

Indigenous and Afro-descendent Populations

Reaching the people in greatest needs

Indigenous and afro-descendent populations represent 40% of the region's total population and are mostly living in poverty. The states of the region must support the improvement of the social and economic condition of indigenous and afro-descendent populations if countries are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

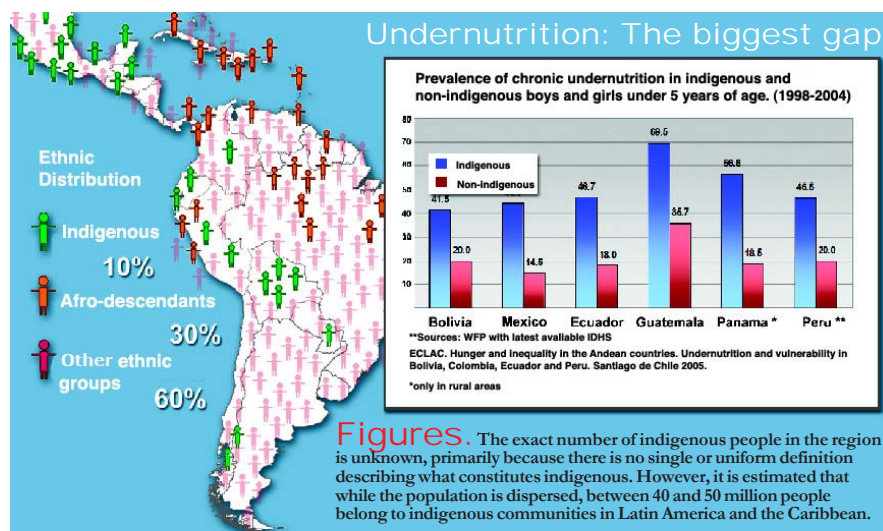
Latin America and the Caribbean is a broad and diverse region with a multi-ethnic and multicultural character. At the same time, it is one of the most unequal areas of the world, with great geographic, social, economic, and cultural disparities existing not only among the countries that comprise it, but also within them. Despite the fact that indigenous and afro-descendent groups represent 40% of the region's population, they still suffer major consequences of inequality and exclusion.

Indigenous groups, which add up to 40 to 50 million people (among 8-10% of the region's population), and afro-descendent populations, including some 150 million people (30% of the regional population), face high indices of poverty, limited access to health services, chronic undernutrition, high levels of infant mortality, low literacy levels, and minimal opportunities for political participation and representation. Throughout the region, indigenous groups earn less income than non-indigenous people.

It is estimated that 92% of afro-descendents in the region live in poverty. For millions of them, access to education, nutrition, and public health services is very limited. Like indigenous communities, they have poor social and economic indicators.



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The term "afro-descendent", on the other hand, refers to the black or African American cultures that descend from ancestors of African origin. Almost 150 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean belong to this ethnic and population group.



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Over the past 40 years, governments in the region have committed to improving the health, nutrition, and education indicators for afro-descendent and indigenous peoples. Resources have been assigned for the development and implementation of policies, strategies, and programs to achieve this goal. However, despite the progress made in the region towards reducing national poverty averages, indicators for indigenous and afro-descendent groups do not show progress towards poverty reduction, access to adequate health services, improvement in access to and quality of education, and other socioeconomic indicators. In fact the social gap that these groups face has increased. This situation is made even worse by migration and displacement, which affect both indigenous and afro-descendent groups in countries throughout the region.

Within these population groups, women and children experience the greatest marginalization, suffering from high birthrates and levels of infant mortality, high indices of poverty, limited access to health and sanitation services, illiteracy, low school attendance, poor educational quality, and precarious work situations for women.

For these reasons, WFP is working in collaboration with governments in Latin America and the Caribbean to provide assistance to these communities, which are the poorest and most vulnerable in the region.

In 2008, WFP provided assistance to some 9 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean, the majority of whom were indigenous or afro-descendent.

WFP's Concrete Recommendations for Overcoming Exclusion and Inequality

- 1 ■ Adequately meet the nutritional needs of children under three years of age and pregnant and breastfeeding women belonging to indigenous and afro-descendent groups.
- 2 ■ Provide mechanisms that allow households to make investments in human capital through education and training.
- 3 ■ Support the ability of households to access basic goods.
- 4 ■ Develop tools that allow households to make better use of natural resources, thereby avoiding natural resource degradation and supporting the development of more sustainable livelihoods over the long term.
- 5 ■ Mitigate the effects of natural disasters in vulnerable areas.
- 6 ■ Support the creation or strengthening of social protection networks.

WFP in action



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WFP's portfolio of activities has promoted the participation and prioritization of indigenous and afro-descendent groups and the Caribbean since its inception. In fact, the majority of people who receive assistance from WFP and its partners in the region are indigenous and afro-descendent, located primarily in rural zones or marginalized urban areas. WFP targets these groups using tested instruments and tools, including Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM).

Food assistance is vital to school feeding and maternal-child health projects, for leveraging production activities, increasing income levels, and stimulating food production. These tools both improve food security in the short term and allow communities to actively participate in their own development processes.

In collaboration with governments, WFP has developed a number of food and emergency assistance activities with a special focus on indigenous and afro-descendent people in Belize, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic.

The experience acquired through these activities allows us to identify the types of strategies required to provide these communities with appropriate assistance taking into account their cultural traditions, aspirations, and potential within the economy and society.



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Gaillard Avenue, Vicente Bonilla Street
 Building 124 - 125, Clayton
 P.O Box: 0819-10751, Zona 6, El Dorado
 Panamá, Republic of Panamá
 Tel: (507) 317-3900
 Fax: (507) 317-3903