

Incorporating Race and Ethnicity into the UN Millennium Development Goals

Edward E. Telles

In 2000, all UN member countries pledged to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—a set of social development targets to be reached by 2015. The targets include cutting by half the percentage of persons living on less than one dollar a day, providing every child with a primary education, reducing child mortality by two-thirds, slashing maternal mortality by three-quarters, and halving the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. The MDGs themselves are silent on the question of race, but the declaration of the World Conference against Racism, adopted by all Latin American and Caribbean countries, urges states to close the social gaps caused by racial discrimination in such MDG target areas as illiteracy, primary education, infant and child mortality, general and reproductive health, and access to safe drinking water. Aside from Brazil, however, where statistics have been collected for years, the lack of reliable data on African descendants and indigenous groups has made it difficult to design and implement remedial policies to address discrimination in Latin America.

Measured by global standards, most of Latin America is made up of middle income countries—many of which will reach a significant number of the MDGs with little difficulty. But, in nearly every case, these countries will leave most of their Afro-descendant and indigenous populations behind. Brazil, for example, appears likely to meet five of the seven MDGs, but the

country's Afro-descendant population will be excluded from this accomplishment. The challenge for Brazil and other nations is not merely to achieve the MDGs; it is to reach them for all racial and ethnic groups.

Pervasive Lack of Data

Available data suggest that Afro-descendant and indigenous populations in Latin America are far more likely than citizens of European origin to live in poverty, be illiterate, die at a younger age, reside in substandard housing, and suffer from police abuse. Most observers agree that racial discrimination is a major cause of these disparities, but more data are needed to differentiate the various factors fostering inequality.

Outside of Brazil, data on Afro descendants are scarce. Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay completely lack census data for their Afro-descendant populations; Costa Rica and Ecuador collected these statistics for the first time in 2000, and Honduras in 2001. Only a few countries regularly collect data on race in their household surveys. Even where race and ethnic data are collected, they usually are not sufficient to measure progress toward most MDG targets. For example, data on infant mortality, maternal mortality, and access to potable water are rarely disaggregated by race.

Two flawed assumptions are often used to justify inattention to racial data. The first is that racial inequalities are the result of class and regional disparities and, there-

(continued on page 2)



INTER-AMERICAN
DIALOGUE

Race Report

“**The challenge is not merely to achieve the MDGs; it is to reach them for all racial and ethnic groups.**”

Foreword

Persistent gaps between blacks and whites make it highly unlikely that Latin America will meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for all of its citizens before 2015. The region has one of the highest levels of inequality in the world. Despite rising socioeconomic levels for nations as a whole, African descendants—who represent one-third of the population—make up over half of those counted as poor. In spite of growing awareness of the importance of race issues, most countries still do not collect basic data on race, thereby limiting our understanding of the condition of blacks in the region.

This report by Edward Telles provides an overview of the current state of people of color in Latin America and the pervasive lack of data required to track the progress toward meeting the MDGs for Afro descendants and indigenous. The report was prepared with support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and other participants in the Inter-Agency Consultation on Race in Latin America (IAC).

The IAC is a consultative group of eight international institutions working together to address issues of racial discrimination, social exclusion, and related concerns of African-descendant populations in Latin America. In addition to the IDB, the core members of the IAC are the World Bank, Pan-American Health Organization, British Department for International Development, Inter-American Foundation, Ford Foundation, OAS Commission on Human Rights, and Inter-American Dialogue, which serves as the IAC secretariat.

Judith Morrison
Executive Director, Inter-Agency
Consultation on Race in Latin America

(continued from page 1)

fore, collecting data by race is unnecessary. The second assumption is that racial classifications are so subjective that they are not useful for understanding social inequalities.

Research has demonstrated that race significantly affects income, even when class, education, gender, and labor-market characteristics are taken into account. In Brazil, white men are more likely to move into higher status occupations than black or brown men who have fathers with similar occupational origins. Brazil's extensive miscegenation has resulted in a significant population of siblings of different racial classifications, allowing researchers to control for all other relevant social and economic variables that would predict educational achievement, aside from race. One such study indicated that white boys and girls have greater educational success than their non-white sisters and brothers.

The second assumption—that racial classification itself is meaningless in Latin America and the Caribbean—is negated by studies that show that different procedures for racial classification tend to produce consistent results.

Brazilian Data on Afro Descendants

Brazil has collected racial data in six of its seven modern censuses since 1940 and in most annual household surveys since 1976. Moreover, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) has made the data available electronically for at least 25 years. Since 1991, the IBGE has asked respondents to select their “race or color” from among five options: white, brown, black, yellow or Asian, and indigenous.

Any variable that is collected in the Brazilian Census or National Household Survey can be tabulated by race or ethnicity and broken down by region or locale, making

Table 1. MDG-Related Indicators for White and Combined Black and Brown Populations in Brazil, 1996–99

	White	Black and Brown
Percent poor	23	48
Infant mortality (per 1,000)	37	62
Child (under 5 years) mortality (per 1,000)	46	76
Mean years of education	7	5
Percentage with access to piped water	83	62

Sources: Jaccoud and Beghin (2002) for percentage poor. All other information is available at [www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/condicao/condicao.aspx](http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/condicao/condicao/condicao.aspx).

Table 2. Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Poverty in Four Latin American Countries (Percent)

Country	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Bolivia (2002)	74	53
Guatemala (2000)	74	38
Mexico (2002)	90	47
Peru (2000)	63	43

Source: Hall and Patrinos (2006).

the nation's data collection system a useful model for the region. Using IBGE data, social scientists have documented Brazil's racial inequality and shown that it is largely due to racial discrimination. These studies have helped fuel Brazil's dramatic change in attitude over the past quarter century. Many Brazilians no longer consider their country to be a racial democracy; rather, they acknowledge the existence of discrimination and support government remedies such as affirmative action.

Table 1 presents Brazilian data related to the MDGs. The table shows that the percentage of whites in poverty is less than half that of blacks and browns. Large gaps exist between whites and blacks-browns in infant and child mortality, years of education, and access to piped water. Furthermore, Brazilian data from 1976 to the present show that, even as blacks and browns have progressed, they have lost ground with respect to whites over the years.

Existing Data on Indigenous Peoples

Information on MDG indicators is available for indigenous peoples in several countries. Indigenous populations in Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru are much poorer than their non-indigenous counterparts (Table 2). In Mexico, for example, 90 percent of the indigenous population lives in poverty, while less than half of non-indigenous peoples are poor.

There are similar disparities in educational attainment, income, and the economic returns to education. Ethnic differences in rural areas are especially striking (Table 3). Table 4 shows large gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in their respective access to potable water and sewerage.

Conclusion

Afro descendants and indigenous peoples clearly are at the bottom of the social pyramid throughout Latin America. Studies suggest that a major part of racial and ethnic disparity can be explained by racial discrimination. Race is important in predicting outcomes

“Brazilian data show that the percentage of whites in poverty is less than half that of blacks and browns.”

“ In Mexico,
90 percent of the
indigenous population
lives in poverty. ”

Table 3. Adult Male Mean Years of Schooling and the Impact on Earnings by Ethnic Group in Five Latin American Countries

Country and Ethnic Group	Mean Years of Schooling	Indigenous/Non-Indigenous Earnings Ratio	Rate of Return to Schooling
Urban Bolivia (1989)			
Indigenous peoples	7	0.6	6
Non-indigenous	10		9
Rural Bolivia (1966)			
Indigenous peoples	1	0.7	–
Non-indigenous	5		–
Guatemala (1989)			
Indigenous peoples	2	0.4	9
Non-indigenous	5		11
Mexico (1989)			
Indigenous peoples	4	0.3	9
Non-indigenous	7		9
Peru (1991)			
Indigenous peoples	7	0.4	3
Non-indigenous	10		6
Paraguay (1990)*			
Guaraní	8	0.6	8
Spanish	11		8

Source: Flórez, Medina, and Urrea (2001).

* Classification in Paraguay was based on the individual's predominant language.

Table 4. Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Men and Women with Access to Potable Water and Sewerage in Guatemala and Bolivia, 1989 (Percent)

Country	Water	Sewerage
Guatemala		
Non-indigenous male	75	44
Indigenous male	65	23
Non-indigenous female	82	58
Indigenous female	72	31
Bolivia		
Non-indigenous male	42	52
Indigenous male	16	30
Non-indigenous female	38	59
Indigenous female	18	37

Source: Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (1994).

such as income, even after class, region, and other labor market variables are held constant. More data, however, are needed to gain a fuller picture of the impact of discrimination and to design remedies to bridge the racial and ethnic gaps.

The international community has defined the MDGs as targets for human development to be met by 2015. It is imperative that these goals be met for all racial and ethnic groups. Afro descendants and indigenous populations will not achieve the MDGs, however, unless specific attention is paid to these groups.

References

- Barros, Ricardo Pães de, Roseanne Mendonça, and T. M. Velazco. 1996. "O Papel da Cor no Processo de Estratificação Social." Unpublished manuscript. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto de Pesquisas Economicas Aplicadas.
- Cunha, Estela M. Garcia de Pinto da. 1996. *Diferenciais na Mortalidade dos Menores de Um Ano Segundo Raça: Novas Constatações*. Anais do XI Encontro Nacional de Estudos Populacionais da ABEP. Caxambu: Associação Brasileira de Estudos Populacionais.
- Flórez, Carmen Elisa, Carlos Medina, and Fernando Urrea. 2001. "Understanding the Cost of Social Exclusion Due to Race or Ethnic Background in Latin America and Caribbean Countries." Unpublished manuscript. Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank.
- Freyre, Gilberto. 1933. *Casa Grande e Senzala*. Rio de Janeiro: Mia and Schmidt.
- Goyer, Doreen S., and Eliane Domschke. 1983. *The Handbook of National Population Censuses: Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Oceania*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Hall, Gillette, and Harry Anthony Patrinos. 2006. *Indigenous Peoples, Poverty and Human Development in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Hasenbalg, Carlos. 1979. *Discriminação e Desigualdades Raciais no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal.
- Helg, Aline. 1990. "Race in Argentina and Cuba, 1880–1930: Theory, Policies and Popular Reaction." In *The Idea of Race in Latin America*, Richard Graham, ed. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Jaccoud, Luciana, and Nathalie Beghin. 2002. *Desigualdade Raciais no Brasil: Um Balanço da Intervenção Governamental*. Brasília: Instituto de Pesquisa Economica Aplicada.
- Knight, Alan. 1990. "Racism, Revolution and Indigenismo: Mexico 1910–1940." In *The Idea of Race in Latin America*, Richard Graham, ed. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Lovell, Peggy. 1989. "Income and Racial Inequality in Brazil." Ph.D. diss. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida.
- Psacharopoulos, George, and Harry Anthony Patrinos. 1994. *Indigenous People and Poverty in Latin America: An Empirical Analysis*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Silva, Nelson do Valle. 1978. "White-Nonwhite Income Differentials: Brazil." Ph.D. diss. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- . 1985. "Updating the Cost of Not Being White in Brazil." In *Race, Class and Power in Brazil*, Pierre Michel Fontaine, ed. Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Afro-American Studies.
- Stefan, Nancy Leys. 1991. *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Telles, Edward E. 1994. "Industrialization and Racial Inequality in Employment: The Brazilian Example." *American Sociological Review* 59: 46–63.
- . 2004. *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Telles, Edward E., and Nelson Lim. 1998. "Does It Matter Who Answers the Race Question?" *Demography* 35: 465–74.
- United Nations Development Programme. 2003. *Human Development Report 2003*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- World Bank and International Monetary Fund Development Committee. 2004. *Global Monitoring Report 2004: Policies and Actions for Achieving the MDGs and Related Outcomes*. [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEVCOMMIT/Documentation/20193150/DC2004-0006\(E\)-GMR.pdf#search=%22world%20bank%20report%202004%20mdgs%22](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEVCOMMIT/Documentation/20193150/DC2004-0006(E)-GMR.pdf#search=%22world%20bank%20report%202004%20mdgs%22).



INTER-AMERICAN DIALOGUE

The Inter-American Dialogue is the leading U.S. center for policy analysis, exchange, and communication on issues in Western Hemisphere affairs. The Dialogue brings together public and private leaders from across the Americas to address hemispheric problems and opportunities. Together they seek to build cooperation among Western Hemisphere nations and advance a regional agenda of democratic governance, social equity, and economic growth.

The Dialogue's select membership of 100 distinguished citizens from throughout the Americas includes political, business, academic, media, and other nongovernmental leaders. Twelve Dialogue members served as presidents of their countries and more than two dozen have served at the cabinet level.

Dialogue activities are directed to generating new policy ideas and practical proposals for action, and getting these ideas and proposals to government and private decision makers. The Dialogue also offers diverse Latin American and Caribbean voices access to U.S. policy debates and discussions. Based in Washington, the Dialogue conducts its work throughout the hemisphere. A majority of our Board of Directors are from Latin American and Caribbean nations, as are more than half of the Dialogue's members and participants in our other leadership networks and task forces.

Since 1982—through successive Republican and Democratic administrations and many changes of leadership elsewhere in the hemisphere—the Dialogue has helped shape the agenda of issues and choices in inter-American relations.

1211 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 510
Washington, DC 20036

PHONE: 202-822-9002 ■ **FAX:** 202-822-9553

EMAIL: iad@thedialogue.org ■ **WEB SITE:** www.thedialogue.org