



A regular series of notes highlighting recent lessons emerging from the operational and analytical program of the World Bank's Latin America and Caribbean Region

INCREASING THE PARTICIPATION OF AFRO-DESCENDANTS IN BANK-FUNDED PROJECTS IN HONDURAS, NICARAGUA, AND PANAMA

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"We know about an environment project here, a couple of government employees came here once to talk about it. We traveled to Bluefields to inquire about the necessary process in order for us to participate, and to submit a request as a community. We had the impression that the project would finance whatever we needed in our community, but we were told that that was not the case. We don't know what to do. We have no information."

These were the words of five members of the community board – the local government – of the small community of Pearl Lagoon on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. On a beautiful morning in May 2004, these five community board members met to discuss the participation of Afro-descendants in Bank-funded projects in Honduras. The soft breeze that blew and the shade from the trees not only made this a pleasant meeting place, but set the tone for the discussion.

The story recounted by the community members recurred in community meetings in Honduras and Panama as well. Afro-descendants in Central America are largely underrepresented in society despite their consider number. Throughout the Latin American and Caribbean region, roughly 30% of the region's population of 520 million is of African descent. In Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama¹,

Afro-descendants represent 7.2%² (indigenous people and Afro-Hondurans combined), 13%³ and anywhere between 14 and 77%⁴ of these countries' respective total populations. Afro-descendants are concentrated in a geographic "belt" in the Caribbean/Atlantic coast in all three countries. In Panama, the "belt" crosses the country from north to south near Colón, and continues on to the Pacific coast. Yet, in Central America the question, "Are there Afro-descendants in Central America?" is fairly common.

A World Bank portfolio (projects) review was carried out with the aim of , (i) analyzing the reach of the Bank's Central America Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development (CAESSD) projects in Afro-descendant areas, and (ii) suggesting recommendations for increasing Afro-descendent participation in projects. The review was a combination of field work and desk review and is part of the World Bank's Latin America and Caribbean region's continuing efforts to increase collaboration with indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants.

Poverty maps and Afro-descendant areas

A simple exercise in which government-issued poverty maps were overlaid with Bank-produced maps showing the geographical location of Afro-descendants, indicated that the areas with the highest poverty density (the percentage of the poor living in a given area) were not strongly correlated with the location of Afro-descendants. Despite the general impression that Afro-



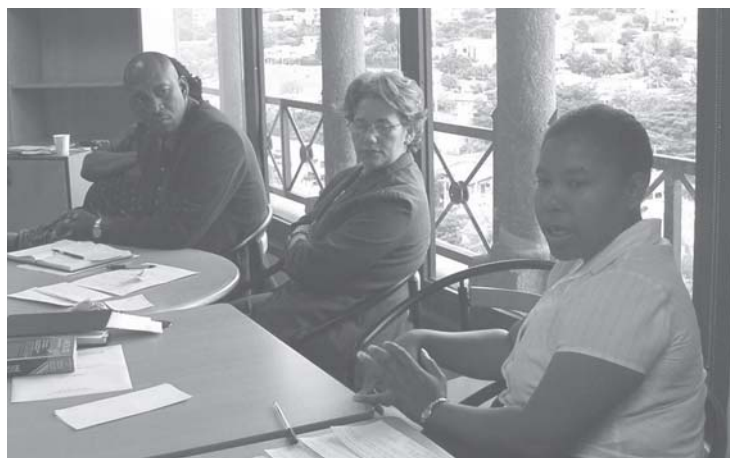
descendants are among the poorest inhabitants, the geographical areas where they have been historically concentrated in are typically considered “medium poverty areas.”

The situation in each country is as follows: Afro-descendants in **Honduras** have higher education levels than the national average. The 2001 Census indicates that Garífunas and Negro Inglés have 9% and 4% illiteracy rates, respectively, compared to the national average of 20%. The statistics also reveal the a considerable gap in this indicator that exists between urban and rural areas in the department of Atlántida; an area with a high concentration of Afro-descendants. In **Nicaragua**, although Afro-descendants may not live in the most impoverished municipalities, they do live in the most isolated and excluded areas of the Atlantic coast. Only 21% of households in this area have access to potable water (the national average is 60%) and 4 to 17.4% have electricity (the national average is 49%). Lack of infrastructure connecting the Atlantic coast to Managua results in a 40-50% increase in the price of seven basic products compared to those in urban cities. **Panama** still has a long way to go to address the issues related to Afro-descendants, and no official data regarding Afro-descendants in the country is available.

Project Reviews

Ten projects were selected for the review based on the following criteria: (i) the project was managed with CAESSD funds; (ii) the project has actual or estimated geographical coverage of areas where Afro-descendants live; (iii) the project was implemented within or as a part of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC) program; and, (iv) the project was implemented in Honduras, Nicaragua or Panama. Through 10 CAESSD projects, a total of \$164.2 million was invested in the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, an area traditionally inhabited by Afro-descendants. This represented 34% of the total amount of CAESSD's projects and grants in fiscal year 2004. There remain, however, large areas inhabited by Afro-descendants that are by-passed by CAESSD projects.

The criteria led to the selection of four projects in Honduras, two in Nicaragua and four in Panama. The specific



projects were as follows:

Honduras: GEF Biodiversity Conservation, Sustainable Coastal Tourism Project, Land Regularization and Administration project (PATH), and sub-regional Mesoamerican Barrier Reef Project. Only in the case of Honduras do all four projects cover the areas where Afro-descendants live; the PATH project covers the entire Caribbean coast of Honduras, while the others do so partially.

Nicaragua: Atlantic Biodiversity Corridor Project and Second Rural Municipal Development Project. The first project covers the Atlantic Coast. The latter contains many innovative components to increase community participation by strengthening rural municipalities, but covers a small area on the southern tip of the Atlantic coast.

Panama: Biodiversity Conservation Project, Effective Protection of the San Lorenzo Protected Area Project, Land Administration Project, and Rural Poverty and Natural Resources Project. Both environmental projects cover the MBC, however, the rural project focuses on the western departments on the Pacific. Nearly half the area where Afro-descendants live in Panama are yet to be impacted by CAESSD projects.

Desk Review: Main Findings and Recommendations

The main findings of the desk review were as follows: (i) a lack of disaggregated data about Afro-descendants presents additional challenges in planning and programming; (ii) there is limited coverage of CAESSD projects in Afro-descendant areas; and (iii) the principle of equity is clearly evident in Bank work - the Bank fights for equal treatment of all (including Afro-descendants) not because of their race but rather because of the conditions in which they live. Recommendations from the desk review include:

- The need for increased support to improve the gathering of disaggregated data on ethnic groups including for Afro-descendants (census, household surveys, poverty assessments, etc).
- The Bank should consider expanding the project areas to reach Afro-descendant communities.
- Afro-descendants should be viewed as active partners in development, and not the objects of development.

Focus Group Meetings: Characteristics and Findings

In yet another day in May, this time in Ensenada, a small community of Garífunas a few kilometers east of Tela, Atlántida, 21 community members gathered to discuss ways of improving the participation of Afro-Hondurans in development projects.

“We need to develop our own capacity in many areas,” said a community member, “so that we can administer the projects funds, analyze information, and understand how the government works with development projects that are destined for our community, so that we can ensure that our community benefits from available resources.” As they pointed out, in many cases, institutional development at the local, regional and national levels, remains a challenge, as well as a priority for more effective programming and project implementation.

To collect more opinions and qualitative information on Afro-descendant participation in Bank-funded projects, three focus group meetings were held in Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama in mid June 2004. A total of 44 representatives participated in the meetings, comprising 50% government counterparts and international organizations, and the other 50% of Afro-descendant civil society representatives and academia; although it proved challenging to maintain this balance. This process was facilitated by the members of the Center for Afro-Cost Rican Women (Centro de Mujeres Afrocostarricenses) in Costa Rica. Each meeting had three clearly defined phases: (i) definition of portfolio review objectives (ii) an open exchange of views; and (iii) suggestions for action-based recommendations.

A wealth of constructive views were shared during the course of the meeting, and a number of concrete actions were suggested. **Nicaragua** had the most balanced group of participants. Clearly well organized, this group clearly have the capacity to contribute significantly to Bank-funded projects in the Atlantic coast region. Although the group in **Honduras** was well-balanced, the overwhelming aggressiveness of one of the civil society representatives toward the public sector representatives (including the World Bank) overpowered the meeting, limiting the other participants’ time and willingness to openly contribute. The focus group meeting in **Panama** was a special case for two reasons: 1) the meeting was held at UNICEF’s Latin America and the Caribbean Region Regional Office [there is no Bank Resident Mission in the country]; and 2) only one of the three invited government counterparts was present at the meeting, and instead of six invited civil society representatives, 20 were unexpectedly present. This created some difficult moments for the government counterpart. However, in the end, the meeting proved to be very constructive. In addition, six civil society representatives from the Central American Black Organization (CABO in English/ONECA in Spanish) had met prior to the meeting, and had prepared a list of seven suggestions on how to increase the participation of Afro-descendants in Bank-financed projects.

In summary, the major findings of the field work included the following: (i) the community’s level of participation is commonly a direct response to their perceived problems; (ii) a social surveillance mechanism is needed (more eyes, less mysteries); (iii) lack of information and communication creates “elephants in the air;” (iv) decentralization and coordination with

local institutions is needed; (v) decentralization of fund management and anti-corruption actions are needed; and, finally (vi) there was a general agreement that the Bank should play a more active role in advocating on behalf of Afro-descendants with national governments.

Recommendations and examples of good practices and/or possible entry points include:

- The use of existing participatory mechanisms to ensure the Afro-community’s participation from project design to evaluation.
- Considerable pay-offs would arise from investment in capacity building for Afro-descendants aimed at making participatory mechanisms function and sustainable.
- The need to integrate the development plans of Afro-descendant communities and organizations at different levels (national, regional, and local) into Bank-funded projects.
- care should be taken to ensure the inclusion of Afro-descendant communities in the areas selected for projects.
- Rather than inventing channels, optimize the use of existing communications networks/ mechanisms for sharing information.
- Provide support to improve the gathering of disaggregated data for ethnic groups, including Afro-descendants.

Conclusions

The portfolio review revealed that:

- (i) There are already many good practices/experiences in operations within as well as outside of CAESSD projects, and these can be expanded: in Nicaragua and Panama, the expansion of the geographical outreach of the projects is



proposed as a way of reaching more actively the Afro-descendant communities;



- (ii) Actively incorporating already existing development plans of Afro-descendants would greatly contribute to the planning, designing and implementing of more strategic programs and projects for Afro-descendants that can include their participation from the initial phase; and
- (iii) Increasing the visibility of Afro-descendants in Bank-funded projects presents a win-win situation for CAESSD and Afro-descendants. The CAESSD will be able to increase the effectiveness of projects and Afro-descendants will be able to contribute to projects where their voices are effectively included.

Country-specific development challenges identified during this portfolio review in terms of increasing the participation of Afro-descendants included:

Honduras: Having reviewed the Bank-funded projects, it was seen that they do indeed reach areas with high concentration of Afro-descendants. A 30-year history of self-organization of Afro-descendants and indigenous groups as well as the ratification of ILO Convention 169, has contributed to making these two groups visible in development projects. Key interventions that will continue and further consolidate the participation of Afro-descendants in Honduras include: 1) strengthening the institutional capacity, particularly of government entities, including the coordination mechanism; 2) continue the advocacy and lobbying effort, to maintain and consolidate the active involvement of Afro-descendants in Bank-funded projects; and 3) bridge the enormous gap between Afro-descendants in rural and urban areas.

Nicaragua: The imminent development of a new Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) for Nicaragua provides a perfect opportunity for the Bank. The CAS could include a new strategy for the Atlantic coast, and the government has already shown interest in undertaking this. Putting a further focus on the Atlantic coast, and ensuring the participation of Afro-descendant communities in Bank-funded projects will be a key element of the new strategy. Key interventions in Nicaragua include: 1) strengthening the public institutional capacity; 2) strengthening open and transparent communication mechanisms between the central government and the communities; 3) supporting the development of an Atlantic Coast Development Plan which recognizes Afro-descendants as well as other indigenous groups; and 4) providing financial and technical assistance to the government to operationalize the communication mechanism for information sharing and coordination mechanism, such as the Comisión Paritaria.

Panama: Afro-descendants are geographically spread throughout the country, making it more challenging to focus on reaching their communities. Panama still has a long way to go in improving the participation of Afro-descendants, and initial interventions could include: 1)

starting open dialogue between the government, the Bank, and Afro-descendant communities; 2) including already existing Afro-descendant development plans in the government's agenda as well as in the Bank's portfolio; and 3) encouraging the government to include questions designed to surface ethnicity in the next census (2010).

As the UNDP's Managua-based Country Officer stated, "The Afro-descendants should be seen as having great potential to become active partners in development projects, instead of being seen as just another of the country's problems which needs a solution. By providing the government with positive data about them, we can change this viewpoint and have them become the subject of human development."

Notes:

¹ Different sources provide different numbers about the estimated number of Afro-descendants in Panama.

² Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2001.

³ De Ferranti, D. et al. 2003. Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean: Breaking with History, Pg.83. The World Bank. Mexico City.

⁴ Data available on-line at: [http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/lac/lacinfoclient.nsf/d29684951174975c85256735007fef12/f09722a39ac12f6785256d7200590085/\\$FILE/geo_location.pdf](http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/lac/lacinfoclient.nsf/d29684951174975c85256735007fef12/f09722a39ac12f6785256d7200590085/$FILE/geo_location.pdf)

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