Empowering Girls and Women for Prosperity
The Pan American Development Foundation works with vulnerable and excluded **girls and women** in the Americas to help them achieve sustainable economic and social progress, thereby creating a Hemisphere of Opportunity for All.
Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, overall poverty rates have decreased dramatically in recent years. However, while some populations flourish, other social groups remain mired in poverty, often outside formal employment and beyond the reach of basic municipal services. Latin America and the Caribbean today is one of the regions with the greatest income inequality. PADF believes that empowering girls and women will lessen that inequality.

Vulnerable populations are disproportionately female and are largely found in indigenous, Afro-descendant, conflict-displaced, rural, and marginalized urban communities. These girls and women face numerous challenges, including impediments to education, employment, and social inclusion. These problems stem from pervasive gender inequality, undercutting the self-worth of girls and women, and impeding the achievement of more widespread progress and prosperity.

PADF’s work throughout the region acknowledges these disparities and challenges. All our programming is gender aware and ensures that issues related to girls and women are identified and addressed. We work both on programs that integrate women’s concerns into activities as well as on programs that are focused primarily on women.

We achieve greater gender equity and women’s empowerment through various strategies, including poverty reduction, democratic governance, disaster
PADF’s five-year strategic focus is to lessen the vulnerability for 60 million people throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, of whom at least **30 million will be women and young people**.

prevention and recovery, and environment and sustainable development. PADF’s signature approach is to use a programmatic vehicle, such as entrepreneurship or environmental awareness, to provide leadership training, self-confidence, and raised self-esteem for girls and women.

Working with community-based groups, non-profit organizations, national and local governments, corporations, and multilateral organizations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, we strive to ensure that girls and women have a strong voice and participate equally in making the decisions that will determine the future of their communities.

PADF constantly draws from its extensive experiences in order to create programs that not only enhance gender equity, but also work alongside marginalized girls and women across the region, integrating them into the workforce, and improving their leadership capacity, while giving them access to education, skills training, health services, and opportunities for greater economic independence. We work to support and strengthen their efforts and, as appropriate, we provide direct services in collaboration with others, meanwhile raising awareness of the problems faced by girls and women and the capacity and commitment to address them. In other programs, PADF focuses primarily on women’s challenges, such as business planning and psycho-social health. We believe that independence and psychological well-being are the cornerstones of women’s advancement and inclusion in the progress of our hemisphere.
Being a Woman in Latin America and the Caribbean

Vulnerable girls and women are often:
- From poor and marginalized urban and rural areas
- Single and/or teenage mothers
- Migrants
- Afro-descendants and from indigenous groups
- Victim of domestic violence
- Persons with disabilities

Threats and Barriers:
- Societal attitudes that devalue girls and women
- Social exclusion
- Income inequality
- Forced labor
- Racial and gender discrimination
- Poverty
- Teenage pregnancy
- Human trafficking
- Access to formal employment
- Lack of education and training
- Gender-based violence

Economic

On average women earn 17% less than men. The disparity is actually higher in urban areas.

Number of women who joined the workforce in the last 20 years. This has reduced extreme poverty in the LAC region by 30 percent in the past decade.

52.9% Percentage of women in the labor force in the LAC region. By contrast, 79.6 percent of males are employed.

Number of women employed in domestic work. Overwhelmingly, women work in the service sector and low skill jobs, and generate consistently low income.

Among women of these ages, gender-based violence causes more deaths and injuries than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, and war. In Chile alone, 50 percent of women 15 to 49 have been victimized by their partners. In São Paulo, Brazil’s largest city, a woman is abused every 15 seconds.

Of the 25 countries in the world with the highest rates of femicide (gender-related killings of women), over half are in the Americas. In addition, with the exception of conflict zones, the LAC region has the highest rates of femicides and gender-based violence in the world.

Number of women in the LAC region who will become a victim of violence within her lifetime. Worldwide this figure is 1 in 3.

Emphasis on plastic surgery and overwhelming media exposure in the LAC region has led to girls and women developing some of the lowest self-esteem rates in the world; low self-esteem is linked to poor health decisions, lower earning potential, and higher likelihood of staying in abusive relationships.

Price for ordering an acid attack on a woman in Mexico. In Colombia, an average of 90 women per years are disfigured in acid attacks.

Proportion of births that take place during adolescence in Latin America and the Caribbean, the only region in the world in which the teenage pregnancy rate is growing. In this part of the world, the risk of maternal death is four times higher among adolescents younger than 16 years than among women in their twenties.

Average number of parliamentarians in the LAC region who are women

Percentage of women who have received university-level education

Percentage of women who have 10 or more years of formal education

Empowering Girls and Women

Social

Participatory
Companies, communities and countries are increasingly realizing what PADF already knows: that women are crucial to economic growth around the world. As more people understand this, a larger share of investments will be shifted toward investing in women. Based on our experiences, women who are able to support themselves economically see the world differently, which means they also do things in different ways. Understanding this, PADF develops programs and works with partners to support equal economic access—from artisans looking to sell their products in new international markets, and small business owners working to make the sale of renewable energy stoves a strong creator of jobs, to home-based micro-enterprises aiming to augment family incomes.

To empower women entrepreneurs, PADF provides technical assistance, business training, social counseling, and in-kind and cash assistance when necessary. In some instances, we also provide matching grants to help grow women’s businesses and spur job creation, and connect women with local business associations and banking institutions to obtain seed capital.
Girls and women play multiple, critical roles, and PADF supports them in doing so. This support comes in many forms, among them: working with young mothers to learn about effective nutrition and sanitation; facilitating girls’ access to education; teaching job application and interviewing skills; and building self-esteem to help shield women from gender-based violence. We aim for girl and women beneficiaries of PADF programming come away with a comprehensive tool kit of life skills that they can draw upon and pass on to their own daughters and friends.

Women are rarely given a platform to voice their needs, and those of their community. However, as heads of households and caregivers, they frequently understand and are able to assess these needs best. In order to empower women, PADF works within communities to create education and awareness around the importance of giving voice to women. We consult with girls and women in a variety of ways to prioritize and enact all of our activities, and directly link concrete results to their valuable input. PADF takes pride in ensuring that voices are not only heard, but acted upon in all of our programming.

PADF considers social inclusion to be much more than a marker of economic development: it is a measurement of equal access to services, and one that we build into programming on topics ranging from democratic governance to judicial system strengthening. Increased participation of women in the labor force has already reduced extreme poverty by 30%, proving that women are an integral part of any economy. Consequently, PADF views social inclusion not only as a vehicle for social change, but also one that promotes and creates sustainable economic prosperity in our countries of operation.

Life Skills

Focusing on women- and girl-targeted initiatives that equip them to counter violence and external pressures and realize their own potential.

Leadership and Participation

Ensuring gender-aware participation of women and men, girls and boys in the implementation of our initiatives.

Social Inclusion

Ensuring equitable inclusion of women and girls in our projects’ activities.
Worked with youth—including a cohort of young single mothers—to support youth-initiated micro and small businesses that increase access to jobs and encourage entrepreneurship in Belize City, providing business planning training, mentorship, job skill development, and connections to private sector employment.

**Belize**

Helped women artisans improve and increase the production of handcrafted goods and gain access to market, thereby enabling them to generate more income and become more self-sufficient. Private sector partner Riley-Sloane integrated these products into their high-end interior design line, providing artisans with global exposure.

**Costa Rica**

Provided training and consulting services to approximately 100 women—many of them already small business owners—to expand their business, spur job creation, encourage micro entrepreneurship, and improve the local economy of the coastal city of Valparaiso.

**Mexico and Central America**

Increased awareness of human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Mexico and Central America through a high-profile campaign targeting youth, including at-risk girls and women. PADF used mass media, documentary screenings, public events, press coverage, and youth-focused events to reach more than 5 million people.

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Program Highlights

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**Colombia**

Created safe spaces for children and youth, among them young and adolescent girls, to combat the forced recruitment of children by armed groups and criminals. These centers, designed with the input of the young people they are meant to serve, promote the safe development of children and adolescents through educational, sports and cultural activities.

Helped more than 11,700 internally displaced persons and vulnerable people, many of them women entrepreneurs, develop small businesses. The Government of Colombia later committed $9 million more to provide cash, in-kind assistance and technical training to participants.

Recognizing that effective assistance to displaced populations requires priority attention to women along with measures to guarantee equal treatment, protection from domestic abuse, and respect for their human and legal rights, PADF’s work to assist displaced Colombian families incorporated a distinctly gendered approach. In this program, PADF developed differentiated approaches to consider women’s particular needs including carefully crafted communications campaigns and cultural and ethnic activities.

Worked with more than 4,500 Colombian women seeking to improve their socioeconomic conditions and offer them better opportunities to develop their productive and entrepreneurial skills. The project, which included training in the areas of leadership, business administration, finances, and marketing, offered beneficiaries the opportunity to acquire productive assets to implement their own business initiatives, while promoting traditional productive practices.

Assisted 11,400 displaced families in 39 rural municipalities—among them women-headed households—as part of a broader national effort to raise 350,000 families from extreme poverty. The program improved their access basic housing, food, and income generation opportunities.

**Haiti**

Carried out some 290 local projects in six neighborhoods in the Port-au-Prince metro area to improve infrastructure, health, education, and micro-enterprises as part of our Participatory Urban Development program. These activities reached more than 109,000 people—of whom 47 percent were women—and established community development councils to ensure the participation of local residents. PADF worked to include women’s organizations on the councils, ensuring their representation and active participation in projects.

Enhanced women’s safety and security by working with women residents to identify their needs. As a result we installed and improved public lighting, created safe spaces to access water, improved access to sanitary services, and ensured access to secure housing.

**Brazil**

Worked with Viva Rio’s Family Health Units to expand preventive care and treatment to reach vulnerable women in Rio de Janeiro. The family health units are multidisciplinary teams composed of a doctor, nurse, nurse technician, community health agents, and sometimes dental health specialists who provide healthcare services to women who may have limited or no access to Primary Care. This program will aim to prevent and reduce chronic diseases through coordination across a network of partners to ensure that the rights and overall wellbeing and health of women are taken into account.
Maritza Saavedra, 57, dreams of opening a spa business in Valparaiso, a coastal city in central Chile. She is one of approximately 100 women entrepreneurs who have received business training through a PADF project. When she told her employer about her plans to enroll in program, the reaction was unexpected. “At work they told me: if you go, don’t come back,” says Maritza. Not one to give up easily on a dream, she left and lost her job.

For women entrepreneurs like Maritza, having their own enterprises means a whole lot: the option for better incomes and greater job security. It also means better chances of ultimately becoming self-sufficient.

In an effort to improve job opportunities locally, PADF and its partners selected a group of women who either had or were planning to start their own small businesses. As part of the program they received business consulting in various areas, including business plan development, marketing, sales, financing, among others. These consultancies were conducted with successful business owners, university students and in partnership with the Chilean Ministry of Labor.

“The courses taught me that I could use this knowledge in any industry. I would recommend these trainings to anyone,” says Orietta Samora Fuentes, another participant. “Now I want to learn more.”

This program has focused on empowering entrepreneurship among women given that they have played an increasingly important role in micro entrepreneurship as a means to overcome social vulnerability and to develop the local economy. Women have a major impact over the life conditions of their families, using a great part of their income to the
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benefit of their household. Women who are head of their homes are multipliers of wealth, accelerating the benefits for their children and families.

“The passion and commitment that these women display is outstanding,” says Luisa Villegas, PADF Program Director for South America. “You can sense their pride and enthusiasm when they show their products or tell you their stories about how their small businesses started and the successes they have achieved. It is an honor for PADF to be supporting these women.”

Maria Tereza Sanchez Catalán, a hostel owner who received business training years ago through a similar program, has grown her business substantially. She also belongs to a local association of women entrepreneurs. The group has already started to incorporate participants of this project.

She adds: “Now I’m not only an enterprising person. I’m a businesswoman.”
"We were caught in the middle. It was terrible. Some stayed. Some of us left," says Rosely Robledo, 29, remembering seven years earlier when the town of Bojayá in the Chocó Department where she lived was caught amidst a tug of war between leftist FARC fighters and right-wing paramilitary units who were fighting for control of this part of western Colombia.

Like many others who escaped the brutality of the country’s long-standing civil conflict, Rosely left everything behind and became one of the 5.2 million Colombians displaced by the violence. Without an education and a support system to help her, she struggled to find work. As an Afro-Colombian woman, she faced the added challenge of discrimination.

Having moved to the northern city of Barranquilla, she learned about a work cooperative that was being created by PADF and other partners. The cooperative would not only give Rosely and 120 other women the opportunity to work, but also a financial stake in the company.

Two years since its founding, the Coopradal cooperative has built a small factory that produces popular Afro-Colombian sweets which are later sold under the cooperative’s own Dulafros brand to local supermarkets or on the streets by coop members. Many members
who used to manufacture sweets from home, often using unhygienic processes, now agree that the project has improved the overall manufacturing process and working conditions. It has also increased incomes and the amount of time workers are able to spend with their families.

“They have realized that they are business women and owners of the company. They’re acquiring independence,” says María Herrera Miranda, Coopradal’s legal representative. “They are also starting to think that this could eventually help the future of their own children.”

Rosely agrees. “As a result of this work,” she says, “my children will be able to go to school. I also hope to study one day.”
Creating a Better Place for Doing Business
The merchants of Simmonds-Pelé, a neighborhood located in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, celebrated the beginning of the year with a new market where they can sell their goods. It was a moment of excitement; for many it is the first time in more than 15 years that they can feel good about the place where they do business.

Working with the Municipality of Delmas, PADF inaugurated the Village Solidarité, creating a new market space that allows some 200 merchants, many of them women, from Simmonds-Pelé to have a clean and safe working environment, but also create a meeting point for the entire community. The new infrastructure was built as part of PADF’s participatory urban development program.

“We were conducting business on mud, dirt and garbage, but finally PADF and the Haitian government came along and they delivered what they promised. For me, this is a dream come true. Now, when I go to work I no longer have to worry about being sick. I think now that everything is clean and nice, more people will come to the market and I’ll be able to sell more,” said Jeanne Lironne Mondésir, a local merchant, adding that while the market had been there since 1997, they had never seen anything like it before.

The new space, which follows para-seismic building guidelines to ensure maximum safety, includes several important features. It has several platforms and tables to display merchandise and is equipped with a clinic. It also provides a closed storage area, green spaces, toilets and showers, and a covered butchery area to ensure improved sanitary conditions for meat processors. A cleaning crew is assigned to clean the market each day after business hours. In the evenings, the marketplace can become a socio-cultural center where youth from the neighborhood can study, listen to music, talk and play games.

Many merchants like Jeanne expressed their appreciation saying that this project was a tremendous accomplishment and a meaningful way to improve not only their lives, but also the quality of life of the entire community. PADF didn’t just build a market. By assessing the needs of and listening to the people of Simmonds-Pelé, we built a community.

This market became possible because the community decided that it was an important priority for them.
About PADF

The Pan American Development Foundation, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization, brings together many stakeholders to improve livelihoods, empower communities, strengthen civil society, support human rights, protect the environment, and respond to natural disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean. Established by the Organization of American States in 1962, PADF has worked in every country in the region. In 2013 PADF reached more than 10 million people by investing $69 million in development resources in 22 Latin American and Caribbean countries.