

## SDOP in Panama after 2 years of partnership



The Presbyterian Committee on the Self Development of People (SDOP) have been working in Panama, as a focus country, since 2018. Just in the first visit of the country on November 2018, by members of the International Task Force Committee and the SDOP staff, proved right that the selection of the country was a very wise decision. Several disadvantaged communities were visited around the country. The poor conditions of the people in general demonstrated that SDOP can be a great support for people that were living oppressed by poverty and disenfranchisement.

After this first visit in 2018, 3 community groups were highly recommended for funding by the visiting team. The SDOP National Committee approved grants for the 3 groups in May 2019. They started receiving SDOP funds in

the middle of 2019. The groups are: Group of Women of Value S.A., in Panama City, Craft, Art and Beauty, in Las Tablas, and Center of Panamanian Women (CEMP), in San Miguelito.

- **Group of Women of Value S.A** is a group of women that came together to start a catering service which provides high quality product at affordable prices which also importantly, provides employment and training to group members. Just in the middle of the execution of the project these were some of the group's remarks: "The effect of this grant exceeded our first expectations because, with the tasting meetings, the Expo gastronomic fair, radio and television shows, we have made new alliances with suppliers and distributors. Following our presentations at some Panamanian television channels, many people have approached us to know how to contact you since we are the one of the first groups supported by you in Panama. Our evolution of women entrepreneurs to microentrepreneurs has been a clear example of how we are able to move forward despite the challenges that we need to face".
- **Craft, Art, and Beauty** was created by women artisans who partnered to create a workshop and a warehouse for the preparation and sale of traditional Panamanian clothing. The artisans did this with the purpose of creating a workplace for craftswomen and a place of sale for handicrafts and where people find their typical garments and information about traditions and customs. The group is also dedicated to give training to new generations by passing on their traditions, having their own income, and enhancing their quality of life. These are some of their remarks: "The Warehouse (Crafts group) has been able to provide and better customer service with the new equipment (semi-industrial sewing machines). It has been possible to obtain better prices in the purchase of materials by wholesale purchase with the support of SDOP financing. We have had the material required for the elaboration of our most accessible works."
- **Center of Panamanian Women** - This groups grant was provided to plan and launch of micro-businesses for 20 Afro-Panamanian women. The first part of the project has been achieved satisfactorily and they have remarked: "We have achieved the training of at least 30 women to motivate them to develop economic ventures. We have supported the preparation of business Plans for low-income women. We can summarize that to date we have 15 female entrepreneurs who have completed their Business Plans".



During the second visit to Panama in 2019, the SDOP team visited with an indigenous group - EMBERA who are located in Darien in Eastern Panama. This group traveled four hours (via motorized canoe) to meet with us. They described difficult conditions in their remote area, with a lack of clean water and its health consequences. The community is well organized and has plans to build a potable water system, so they completed our grant application.

The SDOP Committee awarded the group, **Women Committee at Villa Nueva and Water Council**, a grant to build their water system. The grant was to build a rural aqueduct in a remote indigenous community. A 1500-gallon cement tank-container for water will be built and connections will be made from the tank on several supply routes, providing each house with a spigot. There are 52 houses and a school. It is needed so that each house has access to clean water for human consumption. The group has achieved their goals on time during the first period of their project. These are some of their remarks: “In this 2019 period, the drinking water aqueduct in the community of Villa Nueva has been under construction. Thanks to the Presbyterian Church who have given us this support in which the work has been carried out with the first payment of \$ 7,500.00. The construction of this work is of great benefit to us and we thank for the project in which we have continued to be blessed. All the work that was done has been carried out satisfactorily together with the help of the members of the community who have given us their support”.

Other group that the SDOP team visited in 2019, **Performing Arts of Colon**, demonstrated impressive community work, and they are working on their application to be submitted soon.

The SDOP International Task Force and staff will continue to work to strength their relationship with grassroots and undeserved community groups in Panama in this year and in years to come. The partnerships established have been and continue to be about hope, dignity, empowerment, justice, and compassion.