

## Afro-descendants, Discrimination and Economic Exclusion in Latin America

By Margarita Sanchez and Maurice Bryan, with MRG partners

### Executive summary

This macro study addresses the economic exclusion of people of African descent (Afro-descendants) in Latin America. It aims to examine how and why race and ethnicity contribute to the disproportionately high levels of poverty and economic discrimination in most Afro-descendant communities, and how to promote change.

There are clear links between Afro-descendant communities and poverty, however there is a need for disaggregated data to provide a more precise picture, and to enable better planning and financing of development programmes for this highly marginalized group.

A prime cause for the lack of quantitative material, is that donors and governments have only recently begun to acknowledge Afro-descendant populations' existence. There has also been a tendency to regard their poverty as being no different to the deprivation experienced by other groups. Special mechanisms for comprehensive data collection on the economic exclusion of Afro-descendant women and men are being set up.

Because Afro-descendant populations in Latin America are marginalized economically, socially and institutionally, there are few development programmes that specifically target their needs. While most development agencies would argue that their mandate is to help the marginalized, Afro-descendants do not usually benefit from general development programmes.

Also, Afro-descendants do not have a significant voice in the planning, design or implementation of the policies and activities that directly affect their lives and regions. This is an important omission; while Afro-descendant populations may be materially poor, they have a rich cultural heritage and access to key natural resources. Development strategies need to recognize the historical, social and cultural complexity of Afro-descendants' poverty and consult them on the most culturally appropriate means of achieving positive change.

The views of Afro-descendants are central to much of the information used in this study, which uses a rights-based approach. The study explains some of the causes and consequences of Afro-descendants' exclusion, and offers recommendations for a more inclusive minority rights-based approach to economic development and poverty reduction. The international legal instruments accorded by the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS) are used as guidelines. (See Box 1.)

The study seeks to identify practical strategies to combat discrimination and economic exclusion, including the need: to improve community-based planning and project implementation skills, for Afro-descendants to become proactive in using existing legal instruments to safeguard their rights, and to ensure that their states comply with the Conventions that they have ratified.



Afro-Brazilian woman, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. Photo: Jeremy Horner/Panos Pictures

## Box 1: International legal instruments

### Economic rights

The Articles granting economic rights outlined in the international legal instruments of the UN and the OAS are consistent with each other. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and its Protocol of San Salvador in the Americas (SS Protocol) are particularly relevant. Nonetheless, the rights they outline were previously itemized in more general terms in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UNDM), the Convention on Migrant Workers (MWC), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention no. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries.

For the purposes of this study, the broad categories of economic rights used are:

#### a. General rights and free determination

1. General economic, social and cultural rights (ICESCR Article 5[e]; ICERD Article 5[e]).
2. Free determination to provide for one's own economic development, including as a people, to freely dispose of natural resources and riches, and not to be deprived of one's own means of subsistence (ICESCR Article 1).

#### b. Right to work

3. The right to work: which includes choice, safe and healthy working conditions, security, sanitation, minimum wage, social protection, equal pay for work of equal value, job stability, equal opportunity for promotion based on time of service and capability, etc. (UDHR Article 23; MWC Article 25; ICESCR Articles 6 [1] and 7; SS Protocol Article 7 [b, d, f, g]; ILO 169 Articles 20–23).
4. To access professional and technical training (ICESCR Article 6[2]). Articles 21–23 of ILO 169 address special measures such as programmes to preserve and train in cultural traditional crafts and vocational skills.
5. To access all services destined for public use, such as hotels, restaurants, transport, etc. (ICERD Article 5[f]).
6. To have rest, leisure, limited working hours and holidays (UDHR Article 24; ICESCR Article 7[d]).

#### c. Right to form trade unions

7. Right to trade unions: to form them, belong to them or to choose not to belong to them (MWC Article 26; ICESCR Article 8; SS Protocol Article 8).

#### d. Right to own property/land

8. To own property and to dispose of it (UDHR Article 17). Regarding land, ILO 169 (Part II, Articles 13–19) discusses land rights for areas traditionally occupied or partially used for subsistence, also the right to participate in the use and management of the natural resources on those lands, and that agrarian reform programmes should provide additional lands when those held are insufficient for a normal existence.

#### e. Social rights related to work/employment

9. To an adequate standard of living, including security in case of unemployment, old age, etc. (UDHR Article 25; ICESCR Article 11).

10. To social security (UDHR Article 22; MWC Article 27; ICESCR Articles 9 and 10; SS Protocol Article 9).
11. To education: 'compulsory' primary, 'generally available' secondary and 'equally accessible' higher education (UDHR Article 26; ICESCR Article 13).
12. To the highest possible level of physical and mental health, and access to public health services (ICESCR Article 12; MWC Article 30 for children of workers).

#### f. State Parties' obligations

11. The State Parties agree to devote up to the maximum resources available to achieve progressively, including the adoption of legislative measures, the full exercise of these rights (ICESCR Article 2[1]), and commit to guarantee them without any discrimination, racial or any other kind (ICESCR Article 2[2]).
12. ICERD in its Article 2(2) stipulates that when circumstances so warrant the States shall take, in the...economic field, special and concrete measures for the development and protection of certain racial groups or their individuals to guarantee the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and freedoms.
13. States should take appropriate measures to ensure that minorities participate fully in the progress and economic development of their country (UNDM Article 4[5]) and to also protect their existence and promote the identity of minorities (UNDM Article 1[1]).
15. The national policies and programmes will be planned and executed taking duly into account the legitimate interests of the persons belonging to minorities' (UNDM Article 5[1]), and the same for cooperation and assistance programmes (UNDM Article 5[2]).

#### Reviewing of states' performance

The overseeing of economic and social rights falls mainly under the purview of the UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights established in 1985, which operates under the UN Economic and Social Council. It reviews mandatory reports by States Parties. Special Rapporteurs review economic and social rights in all states, even those not party to the ICESCR.

The guidelines for defining what constitutes a violation to the ICESCR are contained in the 'Limburg Principles on the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights'. These establish that violations are committed when (Principle 72): a) the state is unable to adopt a measure demanded by the Covenant; b) is unable to remove as promptly as possible, and when it must do so, all the obstacles that prevent the immediate achievement of a right; c) is unable to apply with swiftness a right that the Covenant demands be applied without delay; d) is unable, intentionally, to satisfy the minimum achievement of an international norm that is generally accepted and which it is capable of satisfying; e) applies a limitation to a right recognized in the Covenant, by means contrary to the same; f) delays deliberately, or stops the progressive achievement of a right, unless it acts within the limits allowed in the Covenant or because such conduct is due to a lack of resources; g) is unable to present the reports demanded in the Covenant. Article 27 of the Vienna Covenant on the Rights of Treaties of 1969 further stipulates that internal legislation cannot be used as a justification for not complying with a Treaty.



## Preface

### Research context

This macro study results from the realization that communities of African descent (Afro-descendant communities) in Latin America are often marginalized as part of a legacy of colonialism and ‘racial democracy’. The latter has promoted the notion that racism does not exist in Latin America because, in these multi-ethnic societies, an inherent state of harmonious relations supposedly prevails. Afro-descendants have been ‘invisible’ in relation to development.

Afro-descendants issues have frequently been obscured by a greater institutional willingness to address the theme of exclusion as it applies to indigenous communities, and the latter have also developed a stronger organizational and advocacy capacity.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, there has been a lack of national and international research on Afro-descendants that could be used to identify and address their specific economic needs. There is insufficient disaggregated quantitative data to strengthen the evidence for the connection between Afro-descendants’ ethnicity and their poverty.

The main objective of this study is not to demonstrate the unique manner in which Afro-descendants experience poverty, but to explore how racial discrimination functions as a major contributing factor in the poverty that affects 50 per cent<sup>2</sup> of the black population of Latin America.

The study highlights the need for further field-based research and analysis, and for accurate information regarding the causes and consequences of deprivation. This data should be useful in developing and/or improving strategies to overcome Afro-descendants’ poverty.

While the review is not intended to provide an exhaustive account of the regional situation, it is designed to contribute to the debates on improving the targeting of poverty reduction strategies, with an Afro-descendant- and minority rights-based perspective. (See Box 2.)

Further research would help to determine the cost of Afro-descendants’ economic exclusion. It should also improve their participation in development, and lead to more effective national programmes towards equality of opportunity, achieving an adequate standard of living, and towards the building of a cohesive society.

### Box 2: A rights-based approach to analysing economic exclusion

In order to analyse the economic situation of Afro-descendants in Latin America, various international instruments were reviewed to define the main areas that grant economic rights.

The existing international instruments were found to be of two types:

- International or regional instruments granting general rights, including: ICERD, ICESCR, SS Protocol and UDHR.
- Instruments that grant special measures for special groups, including: MWC, ILO 169 and UNDM.

#### Definition of racial discrimination

The definition of racial discrimination used in this study corresponds to Article 1 of ICERD:

*‘Racial discrimination shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.’*

## Introduction

Recently, the presence and status of Afro-descendants in the Americas has been gaining the attention of academics and international development professionals, as never before, yet, there is little precise, or readily available, information on these populations. Over the past decade, the lack of information has prompted a number of initiatives. These include attempts to systematically document the existence of Afro-descendants, and to analyse the causes and consequences of their socio-economic exclusion.

According to most reports, there are approximately 150 million people of African descent in Latin America,<sup>3</sup> representing about one-third of the total population. (See Table 1.)

Most Afro-descendants live in rural areas. In a region characterized by great disparities between wealth and poverty, a disproportionate number of Afro-descendants suffer a lack of infrastructure and utilities, no health services, few schools, high unemployment and low income. Afro-descendants make up over 40 per cent of the poor in Latin America while

**Table 1: Populations with African Ancestry in Latin America**

Country	% of total population	High estimate	Low estimate
Argentina	N/D	N/D	N/D
Bolivia	2	158,000	158,000
Brazil	46–70	111 million	73 million
Chile	N/D	N/D	N/D
Colombia	30–50	17 million	10 million
Costa Rica	2	N/D	66,000
Cuba	34–65	6.8 million	N/D
Dominican Republic	90	7 million	N/D
Ecuador	5–10	1.1 million	550,000
El Salvador	N/D	N/D	N/D
Guatemala	10–15	N/D	N/D
Honduras	2–50	2.8 million	112,000
Mexico	0.5–10	9 million	450,000
Nicaragua	10–50	2.3 million	599,000
Panama	14–77	1.9 million	350,000
Paraguay	3.5	162,000	162,000
Peru	5–10	2.3 million	1.1 million
Puerto Rico	23–70	2.4 million	US Dependency
Uruguay	3–6	192,000	96,000
Venezuela	15–70	14 million	3.1 million

TOTAL POPULATION OF AFRICAN DESCENT IN LATIN AMERICA: 150 MILLION  
 MINIMUM ESTIMATE OF POOR (EXCLUDING CUBA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND PUERTO RICO): 76 MILLION; N/D = NOT DETERMINED. SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM ORGANIZATION OF AFRICANS IN THE AMERICAS (OAA), *QUEST FOR INCLUSION: REALIZING AFRO-LATIN AMERICAN POTENTIAL*, POSITION PAPER, VOL. 1, 2000, P. 16.

being only a third of the population.<sup>4</sup> In many countries, Afro-descendants are considered to be the 'poorest of the poor'. In Ecuador, for example, 81 per cent of Afro-descendants live below the poverty line.<sup>5</sup>

The advocacy work by regional Afro-descendant non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for international recognition of their situation and for the establishment of minority rights protection, finally began to bear fruit in 1992. This came with the publication in New York of the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) Report on the Americas'. The document carried a series of articles entitled *The Black Americas* (1992), which dealt with the existence of Afro-descendants in Latin America as a significant and identifiable group.

The first major international publication that specifically addressed Afro-Latin American issues was MRG's *No Longer Invisible – Black Latin Americans Today* (1995). Although largely anthropological, it vividly documented the invisibility and marginality experienced by Afro-Latin Americans.<sup>6</sup>

Within the international development community, the issue of Afro-descendant exclusion was first raised by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in 1996. Between 1995 and 1996, the IDB undertook a comprehensive assessment of the conditions of Afro-descendants in Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. These studies provided a significant amount of qualitative data gathered from rural and urban black communities and organizations, and represented the most comprehensive assessment of the Afro-descendants' social and economic exclusion that had ever been undertaken.<sup>7</sup> They showed a remarkable similarity in Afro-descendants' experiences throughout the region, including in the causes and

effects of deprivation. Further, the studies highlighted the role racism plays in limiting the range of opportunities available to Latin America's Afro-descendants, and in ensuring the disproportionately high levels of poverty in their communities.

Since then, there have been noticeable changes in policy, especially within the international financial institutions. The IDB has achieved the highest level of institutionalization of these changes including: policy incorporation into programmes mandates and into staff evaluations, investment in specialized technical support, and loans specifically for Afro-descendants.

However, more specific quantitative data is needed to support information collected during initial surveys, and to make a stronger case for Afro-descendants' increased inclusion in national government programmes. Accurate disaggregated data is important for establishing precisely what role colour and ethnicity play in economic exclusion, and would significantly help in development planning and resource allocation. Such data is also crucial for establishing a basis for evaluating development interventions.

Two quantitative studies carried out by the IDB in 2001 have tried to achieve this. The IDB examined the socio-economic situation of different racial and ethnic groups in Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala and Peru. These studies reinforced the notion of a common pattern in the way that discriminatory policies and practices worked to determine Afro-descendants' socio-economic position – especially regarding the link between discrimination, economic exclusion and poverty. Using data for the education sector in Brazil as an example, it was possible to show that unequal allocations for education by the state were reflected in skin colour, and that this was highly significant in creating the

differences that subsequently limited Afro-descendants' employment opportunities.<sup>8</sup>

At the XXIII International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association in Washington DC (September 2001), the panel discussions that examined Afro-descendants' economic development included a presentation of quantitative data on populations in Colombia, a country with the second largest Afro-descendant population in Latin America (10–17 million).<sup>9</sup> The key economic indicators in Colombia also showed a racial divide, revealing that 98 per cent of black communities in Colombia lacked basic public utilities whereas only 6 per cent of 'white' communities were similarly deprived. There were also marked differences in health service coverage (40 per cent 'white' vs 10 per cent of black communities); in social security benefits (28 per cent 'white' vs 3 per cent black), and especially in illiteracy rates, which were as high as 45 per cent in black communities with 14 per cent among 'white' populations.<sup>10</sup> These findings are representative of the experiences of Afro-descendant populations throughout Latin America.

However, the number of national and international development programmes aimed at Afro-descendants have been limited and/or ineffective. Therefore, the socio-economic profile of most of these communities has not changed significantly since the first IDB studies in 1995, and may even have deteriorated.

As was reported at the end of 2002 by the Bolivian community organization ORBOAFRO: 'the Afro-Bolivian population [still] needs everything, from the most basic services to the most important economic and educational support...'<sup>11</sup>

Studies conducted in 2001 by international financial institutions reveal that the multi-million dollar IDB-supported projects in Colombia, Ecuador and Honduras have had a negligible impact on black populations, and Afro-descendants in these countries continue to feel excluded from socio-economic development efforts. Further, these projects have not succeeded in linking with existing Afro-descendant NGOs as partners.<sup>12</sup>

## Perspective on poverty and economic exclusion

### Echoes of history

Over the past decade, poverty and social exclusion have been recognized as a violation of human rights. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 14–25 June 1993,<sup>13</sup> Article 25:

*'affirms that extreme poverty and social exclusion constitute a violation of human dignity and that urgent steps are necessary to achieve better knowledge of extreme poverty and its causes, including those related to the problem of development, in order to promote the human rights of the poorest, and to put an end to extreme poverty and social exclusion and to promote the enjoyment of the fruits of social progress.'*

It also indicates that:

*'It is essential for States to foster participation by the poorest people in the decision-making process by the community in which they live, the promotion of human rights and efforts to combat extreme poverty.'*

In Latin America, social exclusion due to race or ethnicity has been receiving increased attention, especially following the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism (WCAR). For the purposes of this study, social exclusion is considered to be 'the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live'. This interpretation reaffirms that poverty is a relative deprivation, and considers the inter-relationships between poverty, productive employment, and social integration.<sup>14</sup>

The studies undertaken by the IDB and World Bank to date, indicate that Afro-descendants' poverty and economic exclusion in Latin America are consequences of racial marginalization. Their exclusion is characterized by unequal access to services (education, health and utilities); to capital and property; to income (credits, employments and product markets); and to opportunities (ideas, legal redress and social mobility).

### Box 3: Mechanisms of Afro-descendant exclusion

Over several centuries, Latin America has developed an immutable notion of the 'proper' role of its various ethnic groups based on the concept of white supremacy. Beginning with the expulsion of the dark-skinned Moors from the Iberian peninsula in 1492, Spanish administrative policy was aimed at eliminating all African or black influence at home and in the colonies. Spanish American societies have consciously and unconsciously continued this process and sought to support *emblaquecimiento* or 'whitening' of their populations. This is an elevation of all things white or European, while denigrating and excluding other non-white cultures and races. Those classified as black and as indigenous have often been blamed for the worsening state of the nation, and historically have not been accorded or seen as deserving of the same rights and benefits as others. Exclusionary attitudes towards non-whites are reflected in policies and actions of institutions and individuals at all levels of society. In the post-colonial era, all Latin American countries actively sought to 'perfect their biological stock' by encouraging the immigration of white Europeans. Even in the very mixed societies of contemporary Latin America, *emblaquecimiento* remains a preferred option and elites still emphasize or invent northern European family pedigrees and cultural accoutrements in order to overcome any perceived or real handicaps associated with being of non-white ancestry.

High among the causal factors are the institutional and informal mechanisms of exclusion. (See Box 3.) The dynamics of marginalization are now an integral part of social, political, cultural and institutional structures, and may even

be necessary for the continued economic wellbeing of the region's small and very wealthy elite.

This exclusion dates from the beginning of the sixteenth century in the formation of the Atlantic world economy. For over three centuries until the 1880s, tens of millions of Africans were forcibly removed to provide slave labour for the mines and plantations that laid the basis for Latin America's wealth. These racially-biased slave-labour enterprises were founded on the denial of the slave's humanity, and on the perceived hereditary 'inferiority' and socio-economic exclusion of dark-skinned people from Africa. It was a harsh and brutal environment even in an era of scant regard for any notions of human rights.

It is the descendants of these former slaves who now make up a large percentage of Latin American populations. To some degree, their current situation continues to be influenced by social attitudes and relationships developed during that early colonizing period, having endured long after the nineteenth-century abolition of slavery. These included: a denial of the rights of black people to be full citizens; to own property; to go to school; to engage in certain trades; to engage in banking; or to hold rank in the government, military or church.<sup>15</sup>

Over the centuries, Afro-descendants have taken many measures to try to safeguard their right to self-determination, including escaping from bondage situations and establishing safe havens in remote enclaves.<sup>16</sup> After emancipation, many of these settlements increased in size and became the main Afro-descendant communities of today. These can be found throughout Latin America, especially in rainforests, and along the rivers and the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

### Censuses and self-identification

Determining the number of Afro-descendants in the region is not a straightforward task. Many community researchers indicate that gathering information on poverty and economic exclusion in Afro-descendant communities can be hampered by problems concerning identity and definition, especially in ethnically-mixed environments.

The main instruments for data collection are the national census and household surveys. These are used to define where poverty reduction investments are needed. Until recently, most censuses did not include the means to disaggregate data by race or ethnicity. Bolivia, Costa Rica and Ecuador do now include a question on ethnicity in their censuses, however community representatives in these countries are dissatisfied because the Afro-descendant population is undercounted or unrecognized:

*'In Ecuador...we [Afro-Ecuadorians] are approximately 10 per cent of the population, in spite of the population census of 2001 which counts Afro-Ecuadorians – blacks and mulattos – as only five per cent (604,009) of the national population; we attribute this result to the questions contained in the census form which did not allow for the recognition of identity.'*<sup>17</sup>

In countries with small Afro-descendant populations, such as Argentina, Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico and

Uruguay, the situation is particularly acute, as the Afro-Bolivian NGO ORBOAFRO reports:

*'... In the Census 2001 we [Afro-Bolivians] were not included in question 49 of the census form which says: "do you consider yourself belonging to one of the following original or indigenous peoples?"...this is how the "ethnic cleansing" is carried on in a multiethnic and pluricultural country... the last census in which we were counted was conducted on 1st April 1900 during the government of President José Manuel Pando...[we were] spread in different provinces of the country, the majority in La Paz, we were 2.17 per cent of the population ...[currently] the National Institute of Statistics has written the epitaph of "statistical death" for Afro descendants...[this] intentional omission...has excluded us from all social demands, we are not [going to be] considered in any socio-economic policy proposed.'*<sup>18</sup>

Accurately describing the relationship between ethnicity and economic exclusion can be hampered by some people's reluctance to define themselves as Afro-descendants. Afro-descendants generally define themselves as a people who have an ancestral relationship with Africa, descendants of those who were transported as slaves to the Americas, who have continued to preserve their ancestral roots. These people may or may not have visible signs of other non-African connections.<sup>19</sup>

It would appear that a large percentage of the mainstream Latin American population could claim African ancestry. Nonetheless, because of a history of discrimination against non-white people and the threat of social exclusion, there is widespread identity denial.

Except for Brazil, Colombia and Nicaragua, most Latin American countries seem to have been reluctant to include racial data in censuses and other records of statistics, and only began to add such categories after the year 2000. For example, Costa Rican Afro-descendants state that before the 2000 census, the country chose not to differentially register ethnic minorities:

*'Some assume that registering minorities separately ...would stigmatize them...others of us think that such an omission has been coldly calculated [by the authorities] and made deliberately, so as not to accept that Costa Rican society is multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural and to hide the fact that the Costa Rican population is not "white", as the great majority of the citizens usually call themselves...some elements to differentiate and identify members of different minorities were included in Census 2000...however the results are not very trustworthy because they were inexact...'*<sup>20</sup>

It is these attitudes and practices that have helped to perpetuate the myth of a 'racial democracy'. (See Box 4.) Afro-descendants in Latin America are still routinely subjected to insults and petty daily indignities, and strangers and friends still refer to dark-skinned people by their colour rather than by their name or title.<sup>21</sup>

#### Box 4: Racial democracy

In Latin American societies 'racism' is seen to mean *apartheid* and US-style segregation. The argument is that Iberian colonial regimes practised a more liberal form of government compared to Northern European colonial states and this has left a legacy of non-discrimination or 'racial democracy' in the contemporary era. Consequently, Latin Americans cite the absence of overt legal exclusionary mechanisms and violent confrontations as proof of harmonious race policies, and correlate the 'mixed' nature of their populations with the existence and environment of a harmonious inter-ethnic society. The tendency is to try to reduce race to class, and to minimize the extent and impact of racial discrimination using the argument that Latin American society is racially democratic.<sup>22</sup>

Across Latin America there are more than 20 terms used to categorize Afro-descendants. These include: *trigeño* (wheat coloured); *moreno* (brown); *zambo* (half-indigenous); *pardo*, *mulatto* (half-white); *quadroon* (three-quarters white); *octooroon* (seven-eighths white); *preto* (dark), etc. – all designed to avoid having to define the individual as black.<sup>23</sup> This is a direct reflection of the low regard in which African heritage is held, which makes some Afro-descendants of mixed ancestry much more likely to deny any African connections.

Many mixed race people with acknowledged African ancestry therefore claim to be, and are generally accepted as, members of other racial groups. It is sometimes difficult for researchers to ascertain which individuals or communities publicly define themselves as Afro-descendants. Data collection therefore requires researchers to engage directly with communities.

However, self-definition is not the only requirement. Honduras provides an example of how collecting data without community dialogue and cultural understanding can still result in the exclusion of Afro-descendants from poverty reduction surveys. In that country, the most recent preparation of 'poverty maps' in 2001, selected levels of malnutrition among children as a key indicator of poverty, to determine the exclusion or inclusion of communities in future anti-poverty work.<sup>24</sup> Despite their poverty, traditional, rural Afro-descendant nutrition practices across the region have generally staved off extreme malnutrition,<sup>25</sup> so in this case, regardless of their actual economic circumstances, Afro-descendants would not benefit from the programme.

Also in Honduras – as in Colombia, Ecuador and Nicaragua – Afro-descendants can be excluded from poverty reduction surveys. This is because their communities represent poor enclaves that are located within areas that have relatively better human development indices and display the least incidence of overall poverty, therefore these areas are not included in the surveys.<sup>26</sup>

## The right to work, and employment problems

The right to work is an important economic right for Afro-descendants. It includes the freedom to choose employment, to safe and healthy working conditions, to job security, sanitation, a minimum wage, social protection, equal pay for work of equal value, job stability, equal opportunity for promotion, etc. (See Box 1.)

The IDB's extensive studies provide a wealth of data on the high levels of unemployment in Afro-descendant populations, and the types of employment that are accessible to them. The studies shed light on rural and urban communities' working patterns, and on the way that economic migration helps make up the deficit in the finances required for family subsistence. The evidence shows a remarkable regional similarity in conditions and in the Afro-descendant communities' responses.

The data shows that the socio-economic system in Latin America serves to limit most Afro-descendants' employment potential and income to the low-wage and low-skilled end of the spectrum. Education is a key factor in gaining access to well-paid jobs, but for Afro-descendants in both rural and urban areas, the racial discrimination practised by employers and institutions works against this.

A recent IDB study on racial inequalities and employment in Brazil<sup>27</sup> has clearly shown the relationship between education, and skin colour in attaining higher-wage levels and quality employment. (See Box 5.)

Discrimination is therefore a real impediment to employment, and for getting a job commensurate with one's level of education and abilities. It also constrains people from fully engaging in all areas of economic activity and at the highest level. The negative social attitudes towards people of African ancestry can include derisive name calling,<sup>28</sup> which reinforces a hostile daily working environment that can further hamper Afro-descendants' participation.

Data from Bolivia, Guatemala and Peru also show racial discrimination in employment.<sup>29</sup> Equally well-documented is the chronic poverty experienced by Afro-descendants throughout Latin America. The findings strengthen the argument that the constraint on earnings and income produced by racial exclusion helps to perpetuate their poverty. Income levels limit their access to goods and services as well as to opportunities. For Afro-descendants in general, poverty has affected their ability to acquire a good education and limited their academic attainment, with primary education commonly being the highest level reached by most. Poorly-educated people who are also discriminated against, do not get high-paying jobs, and low wages do not provide the extra income needed to educate the next generation. This creates a vicious circle limiting the means to change the individual and collective social standing of Afro-descendant populations. It has resulted in regional employment profiles. Typically, these are low-paid and gender segregated.

### Box 5: Employment, education and racial earning inequality

A 2002 IDB study on *Education, Family Background and Racial Earning Inequality in Brazil* used the concept of returns on education, in this case measured by wage gains, as a way to measure the effect of racial earning differences in the labour market.

The study found that the bulk of Brazil's racial earnings inequality was due to white people's advantages in their own and their parents' education, which was reflected in higher wages in better-quality jobs. This advantage was due to a more favourable socio-economic background and attending school in areas with a relatively higher-quality education. For white people and *pardos* (i.e. *mulattos*), parental education increased their children's educational attainment and resulted in substantial wage returns as adults.

The gradient of skin colour appeared to play a role in people's access to higher wages. At the top of the wage scale, *pardos* and white people with similar educational backgrounds were rewarded similarly by the labour market (i.e. they had access to similar high-wage jobs). The study concluded that for *pardos*, but not *pretos*, a 'better position in the socio-economic scale grants a fairer treatment in the labour market (i.e. money whitens)'. On the other hand, at the bottom of the wage scale, *pardos* faced conditions similar to *pretos* (i.e. their low wages were similar for similar levels of education, and this was lower than the wages earned by white people with a similar level of education). Black people were the only ones who had a decrease in

their return on education. There are few black people employed in top management jobs in any sector or in public service positions, and they are in a far lower proportion than expected given their population group's size and educational level.

This was reinforced by other findings in the study, showing that black children achieved lower levels of educational attainment when their parents had a secondary and/or university education. This was in contrast to the findings for white people and *mulattos*, whose levels of attainment were higher than those of their parents. It could be concluded that beyond a certain level it would not be economically profitable for black people to attend further education or to spend more on education because it would not lead to higher wages, so they would be better off starting to work early in the highest-paid job they could find. This was seen in younger generations of Afro-Costa Ricans working at the docks in Port Limón, who were only studying to reach the level of education required to get a job at the port, to the distress of their parents who expected better of them (Costa Rica, IDB, 1995).

The Brazil study also quantified the 'colour gap' in terms of earning differentials. The 'unexplained gaps' (i.e. the element that could be attributed to racial discrimination as none of the other controlled factors could explain it) were about 16 per cent lower, on average, for a typical black or *mulatto* worker with a secondary education, and close to an 18 per cent earning disadvantage for black people with a university degree. This shows the cost of economic exclusion caused by racial discrimination against *pretos* and *pardos* from 1940–90 in Brazil.

### Rural work

The determining factors in the work profile of rural Afro-descendants throughout Latin America are their lack of paid employment and the type of natural resources to which they have access.

Traditionally, rural Afro-descendants' lifestyles in Latin America have ensured their subsistence. Economic activities have included mainly small-scale agriculture, fishing and forestry. Recently, external factors have had a negative effect on Afro-descendants' subsistence activities and on their poverty. Consequently, the rate of unemployment and underemployment in rural areas is very high, especially among young people.

Rural female work generally centres around the transformation and sale of food products, particularly coconuts, maize, plantains, root crops, and sugar. Where possible, women engage in paid domestic work in nearby towns. Male rural work is based on providing food from agriculture and fishing, and vocational skills related to construction and housing, such as boat building, carpentry and masonry.

Rural work is profoundly affected by the institutionalized discrimination in Latin America. First, in the authorities' failure to recognize Afro-descendants as the rightful owners of their ancestral lands, and second in the authorities' failure to protect the local populations from the predatory actions of outside companies and entrepreneurs. Companies are allowed virtually unrestricted entry into Afro-descendant areas in search of natu-

ral resources such as minerals, or for large-scale fishing and logging, and eco-tourism. These entities also encourage *ladino*<sup>30</sup> peasant colonization onto traditional Afro-descendant lands.<sup>31</sup> Once the lands and natural resources are diminished, communities cannot produce their crops, and their incomes fall. This affects their quality of life, particularly their ability to provide an education for the next generation and/or their ability to pass on the means of production to them.

In addition, throughout Latin America, there is little or no government investment in the infrastructure or services of Afro-descendant areas. This makes it almost impossible for Afro-descendant producers to add value to their products, to readily market their agricultural surpluses or to derive benefits from ecological resources.

As was outlined by the Afro-Bolivian NGO ORBOAFRO:

*'The Afro Bolivian rural population needs...roads that link communities to the most important markets of the country...[this] prevents the diversification of production...in many cases [produce] is lost for lack of transport or... the price is too high ...all community residents coincide on the need to go from a primary economy to a secondary and tertiary economy...the most fundamental tertiary activity is tourism, which has increased considerably in the two Yungas regions. It has generated new employment through construction...but incomes have only benefited external capital...'*<sup>32</sup>

Such constraints on economic participation mean many Afro-descendant rural producers are reliant on the better-connected, better-financed, urban-based primary product entrepreneurs who generally choose to pay rural suppliers as little as possible.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the often strong cultural foundation of many rural Afro-descendant communities, they are unable to use this asset economically. There are no national professional and technical training programmes aimed at them, which could improve existing techniques, or preserve and train community members in traditional cultural crafts and vocational skills (as provided for in ILO Convention 169, Articles 21–3). This could be partly attributed to the fact that in general, craft products do not have a solid market niche and therefore investment funds are limited. Other reasons include a regional history of marginalizing African-influenced culture.<sup>34</sup> Neither the state nor civil society in Latin America formally promotes traditional craft production as a driving force in social, cultural and economic development.<sup>35</sup>

With the limited economic options available to rural Afro-descendants across Latin America, it is hardly surprising that they are migrating to the cities in increasing numbers, even if it means facing overcrowded living conditions and more overt exclusion, including stiff competition for jobs.

## Urban work

The interplay between exclusion, employment and poverty is clearer in the cities, especially with the strong gender segregation of labour.

Besides enduring racism, black women are also subjected to gender discrimination in the workplace. In the urban areas a few Afro-descendant women work in banks or as secretaries, or make a living as itinerant vendors, but most are consigned to jobs that are essentially extensions of women's traditional domestic roles. Most urban Afro-descendant women still work mainly as cleaners, laundry workers, maids and nannies. These are poorly-paid, low-status jobs with no security, that perpetuate the 'servile' roles Latin American society has historically assigned to Afro-descendants; or as Benadita Da Silva of Brazil described them, these are the 'modernized functions of slavery'.<sup>36</sup>

While this form of domestic employment may not be the sole preserve of poor Afro-descendant women, for other groups in society it is more often a temporary step towards other personal social and economic goals. A United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) document (April 2002) cites a study from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which reveals that only 15 per cent of 'white' women work as domestic workers, while 40 per cent of female Afro-descendants work within this sector.<sup>37</sup>

Assessments from across the region indicate that the Brazilian experience is valid for all of the countries. For Afro-descendant women in particular, limited education and discrimination ensure that these domestic jobs, with no scope for advancement, are their main urban employment opportunity. While 'white' women's participation in employment and their wages have risen, black women continue to be confined to underemployment and unemployment, and

wage discrimination.<sup>38</sup>

Although frequently criticized for being exploitative, the rise of export-oriented manufacturing zones (especially in Central America) has become another major option for general female employment. There is a strong association between trade expansion in the South and the rise of female labour in export production. While the working conditions often leave a lot to be desired, as part of the industrial sector this semi-skilled manufacturing work is often perceived as having a higher status than domestic work, and there is fierce competition for jobs. Research is required to determine whether the increasing activity in this sector has had any impact on the work profile of Afro-descendant women, and whether a discriminatory work environment has limited their participation there as well.

Male jobs in the urban areas tend to display a similar historically-influenced racial pattern. Afro-descendant men in Latin America work mainly in the lower levels of construction, and as drivers, seasonal or day labourers, security guards, etc. There are some exceptions in Colombia, Costa Rica and Panama, which have port cities, and in Brazil, which has an industrial base that can offer blue-collar working opportunities, but most Afro-descendant males in the urban areas are relegated to low-paying jobs requiring mainly strength and only moderate levels of intellect.

Professional males and females exist only as a minority. Despite their substantial numbers in many countries, Afro-descendants are remarkably absent from the ranks of the better-paid, who are employed in institutions such as government offices, hospitals and universities. There are few Afro-descendant officers in the police or military forces, and aside from some cities and towns where they enjoy an electoral majority, they are generally under-represented in elected and appointed government positions. Assessments indicate that educated Afro-descendant women in the small regional middle-class are mostly nurses, social workers and teachers. Middle-class men tend to work as accountants, lawyers and teachers. There are very few technicians. The main area for well-paid jobs for men is in sport – mainly football – one of the few positively discriminated employment sectors for Afro-descendants in the region. No similar sector opportunity exists for women.

As discussed, the principal factors affecting economic rights and the right to work have been educational levels and racial discrimination by employers. Marginalization begins at the recruitment stage. Throughout Latin America, descriptions for female-specific jobs usually include the words 'good appearance'. More often than not, this is a euphemism for 'no black females need apply'. In Brazil, for example, which has the largest population of African descent outside Nigeria, job descriptions also frequently ask for 'women with nice faces' meaning light-skinned.<sup>39</sup>

Another impediment at the recruitment stage, is exclusion based on negative profiling and lower expectations. Young Afro-Honduran males who come to the cities seeking apprenticeships as car mechanics have been told that black people are not technically capable of the work, and are re-directed to car cleaning jobs.<sup>40</sup>

Such discriminatory attitudes exclude all but the very

bold or very patient. This exclusion is self-perpetuating, since initial entry into many categories of employment – particularly in the informal sector – is usually based on friendships and family ties. Afro-descendants are often disadvantaged by their lack of these social contacts, and suffer exclusion even when they possess a keen interest and a formal education.

The picture is no better in the self-employed business sector. Even to the casual observer it is obvious that groups other than Afro-descendants dominate practically all the economic activities in the rural areas and cities of Latin America.

Self-employed Afro-descendants in urban areas work primarily in the informal sector. Their right to work and to have an adequate standard of living is regularly hampered by the police harassment of street vendors, and the municipalities' increasingly complex licensing requirements. Afro-descendants lack access to credit because of the extremely small scope of their financial activities. They lack assets for collateral, and experience institutional prejudice. Afro-descendants generally find it difficult to participate fully in local and international market economies.<sup>41</sup>

## Economic migration

In rural and urban areas, when family incomes are insufficient, the most frequent solution has been the migration of adult males and, increasingly young and adult women, to cities, or even abroad, in search of an income.

Migration is very significant for Afro-descendants' economic profile. Also it has different facets depending on the income levels of the migrants. There have been migrants from Central America for several generations, with the United States of America (USA) as the main foreign destination. For Anglophone Afro-descendants of Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua, the Cayman Islands and Jamaica have been important destinations.<sup>42</sup>

Central Americans going to the USA have fared better than economic migrants to regional destinations. Men tend to work in the fishing and tourist boat industry for extended periods of time, returning home during the off-season. Eventually, with the help of a relative, they stay in the USA. Women tend to migrate to the capital as domestic workers, or study and pursue professional careers.

The existence of migrant families abroad brings two benefits: an easier path for the new generations of economic migrants, and remittances, which have become a significant income for Afro-descendant communities.<sup>43</sup> A survey conducted in two representative areas of Livingstone, Guatemala, showed that foreign pensions and remittances represented 23 per cent of all income sources and that only 59 per cent of the households had someone who was working. The reported incomes showed that 47 per cent of the households earned less than US \$6 per day, while only 14 per cent had incomes of \$24 a day.<sup>44</sup>

The down side is that foreign and internal economic migration has resulted in the breakdown of the family unit and the creation of social dynamics that can lead to further poverty. For example, the incidence of single women living alone represented an average of 53 per cent of Afro-Honduran communities and these had 3–4 children.<sup>45</sup> In

Costa Rica and Honduras, migration, coupled with teenage motherhood, has resulted in middle-aged grandmothers becoming responsible for their grandchildren, while their daughters migrate to the capital.<sup>46</sup> The people who migrate also tend to be the most educated, dynamic and ambitious members of their community, which creates a local 'brain drain' that can hamper efforts to organize and mobilize communities for self-development.

Youth migration has risen, particularly since the 1990s, when structural adjustment measures brought increased economic hardship to many Afro-descendant communities. Youth migration is usually motivated by the need for education (secondary school) and for work. Most of these youths face the same barriers to urban employment as adults, and have fewer educational assets.

The links between racial discrimination, economic exclusion, extreme poverty and migration are obvious in the case of Afro-Ecuadorians. Low youth employment rates in rural Esmeraldas Province, along with unrealized expectations among those who migrate to the city of Guayaquil, can result in crime; including gang formation and territorial fights, the petty drugs trade and prostitution. Miguel Ramírez, *diputado* (MP) for Esmeraldas, estimates that the unemployment rate for the province is around 50 per cent but for black people this rises to 70 per cent.<sup>47</sup>

In Latin America, migrant workers face harsh conditions. Afro-Colombians, who are essential to the agricultural and livestock sector of Zulia province in Venezuela, are mainly male migrant workers with low levels of education and no knowledge of their rights.<sup>48</sup> Afro-Dominican women have a visible presence in Venezuela, as vendors and domestic workers, and also in Argentina as domestic workers. These are mostly single mothers who have left their children back home with grandmothers and face insecure, usually illegal, and poorly-remunerated working conditions. Many find themselves financially unable to return home.<sup>49</sup> Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic are a special case. Their presence is vital to the profitability of the sugar industry, yet they are poorly paid, and their conditions of work are unsafe and unsanitary. They experience a range of abuses. Their human rights are neither respected nor guaranteed; their migrant worker rights are ignored. This situation has remained unchanged for over 40 years.<sup>50</sup>

Some areas that could shed more light on economic exclusion but remain publicly unexplored include self-employment and entrepreneurship, as well as financing strategies and credit issues. More information is also required on migrant work and remittances, and on experiences of trade unions.

## Land rights

### Property and titles

One of the most important elements in helping to safeguard the human rights and economic survival of Afro-descendant communities in Latin America has been their access to land. Even with their poor economic conditions, at the very least, land access enables people to produce their own food, pro-

vide basic shelter and minimizes the worst effects of their extreme poverty.

In most Latin American countries, Afro-descendants have long had access to significant stretches of land in the rural provinces. For centuries, these holdings represented a refuge from enslavement, and later, an important means of survival in a socially and economically exclusionary society. It is only in countries such as Argentina, Peru and Uruguay, where Afro-descendants were mainly urban or tied to semi-feudal systems, where Afro-descendants did not historically control extensive areas of land.<sup>51</sup> However, for most Afro-descendants, land represents the only stock of wealth they possess and the only transferable asset they have to pass on to their sons and daughters as an inheritance.

Today however, these ancestral lands are facing large-scale economic exploitation. For many Afro-descendant communities therefore, guaranteeing entitlement and ownership of traditionally-occupied lands is one of the most pressing 'rights issues'. As explained by ORBOAFRO:

*for the Afro-Bolivian rural population...the order of priorities...is...land...scarcity, shortage of land for the younger population...and to legalize [the land] that they presently have'.<sup>52</sup>*

However, land issues, as understood by most Afro-descendant communities in Latin America, are not considered within the right to own property in either the ICERD, ICESCR, the SS Protocol or the UNDM. Land issues have only been considered in the ILO Convention 169 (for indigenous and tribal peoples).

Some have argued that ILO 169, theoretically, could be applied to Afro-descendants. Their lifestyle is similar to that of indigenous and tribal peoples, and rural Afro-descendants have already positioned themselves as a distinct ethnic group with their own culture and as protectors of the environment. In addition, the factor of land in their ability to work and to a reasonable standard of living is of key importance to them.

The Colombian Constitution recognizes Afro-Colombians on the coast as a distinct population. The Brazilian and Ecuadorian Constitutions view the *quilombos* and Afro-Ecuadorians, respectively, as separate groups. In Belize, Guatemala and Honduras, the local Garifuna populations are similarly recognized.

It should be noted that many rural Afro-descendants have established close relations with indigenous peoples in Latin America, and have established formal and informal alliances with them. In some instances, complex social ties exist between the two groups that go back centuries, which have facilitated more explicitly political relationships.<sup>53</sup>

However, there are no legal precedents regarding the self-affirmation of Afro-descendants as an 'indigenous-like' or 'tribal-like' people, especially given their lifestyles and other cultural and historical factors. Acquiring recognition as a 'people' would be a requirement to enable them to apply this Convention in the region.

In Honduras, Afro-descendant leaders have been following the ILO 169 path for the recognition of their right to own the lands that have been ancestrally occupied and used

for their subsistence. In Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, rural Afro-descendant communities have used the agrarian reform process to acquire title to lands. In Brazil and Colombia, constitutional amendments provide a process of recognition for Afro-descendant land tenure. However, in Brazil, this does not include agricultural land and, in Colombia, land titles mean nothing to heavily-armed forces bent on dispossession.

## Land tenure

There is a strong overlap between the environment and the economy in relation to Afro-descendants' ancestral territories. An environmental perspective is central to understanding Afro-descendants' approaches to environmental sustainability, productive strategies and the positive economic impact that Afro-descendants generally have.

There are two typical situations regarding land tenure. There are communities where Afro-descendant rural populations have historically settled and used large areas of territory. They do not usually have title to these, although their ancestors are commonly known to be the traditional owners.

Second, there is land acquired through general agrarian reforms. Over subsequent generations these have been subdivided for inheritance. The current land-holders do not have titles for their sub-plots and this creates uncertainty, particularly in Bolivia and Peru. In addition, the sub-divided land is no longer sufficient to support the population, leading to youth migration.<sup>54</sup>

In their land tenure requirements, Afro-descendants have benefited from the role of multilateral development banks such as the IDB and World Bank, as well as UN agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which have funded land titling activities in several countries.

Further, in 1988, the Brazilian Constitution adopted Transitory Article 68, which recognized the land claims of the country's historical communities of descendants of self-liberated slaves, known as *quilombos*. In Colombia, through Transitory Article 55 in 1991 and approval of Law 70 in 1993, the Constitution recognized the land rights of Afro-descendants on the Pacific coast. Also in 1998 the Constitution of Ecuador adopted Article 83 which granted Afro-Ecuadorians collective rights for ancestral lands.

While tenure acquisition processes for Afro-descendant lands are still not universally available throughout the region, all countries show that land tenure is vital for ensuring the economic rights of rural Afro-descendant communities, and for preserving their cultural legacy. However, even when tenure acquisition mechanisms exist, they rarely include the lands that communities have traditionally used for agricultural production and other income generation activities. Further, many communities cannot meet the stringent criteria that are sometimes established by governments before official recognition of ancestral lands can be granted; particularly if the lands hold natural resources wanted by the private sector.

Afro-Bolivians have migrated to areas in Bolivia, where new lands are being opened up, but discrimination by public

officials often prevents them from acquiring their titles as fast as other population groups.<sup>55</sup> This type of discrimination is very difficult for Afro-descendants to prove and is therefore hard to challenge legally. At the Interagency Consultation on Afro-Latin Americans held in Washington DC in 2000, these attitudes were considered by the Afro-Colombian lawyer and parliamentarian Julio Gallardo:

*'The power structures, both public and private, that practice such discrimination fail to see their actions or omissions as being discriminatory, and whenever anyone attempts to question them they flaunt the legal and constitutional precepts of equality, even though the real situation is different.'*<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps the greatest threats to Afro-descendant land-related economic rights come from the private sector's interest in the appropriation of these lands because of the great riches to be extracted, the potentially huge profits to be made by those involved in the 'trafficking' of land,<sup>57</sup> and the indiscriminate exploitation of resources in logging, shrimp-ing and petroleum.<sup>58</sup>

It is clear that the loss of land, as seen in Esmeraldas Province in Ecuador, leads directly to a loss of economic rights. It prompts urban migration and produces lives of abject poverty on the hillsides in the city of Esmeraldas, or on the river edges of the city of Guayaquil.<sup>59</sup>

## Social rights

There are factors that properly fall into the category of social rights but which can be indispensable to the full achievement of economic rights. These include the right to a decent standard of living, education, health and to social security.

Here too, discrimination against Afro-descendants is striking in the disparity between the level of government services, such as health and education, that are provided to Afro-descendant populations as opposed to other citizens.

## Education

Since education plays such an important role in characterizing the employment sector, the right 'to access education: "compulsory" primary, "generally available" secondary and "equally accessible" higher education',<sup>60</sup> is critical.

Across Latin America there are great differences in the quality and in the access to primary and secondary education, and the economic level of the population defines the quality they can access. Even where racial discrimination is prevalent, a worker's educational attainment, and that of their parents, helps to determine access to employment, and an individual's capacity to perform well and advance socially.

Perhaps because poverty and racial discrimination limit their social advancement, Afro-descendants have generally tried to get as good an education as possible, as a means of breaking the cycle of deprivation. Many make sacrifices to educate their children, even under trying conditions.

However, low educational levels characterize many semi-urban Afro-descendant communities. For example, in two Afro-descendant *barrios* in Livingstone, Guatemala, more

than half of the population had not completed primary school (52 per cent) only 13 per cent had attended secondary school at some level, and only 10 per cent had graduated from secondary school. Just 3 per cent had attended university, of whom only 1 per cent had graduated.<sup>61</sup> A survey of the Garífuna's socio-economic position in 44 communities in Honduras showed that 10.2 per cent had no formal education, 68.4 per cent had primary education, 17.7 per cent reached secondary school and 3.7 per cent had a university education.<sup>62</sup>

Not surprisingly, discrimination also plays a large role in the day-to-day marginalization and exclusion within education. In Andean countries such as Ecuador and Peru, discrimination towards Afro-descendant students includes covert prevention of child registration in urban schools,<sup>63</sup> or officially ignoring or belittling their high academic performance.<sup>64</sup> In Argentina and Uruguay, the classroom environment fosters the teasing of black students, which results in these students dropping out as soon as it is legally possible to stop attending school.<sup>65</sup>

The poverty and discrimination that limits Afro-descendants' access to a proper education, can hamper employment and income opportunities – including the ability to become professionals in the education sector. This limits the number of Afro-descendant teachers and role models.

Primary education is available in most rural communities, except the smallest, however, the quality is not uniform. Most rural schools suffer from insufficient teaching hours, a lack of materials and a poor infrastructure. There are sometimes multiple classes per teacher, the pupil-teacher ratios are high, and classes are multi-graded with students of all ages. Thus universal access to primary education as a right may be complied with, but the quality of delivery leaves a lot to be desired.

One of the main conclusions of the IDB study on racial earnings inequality in Brazil (see Box 5), is that equalizing access to quality education, including improved provision for early learning, is important to reduce inter-racial earning inequality. This would also be true for other Latin American countries.

Students from wealthier families have the option of attending fee-paying schools, which provide a better education. Those with lower incomes, whether in cities or rural areas, can only attend state schools where the quality of learning reflects the poor pay of teachers, and the lack of educational resources. Rural schools are even more limiting because the infrastructure tends to be marginal and teachers do not want to be assigned there.

Further, in all countries, secondary schools are generally not accessible to rural populations, so continuing an education means migration to an urban zone with all the expenditure and complications that relocation entails.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the right to a secondary education is severely limited. The right to an 'equally accessible' university education can hardly be discussed when poverty prevents the vast majority from even reaching secondary school.

Language and culture also play a role in the quality of learning. Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua

have Afro-descendant populations whose first language is not Spanish. Such children in rural areas are still taught in Spanish at primary school, despite this being a new language for many of them. Teachers often cannot speak the local language.

Anglophone Afro-descendant minorities in the Central American Spanish-speaking countries are also concerned about their children being deprived of the opportunity to learn English, a language that could increase their economic options.

Bilingual education programmes have been adopted by most of these countries, but states have not seemed able or willing to comply with the rights of Afro-descendant minorities to be taught in their 'mother' tongue (first language), and these bilingual programmes have not been implemented beyond the pilot stage, at best.

Aurelia Satuyé of the Asociación de Mujeres Garífunas de Guatemala (ASOMUGAGUA) revealed that a 2001 UN Verification Mission to Guatemala found very little progress in inter-cultural and bilingual education for Afro-descendants. There had been no compliance with agreements signed by the government, cultural diversity had still not been considered in the design and implementation of education policies, and a global programme of bilingual and inter-cultural education still did not exist.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, as indicated by Sidney Francis of the Afro-Nicaraguan community organization ADEPHCA, the English-speaking black communities on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua have not been educated in their own language, because the inter-cultural bilingual programme has so far been confined to just one school, in the city of Bluefields.<sup>68</sup>

## Educational content

The curriculum's content also adversely affects Afro-descendants. By condoning and supporting racial stereotypes, and failing to provide accurate information about Africa and Afro-descendants' achievements and contributions, discrimination is reinforced.

During the IDB Poverty Forum (1996), this gap within Afro-descendant education was raised by delegates from all the countries of the region. At the end of 2002, the organization ORBOAFRO indicated that there were still no references to Afro-descendants in Bolivian history texts despite centuries of presence.

The comments by Reina Arratia on the system in Venezuela exemplifies the situation throughout the region. She indicated that the only references to black people in school texts is as an historical aside during slavery. This distortion perpetuates stereotypes and racism, as she explained:

*'Our boys and girls do not see themselves represented in our school textbooks nor in the other teaching resources used in the teaching-learning process, which influences the rejection that many of them feel towards themselves, in not wanting to be black. For this reason it is of the greatest importance to incorporate, in the curricula, the real history of Africa with its valuable contributions to the development of humanity, with an equitable presence of black men and women.'*<sup>69</sup>

Clearly this impacts on Afro-descendants' self-esteem, and social and economic alienation, which tends to shrink individual and community ambitions and efforts. This serves to reinforce stereotypes of 'unambitious and incompetent' black people, which perpetuates the cycle.<sup>70</sup> As has been shown already, this lack of self-esteem can have notable economic consequences, including on how people self-identify during censuses and economic surveys.

## Health

Health also constitutes a strong factor in a person's ability to perform in the economy and in the type of employment they can engage in. The right to health consists of being able to achieve 'the highest possible level of physical and mental health, and access to public health services'.<sup>71</sup>

The quality of a person's health care will also impinge on the time available to devote to employment, particularly in the case of Afro-descendant women. Low salaries in Afro-descendant communities limit access to health care for all members of the family, particularly when the medicine and consultation services are not provided free of charge.

Discrimination functions primarily in an institutional context in the consistently poor health service received by most Afro-descendants in the region. If rural health centres exist, they lack doctors or medicine, and communities often resort to traditional medicine. In many communities there is no access to safe drinking water, which increases the chances of intestinal diseases; in addition, health education programmes and preventative care are practically non-existent.

As a result of poverty and increasing migration, Afro-descendants are also particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Its impact is not currently known because of the lack of specific government and agency programmes.

The unsatisfactory way in which the right to health is being honoured by Latin American countries can be illustrated by one of the few available quantitative health surveys among Afro-descendant communities. A 2001 survey in the Garífuna communities of Honduras, in the department of Colón, found the main causes of infant mortality to be: pneumonia (34 per cent), diarrhoea (18 per cent), perinatal (14 per cent) and malnutrition (5 per cent). Studies in the same area by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in 2000 showed that the most common diseases were all preventable: these were: chickenpox, colds, diarrhoea and parasites.<sup>72</sup> Among the rural population, diseases are predominantly contagious but preventable, and related to living near water, in unsanitary conditions and being too poor to buy preventative medicine.<sup>73</sup>

Recently, due to the land titling issues and natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods, access to traditional food sources has been negatively affected and there is the risk of an increasing deterioration in child nutrition.<sup>74</sup> This can cause learning difficulties and educational and developmental problems that work to the detriment of the whole community. Poor health, poor education and discrimination also mean that there are and will continue to be very few Afro-descendant doctors. The handful of Afro-descendants who study medicine do so mostly as overseas migrants, and find it socially and economically advantageous not to return to their countries or their communities.

## Social security

The right to security<sup>75</sup> is especially applicable in the context of economic rights and in connection to the possession of adequate documentation. Lack of proper documentation is a pertinent factor in accessing education, in job security, for land tenure and in seeking legal redress.

The violations to this right stem mainly from the non-documentation of generations of Afro-descendants, particularly in Brazil, Colombia's Pacific coast, Ecuador and Peru. Millions of Afro-descendant women, men and children have no birth registration or personal identity documents. This results in a lack of access to most social services, to formal sector employment and to social security (when it exists).<sup>76</sup> This illustrates the transgenerational nature of marginalization and institutional 'invisibility', which affects most Afro-descendants.

Other social security rights deficiencies that have been recorded, include the non-documentation of Afro-Colombian migrant workers in Zulia province, Venezuela, and the denial of birth certificates and nationality to children of Haitian workers for the past 40 years in the Dominican Republic.<sup>77</sup> Information on social security issues, such as access to pensions by older people, and its relevance to income is generally absent.

## Afro-descendant NGOs' perspectives on achieving economic rights

It is unlikely that the gains made so far in highlighting Afro-descendants' marginalization and economic exclusion would have been possible without the relentless advocacy of the Afro-descendant NGOs in Latin America.

Over the past three decades, these community NGOs<sup>78</sup> have facilitated the collection of most of the data for the studies on Afro-descendant exclusion. Even though the data may have been formally compiled and disseminated by multilateral institutions, Afro-descendants have been the main source. It is therefore safe to say that the bulk of currently available information is a direct reflection of Afro-descendant perspectives on their social and economic situation.

Many of these national organizations are now regional and sub-regional networks and umbrella groups. The main umbrella organizations are: the Afroamerica Twenty One Process (AAXXI), the Caribbean Afro-Latin Global Alliance (AGALAC), the Central American Black Organization (ONECA) and the Continental Network of African-American Organizations.

Having achieved a measure of success in raising international awareness, regional and local NGOs now want to promote socio-economic rights through initiating local development programming, and not just by advocacy alone.

The 'Afro-America Declaration XXI, 12 November 1996' that emerged from the IDB Forum, identified the need for Afro-Latin Americans':

*'effective participation in economic production and trade...[this]...requires...(a) Training relevant to present and new markets; (b) The creation of new mechanisms of distribution of income based on production; (c) Compensation for historical inequalities; (d) The materialization of mechanisms for participation; and (e) The protection of the environment and conservation of the tenure of the land in the hands of Afro-Americans, avoiding their displacement by substitution of the population. In Education: (1) to achieve levels of education which would place us in more and better positions of competitiveness, productivity and effectiveness in accordance with present and future scenarios...(4) to shape education into an instrument for the circulation and equitable utilization of the knowledge accumulated in science and technology that can contribute to the improvement of our quality of life.'*

The areas of economic activity that Afro-descendants particularly wished to see addressed were agriculture and agro-industry, ethno-cultural products (i.e. goods based on Afro-descendants' lifestyles and traditions), ethno-ecological tourism, the media, natural medicines/pharmaceuticals and transport.

A continuing constraint on realizing these goals across the region, is that Afro-descendant NGOs are not yet recognized by national and international agencies as being effective project implementing bodies, or as institutions that do more than just represent their communities.

The national NGOs that attempt to function with a community-based development approach are essentially voluntary, irregularly financed and chronically understaffed. They fully understand their communities' needs and the strategies required for change, but lack teams of experienced planners, development professionals, community promoters and extension workers, and the funding to get them. Some manage to obtain small project funding from the European Union (EU), NGOs, bilateral agencies and US foundations, but most Afro-descendant NGOs have difficulties in dealing effectively with the major national and international institutions. As a result of uneven past performance, they are also viewed with suspicion by some in their own constituency as well as within the donor community, especially with regard to their capacity to administer funds.<sup>79</sup>

Therefore the success of NGOs in influencing policy changes has not translated into achieving social and economic rights or development gains. A pressing concern is the need to create legally-registered institutions with the capacity to administer funds that are based directly at the level of the community, and that emerge directly from the residents themselves, and their rural and urban needs.

The experience of communities in Ecuador, Guatemala and Honduras,<sup>80</sup> has shown that empowering people at the community level increases local leaders' ability to organize people in their own communities, and to acquire the technical skills needed to help formulate and advance their own local development agendas.

## Conclusion

### Economic arguments for eliminating discrimination and exclusion

In a pragmatic and culturally unbiased global environment, it would be easy to argue that economic exclusion and discrimination against Afro-descendants fosters inefficient, dysfunctional and unsustainable regional socio-economic models.

As the data demonstrates, poverty and the economic rights of Afro-descendants are closely tied to the right to work. These rights are severely hampered by racial discrimination on the part of individuals and institutions. Afro-descendants' poorly-paid, low-skilled, gender-specific work profile is the result of years of discrimination and of the low educational attainment levels of most Afro-descendants.

Yet Afro-descendants' presence in and contribution to the region's economy is vast. They are producers of essential goods and services at all levels of society, and represent some 150 million customers.

Despite the manner in which Latin American society consistently perpetuates Afro-descendants' statistical invisibility,<sup>81</sup> they are central to many key areas of production, and the standard of living of the middle-classes in Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, and the capital cities of the region including the USA, could not be maintained without the domestic work contributions of black women and young men.

Moreover, the informal sector that provides goods and services, and feeds the low-income and poorer sectors of the population is sustained by Afro-descendant women making and selling foodstuffs, and Afro-descendant men selling fruit and cold confections in the region's streets. Latin America's quality of life today would be unrecognizable without the active economic presence of Afro-descendants. Yet, like their ancestors centuries before them, they continue not to be properly rewarded economically or even respected socially.

Regarding Brazil, Jeanette Sutherland, concludes that:

*'...The choices made by Brazil's ruling elite in pursuit of capitalist development and inclusion in the world economy have been at the expense of the majority of the population, in particular Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous peoples.'*<sup>82</sup>

The perpetuation of systems and attitudes that confine Afro-descendants to low-paid, racially-defined areas of work, where education plays a limited role in terms of advancement, is therefore seen by many to be only a slightly altered, modern version of slavery. Freedom of movement and advancement in the economic arena is blocked by racial discrimination in education, recruitment and promotion, and by workers' lack of knowledge about their human and economic rights. This forces a large mass of workers to be available consistently to function only as cheap labour in sectors where the 'white' population do not wish to work. This not only stifles the self-development of Afro-descendant workers, but guarantees the continuation of the unequal distribution of income. This dispensation may guarantee a

better quality of domestic life for the middle- and upper-classes of the region but, as in prior eras, it is achieved at the expense of Afro-descendants' rights.

It could also be argued that, if these are the economic gains for the region, from a population that has been educationally and socially suppressed, one can only wonder what the region's economy may be missing by condoning or by continuing to do nothing about eliminating their economic exclusion.

Zoninsein has shown how these practices contributed to the slow economic growth of Latin American and Caribbean countries.<sup>83</sup> Discriminatory employers and institutions who invest less in training Afro-descendant (and indigenous) individuals than 'white' people in Latin America and the Caribbean, fail to invest in a very large section of the population and limit the economic potential of the entire region.

It is perhaps important to recall at this stage, that the demise of both slavery and *apartheid* owed as much to their economic inefficiency as to their moral untenability. In the long term, market discrimination and segmented economies established along racial, ethnic and gender lines diminish productivity, growth and economic development.<sup>84</sup>

With the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in 2005, it would undoubtedly serve the best interests of the region to promote Afro-descendants' inclusion, with a focus on increasing educational opportunities, and decreasing the discrimination and other factors that perpetuate their economic exclusion.

Venezuela's Orlando Machado states:

*'...it is hard to understand why any of our countries do not utilize all the potential at their disposal... We [Afro-descendants] possess factors that improve the competitiveness of our countries...we are ready to enter the fabric of the world economy...with certain minimum requirements [such as the preservation of]...our culture and...the environment...'*<sup>85</sup>

### States' performance on economic rights

Many governments in Latin America are parties to key Conventions and Declarations that have an impact on Afro-descendants' rights. Therefore, there is – at least – an understanding of the need for rights and an agreement about the basic equality of rights.

The performance of these states on issues of racial discrimination and the treatment of minorities show that progress has been made on the legislative front – at least in terms of enacting legislation – but there is far less progress in implementing such legislation. When it comes to policy enforcement, the racial prejudices of the responsible public functionaries serve to prevent effective application. Afro-descendants' are generally not considered, nor are they involved, in the design of development policies and programmes that affect them, particularly policies such as the decentralization of resources to municipalities, where Afro-descendants are demographic majorities, and in economic policies related to non-traditional exports.

Although many countries have begun to introduce legislation to recognize Afro-descendants as minorities, and to

punish racial discrimination, few of these laws are enforced. When they are enforced, their application by the authorities usually discriminates against the interests of Afro-descendants. This is achieved via delays, when the outcome is likely to be beneficial to Afro-descendants, or by undue swiftness when it will work against them. This occurs especially in the titling of property for *ladino* peasants who have encroached upon and occupied Afro-descendant ancestral lands. The most detrimental omission by governments, however, is their failure to establish appropriate institutions to denounce the violations of Afro-descendant social and economic rights, and to demand retribution.

### Means to denounce and redress offences

As discussed, there is no means for Afro-descendants to seek retribution when faced with racial discrimination. There is little legislation and virtually no regulation to make the equality granted in Latin American Constitutions function effectively. Until 1996, with the exception of Argentina and perhaps Costa Rica, no Latin American country had 'effective recourse before competent national tribunals' to deal with such abuses.<sup>86</sup>

The excuse frequently given is that to provide such special rights and advantages would be to discriminate against 'white' people, indigenous groups and *mestizos*. However, Article 2 of ICERD provides for these very measures, which would not be construed as being 'reverse discrimination'.

### Recognition and protection of minorities

Few countries have enacted legislation to recognize the rights of Afro-descendant minorities. The earliest was Brazil, which has enacted some of the most comprehensive constitutional guarantees, recognizing: the need to title lands of *quilombos*, discrimination in the media (Federal Law 8, 01/90 Lei Cao) and racism in the workplace (Law 9455/97).

There is a need to transform the public perception of black people through changes in the formal education curriculum, to incorporate an accurate history, and the contribution of Africans and Afro-descendants in the Americas. Yet, apart from developing a bilingual education curriculum in some Central American countries, no known efforts are being made at any level in the region to change attitudes about race and discrimination.

The reluctance of governments in Latin America to honour their commitments is perhaps so central to the historical and social make-up of these states that it merits the special attention that is reflected in Article 79 of the 2001 WCAR Declaration, where the delegates stated:

*'We firmly believe that the obstacles to overcoming racial discrimination and achieving racial equality mainly lie in the lack of political will, weak legislation*

*and lack of implementation strategies and concrete action by States, as well as the prevalence of racist attitudes and negative stereotyping.'*<sup>87</sup>

It is useful to recall that the exclusion of Afro-descendants in development assistance was glaring until 1996 when the IDB brought it onto the agenda and, through the efforts of the international donor community the issue has begun to permeate national government structures. Movement by some national governments towards recognizing Afro-descendants' needs could have been prompted more by the need to comply with international financial institutions' funding criteria, than by any major policy shift at the national level.

In the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs),<sup>88</sup> only Honduras specifically mentions Afro-descendants by name and includes them in the plan of action. In the strategies of other countries, such as Nicaragua, Afro-descendants are only 'mentioned' by inference, for example, in the need for Nicaragua to pay, 'special attention to rural communities, women, indigenous groups, and the inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast'. More alarming for Afro-Nicaraguans is that the development strategy includes programmes for 'the development of the Atlantic Coast', based on 'an aggressive private sector response'. This expansionist approach is exactly what Nicaragua's Afro-descendants have identified as being the prime threat to their economic rights, their land tenure, their culture and the coastal ecosystem.<sup>89</sup>

For most Afro-descendants and their community NGOs, there are still no significant programmes being designed or implemented expressly for their communities, especially at the kinds of levels required to make an appreciable difference, given their long history of exclusion.

Afro-descendant invisibility in development programmes began to be addressed in 1999, via the IDB and the Census Departments of the region. Since 2002, the censuses have been encouraged to include questions of identity, but with mixed results, often because neither questioner nor questioned are clear about the benefits of counting or being counted.

Afro-descendants' previous lack of participation in programmes is also being improved through more active Afro-descendant NGO involvement in all countries, as shown by their input into the WCAR. While there has been more movement on social inclusion and Afro-descendants' rights since 1996, the statistical information available to clarify its impact is still extremely limited, considering their substantial population.

Latin American states need to act to meet the mandate of full participation in development as set out in the UNDM, the Vienna Declaration and in Articles 92–8 of the WCAR Programme of Action.

## Notes

- 1 The socio-historical experience of indigenous peoples allowed for the retention of key elements of their culture, including cultural organizational characteristics. However, Afro-descendants were forced to endure slavery, which broke up traditional African-based associational structures.
- 2 According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) *Strategy to Reduce Poverty*, February 1997, the number of poor in the region is 181.1 million, with Afro-descendants being 76 million of this figure (some consider this to be an under-estimate).
- 3 Cowater International Inc. (ed.), *Comunidades de Ancestría Africana en Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay y Venezuela*, IDB, Washington DC, 1996, pp. 20–21. (Hereafter referred to in the notes and text as Uruguay, IDB, 1996; Venezuela, IDB, 1996, etc.)
- 4 IDB, 1997, *op. cit.*
- 5 Organization of Africans in the Americas (OAA) (ed.), *Quest for Inclusion: Realizing Afro-Latin Potential*, OAA, Position Paper, vol 1, 2000, p. 6.
- 6 Various MRG publications on Afro-descendants in Latin America are particularly recommended as background reading to this study or for anyone seeking a general overview, as they provide useful information on the culture, history and overall composition of the region's Afro-descendant populations. See [www.minorityrights.org](http://www.minorityrights.org)
- 7 *Forum on Poverty Alleviation for Minority Communities: Communities of African Ancestry in Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela*, Washington DC, IDB, 1996. (Hereafter referred to as IDB Forum, 1996.)
- 8 IDB, *Raza, grupos étnicos y exclusión social en América Latina: ¿que sabemos al respecto?*, IDB, Washington DC, June 2001.
- 9 See Table 1.
- 10 Fitts, M., 'The Mundo-Afro project', *Economic Development in Latin American Communities of African Descent*, Presentations from XXIII International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington DC, September 2001.
- 11 ORBOAFRO, Bolivian NGO contribution, *Invisibilidad y Pobreza del Afro descendiente Boliviano*, Seminario de Consulta a Organizaciones Afrodescendientes, Antigua Guatemala, December 2002.
- 12 Coupal, F., *Overview Experiences, Guidelines and Practical Action for Working with Afro-Latinos, IDB's Experience in Honduras, Guatemala and Ecuador*, prepared for Social Development Division, IDB, 15 May 2001.
- 13 UN Doc. A/CONF.157/24 (Part I) at 20 (1993).
- 14 Oakley, P., 'Social exclusion and Afro-Latinos: a contemporary review', presented at the *Inter America Foundation Panel Presentations from XXIII International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association*, Washington DC, 2001.
- 15 OAA, 2000, *op. cit.*
- 16 These fortified settlements and their populations were known by various names, which they still bear. *Mocambos* and *Quilombos* in Brazil; *Palenques* in Ecuador, Cuba and Colombia; *Jukas* in Suriname; *Cimmarones* in some former colonies; and *Maroons* in Jamaica and other Anglophone areas. These settlements have been very important in preserving ancestral African social and cultural values, languages and aesthetics.
- 17 Viveros, S.E., *AFROECUATORIANOS*, *Seminario de Consulta a Organizaciones Afrodescendientes*, Antigua Guatemala, December 2002.
- 18 ORBOAFRO, 2002, *op. cit.*
- 19 OAA, 2000, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
- 20 Lambert, I., Costa Rica NGO contribution *Afrodescendientes, Discriminación y Exclusión Económica En América Latina*, Seminario de Consulta a Organizaciones Afrodescendientes, Antigua Guatemala, December 2002.
- 21 OAA, 2000, *op. cit.*
- 22 Nobles, M., 'Race and poverty in Latin America: conceptual difficulties'; Guimarães, A.S.A., 'The causes of black poverty in Latin America', from A.S.A. Guimarães, and F. Consoni, *Race and Poverty in Latin America, Interagency Consultation on Afro-Latin Americans, Session 4, Proceedings of the Roundtable held June 19, 2000 in Washington DC*.
- 23 Latin America's racial structure has been described as a pyramid characterized by a small group of 'white' people at the top who formally and informally manage the process of exclusion. Below these are scores of progressively darker-skinned human layers each one discriminating against the subordinate colours to obtain benefits derived from being whiter. (OAA, 2000, *op. cit.*)
- 24 The census used the height/weight of children as an indicator of malnutrition.
- 25 Some 91 per cent of Afro-Honduran women practise breastfeeding for 12 months after birth and children are given a traditional natural cereal as a supplement. Also rural Afro-descendant communities meet their subsistence needs across Latin America, with relatively nutritious food resources, which do not require cash outlays. They also do not require technologies that are much different from those traditionally used for the past 200 years.
- 26 Honduras Poverty Reduction Strategy, [poverty.worldbank.org/files/Honduras\\_PRSP.pdf](http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/Honduras_PRSP.pdf)
- 27 Arias, O., Yamada, G. and Tejerina, L., *Education, Family Background and Racial Earnings Inequality in Brazil*, IDB, September 2002.
- 28 Terms such as 'slum-dweller', for example, are among the most frequently used racial insults in Brazil.
- 29 Zoninsein, J., 'The economic case for combating racial and ethnic exclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean countries', *Towards a Shared Vision of Development*, Washington DC, IDB, 2001.
- 30 A *ladino/a* is a person of Spanish descent, culture or mixture in Latin America.
- 31 IDB studies, 1996, *op. cit.*; see also MRG (ed.), *Afro-Central Americans: Rediscovering the African Heritage*, London, MRG, 1996.
- 32 ORBOAFRO, 2002, *op. cit.* The Yungas are humid forested zones in western Bolivia, to the north-east and north of La Paz and Cochabamba.
- 33 ORBOAFRO, 2002, *op. cit.*
- 34 While the dominant class in Latin America consistently promoted European norms and values, and deculturation from the African past, it was not unusual for them to protect isolated cultural values of Afro-descendant and indigenous populations, but only to the extent that this helped to reinforce the unequal social structure.
- 35 Costa, D.C.T., 'Portrait of Afro-Brazilian craftswomen', *Economic Development in Latin American Communities of African Descent*, Washington DC, 2001, p. 43. However, there have been positive developments on cultural heritage in Honduras, see [poverty.worldbank.org/files/Honduras\\_PRSP.pdf](http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/Honduras_PRSP.pdf)
- 36 IDB Forum, 1996, *op. cit.*
- 37 See Thovin, M., 'The economic exclusion of women of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean', 2003, background document for this MRG study.

- 38 Guimarães, and Consoni, 2000, *op. cit.*
- 39 Nelson, C.A., 'Race and ethnicity as factors in economic development in the Americas: towards a new paradigm for development assistance', Presented at the Conference on Women, Ethnicity, Race and International Human Rights: Intersections in the Americas, 25–7 February 1999, New York.
- 40 CAMAFROH, *Youth Group Conclusions at Evaluation Workshop of Foro sobre el Fortalecimiento de Comunidades Afro-Hondureñas*, Travesía, Honduras, 18 October 2001.
- 41 OAA, 2000, *op. cit.*; and IDB Forum, 1996, *op. cit.*
- 42 This was particularly the case in the 1980s. ODECO, Honduran NGO contribution, *Seminario de Consulta a Organizaciones Afrodescendientes*, Antigua Guatemala, December 2002.
- 43 Some 50,000–100,000 Honduran Garífuna live in the USA. Their remittances provide an importance source of foreign exchange for the country.
- 44 Community census in the *barrios* of San José and Pueblo Nuevo, Livingstone, Grassroot Community Building Project, CAMAFROH, 2001.
- 45 Grassroots Community Building Project (in Honduras), CAMAFROH, 2001.
- 46 Cowater International Inc. (ed.), *Costa Rica Country Report, Poverty Alleviation Program for Minority Communities in Latin America*, Washington DC, IDB, 1995.
- 47 Cowater International Inc. (ed.), *Ecuador Country Report, Poverty Alleviation Program for Minority Communities in Latin America*, Washington DC, IDB, 1995.
- 48 Venezuela, IDB, 1996.
- 49 Argentina, IDB, 1996.
- 50 OAA, 2000, *op. cit.*
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 ORBOAFRO, *op. cit.*
- 53 Thorne, E.T., 'Ethnic and race-based political organization and mobilization in Latin America: lessons for public policy', Submitted at the Dialogue on Race, Ethnicity and Inclusion, Washington DC, IDB, 2001.
- 54 ORBOAFRO, *op. cit.* Peru, IDB, 1996.
- 55 Bolivia, IDB, 1997; ORBOAFRO, *op. cit.*
- 56 Gallardo, A.J.E., *Colombian Legislation: Regulations Governing Afro-Colombian Communities, National and International Law Perspectives*, LCR Sustainable Development Working Paper No. 9, Race and Poverty: Interagency Consultation on Afro-Latin Americans, Proceedings of the Roundtable Washington DC, November 2000.
- 57 'In Apartadó...a Black person had a large farm he was forced to sell 20 years ago for 5,000 pesos. That property was sold again three years ago for 5,000 million pesos. This illustrates how they have been displacing us.' Statement by Cerén Villorino Guillermo, 'Cooperativas y microempresas de productores rurales', IDB Forum, 1996.
- 58 Viveros, *op. cit.* See also Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, IDB, 1995.
- 59 Ecuador, IDB, 1995.
- 60 UDHR Article 26; ICESCR Article 13.
- 61 CAMAFROH (ed.), *Grassroots Community Building Project, Livingstone Neighborhood Census*, 2001 (unpublished).
- 62 ODECO (ed.), *Exclusion Económica de Afrodescendientes en Honduras*, Honduras, 2002.
- 63 Ecuador, IDB, 1995.
- 64 Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, IDB, 1996.
- 65 Argentina, Uruguay, IDB, 1996.
- 66 Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, 1996.
- 67 ASOMUGAGUA, Guatemala NGO contribution *Seminario de Consulta a Organizaciones Afrodescendientes*, Antigua Guatemala, December 2002.
- 68 Francis, S., in the Seminario-Taller de Consulta, Antigua Guatemala, December 2002.
- 69 Arratia, R., 'Desarrollo de un curriculum que fomente la equidad', IDB Forum, 1996.
- 70 Degler, C.N., *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1971, pp. 164–5.
- 71 ICESCR Article 12; MWC Article 30 (for workers' children).
- 72 Cited in ODECO, *op. cit.*
- 73 IDB Forum, 1996.
- 74 Hurricane Mitch did much damage to coconut trees in Central America on the coasts where Afro-descendants predominate, and 80 per cent of the people affected by floods in Venezuela were Afro-descendants.
- 75 UDHR Article 22; MWC Article 27; ICESCR Articles 9 and 10; etc.
- 76 OAA, 2000, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
- 77 *Ibid.*
- 78 Many of the Afro-descendant community NGOs were started by professionals who were influenced by the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s, and wished to see change occur in their countries. Having managed to overcome the many obstacles to their own social advancement, they wished to give something back to their communities.
- 79 OAA, 2000, *op. cit.*
- 80 Grassroots Community Strengthening Project, *op. cit.*
- 81 Except in the data on crime.
- 82 Sutherland, J., 'Economic development versus social exclusion: the cost of development in Brazil', *Economic Development in Latin American Communities of African Descent*, Inter-American Foundation, 2001.
- 83 Zoninsein, *op. cit.*
- 84 Nelson, C., in a speech referring to H.A. Patrinos, *The Costs of Discrimination in Latin America*, World Bank, 1995.
- 85 Machado, O., 'Inversión en las comunidades negras', IDB Forum, 1996.
- 86 OAA, 2000, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
- 87 *Report of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance*, Durban, September 2001.
- 88 See [poverty.worldbank.org/files/Bolivia\\_PRSP.pdf](http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/Bolivia_PRSP.pdf), see also [poverty.worldbank.org/files/Nicaragua\\_PRSP.pdf](http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/Nicaragua_PRSP.pdf), [poverty.worldbank.org/files/Honduras\\_PRSP.pdf](http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/Honduras_PRSP.pdf)
- 89 IDB, *op. cit.*, 1995 and Oakley, P., 'Creoles on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua', *Social Exclusion and Afro-Latinos, a Contemporary Review* (Draft), IDB, 2000.

## Bibliography

- Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights, 'Protocol of San Salvador', OAS, 1988.
- Afroamérica XXI, *Situación de los Afrolatinoamericanos y Recomendaciones para la Acción*, Conferencia Muncial contra el Racismo, la Discriminación Racial, la Xenofobia y las Formas Conexas de Intolerancia, OAA, 2000.
- Arias, O., Gustavo, Y. and Tejerina, L., *Education, Family Background and Racial Earnings Inequality in Brazil*, IDB, 2002.
- Banco Inter-Americano de Desarrollo (IDB) (ed.), *Procedimientos del Foro Sobre Alivio a la Pobreza en Comunidades Minoritarias en América Latina*, Washington DC, IDB, 1996.
- Banco Inter-Americano de Desarrollo (IDB), *Sub-Programmea Diagnóstico de la Situación del Negro en Bolivia*, Programmea de Alivio a la Pobreza en Comunidades Minoritarias en América Latina, Bolivia, 1997.
- CAMAFROH (ed.), *Foro Sobre el Fortalecimiento de Comunidades Afro-Hondureñas*, Honduras, 2001.
- Convention (No. 169) concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, ILO, 1991.
- Cottrol, R.J. and Hernandez, T.K., 'The role of law and legal institutions in combatting social exclusion in Latin American countries: Afro-American populations', *Towards a Shared Vision of Development*, Washington DC, IDB, 2001.
- Cowater International Inc. (ed.), *Costa Rica Country Report, Poverty Alleviation Program for Minority Communities in Latin America*, Washington DC, IDB, 1995.
- Cowater International Inc. (ed.), *Ecuador Country Report, Poverty Alleviation Program for Minority Communities in Latin America*, Washington DC, IDB, 1995.
- Cowater International Inc. (ed.), *Honduras Country Report, Poverty Alleviation Program for Minority Communities in Latin America*, Washington DC, IDB, 1995.
- Cowater International Inc. (ed.), *Nicaragua Country Report, Poverty Alleviation Program for Minority Communities in Latin America*, Washington DC, IDB, 1995.
- Davis, D.J., *Afro-Brazilians: Time for Recognition*, London, MRG, 1999.
- Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, UN, 1992.
- Degler, C.N., *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1971.
- Inter-American Foundation (ed.), *Economic Development in Latin American Communities of African Descent*, Washington DC, 2001.
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, UN, 1976.
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, UN, 1968.
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, UN, 1990.
- Lambert, I., *Afrodescendientes, Discriminación y Exclusión Económica en América Latina, Seminario de Consulta a Organizaciones Afrodescendientes*, Antigua Guatemala, December 2002.
- MRG (ed.), *Afro-Central Americans: Rediscovering the African Heritage*, London, MRG, 1996.
- MRG (ed.), *No Longer Invisible*, London, MRG, 1995.
- Morrison, J., *Cashing In on Afro Latin Communities: Strategies for Promoting Grassroots Initiatives*, Inter-American Foundation, 2001.
- Oakley, P., 'Social exclusion and Afro Latinos', *Towards a Shared Vision of Development*, Washington DC, IDB, 2001.
- OAA, *Quest for Inclusion: Realizing Afro-Latin American Potential*, Position Paper, vol. 1, 2000.
- ODECO (ed.), *Seminario de Consulta a Organizaciones Afrodescendientes*, Antigua Guatemala, December 2002.
- ORBOAFRO (ed.), 'Invisibilidad y Pobreza del Afro descendiente Boliviano,' Bolivian NGO contribution, *Afrodescendientes, Discriminación y Exclusión Económica En América Latina*, Antigua Guatemala, December 2002.
- Sutherland, J., *Economic Development versus Social Exclusion: The Cost of Development in Brazil*, Inter-American Foundation, 2001.
- Thorne, E., 'Ethnic and race based political organization and mobilization in Latin America: lesson for public policy', *Towards a Shared Vision of Development*, IDB, Washington DC, 2001.
- UN (Doc A/CONF.189/12), *Report of the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance*, UN, 2001.
- United Nations Millennium Declaration, UN, 2000.
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN, 1948.
- Viveros, S.E., *AFROECUATORIANOS, Ecuador NGO contribution Afrodescendientes, Discriminación y Exclusión Económica En América Latina, Seminario de Consulta a Organizaciones Afrodescendientes*, Antigua Guatemala, December 2002.
- Zoninsein, J., 'The economic case for combating racial and ethnic exclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean countries', *Towards a Shared Vision of Development*, Washington DC, IDB, 2001.

## Recommendations

1. People of African descent (Afro-descendants) should be recognized as a distinct group. This recognition should be constitutionally entrenched.
2. In line with Article 99 of the WCAR Programme of Action, governments should elaborate national action plans to combat discrimination, particularly in education, employment, health care, housing and social security. Mechanisms to ensure the implementation of non-discrimination laws should be established.  
In line with Article 8 (a) of the Programme of Action, international financial and development institutions should devise specific programmes for Afro-descendants, including: 'allocating additional investments to health systems, education, housing, electricity, drinking water and environmental control measures and promoting equal opportunities in employment'. These actions should be carried out in collaboration with Afro-descendants.
3. Disaggregated, gender-specific quantitative data should be systematically collected to monitor the realization of Afro-descendants' economic and social rights. This should be collected with Afro-descendants' full understanding, participation and consent, and publicized, including in all state reports on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
4. Further research on the causes of Afro-descendants' poverty is needed to improve strategies for overcoming the particular barriers, including discrimination, that they face. Afro-descendants should be involved in the production of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, and in any review and monitoring plans. Social impact assessments for trade and economic development agreements should examine the impact on Afro-descendants.
5. The right to education for Afro-descendant communities must be fulfilled in order to achieve the MDG of universal enrolment for primary education. This means ensuring wide access to bilingual and inter-cultural education, improving resources to schools serving Afro-descendant communities, and tackling discrimination in schools and in the curriculum. Special measures are needed to ensure that Afro-descendants can obtain and complete secondary and tertiary education on an equal basis.
6. The low and underemployment rates of Afro-descendants should be addressed. All aspects of the right to work, including equal and adequate wages, safe and non-discriminatory working conditions, and non-discrimination in recruitment and promotion, should be safeguarded for Afro-descendants via special measures, laws and monitoring. Particular attention should be paid to gender discrimination and the protection of Afro-descendants as migrant workers. Programmes of support to Afro-descendants' small and medium-sized businesses, and access to credit, should be established.
7. The land rights of Afro-descendants should be legally recognized and secured. Land titling processes should be expedient, transparent and accessible. Land rights in relation to land used for agricultural production and other economic activities should also be recognized.
8. Afro-descendants' NGOs should participate in development planning, implementation and monitoring. They should be supported to build their technical capacity to realize their right to fully participate in these areas.

**Minority Rights and Development** This study is published as part of MRG's Minority Rights and Development Programme. This research and advocacy programme was established by MRG and its partners to address the development-related exclusion and marginalization of minority and indigenous communities, and to work towards the elimination of poverty.

**Acknowledgements** MRG and its programme partners gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Danida and DFID, and the advice of the expert readers who commented on this study. Project coordinator: Angela Haynes. Editor: Katrina Payne.

**Authors** Margarita Sanchez and Maurice Bryan are development consultants with many years of experience of these issues; with ADEPHCA, Asociación Proyecto Caribe, ASOMUGAGUA, Movimiento de Mujeres Negras, ODECO and ORBOAFRO.

**Afro-descendants, Discrimination and Economic Exclusion in Latin America** © Minority Rights Group International, May 2003.

**ISBN 1 904584 05 5.** This study is published as a contribution to public understanding. The text does not necessarily represent in every detail the collective view of MRG or its partners. Copies of this macro study are available on line at [www.minorityrights.org](http://www.minorityrights.org). Copies can also be obtained from MRG's London office.

**Minority Rights Group International (MRG)** is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working to secure the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples worldwide, and to promote cooperation and understanding between communities. Our activities are focused on international advocacy, training, publishing and outreach. We are guided by the needs expressed by our worldwide partner network of organizations which represent minority and indigenous peoples. MRG has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and observer status with the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights. MRG is registered as a charity, no. 282305, and a company limited by guarantee in the UK no. 1544957.

**Minority Rights Group International** 379 Brixton Road, London SW9 7DE, UK

**Tel** +44 (0)20 7978 9498 **Fax** +44 (0)20 7738 6265 **Email** [minorityrights@mrgmail.org](mailto:minorityrights@mrgmail.org) **Website** [www.minorityrights.org](http://www.minorityrights.org)