

Indigenous Peoples



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Census-based profile of the Mbororos and the Pygmies in the Central African Republic

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One of the poorest and most fragile countries in the world due to many years of political instability and conflict, the Central African Republic has more than 80 ethnic groups, most with their own language. The Mbororos and the Pygmies are among the smallest and most vulnerable of the various ethnic groups. The Mbororos are generally not considered indigenous peoples, but their nomadic lifestyle and ethnic identity sets them apart from other groups. They account for about 1 percent of Central African Republic's population, according to the 2003 census. The Pygmies account for only 0.3 percent of the population in the census. While their semi-nomadic lifestyle has persisted for thousands of years, they are becoming not only more sedentary, but also more disadvantaged and vulnerable. For simplicity of expression in this brief only, "nonindigenous" is defined as all population groups except the Pygmies and Mbororos, even though it is debatable whether the Mbororos are indeed indigenous and whether other population groups could also be considered indigenous.

Good data on the socioeconomic status of indigenous peoples in Africa are scarce, because these groups are often poorly represented in household surveys. This note uses census data on 6,000 self-identifying Mbororo households and 2,200 Pygmy households in the 2003 Central African Republic census to assess their well-being and human development outcomes.

Census data do not include information on consumption, but estimates of wealth can be obtained through factorial analysis of the assets owned by households (including housing characteristics). Slightly fewer than half of the Mbororos are in the poorest wealth quintile, as are nearly 90 percent of the Pygmies (figure 1).

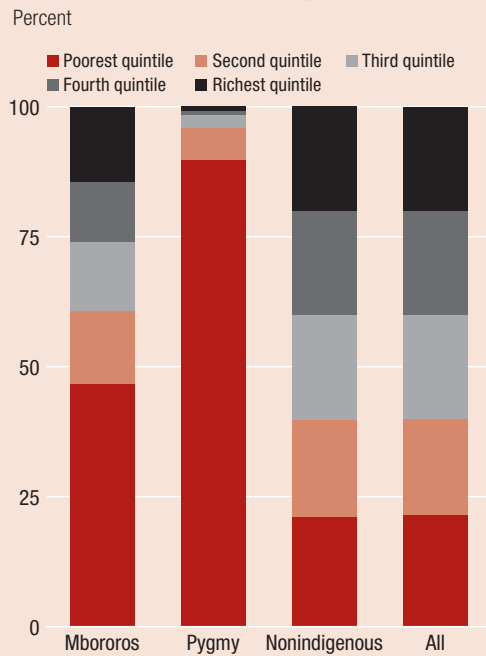
Labor force participation rates among the Pygmies are roughly on par with those among the overall population, but among the Mbororos rates are higher for men and lower for women. Unemployment is typically lower among indigenous groups, probably in part because the Mbororos and the Pygmies are so poor that they cannot afford not to work. But the share of workers who are not paid for their work is again roughly the same among the Pygmies and the overall population but larger among the Mbororos. The Mbororos and especially the Pygmies work more in agriculture and animal husbandry than other groups do, which may contribute to higher poverty and lower wealth, since households whose head works in the agricultural sector tend to be poorer on average than households with heads working in other sectors.

School enrollment rates are much lower among the Mbororos and the Pygmies than among other groups. Gross primary enrollment is only 6.7 percent for the Mbororos (probably due partly to the fact that many Mbororos remain nomadic) and 20.7 percent for the Pygmies, compared with 73.0 percent for nonindigenous peoples. Differences

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FIGURE 1

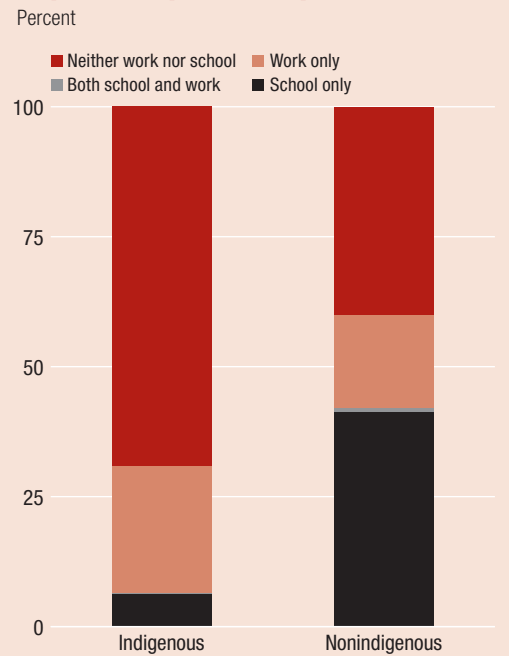
Population share, by quintile of asset-based wealth and ethnicity in the Central African Republic, 2003



Source: Authors' estimates based on 2003 census data.

FIGURE 2

Share of children in school and working in the Central African Republic, by ethnicity, 2003



Source: Authors' estimates based on 2003 census.

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at the secondary level are similarly striking and persist when considering net enrollment rates.

One reason for lower school enrollment among the Mbororos and the Pygmies may be the opportunity cost of schooling in terms of income and other benefits lost if schooling reduces the ability of a child to work and thereby support its family. As is the case in other countries where Pygmies live, in the Central African Republic, indigenous children are more likely to work than children in the rest of the population are (figure 2). At the same time, the probability that indigenous children are neither working nor at school is also higher.

Average years of schooling are 0.3 for men and 0.1 for women among indigenous peoples, compared with 2.8 for men and 1.4 for women among the nonindigenous peoples. Regression analysis shows that even after controlling for other observable characteristics such as household composition, age, geographic location, and the like, indigenous children have a substantial and statistically significant lower probability of being enrolled. The share of households living in a village or area with a health facility is smaller for the Mbororos and the Pygmies than for the population

as a whole, although the differences in distances to health facilities are small. Indicators such as access to condoms are much lower for indigenous peoples, and the share of households that lost a member due to a long-term illness is higher among indigenous peoples than among the overall population, although the share of households that have a lost a member due to HIV/AIDS is smaller.

In terms of infrastructure the Mbororos and pygmies are significantly less likely to have access to safe water and electricity; more likely to live in dwellings whose walls, roof, or floor is made of temporary materials; and less likely to have adequate sanitation facilities.

The 2003 census data for the Central African Republic thus show that the Mbororos and especially the Pygmies are lagging behind the general population in terms of wealth, education, and access to basic infrastructure. While these findings do not point to specific policies that the government could implement to improve the Mbororos' and the Pygmies' living conditions, they do suggest the need for more qualitative and institutional analysis of measures to target these especially vulnerable segments of the Central African Republic's population.