote greater numbers of men and women leaders that have incorporated a gender focus into their work in vulnerable communities through ongoing training programs by the National Government, in order to not lose the institutional and community capacity established in vulnerable areas.
6. That joint programs continue with this experience, replicating it in other community scenarios where it is necessary to undertake a similar intervention; taking into account the human resource (men and women) who have been trained for this purpose.
7. International agencies should allocate more funds for the development of a greater number of programs and projects, with a focus on community participation that involves both men and women on equal grounds.

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# **Annexes**

**Annex 1: List of people consulted at the Bisira community workshop**

#	Name	ID Card	Post/Town
1	 Benjamin Mendoza	1-740-1509	JAAR Operator/San Agustin
2	 Bernardino Castillo	1-723-384	Builder/Barrio Lindo
3	 Carlos Becker	1-711-2448	Community advocate/San Miguelito
4	 Ceferina Steel	1PI-13-687	Ex-District Representative/San Miguelito
5	 Elena Beker	1PI-9-20	Regional Chief/Bisira and Kankintu
6	 Elena Castillo	1-708-1817	JAAR President/San Miguelito
7	 Eneida Monero	1-43-93	Community leader/Esperanza

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8		Luis Ortega	1-700-1493	Community leader/Barrio Lindo
9		Ricardo Luca	1PI-8-500	Community leader/Barrio Lindo
10		Roberto Abrego	1-708-1604	Teacher from the Basic Services Center /Barrio Lindo
11		Susana Becker	1-52-956	Entrepreneur/Ulikron
12		Vicente Taylor	1-710-920	School teacher/San Miguelito
13		Debora Goddard		Director of the Bisira Health Center

Group of respondents in Bisira










**Annex 2: List of people consulted at the Kankintu community workshop**


#	Nombre		Cédula	Cargo/Poblado
1		Abelardo Beker	1-710-1045	President of the Association for Professionals and Technicians / Kankintu
2		Calixto Palacio	1-42-561	Community advocate/Kankintu
3		Delfidia Serrano	1-708-336	Community leader/ Kankintu
4		Julia Smith	1-728-1298	Community leader/ Kankintu



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5		Manuela Bilbord	1-22-1171	Community leader/ Kankintu
6		Margarita del C. Abrego	1-34-891	Community leader/ Kankintu
7		Margarita Guerra	1-45-14	Women's group coordinator/ Kankintu
8		Máximo Quintero	1-28-932	JAAR Spokesperson/ Kankintu
9		Mirna Abrego	1-701-46	Neighborhood President/ Kankintu
10		Ramiro Santos	1-713-2174	Member of the Association for Professionals and Technicians/ Kankintu
11		Santa Bisia Tibibo	1-21-1514	Social Advocate-Ministry of Social Development/ Kankintu

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12		Ruben Miranda		Environmental Sanitation for the Ministry of Health/ Kankintu
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**Group of people consulted in Kankintu**



**Annex 3: Format of interviews conducted with respondents**

#	Project Area	Needs of the Participants
1	Analysis of the initial situation that led to the justification of the intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What were the main limitations in terms of women's rights and / or gender equality? Include qualitative and quantitative data.</li> <li>b. Were these limitations properly identified during the development of the program? In what way?</li> <li>c. If these limitations were apparent at a later stage, how were they integrated into the program?</li> </ul>
2	Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What were the main objectives of the developed program that sought to address the limitations / difficulties identified?</li> <li>b. Outline the indicators used to define and guide advancement towards these goals. Using those, analyze the integration of a gender perspective.</li> </ul>
3	Description of the defined program strategy to address the identified constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How was the program strategy defined? Who participated in the design and decision making processes? What factors were taken into consideration to identify and define this specific strategy over another?</li> <li>b. What are the main components of this strategy? Describe the contributors that are involved and their expected roles. Highlight the integral, multi-sectorial and/or inter-institutional aspects of the strategy. Analyze the program coherence.</li> <li>c. Is there an initial component of the strategy that has yet to be implemented? Why?</li> </ul>
4	Description of the main results achieved by the intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. To what extent have the initial situation and exercised rights improved for women who are part of the target population? Consider both practical and strategic interests.</li> <li>b. Has the experience benefitted men, women or both? What men and women?</li> <li>c. How has the intervention influenced relationships and gender equality?</li> <li>d. What national and institutional capacities have been strengthened? How?</li> <li>e. What civil society capacities have been strengthened? How? Consider women's groups, youth, community-based organizations, NGOs, academia, media, private sector and other groups.</li> <li>f. Do the results match the results and products defined in the results framework program? Is it possible to monitor the results achieved using the indicators that are included in the program monitoring and evaluation framework?</li> <li>g. Are there results within the framework of monitoring and evaluation that have not been achieved? Why?</li> <li>h. Have there been any unexpected positive or negative results?</li> <li>i. Have any groups resisted or opposed the program objectives? What have been the effects of these oppositions? Have they been overcome or are they still persistent? How can they affect the sustainability of the results achieved by the program?</li> <li>j. What human or financial resources have been dedicated to achieving these results? What percentage of the programs total budget do they represent?</li> <li>k. Has the agenda for Aid Effectiveness and gender rights been strengthened? How?</li> </ul>

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5	Analysis on the implementation of the processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What contextual factors positively or negatively influence the implementation of the strategy? Consider internal and external factors.</li> <li>b. What have been the principal achievements of this experience? What factors have contributed to its success?</li> <li>c. What have been the main challenges and difficulties during the implementation? What measures have been taken to overcome them? What has been the outcome of these measures? Have any of the challenges persisted? Why?</li> <li>d. How participatory has the implementation process been? What kind of participation was it? What processes and areas have different contributors participated in: national and local government counterparts, civil society counterparts, the community, beneficiaries of the program, other participants?</li> <li>e. How successful has the multi-sectoral and inter-sectoral focus been? Describe the main difficulties and achievements of this focus.</li> <li>f. How have the program coordination mechanisms worked? Consider both internal and external mechanisms. Describe the main challenges and achievements.</li> <li>g. Has there been any coordination or synergy with other MDG Fund programs in the country? Describe how this coordination was achieved and its results.</li> <li>h. How have other initiatives in the same field been coordinated or complemented? Consider any initiative implemented by the United Nations system, national or local governments, development agencies, civil society and any other actor.</li> </ul>
6	Strengths and weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What have the primary strengths of the process been? Why?</li> <li>b. What have the primary weaknesses of the process been? Why?</li> <li>c. Are there unresolved issues? What are they?</li> </ul>
7	Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What mechanisms and strategies have been designed within the program framework to ensure the continuation of activities and results beyond the duration of the joint program?</li> <li>b. Has the program secured political or financial assistance that will allow the continuation of the initiated processes?</li> </ul>
8	Potential for replication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What are the possible usages of this practice beyond its original context? Are there possible functions on a national or regional level, in emergency situations, etc.?</li> <li>b. What are the main conditions necessary for replicating or expanding the promising practices that have emerged from this experience?</li> <li>c. In what situations can this case study be used to inform and influence programming and budgeting in a government or UNCT environment?</li> </ul>
9	Lessons learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Are there lessons learned that can be shared with similar initiatives in other contexts?</li> <li>b. What advice would you give to future projects or programs based on this experience?</li> </ul>