



# Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant voices in the Americas

## Side event exhibit on the margins of the second regular session of the Executive Board 15 November 2022

### Context

It is estimated that almost 33 percent of the population of Latin America –150 million people – are of African descent. According to the World Bank one in four Latin Americans identify as people of African descent. Indigenous peoples represent about 11 percent of the total population in Latin America and the Caribbean numbering around 58 million people. It is a population made up of 800 Indigenous Peoples speaking more than 500 languages, making the region one of the most culturally diverse on the planet.

Indigenous peoples often reside in sites of rich biodiversity and possess rich biocultural diversity and knowledge that has been preserved for generations. The territories they inhabit encompass 28 percent of the surface of the globe and contain 11 percent of the world's forests. Moreover, Indigenous Peoples are guardians to almost 80 percent of the world's remaining biodiversity. Studies show that Indigenous communities with ownership of their land have lower rates of deforestation than neighbouring areas. In the Americas, deforestation was 17 percent lower on average in Indigenous lands compared to unprotected areas due to their knowledge, practices and institutions that prevent over-exploitation.<sup>1</sup> Despite this ecological and cultural richness, 18 percent of Indigenous peoples live below USD 1.90 a day compared to 6.8 per cent of non-Indigenous people<sup>2</sup> and are nearly three times more likely to be extremely poor compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Moreover, Indigenous peoples earn on average 18.5 percent less than non-Indigenous people globally, with the largest wage gap in Latin America and the Caribbean (31.2 percent). On the other hand, more than 82 percent of Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean reside in urban areas often following a pattern of geographic segregation. Moreover, their probability of living in poor or informal neighbourhoods is double that of non-Afro-descendant households.<sup>3</sup> Afro-descendants found in rural areas are often living in remote parts of the country inhabiting fragile ecosystems like the Chocó in Colombia, Esmeraldas in Ecuador and the Atlantic region of Nicaragua.

Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendent communities have significant and validated contributions to the sustainability of the food systems they inhabit. There are multiple examples of territorial or local management practices that are carefully attuned to the ecological and food systems in which they live. These practices have fostered biodiversity preservation and have created food systems that generated food for their communities for generations. Simultaneously, these food systems are changing profoundly and are rapidly influenced by internal and external drivers. These drivers are transforming some of the ancestral or traditional practices and rapidly altering their food systems, resulting in the unsustainable or abandonment of practices. Access to markets is one of the largest factors transforming traditional food systems. Fuelled by improved access to communications, markets are bringing new opportunities in terms of cash generation, new services and goods, and new tastes and foods. At the same time, these food systems are

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<sup>1</sup> The Conversation. 2021. *Indigenous lands have less deforestation than state-managed protected areas in most of tropics*.

<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization. 2019. *Implementing the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169: Towards an inclusive, sustainable and just future*.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank. 2018. *Afro-descendants in Latin America : Toward a Framework of Inclusion*.

increasingly vulnerable to the amplifying effects of climate change and compounding factors, such as economic uncertainty and underemployment. Historically, traditional food systems were resilient by aligning with the cycles of natural resources. As these cycles are disrupted by climate change, so too are their food systems and food security and nutrition<sup>4</sup>.

Indigenous Peoples' food systems have high levels of self-sufficiency ranging from 50 percent to 80 percent in food and resources generation. Their food systems make use of several hundred species of edible and nutritious flora and fauna, including traditionally cultivated crops, crop wild relatives and animal wildlife. However, Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities are feeling the effects of the global dietary transition, with persistently higher malnutrition rates than their non-Indigenous or non-Afro-descendant counterparts worldwide; and increased consumption of highly processed foods associated to chronic cardiovascular diseases. In Latin America, stunting prevalence has experienced a 43 percent reduction (from almost 24 percent in 1990 to 13.5 percent in 2010), and was projected to fall to 10 percent by 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, overall progress hides important within-country inequalities. Multi-country analysis showed a median stunting prevalence among Indigenous children of 31.9 percent (61.4 percent in Guatemala)<sup>5</sup>, which is significantly higher than national reference.

It is crucial to recognize Indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples as key players in achieving the Zero Hunger Agenda. Therefore, we need to create larger spaces for more inclusive dialogues recognizing the lessons to be learned from them. Simultaneously, the support of ancestral agri-food systems practices is critical to their future health, and to the global biodiversity conservation. The aim of this event is to discuss Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants' key role in the world's food systems sustainability and resilience for improved food security nutrition.

## Objectives

The objective of the side event is to raise awareness and foster dialogue with members of Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities to tackle the drivers of intersecting inequalities that affect food security and nutrition in their communities, especially in Latin America. This event supports the discussion on the new country strategic plans that will be presented to the board (in particular Honduras, Ecuador, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia).

## Agenda

- Introductory panel discussion.
- Multimedia exhibit to be left on display for people to see whenever possible during the Executive Board (the video exhibit will consist of short personal stories told by members of these communities).

## Opening of the exhibit

Side Event in November 2022

## Introductory remarks

Mr David Beasley, Executive Director, WFP

H.E. Mario Arvelo, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic,  
Ms Kairen Gutiérrez, Adviser to the Vice-President in the area of Food Security/Sovereignty and Nutrition, Vice Presidency of the Republic, Colombia.

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<sup>4</sup> FAO and Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT. 2021. *Indigenous Peoples' food systems: Insights on sustainability and resilience in the front line of climate change*.

<sup>5</sup> Gatica-Domínguez, G., Mesenburg, M.A., Barros, A.J.D. et al. 2020. *Ethnic inequalities in child stunting and feeding practices: results from surveys in thirteen countries from Latin America*. *Int J Equity Health* 19, 53. Onel Masardule, Director Ejecutivo en Fundacion para la Promocion del Conocimiento Indígena.