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Mapping Inequities in Health and Education Among Afro-descendant Populations in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

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Summary

In order to produce more fact-based evidence and comparable research frameworks profiling exclusions among Afro-descendant populations in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), this project proposes to create interactive, web-based mapping tools using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to map key social, demographic, and economic data about Afro-descendant populations in the LAC region. The value of this pioneering initiative is that it will assist in the development of effective and equitable health and education policies by identifying the specific social, economic and cultural needs and challenges of Afro-descendant populations in LAC.

Project Context

There is a stronger correlation between African descent and poverty than for any other racial or ethnic identification in LAC. According to research by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the African-descendant population in LAC is estimated at between 120 to 150 million people, or close to 40 per cent of the region's population. Ninety-two per cent of this population is very poor. Data from Brazil show that blacks represent 45 per cent of the population, but constitute 64 per cent of the poor and 69 per cent of the extremely poor. Data from Colombia, which has the second largest Afro-descendant population after Brazil, show that blacks constitute about 25 per cent of the Columbian population, and 80 per cent live in conditions of extreme poverty. Trends in development literature and debates increasingly reflect inequities in health and education indicators for Afro-descendants and the rest of the Latin American population. The Chocó region of Colombia, for example, has the country's highest percentage of Afro-Colombians (70 per cent), as well as the lowest per-capita level of government investment in health, education, and infrastructure.

Despite efforts to reduce levels of social inequity through social policy revision and reform, Afro-descendants in LAC continue to be confronted with growing disparities, including relatively poor health and education outcomes. Policy-makers, researchers and communities of practice that are interested in facilitating change in these conditions, need fact-based evidence that is specific to Afro-descendant communities in the LAC region. Existing statistical data collection methods used by government ministries and agencies in the region often lack identification questions for sub-communities, such as Afro-descendants and Indigenous peoples for example. Moreover, the survey methods themselves are often fraught with methodological inconsistencies and lack relevant standardized questions and operational indicators. Identifying comparable indicators of exclusion, for example, is a practice that has precedence in the design of social and economic programs to target inequities in Canada and in the United States. Some countries in the region, most notably Brazil, Ecuador and Peru, have recognized the value of layering their national census with sub-strata of information about African descendant nationals as a first step at understating the inequities. However, if Millennium Development Goals are to be realized in the LAC region, Afro-descendant populations will have to be specifically targeted in development policy and programming.



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One way to highlight the greatest health and education challenges facing the Afro-descendant population in LAC, while facilitating efforts to improve the level and quality of statistical data on Afro-descendant communities, is to apply the existing data to new research frameworks that can guide policymakers, researchers and practitioners to address the following:

- What health and education survey data exist that report on indicators specific to Afro-descendant populations in LAC?
- Is there a significant overlap between areas of high incidence of Afro-descendant populations and low health and education indicators relative to the rest of the population?
- Where are exceptions to this trend observed, and how might these exceptions be studied to provide policy and programming models for improving health and education outcomes in Afro-descendant populations in LAC?

The Proposal

FOCAL proposes to create an interactive, publicly accessible, web-based analytical mapping tool using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to analyze key socio-economic demographic data on Afro-descendant populations in the LAC region. This tool will provide stakeholders with new ways to examine the strong correlation between African descent and poor health and education outcomes in the region. GIS is a Canadian-developed mapping tool that combines the collection, organization, management and analysis of geographic data to allow users to compile and visualize intricate concepts and relationships, as well as to monitor changes over time and identify patterns and trends that are obscure or not captured by written documentation.

The GIS mapping tool will allow users to overlay existing data from national censuses and other official sources that include ethnic origin identification questions with independent variables for health and education in geographic areas in LAC with a high concentration of Afro-descendants. Ultimately, this initiative will facilitate better understanding and examination of the needs and challenges of Afro-descendant populations in LAC with respect to access to health and education. The application of this technology will assemble together large amounts of data previously unavailable to researchers, policy makers, civil society and government officials. More importantly, the visual nature of GIS will allow stakeholders to better understand and interpret the data therefore contributing to the development of new frameworks to guide policy-relevant empirical research and contribute to improving health and education outcomes among Afro-descendant populations in LAC.

It is anticipated that the Mapping Inequities tool will increase the capacity of researchers in the LAC region and Canada to:

- a) Localize and examine the specific variables impacting inequitable health and education outcomes for Afro-descendant populations in the LAC region;
- b) Improve existing statistical data collection methods in the region;
- c) Raise awareness about new and important issues on LAC social inclusion agendas, specifically increased information about health and education conditions among distinct sub-groups; and
- d) Provide new policy options for effective and equitable strategies and programmes in the region.



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In collaboration with Canadian and regional partners, FOCAL will collect statistical data about Afro-descendant populations (e.g. location and social and economic indicators) in LAC, as well as relevant health and education variables (e.g. infant mortality, access to health services, school enrolment and achievement rates). In partnership with GIS experts, the Mapping Inequities tool will be designed to display the data on a series of interactive maps to be used for analysis and research. Utilizing the maps in collaboration with experts and practitioners, a series of narrative and visual reports on relative trends and issues in health and education among Afro-descendant populations will be produced and disseminated to a wide circle of stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, development officials, academics, civil society and government institutions). To further facilitate research and dissemination activities, small grants will be provided to experts to carry out in-depth analysis of the maps and selected data thereby facilitating new policy-relevant research agendas on health, education and Afro-Latino populations. FOCAL and project partners will also develop education seminars and other outreach activities to raise awareness and interest in the utility of the maps.

Partial funding for the project has been secured from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Additional potential partners include the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Health Canada, Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), Latinobarómetro, and Laboratório de Análises Econômicas, Sociais e Estatísticas das Relações Raciais (LAESER), as well as academic and civil society institutions that can contribute to a research agenda and/or provide data and information. FOCAL is currently working with the Geography Department at University of Ottawa, Canada who will act as the GIS technical partner.

About FOCAL

This project proposal builds on FOCAL's successful completion of an innovative GIS mapping project, *Mapping the Media in the Americas*, that is now having an impact on debates about media and democracy in the Americas. The project created interactive maps of media ownership, electoral and socio-demographic information in 11 countries in LAC and Canada, which increased the transparency of the media's role in democratic processes in these countries. These web-based mapping tools are a unique social science and policy research tool that is now being used by academics, civil society and government institutions to conduct research on this fundamental area of democratic development. To better understand how GIS technology leverages data and provides an innovative perspective for researchers, please view the project at **www.mediamap.info**.

The Mapping Inequities project further builds on FOCAL's CanAFRO project (**www.igloo.org/canafro**), an electronic research portal that archives and acts as a clearinghouse for high-quality information and research focused on Afro-descendant communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Celebrating two years after its creation, the CanAFRO project has proven that Afro-descendant populations are of increasing interest to development practitioners and researchers. The success of the initiative was strengthened through partnerships with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the former Inter-Agency Coalition for Race in the Americas (which includes the World Bank, Inter-American Dialogue and the Inter-American Foundation). The research and network base developed as a result of this project will feed the Mapping Inequities project with viable research agendas, partners and resources specific to health and education.