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# People of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean:

An exploration of social and territorial  
realities in the rural world



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**Suriname:** Department for Sustainable Development of Afro-Surinamese and KAMPOS Organization.

**International:** Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, Afro-descendant Youth Network of LAC, International Land Coalition, The Tenure Facility, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and Universidad Javeriana of Colombia.



## ABBREVIATIONS

**AWID** Association for Women's Rights and Development

**BADEHOG** Household Survey Data Bank

**CARICOM** Caribbean Community

**CELADE** Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center

**ECLAC** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

**CERD** United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

**CODAE** Afro-Ecuadorian Development Corporation

**CODISRA** Presidential Commission on Discrimination and Racism against Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala

**CONACOD** National Commission against Discrimination of Peru

**CONAPRED** National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (Mexico)

**CONAQ** Coordenação Nacional das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas (National Network of Rural Black Quilombola Communities)

**DINAFROH** Directorate of Indigenous and Afro-Honduran Peoples

**FAO** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

**FECONIC** Federation of Black Communities and Organizations of Imbabura and Carchi (Ecuador)

**INADI** National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism in Argentina

**INCODIR** National Institute against Racial Discrimination of Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

**INDEPA** National Institute of Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian Peoples

**INPI** National Institute of Indigenous Peoples in Mexico

**IPEA** Institute for Applied Economic Research of Brazil

**SDGs** Sustainable Development Goals



**ILO** International Labour Organization

**NGO** non-governmental organization

**OTEC** Observatory of Ethnic and Rural Territories of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana of Colombia

**PCN** Black Communities Process in Colombia

**UNDP** United Nations Development Programme

**RRI** Rights and Resources Initiative

**SAIA** Secretariat of Indigenous and Afro-Descendant Affairs of Nicaragua

**SEPPIR** Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality of Brazil

**UNFPA** United Nations Population Fund





## FOREWORD

Census data from different countries reveal that Afro-descendants experience the greatest situations of inequality, marginalization, and discrimination, especially in rural areas. This situation is even more worrying when it comes to Afro-descendant women and youth, for whom opportunities for access to land tenure, essential services, quality education, and housing, among others, are more limited. It is even more critical when the issues at stake are participation, autonomy, and self-determination as Afro-descendants.

At the same time, it is important to note that in Latin America and the Caribbean, there are 153.3 million Afro-descendants, of whom approximately 26 million live in rural areas. This means that 22.5 percent of the rural population in the region is of African descent.

It is also necessary to consider that, according to a recent study carried out in 16 countries, the rural and ancestral territories historically occupied by Afro-descendants in Latin America amount to 205 million hectares. However, only a little more than 9.4 million hectares of these lands (5 percent) have legally recognized the collective right of tenure over land and territory for Afro-descendants (RRI, PCN, CONAQ, OTEC, 2024).

Afro-descendants play a fundamental role in rural areas in terms of mitigating climate change and the loss of biodiversity. They also contribute to food production and to the food security and sovereignty of their peoples and communities based on their traditional knowledge and respective production practices, although this is often not made visible or recognized.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) prepared this report in the region as a follow-up to the work that governments, organizations of Afro-descendants and international organizations have been undertaking to give visibility to Afro-descendants, to ensure their recognition and foster the necessary environment for the effective exercise of their rights.

Inclusive and culturally relevant public policies and programs are essential, especially in rural contexts. This requires the availability of quality and disaggregated data to produce in-depth analyses with solid foundations, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the different social, political, economic and environmental situations.



FAO's Strategic Framework 2022 – 2031 aims to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by moving towards more efficient, inclusive, resilient, sustainable agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, better environmental care, and improved lives, leaving no one behind.

These four improvements reflect the interconnections between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of agrifood systems and provide a foundation for how FAO intends to contribute directly to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

In turn, ECLAC contributes to the fight against discrimination, racism, and the structural exclusion of the Afro-descendant population in the region, which is reaffirmed and supported by its subsidiary bodies. The Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean includes priority actions which explicitly include Afro-descendant communities and their development in the territory within the human rights framework.

Furthermore, the Montevideo Strategy for the Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda of the Regional Conference on Women and the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean have both supported the adoption of an intersectional perspective; one that reflects the interlinkages between different forms of inequality and discrimination that further exacerbate the issues faced by Afro-descendant populations.

The Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, through the technical team dedicated to working for a “Better Life”, have made this report available as a first step towards reducing inequalities and poverty in the rural world, fostering inclusive rural transformation and more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.

Experience has shown that, by working together, it is possible to achieve concrete and long-lasting objectives. For this reason, a preliminary version of this report was presented in the context of the Regional Technical



Workshop on Afro-descendants and Rurality in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Santiago, Chile, and organized by the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean and ECLAC on November 16th and 17th, 2023, with the participation of government authorities and Afro-descendant organizations from 11 countries in the region, also representing women and youth.

The results of this opportunity to share experiences and knowledge have led to a constantly updated roadmap, strengthening the existing multi-sectoral collaboration networks, adding new voices, intentions, and visions and highlighting the gaps that still need to be resolved.



01



**Introduction: giving visibility  
to people of African descent  
in the rural world**



The content of this document provides an analytical framework on the socioeconomic, political, legal situation of hundreds of Afro-descendant populations in rural areas in Latin America and the Caribbean, focused on the analysis of three key areas: territories, natural resources, and productivity.

Contemporary demographic studies generally describe Afro-descendants as an urban phenomenon, a product of the rural-urban migrations that took place from the second half of the 19th century onwards, when the abolition of slavery began. However, there is a lack of discourse on Afro-descendant life in rural areas, in the agricultural, mining, coastal, forest, savannah, desert, and plains areas where hundreds of families of African descent remain or have migrated. For this reason, this report seeks to give visibility to Afro-descendant life in rural areas in terms of their right to development, their claims and historical reparations.

Given the socioeconomic disadvantages that affect Afro-descendants in rural areas, intersectoral public policies are urgently needed to guarantee their right to development. The aim is to guarantee Afro-descendant rights based on their perspective of development, with the understanding that this is a pathway to citizenship. Development is achieved when citizens are guaranteed their most basic human rights. However, structural racism currently limits the exercise of the economic, social, cultural, territorial, and environmental rights of millions of Afro-descendants (Antón *et al.*, 2019; ECLAC and UNFPA, 2020). In fact, following the declaration of the Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance held by the United Nations in Durban (2001), people of African descent have been mobilizing to demand their right to development, as established by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993).

The claim for the right to development for Afro-descendants is historically rooted in slavery. Alongside this, and within the context of their struggles, they seek the right to historical reparations for the damage caused by the crimes of colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and slavery (Ojulari, 2023). The purpose of reparations is threefold: seeking the truth about history, the pursuit of justice, and the development deserved. The truth about history refers to the role of Afro-descendants in the world and how the impacts of slavery, colonialism, and structural racism must be acknowledged. The pursuit of justice is necessary since a supreme and legitimate act is required to repair the



harm of slavery, given that the denial of the Afro-descendants' human condition has condemned them to perpetual poverty. The development deserved refers to the objective of reparations, which is to guarantee, once and for all, citizenship and human rights for Afro-descendants. The aim is to move progressively and decisively towards political, economic, environmental, cultural and social development.

A recent study (ECLAC and UNFPA, 2020) identifies the inequalities and gaps affecting the well-being of the Afro-descendant population in Latin America, which is currently 153 million people, representing 23.7 percent of the total population. These inequalities intersect with gender, generational, and territorial inequalities, exacerbating the situation of women and rural Afro-descendants. In Latin America, in general, the Afro-descendant population faces food insecurity. More specifically, in the case of Brazil, the Afro-descendant population living in food insecure households amounts to 40.2 percent, while in Colombia it is 14.9 percent, in Ecuador 31 percent, and in Peru 24.7 percent (FAO, 2023). Although approximately eight million hectares of Afro-descendant collective territories have been granted land titles in the last thirty years, there are still gaps in the implementation of rights hindering rural communities' development.

On the other hand, it is necessary to recognize that ancestral knowledge and coexistence with ecosystems have served as instruments for the consolidation of collective territories, self-development and the recognition of their rights as peoples and ethnic communities. This is the basis for promoting and giving visibility to an Afro-descendant agenda, with a particular focus on the rural sector of the region.

Accordingly, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) seek to bring attention to the issues faced by Afro-descendants in the rural world, taking as a frame of reference the principles of the Permanent Forum on Afro-descendants, the Buenos Aires Declaration of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) of January 2023, the International Decade for People of African Descent proclaimed by the United Nations (2015 – 2024), the United Nations Decade for Family Farming (2019 – 2028), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean.





In this context, dialogue and collaboration between countries in the region and Afro-descendant communities are key to achieving an effective and sustainable transformation of agrifood systems, where no one is left behind; as established in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda, with an emphasis on SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).



# On the rights of the people of African descent and the right to historical reparations

Historical reparations are understood as measures aimed at redressing racial and ethnic injustices as a result of colonialism and enslavement. As such, historical reparations for people of African descent would likely generate opportunities for wealth creation that in turn address racial disparities in education, housing, and business ownership.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, slavery made the owners of enslaved people and their descendants richer, often boosting a country's economy while suppressing wealth creation for the enslaved population, and allowing "investors" to emerge as the political and economic elite. For the most part, the countries that participated in the transatlantic slave trade of enslaved Africans have yet to compensate their descendants for their labour financially, nor have they meaningfully addressed their discriminatory public policies in criminal justice and education, among others, or how those policies have deprived Afro-descendants of the wealth-generating opportunities enjoyed by their "white" counterparts. It should be stressed that reparations are not limited to monetary resources. Some reparations, especially in the United States of America, could be made through affirmative action, such as two – or four – year paid college tuition for descendants of enslaved Africans, student loan forgiveness, down payment grants of the purchase and housing renovation, business grants for start-ups, and the expansion of businesses to hire more employees or purchase property; in all cases for descendants of enslaved Africans (Ray and Perry, 2020).

It is important to note that, despite facing legal obstacles, the call for reparations is growing in African and Caribbean countries. In this regard, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Reparations Commission has drawn up a 10-point plan that calls for, among other things, a careful accounting of the occurrence, formal apologies, attention brought to the psychological and cultural toll of centuries of oppression, and international debt forgiveness. The African Union has also recently partnered with CARICOM in its efforts to intensify pressure on former slave nations to engage in the reparations movement movement (Gentleman, 2023).





The United Nations Secretary-General's report A/78/317 (2023) on celebrating the International Decade for People of African Descent urged governments to show strong leadership and political will to address the lasting consequences of slavery, noting that “Under international human rights law, awarding compensation for financially assessable damages, if done appropriately and proportionately to the gravity of the violation and the circumstances of each case, can also be a form of reparation” (UN General Assembly, 2023). While noting that in most cases the handling of claims is complex, it was stated that “such difficulties cannot constitute the basis for nullifying the existence of basic legal obligations” (UN General Assembly, *op cit.*). In addition, a 2019 report stresses that “reparations for slavery and colonialism entail moral, economic, political and legal responsibilities”, and that “full implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination must also be understood as a central pillar in achieving reparations for slavery and colonialism” (UN General Assembly, 2019).



02



## People of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean



Afro-descendancy is understood as a unique phenomenon in the Americas that originated in the context of African enslavement between the 16th and 19th centuries, when capitalism, European modernity, and socioracial inequalities in the West took shape (ECLAC and UNFPA, 2020). Specifically, Afro-descendants have a unique identity, with their own ancestral cultural institutions that predate the current establishment of nation-states. Given this scenario, the idea that Afro-descendants share similar characteristics to native tribal peoples and sometimes to Indigenous peoples has been strongly emphasized, including the legal recognition of this concept in some countries of the region (as is the case of the Garifuna), as determined by Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) of 1989 (Antón *et al.*, 2019; Campoalegre and Antón, 2023). The status of tribal peoples, while it may encompass the entire Afro-descendant phenomenon in the Americas, refers to the fact that Afro-descendants represent the rural populations that best reflect the specific conditions outlined in the Convention.

“Afro-descendant” also provides for the sense of belonging and inclusion of the various African-descendant peoples of the Americas in their countries of origin. This gives rise to ethnonyms such as Afro-Colombian for Colombian Afro-descendants or Afro-Ecuadorian for Ecuadorian Afro-descendants (Antón and García, 2018). In short, the concept of Afro-descendant refers to the condition of ethnic self-identification by all individuals who identify as descendants of the survivors of the transatlantic slave trade, regardless of their skin colour. It is a term that seeks to politicize cultural identity beyond socio-racial aspects (Duncan, 2012).

## 2.1 ♦ Afro-descendants in the Caribbean context

When we speak of Black or Afro-descendant culture, we refer to the identity of populations descended from enslaved Africans in the New World. However, this concept should be used in plural forms, since this phenomenon cannot be understood as a single concept due to its complexity. According to Livio Sansone (2010), Black populations in the Americas represent a variety of cultures and identities related to local interracial systems. Therefore, one should not speak of Black culture but of multiple Black cultures, which exist in different contexts and different realities. These Black cultures were, in a way, influenced by the specific power relations that formed in the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 2014). This is reflected in the cultural differences between the African diaspora cultures



that were shaped by the geopolitics of Spanish, French, Dutch, English, and Portuguese colonial powers. These arguments help clarify the need to make important distinctions between Black or Afro-descendant cultures, one of them being the “Caribbean world” or the “Caribbean cultural space”, as defined by certain scholars (García, 2001).

While it is not an attempt to exhaustively describe Afro-descendant cultural experiences in the Caribbean, the Caribbean space encompasses a heterogeneous population group that can distinguish between the insular and the continental Caribbean worlds. In the Americas, from Brazil and northwards to French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), and the Caribbean coastal areas of Colombia, the whole of Central America and Mexico, a powerful Caribbean cultural world has taken shape. In the insular Caribbean, dozens of islands make up the Antilles, including the Greater Antilles and the Lesser Antilles, referring to their geographical and socio-demographic size. Nevertheless, what truly distinguishes the insular Caribbean is its colonial history and the linguistic and geopolitical relations that have historically been established there. Consequently, certain particularities resulting from the Dutch, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish colonial powers, resulting in several Caribbean islands that have unique traces of identity: Cuba, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico as a large Spanish-speaking block; Guadalupe, Haití and Martinique as a French-speaking block; and the English-speaking block, which includes a dozen nations such as Barbados and Jamaica, as well as the heritage of the Dutch colonies (Antón and Wong, 2014).

Also worth noting is the Caribbean’s demographic weight and its distinct landscape of social inequalities. An estimate of the Afro-descendant population in the geocultural area of the Caribbean has yet to be determined. According to the 2010 round of censuses, the Afro-descendant population in Cuba corresponded to 35.9 percent (four million, including those identifying as Black and Mulatto or Mestizo). In Puerto Rico, which conducted its census together with the United States of America in 2010, the Afro-descendant population was found to be 12.4 percent (approximately 462 000 citizens identified as Black or African American). Meanwhile, Belize (an English-speaking Central American country) conducted its last census in 2022, revealing 29 percent people of African descent (approximately 116 000 people identified as Creoles and Garifuna).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For more information about the census see Population and Housing Census. 2022. *Statistical Institute of Belize*. <https://sib.org.bz/census/2022-census/>



Without further detail on the complexity of the Afro-descendant cultural expressions of the tremendous geocultural space of the Caribbean,<sup>2</sup> the following are a few brief examples. In the context of the Caribbean, dozens of Afro-descendant communities coexist with cultural structures that reflect their history of enslavement and colonization. These include the Raizales from the San Andrés and Providencia islands in Colombia, the Black English from the Bay Islands in Honduras, and those from Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Panama. In the Caribbean, the Garifuna culture, for example, is the most vivid expression of Indigenous inhabitants as a people who are ethnically and culturally distinct from others. They are an ancestral culture from a combination of African, Arawak, Carib influences, with their language, religious belief system, family structure, and ancestral farming and fishing practices. The Palenque people of San Basilio in Colombia and the Maroons of French Guiana, Guyana, and Suriname, where the legendary Saramakas are found, are also among the groups with a strong African heritage (Anton, 2023).

In the Caribbean, Afro-descendant peoples have developed a rich heritage of African rhythms, poetry, and literature. They have their musical traditions, and Afro-American religious practices such as Rastafarianism, Cuban religious traditions with the Rule of Palo Monte, the Rule of Ocha and the secret society of the Abakúa. Haiti, for example, has a vibrant native Afro-descendant culture where, in the cradle of Latin American democracy, Haitian Creole is the national language, and Vodou is the official State religion (Antón, 2023).

It is worth mentioning that an exploration of cultural aspects, particularly in the Caribbean, requires an understanding of the marine territories, together with the historical, sociopolitical and cultural interactions that, as a result of the need to adapt to and manage the immense aquatic environment, have been shaped by the communities that today continue to practice small-scale fishing and navigation systems, and that still experience a certain degree of exclusion, even though they are no longer in the minority (Herrera and Tapia, 2023; Mannisi *et al.*, 2023). This is a pending issue that requires a deeper examination.

<sup>2</sup> The development of a map server of the Greater Caribbean and the presence of Afro-descendants in coastal and oceanic areas is underway, all within the framework of the mapping of marine territories (2024 – 2025), which is led by the Coalition of Afro-descendants with the support of Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and the academic advisory services of Observatory of Ethnic and Rural Territories of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana of Colombia (OTEC)





03



## Demographics of the Afro-descendant population in Latin America and their relevance in rural areas



According to the latest ECLAC demographic estimates, as of 2024, the Afro-descendant population of Latin America and the Caribbean is estimated at 153.3 million people, representing 23.3 percent of the region's total population. These estimates are based on population and housing censuses, and questions on racial-ethnic self-identification have become increasingly standard in this century, as confirmed by the 2020 round of censuses (ECLAC and UNFPA, 2020). However, the census results on the number of Afro-descendants have not been free of controversy, since Afro-descendants are affected by the way the questions are written, by the quality of the different census rounds and by the racial-ethnic perspective (map updating, training, communication strategy, Afro-descendant participation, among others), as well as by the sociopolitical context in which the census is carried out (Del Popolo, 2019; ECLAC and UNFPA, 2020). In the 2020s and to date, nine population and housing censuses that include Afro-descendant self-identification questions have been conducted (Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Uruguay). Two countries are in the process of conducting them (Chile and El Salvador). Moreover, 18 out of 20 Latin American countries are expected to have included questions on the subject in the 2020 census round (except Haiti and Paraguay).

The case of Panama is worth noting, where the percentage of those identifying as Afro-descendants nearly quadrupled in the census (8.8 percent in 2010 compared to 31.7 percent in 2023), which reflects not only Afro-descendant demographic dynamics but also improvements in the census processes and an increase in self-identification. Also notable is Brazil, whose Afro-descendant population remains a majority and is growing, according to the 2022 census. As shown in Table 1, Haiti and Brazil have the highest percentages of Afro-descendants, 95.5 percent and 55.5 percent of their population, respectively. Following this are the Afro-descendant populations of Cuba (35.9 percent), Dominican Republic (34.0 percent) and Panama (31.7 percent).<sup>3</sup> The people of African descent populations in Colombia and Costa Rica are close to 10 percent, and in the remaining countries, this population represents less than 5 percent of the respective national totals. Among the latter, it is worth noting the

<sup>3</sup> Figures for the Dominican Republic are from the 2021 National Multipurpose Household Survey, as results on the Afro-descendant population from the 2022 population and housing census are not yet available.



case of Argentina, where the population that identifies as Afro-descendant doubled in size between the 2010 and 2022 census, increasing its relative demographic weight in the national total from 0.4 percent to 0.7 percent.

Afro-descendant populations are predominantly urban (in Latin America, 83 percent of the total Afro-descendant population resides in urban areas and 17 percent in rural areas). However, there are differences between countries: in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay less than 10 percent of the Afro-descendant population resides in rural areas, whereas in countries such as Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti and Honduras, approximately one-third of Afro-descendants reside in rural areas.

According to ECLAC (2023), Afro-descendant populations are in advanced stages of the demographic transition, showing signs of population aging primarily due to declining fertility, although they continue to have relatively younger population structures than those of the non-Afro-descendant and non-Indigenous population (ECLAC, 2023; ECLAC and UNFPA, 2020). Once the 2020 round of censuses is completed and the results are available, it will be possible to examine rural areas' demographic and social characteristics.

### **3.1 ♦ The Afro-descendant population in rural areas**

Estimates as of 2024 highlight that 22.5 percent of the total rural population of Latin America are Afro-descendants (see Table 1), which is politically, economically, and socially relevant. Similarly, the demographic heterogeneity observed for the national total is also reflected in rural areas. In this regard, for example, in Brazil, Afro-descendants account for 65.9 percent of the rural population, and in Cuba and the Dominican Republic they account for around 37 percent. In comparison, in 12 countries the relative demographic weight of Afro-descendants in rural areas is less than 5 percent. The demographic weight of Afro-descendants leads to significantly different scenarios among countries when it comes to designing and implementing policies in the rural sector. It also shapes the political strategies of Afro-descendants themselves. Notwithstanding this, the state's obligation to guarantee Afro-descendant rights, including territorial rights, is universal and goes beyond demographics.





**TABLE 1**

**Latin America (19 countries): Afro-descendant population estimates (in thousands) and percentage of Afro-descendant population by urban-rural area of residence, 2024**

Countries	Estimated Afro-descendant population by 2024 (in thousands)			Percentage of Afro-descendant population		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
Argentina	284.2	19.8	304.0	0.7	0.6	0.7
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	21.9	7.4	29.3	0.2	0.2	0.2
Brazil	103 269,9	17 492,3	120 762,2	54.0	65.9	55.5
Chile	9.3	0.6	9.9	0.06	0.03	0.06
Colombia	3 300,2	1 564,1	4 864,2	8.1	13.5	9.3
Costa Rica	359.1	63.8	422.8	8.2	7.2	8.1
Cuba	3 089,2	918.6	4 007,9	35.5	37.0	35.9
Ecuador	629.7	258.6	888.3	5.3	4.0	4.8
El Salvador	5.9	2.3	8.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Guatemala	38.0	20.7	58.7	0.4	0.3	0.3
Haiti	7 564,1	3 768,9	11 333,0	95.5	95.5	95.5
Honduras	100.1	52.3	152.4	1.5	1.2	1.4
Mexico	2 018,5	550.4	2 568,9	2.0	2.0	2.0
Nicaragua	29.9	3.8	33.7	0.7	0.1	0.5
Panama	1 114,3	321.0	1 435,4	35.7	22.8	31.7
Peru	1 111,5	169.4	1 280,9	3.7	3.4	3.7
Dominican Republic	3 234,6	657.8	3 892,4	33.4	37.6	34.0
Uruguay	161.4	3.0	164.4	4.9	3.1	4.8
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	868.1	147.5	1 015,6	3.3	4.7	3.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>127 222,7</b>	<b>26 026,0</b>	<b>153 248,7</b>	<b>23.9</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>23.7</b>

**Source:** Elaborated by CELADE – ECLAC Population Division with estimated were made on the basis to the last census or survey is maintained, and that the urban and rural population variation from the last available date to 2024 at the national level is similar for Afro-descendants and non-Afro-descendants. In this sense, estimates based on censuses from the 2010s should be approached with caution. The baseline census dates are Argentina 2022, Brazil 2022, Bolivia (Plurinational State of) 2012, Chile 2017, Colombia 2018, Costa Rica 2011, Cuba 2012, Ecuador 2022, El Salvador 2007, Guatemala 2018, Honduras 2013, Mexico 2020, Nicaragua 2005, Panama 2023, Peru 2017, Uruguay 2011, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) 2011. In the case of Colombia, this is based on the estimate made by the Colombian National Statistics Office (DANE), recognizing the lower estimate of the 2018 census; while for Haiti, it is based on the Afro-descendant percentage of the study by Simms, T. M., Rodríguez, C. E., Rodríguez, R., and Herrera, R. J. (2010), *The genetic structure of populations from Haiti and Jamaica reflect divergent demographic histories*, American Journal of Physical Anthropology, 142(1), 49 – 66. In the case of the Dominican Republic, the results of the 2021 National Multipurpose Household Survey (ENHOGAR) were used.

Historically, Afro-descendants resided in both rural areas and cities during colonial times to perform slave labour, both on plantations and in mines, construction, domestic work and general urban services (cleaning, water distribution, markets, games, recreational activities, etc.). After the abolition of slavery and the establishment of nation-states, as well as the modernization of society, the descendants of enslaved people virtually disappeared from the national discourse. Consequently, the incorporation of the descendants of enslaved people into civic life took place in several ways, determined by inclusion, cultural integration, assimilation, or integration, with racial intermingling being the main instrument, with its corresponding denial of identity and whitening of African descendants. Therefore, they experienced a certain level of invisibility, both culturally and in terms of their population. In a sense, the Afro-descendant community was forgotten in the pursuit of nationalist endeavors of a single culture, a single nation, a single language, a single identity and history. Many Afro-descendants engaged in racial intermixing, while others took refuge in rural areas, which later became known as Black community areas or ancestral territories where they could revive the culture of their ancestors.

In general terms, Afro-descendant populations tend to settle in areas where the main cities or large metropolises of countries are located, as well as in areas linked to the territories of arrival and settlement during slavery, which in many cases were located in rural areas. Similarly, when examining the relative demographic weight at the sub-national level, it is possible to identify a group of municipalities where the presence of Afro-descendants is more significant than the average for the respective country (ECLAC and UNFPA, 2020).

Therefore, beyond the urban areas, it is necessary to highlight the importance of rural areas where Afro-descendant ancestral territories are located, as these areas are highly relevant. For example, in Colombia, the Pacific basin has been recognized as the Afro-descendant region par excellence, where more than 6 million hectares have been collectively titled to the Black coastal communities in the area. In addition, there are rural Afro-descendant settlements in the inter-Andean valleys of the departments of Cauca and Valle del Cauca, the lower areas of the Magdalena River, Palenque de San Basilio in the department of Bolívar, and the islands of San Andrés and Providencia. The same is true in Ecuador, where the ancestral territories of the Chota valley (Andean zone) and the province of Esmeraldas (Pacific Coast) are considered



Afro-descendant rural ancestral territories. In Honduras, the coastal area of the department of Atlántida, whose capital is La Ceiba, and the Bay Islands (Roatán) are recognized as the ancestral lands of the Garifuna and the “English-speaking Black people”. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, for example, the rural area of Barlovento is well known as a traditional Afro-descendant settlement. The same is true in Brazil, particularly in the Northeast, where a significant proportion of the population of the states of Bahia and Maranhão identifies as Afro-descendant (76 percent and 78 percent respectively, according to the 2010 census conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics).<sup>4</sup> In Peru, there are ancestral rural communities located in the villages of El Carmen and Guayabo in the province of Chincha, and also in Yapatera, in the province of Piura. In Chile, there are rural Afro-descendants of the Azapa Valley in the northern region of Arica. Lastly, the rural region of the Yungas Valley in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, where Afro-Bolivians have cultivated a significant cultural heritage, with populations such as Coripata and Tocaña among these.

### 3.2. ♦ **Some indicators on the living conditions of the Afro-descendant population**

Poverty is one of the indicators reflecting the living conditions of Afro-descendants, and the Afro-descendant social movement emphasizes not only its prevalence but also the factors that contribute to this situation; in other words, how they have been impoverished in the same way they have been discriminated against, racialized and historically excluded.

Poverty among Afro-descendants is characterized by situations of racial discrimination, social, political, and cultural exclusion, and levels of socioeconomic inequality (World Bank, 2018). Social indicators paint a grim picture of poverty in which racial, ethnic, gender, and territorial factors intersect. The information available for six Latin American countries shows that between 2016 and 2021, poverty worsened among both Afro-descendant and non-Afro-descendant populations, except in Panama and Peru, a trend that extends to rural areas (see Figure 1); revealing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the national level, all countries with data for 2022 (five countries) indicate a decrease in poverty levels compared to 2021 in both population groups, except among Afro-descendants in

<sup>4</sup> Brazil's 2022 census identified the Quilombola territories, and for the first time it will be possible to determine the population residing there and their main sociodemographic characteristics.



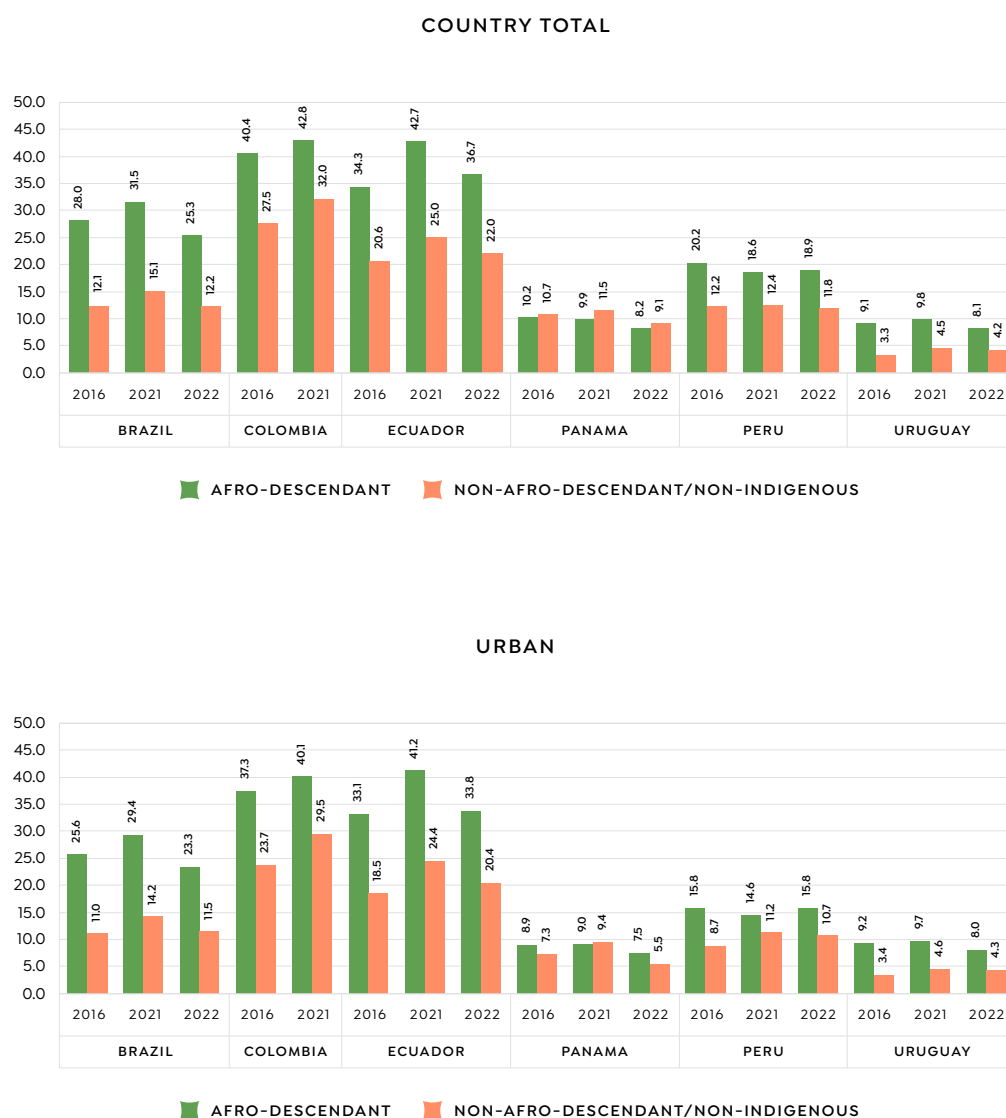
Peru. However, in Ecuador, poverty levels are still above those of 2016. In the same period (2021 – 2022), rural poverty among the Afro-descendant population also decreased, in this case without exceptions. However, in Ecuador and Uruguay, the figures remain above those of 2016.

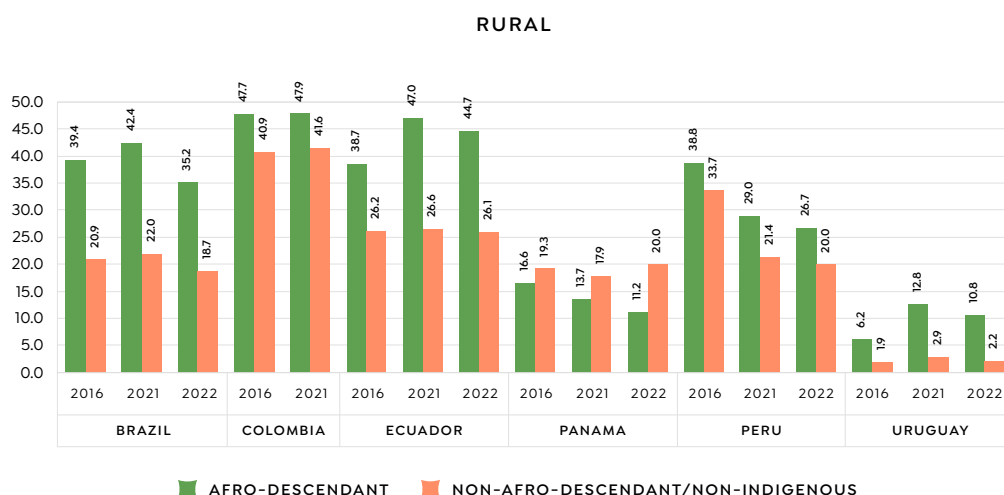
Along with the above, Figure 1 also reveals that territorial and racial-ethnic inequalities remain persistent, putting rural and Afro-descendant populations at a disadvantage. Indeed, according to the most recent data, poverty rates for five of the six countries with available data are systematically higher among the Afro-descendant population than among the non-Afro-descendant and non-Indigenous population, except Panama. This situation also applies to rural areas but not urban areas, where Afro-descendant poverty is higher in all six countries (see Figure 1). Additionally, in relative terms and examining the figures for rural areas, the most significant inequalities are found in Uruguay, where rural poverty among Afro-descendants is five times that of non-Afro-descendant and non-Indigenous populations, and in Brazil and Ecuador, where it is almost twice as high.



## FIGURE 1

**Latin America (six countries): Afro-descendant and non-Afro-descendant and non-Indigenous poverty rates in six Latin American countries (2016, 2021 and 2022)**





**Source:** CEPALSTAT, ECLAC, based on country household surveys. Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG). United Nations. <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/index.html>

The path to overcoming poverty, to achieving social and economic integration, equality and access to social protection is driven by decent work,<sup>5</sup> which is fundamental for building autonomy, identity and personal dignity, and expanding citizenship. Likewise, non-discrimination in employment is an integral part of the concept of decent work, which is at the heart of SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

One of the leading indicators of exclusion from the labour market is unemployment, which affects women and youth to a greater extent in Latin America and in all regions of the world. Multiple studies on the labour market in Latin American countries that incorporate a racial-ethnic dimension have also shown that unemployment has a more significant impact on people belonging to Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations and, in particular, on women and youth belonging to these groups (ECLAC and UNFPA, 2020; Holz *et al.*, 2022).

According to census data from 12 Latin American countries around the year 2010, except the Plurinational State of Bolivia, in all countries surveyed, the unemployment rate was higher among the Afro-descendant population (ECLAC, 2017). In the publication “Afro-descendants and the Matrix of Social Inequality in Latin America” (ECLAC and UNFPA, 2020),

<sup>5</sup> The ILO defines decent work as productive, quality employment or occupation, adequately remunerated, exercised in conditions of equality, freedom and security, and free from discrimination of any kind (for a discussion on the topic, see Abramo, 2015).

ECLAC mentions that unemployment rates measured through household surveys in six Latin American countries around 2018, disaggregated by racial-ethnic status and sex, confirm this pattern of intersecting racial-ethnic, gender and age gaps. Moreover, evidence shows that in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Uruguay, unemployment rates for Afro-descendants are always higher than for non-Afro-descendants, with much higher levels for youth and women, and especially for young women. This pattern of higher unemployment among Afro-descendants, and mainly among women of this group, remained the same in 2020 for four of the five countries with available data (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Uruguay), except for Peru (ECLAC and Ford Foundation, 2022).

Moreover, Table 2 shows unemployment levels for six countries in the region according to the most recent surveys available, revealing that they remain higher among Afro-descendant populations, except for Peru. And while the data reveals that unemployment is lower in rural than in urban areas, among both Afro-descendants and non-Afro-descendants, racial-ethnic gaps at the expense of Afro-descendant populations are more acute in rural areas in Brazil, Ecuador and Uruguay.

Moreover, in all countries, unemployment is higher among women, regardless of their racial-ethnic group. However, the gender gaps are widest in rural areas, except for Peru. In addition, the gender gaps for Afro-descendant rural women are higher than those for rural women who are neither Afro-descendant nor Indigenous.



**TABLE 2**

**Latin America (six countries): Unemployment rates of the population aged 15 and over by racial-ethnic status, sex and area of residence, 2021 – 2022**

Country and date	Country total		Rural		Urban	
	Afro-descendants	Non-Afro-descendants	Afro-descendants	Non-Afro-descendants	Afro-descendants	Non-Afro-descendants
<b>Brazil (2022)</b>						
Both sexes	11.5	8.0	9.4	4.9	11.8	8.3
Men	9.2	6.6	7.5	4.0	9.5	6.9
Women	14.5	9.5	13.1	6.7	14.6	9.8
<b>Colombia (2021)</b>						
Both sexes	17.4	14.0	11.7	9.0	19.8	15.1
Men	12.1	10.8	6.4	5.8	15.1	12.2
Women	24.4	18.1	21.9	15.8	25.2	18.4
<b>Ecuador (2022)</b>						
Both sexes	8.3	4.6	6.7	2.6	8.8	5.5
Men	7.4	3.9	5.3	2.1	8.2	4.6
Women	9.3	5.8	9.3	3.4	9.4	6.6
<b>Panama (2022)</b>						
Both sexes	12.6	9.6	6.1	6.0	13.9	10.7
Men	11.0	8.6	3.5	4.4	12.8	10.0
Women	14.6	10.9	10.4	8.7	15.4	11.4
<b>Peru (2022)</b>						
Both sexes	3.7	5.1	0.7	0.9	4.8	5.7
Men	3.2	4.3	0.9	0.8	4.1	4.8
Women	4.1	6.1	0.4	1.0	5.5	6.7
<b>Uruguay (2022)</b>						
Both sexes	12.7	8.6	9.5	4.1	12.7	8.9
Men	10.5	7.7	7.3	3.6	10.5	7.9
Women	15.0	9.5	12.1	4.9	15.2	9.8

**Source:** CEPALSTAT, ECLAC, based on country household surveys. Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG). United Nations. <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/index.html>

Previous studies also show inequalities that place the people of African descent population at a disadvantage in terms of housing conditions and access to essential services, revealing significant gaps in terms of the right to decent housing and health care (ECLAC and UNFPA, 2020; ECLAC, 2021). Crowded living conditions and the lack of access to drinking water, sanitation and electricity tend to be more prevalent among



Afro-descendant populations, especially in rural areas. These conditions undoubtedly had a more serious impact on morbidity and mortality from COVID-19 among Afro-descendants, as was observed in some countries in the region (ECLAC, 2021).

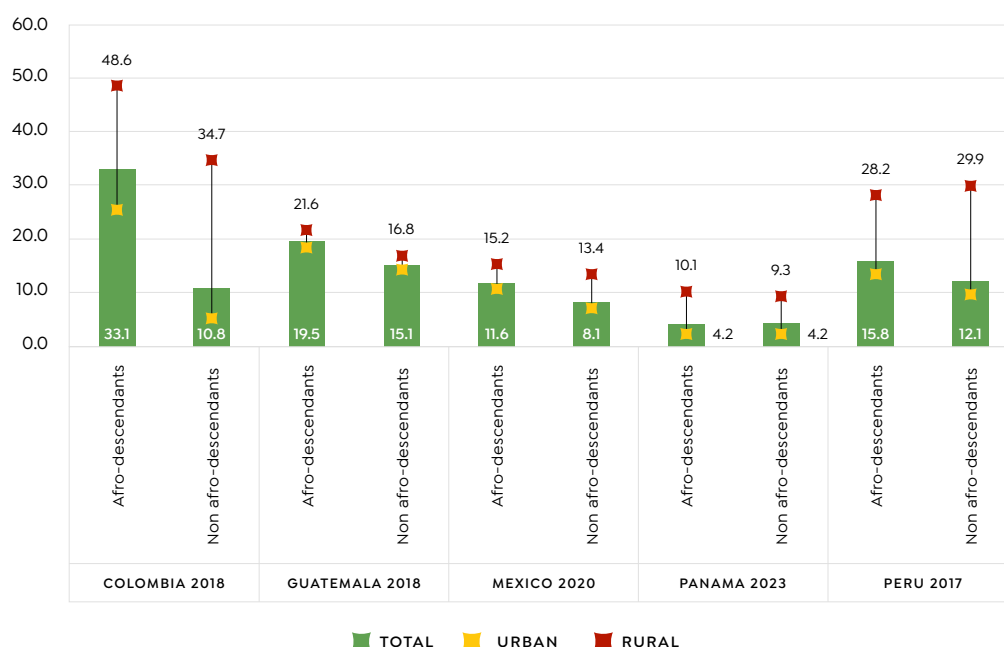
Access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation is essential to fully exercise the right to health and food security, especially for women, children, and the elderly in vulnerable conditions, as guaranteed under SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation). In addition, with the threat of climate change, sustainable water management is an issue that can no longer be ignored, especially among rural Afro-descendant communities. Furthermore, it is a known fact that households without safe drinking water face more significant economic and social challenges, since insufficient access to improved water sources leads to morbidity and mortality, particularly among children. Similarly, this affects access to education and employment opportunities, especially among women; not only because of the associated health problems but also because it implies a more significant burden of unpaid work for those who must search for drinking water, which reduces the time available for studies and work (ECLAC, 2017, 2021).

Censuses in Colombia (2018), Guatemala (2018), Mexico (2020), Panama (2023), and Peru (2017) reported racial-ethnic and territorial inequalities in access to safe drinking water. In terms of racial-ethnic inequalities, Colombia and Mexico stand out, and even more so in Mexico, as both the magnitude of the gap and lack of access to water for Afro-descendants are significant, especially in rural areas (see Figure 2). Considering the territorial aspect, 25 percent of Afro-descendants in urban areas of Colombia do not have access to drinking water, compared to 5 percent of non-Afro-descendants, whereas in rural areas, these percentages are 49 percent and 35 percent, respectively.



## FIGURE 2

**Latin America (five countries): Population without access to safe drinking water in the household by racial-ethnic status and area of residence, according to the latest available census**



**Source:** elaborated by ECLAC, special processing of microdatabases from official national population and housing censuses available at CELADE-Population Division, using REDATAM.

Once the results of the 2020 round of censuses become available, it will be possible to update the assessments and evaluate the progress (stagnation or regression) of Afro-descendant rights through different indicators, leveraging this source of data further to disaggregate racial-ethnic, gender, generational and territorial data. In this regard, it is worth noting the relevance of Objective 17.18 of the 2030 Agenda and priority measure 94 of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development of the Regional Conference on Population and Development of Latin America and the Caribbean regarding the disaggregation of data by racial-ethnic origin, and following an intersectional approach. This requires not only including self-identification questions in all data sources but also, in the particular case of household surveys, redefining the sample designs so that the indicators are disaggregated beyond the Afro-descendant or non-Afro-descendant category by sex, age, and urban-rural location as the most relevant ones.

04



## Overview of the institutional framework for addressing peoples of African descent issues



In recent decades, significant progress has been made in inclusive social development in the Latin American and Caribbean region, for example, in the reduction of poverty between 2002 and 2014, the reduction of income inequality, improvements in the population's education levels, and in specific indicators of health, social protection and access to basic infrastructure (ECLAC, 2016a, 2016b, 2017b, 2018a, 2019a and 2019b). However, there are still serious challenges for public policies if considering the volatility of economic growth, climate change, new technologies, demographic transition, disasters, migrations and, more recently, the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economic, social and health situations of the countries in the region (ECLAC, 2020b, 2020c and 2024).

In some countries, new government mechanisms have been created that focus on population groups in situations of greater exclusion, discrimination or vulnerability (Martínez, 2019). There has been an increase in the number and variety of institutions in charge of social issues in the region in recent decades, which reflects a progressive institutionalization of social policy, particularly in areas such as social protection and the fight against poverty, as well as government mechanisms in charge of specific themes, such as women, gender equality and Afro-descendants.

The creation of national coordinating mechanisms for policies in these areas increased following the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (Durban, South Africa, 2001).

To date, 15 Latin American countries have created a governmental mechanism dedicated to issues related to the Afro-descendant population and to tackle racial-ethnic discrimination (see Table 3).

These mechanisms aim to coordinate issues related to racial-ethnic issues and to foster policies to improve the well-being of Afro-descendant populations, as well as to promote racial equality and tackle racism and discrimination. Along these lines, the mechanisms work towards the mainstreaming of racial-ethnic issues in public policies and directly implementing policies and programs targeted to the Afro-descendant population. The work achieved, however, depends on the conditions in which they operate, as some of these units are still understaffed and have limited budgets (ECLAC and UNFPA, 2020; ECLAC, 2024).



**TABLE 3**

**Latin America (15 countries): institutions in charge of Afro-descendant affairs by governmental unit and year of creation**

Country	Name of the mechanism for the promotion of racial equality	Institutional dependency	Year of foundation
Argentina	National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI)	Ministry of Justice and Human Rights	1995
	National Directorate for Racial Equality, Migrants and Refugees	National Secretariat for Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights	2020
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	National Committee against Racism and All Forms of Discrimination	General Directorate for Combating Racism and All Forms of Discrimination of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism	2010
Brazil	Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPIR)	Office of the President of the Republic / Ministry of Women's Affairs, Family and Human Rights	2003 / 2016
	Ministry of Racial Equality	Presidency of the Republic	2023
Chile	Indigenous and Afro-descendant Affairs Coordination Unit	Under-Secretary of Social Services, Ministry of Social Development and Family	2024
Colombia	Directorate of Affairs for Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero Communities	Ministry of the Interior and Justice	1993
	Vice-Ministry of Ethnic Peoples and Peasant Farmers	Ministry of Equality and Equity	2023
Costa Rica	National Afro-Costa Rican Commission for the Celebration of the Year for People of African Descent in Costa Rica and related activities	Ministry of Foreign and Religious Affairs	2011
	Commissioner of the Presidency of the Republic for Matters Related to the Afro-Costa Rican Community	Presidency of the Republic	2015



<b>Ecuador</b>	Afro-Ecuadorian Development Corporation (CODAE)	Presidency of the Republic	1998
	National Council for the Equality of Peoples and Nationalities	Presidency of the Republic	2015
<b>Guatemala</b>	Presidential Commission on Discrimination and Racism against Indigenous Peoples (CODISRA)	Presidency of the Republic	2002
<b>Honduras</b>	National Commission against Racial Discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance	Ministry of the Interior, Justice and Decentralization	2004
	Directorate of Indigenous and Afro-Honduran Peoples (DINAFROH)	Secretariat for Development and Social Inclusion	2010
	National Coordinating Committee for Indigenous and Afro-Honduran Peoples	Office of Social Development of the Secretary of State	2022
<b>Mexico</b>	National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED)	Ministry of the Interior	2003
	National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI), which by law extends its mandate to Afro-descendants	Presidency of the Republic	2018
<b>Nicaragua</b>	Secretariat of Indigenous and Afro-Descendant Affairs (SAIA)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	2008
	Committee on Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples' Affairs and Autonomous Regimes	National Assembly	2012
<b>Panama</b>	National Commission against Discrimination	Ministry of the Presidency	2002
	National Council of the Black Ethnic Community	Ministry of the Presidency	2007
	National Secretariat for Afro-Panamanian Development	Ministry of Social Development	2016
	National Secretariat for the Development of Afro-Panamanians	Ministry of Social Development	2023





Peru	Afro-Peruvian Policy Directorate	Deputy Minister of Interculturalism of the Ministry of Culture	2010
	National Commission against Discrimination (CONACOD)	Deputy Minister of Human Rights and Access to Justice, Ministry of Justice and Human Rights	2013
Uruguay	Honorary Commission against Racism, Xenophobia and All Other Forms of Discrimination	Ministry of Education and Culture	2004
	National Consultative Council for Ethnic-Racial Equity and Afro-descendancy	Ministry of Social Development	2019
	Division for the Promotion of Public Policies for Afro-descendants	Ministry of Social Development	2020
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	National Institute against Racial Discrimination (INCODIR)	Vice-Presidency of the Republic	2011
	National Council for the Development of Afro-descendant Communities in Venezuela	Vice-Presidency of the Republic	2012

**Source:** updated from ECLAC and UNFPA (2020), *Afro-descendants and the matrix of social inequality in Latin America: challenges for inclusion*.

\* In countries where two or more institutions are recorded as existing, it should be noted that all are in force in Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of); in Brazil, Costa Rica and Ecuador, the most recently created one is in force; in the case of Honduras and Peru, the last two are in force; and in Panama, the first and last one are in force.

Such mechanisms can be found at the regional, national, and local levels. Some are focused on working for the elimination of racial and ethnic discrimination in general, while others are explicitly working on issues related to Afro-descendants. Specific mechanisms are also focused on Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant populations, and other groups. It is worth mentioning that the governmental mechanisms responsible for coordinating and promoting racial equality in the region at the national level vary greatly and experience constant advances and setbacks due to their sensitivity to economic and political cycles (changes in government), which can lead to considerable changes in their legal status, and therefore, their budgets.



In most cases, these changes are aimed at improving these mechanisms and giving them more influence in terms of policies, stability, and resources, such as the case of a committee that becomes a secretariat or a ministry. However, there are also instances to the contrary. By way of illustration, these ups and downs can be seen, for example, in Brazil's Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPIR). It had the status of a ministry between 2008 and 2016, while in 2016, it ceased to be directly linked to the Presidency of the Republic and was given the status of a secretariat under the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights and in 2023, regained its status as a ministry. Other examples can be seen in Colombia and Panama, where Afro-descendant institutions have recently been strengthened (see Table 3). Chile, which approved Decree 12 of the regulations governing the consultation process with the Chilean Afro-descendant Peoples (August, 2024), changing the name of the National Unit for Consultation and Indigenous Participation to the Coordination Unit for Indigenous and Afro-descendant Affairs in the Ministry of Social Development and Family (see Table 3).

Beyond the institutional framework, important steps are being taken in other countries. For example, in Cuba the National Program Against Racism and Racial Discrimination was created (2019), adopting a comprehensive affirmative approach; while in Mexico the National Council of Indigenous Peoples was established in 2024, which includes councilors representing the Afro-Mexican people; and in Paraguay Law 6 940 of 2022 established mechanisms and procedures to prevent and punish acts of racism and discrimination against people of African descent (ECLAC, 2024).

The coordination of work with other public institutions and civil society organizations is also highlighted as one of the main strengths of these mechanisms to promote racial equality, given that the aim is to manage cross-cutting policies in such a way that they incorporate the social movements involved in this issue (ECLAC, 2017, 2024).

In sum, in recent decades, Latin America has made significant progress in the creation of national coordinating mechanisms for social policies, as well as for those aimed at specific sectors of the population, particularly Afro-descendants. The current stage – defined by the weakness and volatility of economic growth, accelerated demographic transition, increased migratory flows, increased disasters associated with climate change, profound transformations in the labour market and in society related to the fourth industrial revolution, in addition to the problems arising from





the COVID-19 pandemic – poses new challenges for public policies and underscores the need for a social – institutional framework capable of addressing them, while giving greater visibility to Afro-descendant populations. This visibility must also be reflected in official statistics to ensure that initiatives aim to broaden their participation in policies.

There are currently two countries in Latin America whose population censuses do not collect data on the self-identification of Afro-descendants. On the other hand, in the case of household surveys, only a fraction of these collect such information, and due to limitations in sample sizes, it is often not possible to disaggregate indicators for rural Afro-descendants. Although these Afro-descendant organizations have long-standing and ongoing concerns, the lack of statistics and records disaggregated by racial-ethnic self-identification is evident, and even more so when it comes to gender, generational and territorial issues, which are essential to the design of targeted and integrated policies.

This highlights the importance and urgency of striving for the inclusion of racial-ethnic self-identification in the different data sources in order to improve the assessment of their situation, and increase the effectiveness of the design and monitoring of policies applied to them (ECLAC, 2020, 2024).

Finally, the next step would be to identify how the ministries of agriculture and rural development are incorporating Afro-descendant populations and communities into their institutions. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that in Brazil, in January 2023, the Secretariat of Quilombola and Traditional Territories and Productive Systems was created within the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Farming. This secretariat aims to promote and strengthen public policies to recognize territories and access to land for Quilombola and traditional communities. Knowing and understanding how these entities coordinate with Afro-descendant institutions is also key to their capacity building.



05



**The Afro-descendant rural  
population as a collective  
community with rights**



Understanding rural Afro-descendants as a cultural group of an ancestral nature with racial-ethnic identity markers brings us closer to the definition of tribal peoples, as set out in Article 1 of ILO Convention 169 of 1989:

1. This Convention applies to:

- a) tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;
- b) peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries ...

3. The use of the term peoples in this Convention shall not be construed as having any implications as regards the rights which may attach to the term under international law.

While Afro-descendants, especially those living in rural areas, have not been determined to have the status of tribal peoples, each country has developed a particular policy of official recognition for them. Colombia, for example, in Law 70 of 1993, recognizes Afro-descendants as “Black communities” as an ethnic group. In its Constitution, Ecuador recognizes them as “peoples” in the same context as Indigenous peoples. The same is true in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, where the Constitution recognizes them as “peoples”. In contrast, the national legislation of both Chile and Costa Rica recognizes Afro-descendants in the rural areas of the Arica region and the Costa Rican Caribbean coast, respectively, as “tribal peoples”. It should be recalled that the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has already ruled that Afro-descendants living in rural areas of Suriname, the Black communities of Bajo Atrato in El Chocó (Colombia) and the Garifuna on the Caribbean coast of Honduras are indeed tribal peoples (Antón *et al.*, 2019; ILO, 2009).

## **5.1 ♦ Advances in the recognition of the collective rights of people of African Descent and their impact on the rural world**

While progress is being made in the recognition of the collective rights of Afro-descendants in the rural world, especially about collective rights to territory and the protection of their rights to ancestral knowledge, it



should be pointed out that this is a gradual process. Afro-descendant organizations continue to play an important role in this regard and have become more visible and relevant in national and regional debates. At the constitutional level, countries such as the Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Nicaragua have introduced important constitutional reforms to recognize the political character of peoples or communities of African descent. About the recognition of their status as collective rights holders, the cases of Chile and Costa Rica are worth highlighting, where the governments have legislated in favor of the recognition of their status as tribal peoples. Collective ownership of their ancestral territories has been recognized in Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador. In Nicaragua, Afro-descendants share autonomous territories with Indigenous peoples in the Caribbean coast area. At the same time, in Honduras the government has granted collective land titles to Afro-descendant Garifuna communities, amidst internal conflicts over land ownership and disputes with non-Afro-descendant actors.

It is also worth noting that the 1988 Brazilian Constitution contains a transitional provision guaranteeing collective land rights to Quilombola communities. On 8 February 2018, the Brazilian constitutional court (Supremo Tribunal Federal) overwhelmingly upheld the constitutionality of an executive order detailing the process for collectively granting titles for lands occupied by specific Afro-descendant communities. This order – Decree 4 887 – issued by the President’s Office in 2003, implemented Article 68 of the Transitory Constitutional Provisions Law (ADCT 68) of the Brazilian Constitution of 1988. ADCT 68 recognizes the territorial rights of the Quilombolas, specifically: “The remaining members of the Quilombola communities that are living on their lands will be granted definitive ownership and the State will grant them the respective property titles” (Engle and Lixinski, 2021). However, despite these robust legal frameworks, obtaining land titles for Quilombola communities has been slow, as applicant communities must provide documentation and go through a lengthy process (World Bank, 2018).

In short, in terms of recognizing collective lands for Afro-descendants, progress has only been made in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, while in Honduras and Suriname the process of recognizing Afro-descendant collective lands is experiencing internal difficulties and awaiting decisions of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.



In general terms, rural Afro-descendants have been recognized as a people in some countries in the region, regardless of whether they are explicitly recognized as tribal peoples, but they commonly appear in institutional or social literature as ethnic groups. However, it has become increasingly apparent in the region that these demands echo those arising from the Afro-descendant social movement that began in the 1990s, aimed at achieving recognition as a people within the nation-state. Afro-descendants' status as a 'people' grants them the recognition of collective rights, in the sense that they declare themselves collective rights holders. Collective rights are attributed to a previously legally determined group. In the case of Afro-descendants, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has already identified a set of rights in General Recommendation 34 that could be attributable to Afro-descendants.

General Recommendation 34 draws on the concept of "Afro-descendants" as presented in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. It refers to people of African descent who lived through the experience of transatlantic slavery. It also points out that discrimination has led to an asymmetry in the application of universal equality, causing millions of people of African descent to be situated at the lowest social strata.

According to the United Nations, Afro-descendants are entitled to exercise the following rights, individually or collectively, without discrimination:

- a. the right to ownership and the right to the use, conservation and protection of their traditionally occupied lands and natural resources, where their ways of life and culture are connected to the use of these lands and resources;
- b. the right to their cultural identity and to maintain, safeguard and promote their way of life and their forms of organization, culture, languages and religious expressions;
- c. the right to the protection of their traditional knowledge and their cultural and artistic heritage; and
- d. the right to prior consultation when decisions affecting their rights are taken, in accordance with international standards.

The Committee understands that racism and racial discrimination against Afro-descendants are expressed in many forms, including structurally and culturally, for which other rights related to non-discrimination are necessary, such as socioeconomic equality and the right to social, economic and





cultural development. To make these collective rights effective, the United Nations recommends a series of strategies to guarantee them, which it calls “special measures”, including historical reparations for enslavement and, among them, the adoption of affirmative measures as stipulated in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Art. 1, para. 4 and Art. 2, para. 2). These measures, both general and specific, are as follows:

- ◆ Identify Afro-descendant communities in their ancestral territories, their demographic composition in cities and their forms of self-identification as a people and as a culture.
- ◆ Enact or amend national legislation with a view to eliminating all forms of racial discrimination against Afro-descendants.
- ◆ Adopt and implement national strategies and programs for Afro-descendant development.
- ◆ Establish mechanisms for communication and dialogue between Afro-descendant communities and the relevant state authorities.
- ◆ Strengthen existing institutions or create specialized institutions to promote respect for the human rights of Afro-descendants.
- ◆ Conduct regular surveys on the state of discrimination against Afro-descendants.
- ◆ Effectively acknowledge through policies and actions the negative effects of past harms to Afro-descendants, most notably colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, the effects of which continue to disadvantage people of African descent.

## **5.2 ◆ Mapping Afro-descendant collective and ownership**

As noted above, for Afro-descendants, their territory is considered the space that is essential for their self-development; their culture, spirituality, society, development and life itself. The territory comprises the land and its natural resources, the waters, the sea, and the living elements and biodiversity found there (Antón and Ramos, 2022).

Since 2021, various Afro-descendant organizations have participated in an important capacity-building and coordination process at the regional



level to advocate for the recognition of their territorial rights. As a key step, they have been working to close the systematic and comprehensive information gap on the presence, lands and territories of Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean. Organizations such as the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN) in Colombia and the Coordenação Nacional de Articulação de Comunidades Rurais Quilombolas (CONAQ) in Brazil, with the strategic support of the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and the technical support and mapping assistance of the Observatorio de Territorios Étnicos y Campesinos of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana de Colombia (OTEC), and in coordination with 20 other organizations in the region, have developed a crucial map of the territorial presence of Afro-descendants in 16 countries of the region: Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (RRI, PCN, CONAQ, OTEC, 2024).

This mapping exercise serves as a key input for advancing the recognition of the territorial rights of Afro-descendants, and allows the existing gaps to be identified.

The rural territorial presence of Afro-descendants in the 16 countries was mapped, considering the rural and ancestral territories historically occupied by Afro-descendants in Latin America, amounting to 205 million hectares. However, only 5 percent of these lands, which represent a little more than 9.4 million hectares, have the legal recognition of Afro-descendant collective land and territory tenure rights (RRI, PCN, CONAQ, OTEC, 2024).

Ancestral territories have only been recognized as the collective property of Afro-descendants in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Honduras. While this is a key step forward in guaranteeing collective rights, there are still challenges to overcome. In countries such as Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), where there are Afro-descendant communities with deep-rooted rural ancestral traditions, no progress has yet been made in claiming ancestral territories, despite the collective actions undertaken by organizations to claim collective ownership of territories as a strategic issue.





The study's findings highlight the urgency of addressing the lack of territorial rights of Afro-descendants. With just one example of 205 million hectares identified as part of the territory of Afro-descendant peoples in the 16 countries studied, where only 5 percent have the legal recognition of Afro-descendant collective rights, the issue becomes evident.

Tenure rights and, above all, autonomy in the use of natural resources, are fundamental for consolidating conservation strategies led by Afro-descendant communities, especially for areas with unique biodiversity.

This study is the only one of its kind to date, and there is still much to be mapped – with and by Afro-descendants – so that the results can serve as powerful inputs to develop the necessary public policies to provide territorial security and strengthen cultural identity, production, biodiversity conservation and development, in line with the vision of the Afro-descendants themselves.



## Some critical points in relation to the territorial rights of Afro-descendants

**Brazil.** From 1988 to date, the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) and the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) have been in charge of the policy for the regularization of rural Quilombola territories, benefiting more than 362 rural and urban communities by granting permanent titling of their territories through a joint effort between the Federal, State and Municipal Governments. This process has brought with it several complexities and a range of challenges and opportunities in the recognition of rights and the repayment of centuries-old historical debt. Efforts to recognize the territorial rights of Quilombola communities are based on the understanding that their territory is at the core of their lives since their social lives are closely linked to the territory.

In Brazil, the institutional system must title more land in favor of Afro-descendant communities, for which there are measures to promote the strengthening and organization of sustainable productive mechanisms, improve the effectiveness of institutional initiatives, guarantee the established regulatory frameworks, build institutional networks and support the participation of social movements, in addition to improving Quilombola food security, which requires the acceleration of land demarcation and titling processes. What positive impact will these policies have on young people, given that vulnerability in the territories is increasingly leading them to migrate from the countryside to the city? This is an important issue to continue monitoring.

**Guyana.** After slavery ended, Afro-descendants bought more than 200 villages on the Atlantic coast from the government, representing 40 000 hectares. At the same time, the colonial government created a law that removed all forms of pre-existing property. Subsequently, all properties of the Crown passed to the independent State of Guyana, depriving Afro-descendants of that right and taking control. This situation is still a pressing issue to this day, as many of those ancestral lands and plots purchased are still awaiting development actions by the government.



**Suriname.** Particular attention should be paid to the collective and land tenure rights of Afro-descendants in this country. As a result of rulings of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the government has contacted tribal communities. It has maintained ties with their authorities, while at the same time, there is no clarity in the domestic law on the recognition of the same Afro-descendant authorities in accordance with their self-determined status. Afro-descendant organizations in Suriname believe there is a need for greater collaboration with local and national governments, capacity building and incentives for organizational strengthening, including funding. International collaboration is also envisaged in order to achieve better quality technical assistance, cooperation and joint work between organizations and governments.

Among the specialized cooperation organizations, the International Land Coalition (ILC) stands out as a potential strategic ally for promoting and defending the collective rights of Afro-descendants, especially their right to land. International cooperation could play a key role in the promotion and sponsorship of national regulations for the defence of Afro-descendant territorial rights, but an agenda could also help increase the value of the natural resources in Afro-descendant ancestral territories, since they are often in a vulnerable position in the face of large-scale projects.

**Source:** Statements from participants in the “Regional technical workshop on Afro-descendants and rurality”, organized by FAO, ECLAC and the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana of Colombia, held in Santiago, Chile, 14–16 November 2023.



### 5.3 ♦ The protection of ancestral or traditional knowledge of people of African descent in rural areas

Key aspects of Afro-descendant rural life include environmental conservation strategies, food security, sustainable management of natural resources, medicine, and traditional forms of production. To this end, communities' ancestral knowledge regarding their territories, ecosystems and natural resources is essential. It is worth noting that traditional knowledge is intricately linked to protecting and implementing agrifood systems specific to Afro-descendants and their respective countries' food security. Therefore, in conducting this review of Afro-descendant rural life, it is vital to understand the role of traditional or ancestral knowledge.

According to CERD's General Recommendation 34, the protection of traditional knowledge is a specific right of Afro-descendants that should be enshrined in international law.

In anthropology, "traditional" or "ancestral" knowledge is a body of knowledge that ethnic communities have preserved as part of their intangible heritage. These are multi-systemic groups, and therefore, their ownership is communal, in accordance with the ethnic group to which they belong. This collective nature transforms knowledge into a cultural and living heritage for Afro-descendants. However, it is important to bear in mind that the application of this knowledge benefits all of humanity; that is, the local communities, as holders of such knowledge, contribute to the development of all living beings and to the harmony of the earth. It is pertinent to consider such ancestral knowledge as contributing to the benefit and well-being of the communities that possess such knowledge. Consequently, the incentives obtained from the benefits and the sharing of this universal knowledge should be subject to the autonomous decisions of the communities through their respective internal regulatory and organizational mechanisms.

It is important to emphasize that the development and protection of the ancestral knowledge of Afro-descendant communities and peoples is directly connected to the recognition of their collective rights, as



enshrined in Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>6</sup> and in Decision 391 of the Andean Community of 1996, as well as other international norms and conventions that support the cultural rights of the world's ethnic minority peoples (Convention on Biological Diversity, 1993).

Although there are international norms to protect the ancestral knowledge of these communities, such protection is considered possible if the States recognize and ensure the right to collective ownership of the territory as a constitutional guarantee so that the communities can exercise their cultural rights. Another strategy for the development and protection of ancestral knowledge lies in these communities reaffirming their ethnic status, as well as the development of their world view and identity, and strengthening their ethno-educational and productive systems. The development and protection of ancestral knowledge will be achieved as Afro-descendants improve their standards of living and quality of life, gain access to their natural and genetic resources and biodiversity, guarantee food security, and leverage their sustainable technological and productive potential.

<sup>6</sup> Article 8(j): "Subject to national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge innovations and practices."



06



**Opportunities for Afro-descendant  
rural life and the key role of  
Afro-descendant women**





In many regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, colonialism and slavery led to the formation of territories known as Quilombo (Brazil), Palenque (Colombia), or Cumbe (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela). In general, these are remote and geographically inaccessible places, in the middle of forests and jungles or areas with low population density, where people who had been enslaved and fled could gather and live. In some places, these areas are also known as 'Cimarrones'. Quilombola and Palenquero communities survive to this day in many of these territories which, over time, have shaped, transformed and strengthened their traditions, through an intrinsic connection between the environment and the ancestral cultural heritage of Black and Afro-descendant people (ECLAC, 2018b). These territories play a key role in shaping the identity of Afro-rural communities.

Afro-rural communities have distinct characteristics that define them, especially the women of these communities, so it is important to carefully analyse this aspect. Considered the nucleus of the family and the community within a matrilineal and matrifocal vision of the Afro-descendant culture, Afro-descendant women have established organizational consistency and individual and collective empowerment, giving them greater visibility in the regional organizational process. Afro-descendant women experience adversity within the context of gender, feminism and the struggles of Afro-descendant communities. As a result, their visibility, perseverance and proactive capacity in the public sphere have earned them a wealth of experience, empowering them to claim their rights. Following the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1965 and ILO Conventions 111 (1959) and 169 (1989), the IV World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), and the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (Durban, 2001) have been the main forums where Afro-descendant women have made their demands clear.

Rural Afro-descendant women are the backbone of the identity of Black or Afro-descendant communities, especially in the rural-urban context. They are the custodians, defenders and bearers of ancestral values, they are the guardians of ancestral knowledge and traditional production practices, they support their families and strive to survive when faced with numerous forms of discrimination; especially in a rural context which is often marked by gender-based violence, patriarchal dynamics and male domination.





It is essential to give greater visibility to the role of Afro-descendant women within these territories since they are the ones who promote unity and solidarity and play a crucial role in the formation of their community and territorial identities (IPEA, 2013).

In addition, the territory plays a transcendental role in the food security of rural Afro-descendant communities. Through their adaptation process and drawing from their ancestral knowledge, they have developed livelihoods based on traditional production practices or systems. Afro-descendant communities have developed adaptive forms of subsistence on the land, based on productive practices that range from agriculture to mining and fishing. These traditional production systems include other complementary activities, such as manufacturing tools and utensils, harvesting the forest for timber to build houses, and producing traditional natural medicine for their communities.

These systems represent an ancestral subsistence model based on the family as the basic unit of production. It is based on a division of labour by gender and a complete and complex code of norms for the division of labour among family members. The system aims to ensure sustenance and is mainly carried out through harvesting and cultivation.

From this perspective, Afro-descendant rural life can be characterized by three main scenarios (the pursuit of life with dignity in their territories, especially their ancestral lands; the management of natural resources; and traditional production practices). These are often combined with subsistence activities associated primarily with agricultural production, such as day labour in agricultural work; small and medium-sized livestock farming; sugar cane, corn, cereal and rice single-crop farming; hunting and fishing; the extraction of timber products; shellfish harvesting; horticulture; traditional mining; and fruit harvesting.

In these three scenarios, Afro-descendant women again play a key role, as many work as traditional shellfish gatherers, traders of agricultural products, fruit merchants and miners, among other productive activities. In rural and urban life, Afro-descendant women face a lack of opportunities for employment, productive activities and entrepreneurship. In this regard, it is not possible to understand the challenges of Afro-descendant rural life without understanding the situation of Afro-descendant women, which, as mentioned, is subject to multiple forms of discrimination.



Gender discrimination, for example, is reflected in the issues of job instability and interruptions in employment as a result of their reproductive roles, a guilt complex due to the so-called abandonment of their children, and personal situations, which explain the structural inequality faced by Afro-descendant women. But this discrimination also affects Afro-descendant youth in rural areas, as many young people find it difficult to complete their studies, and many who manage to graduate from high school often join the military as combat troops. In contrast, others are involved in sports activities such as football.

Territory is the basic foundation for development; with it, self-sufficiency can be achieved and spending can be managed. In other words, rather than a conceptual notion, territory should be understood as a model that provides its inhabitants with a fundamental strategy to determine their life plans, and as an instrument of negotiation, ownership and well-being (Antón, 2021). According to Hernán Cortes, from Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN) in Colombia, territory in the rural Afro-descendant world is understood as belonging to nature, a biocultural system where social structures, productive practices, religious practices, spirituality and languages, among other aspects, determine “the good life” or “living well”; a concept of well-being that includes the community at large rather than individuals. Living well as a cultural concept of development refers to achieving an optimal well-being situation, in the space to exist (the territory) (Cortes, 2002). It should be noted (following Cortes) that “In order to guarantee the well-being of the territory, any intervention or possession is regulated by the principles of self-sufficiency, productive diversity, balance and support. The conservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural foundations of the territory is what makes it self-sufficient. Productive diversity refers to the fact that people must plant seeds in the earth when the moon and the water indicate it, and keep the rivers and the sea healthy in order to have abundant food and good health”.



07



**Overview of the challenges  
faced by people of African descent  
in the rural world**



As previously mentioned, Afro-descendants today have great potential in terms of land, natural resource management and traditional production practices. However, it should be noted that in rural areas, they face serious challenges due to economic pressure on their territories; for example, the lack of titles to their land, weak community governance in the territories and low productivity, among other elements, as described below (Antón, 2022; Antón *et al.*, 2019).

### **National and international interests putting pressure on the territory of Afro-descendant communities and their wealth**

In the regions where the territories of Afro-descendant communities are located, significant economic capital associated with agro-industrial, mining, and tourism investments exerts influence over the communities' territory, often leading to the sale of land under pressure, land grabbing by businesspeople, indiscriminate logging, environmental pollution due to agro-industrial processes and mining concessions, among other issues. This, in turn, leads to a shortage of land for cultivation, especially for women and youth, as well as rural-urban migration and the loss of natural resources, which affects their quality of life and worsens poverty in the communities.

### **Lack of legalization of individual and collective rural lands**

In many countries of the region, especially Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras and Peru, where there are significant Afro-descendant populations in rural areas, many families and individuals lack titles to the land, which leads to legal uncertainties in land tenure, as well as invasions, land trafficking, and not being eligible for credit or being excluded from support programs from both non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and state institutions; all of which further marginalizes them.

### **Lack of adequate housing and adequate public services**

Due to their economic circumstances, the low income they receive for their mostly unskilled jobs and, in other cases, occurrences of racism, many rural Afro-descendants have no access to decent housing with basic services, nor access to electricity, communication technologies and the internet. They are forced to live in inadequate housing conditions, which worsens their already difficult living conditions and further exacerbates their social exclusion.



## **Constraints to productivity and rural Infrastructure development in Afro-descendant territories**

The lands of Afro-descendant communities face multiple challenges that affect their productivity, including soil depletion, the use of low-quality seeds, inefficient irrigation water management, and lack of access to adequate infrastructure. The absence of strategic investments in enabling infrastructure – such as rural roads, irrigation systems, storage, and digital connectivity – limits development opportunities, reducing the profitability of agricultural production and deepening rural poverty. As a consequence, migration of young people to cities, abandonment of land, and the disintegration of territories and their social dynamics are intensifying. Mobilizing investment in rural development is key to reversing these trends, promoting sustainable production models that improve the economic and social resilience of these communities.

## **Inadequate administration of the territory legally recognized as ancestral lands**

Afro-descendant communities own more than 9.5 million hectares of collectively owned land. However, the lack of understanding of the concept of territory among some leaders and communities, and the pressure exerted by external economic interests, contribute to poor territorial administration. This leads to a situation in which certain people do not value the concept of territory, thus jeopardizing its very existence and relevance. This is a complex issue involving the loss of community governance, which is also fueled by the presence of unauthorized armed actors and informal economies.

## **Difficulty in access to credit for Afro-descendants**

In both the urban and rural sectors, some Afro-descendant communities are not considered eligible for credit by financial institutions due to prejudices in the banks themselves (for example, claiming that Afro-descendants do not make their payments), or because the interest rates are too high for the type of activities that Afro-descendants undertake. In addition, they cannot meet the guarantees and requirements of the banks, since the income they receive does not guarantee their ability to repay the loan. Consequently, few Afro-descendants have access to credit, and as a result, they instead carry out individual, family or collective productive activities.



### **Limited access to rural employment**

In both the public and private sectors, access to employment for Afro-descendants is intricately linked to factors of discrimination, social exclusion, and education. Difficulties in accessing quality basic and secondary education, as well as higher education, limit access to good jobs and salaries. Thus, the majority of Afro-descendants do not find jobs in accordance with their levels of education.

### **Insufficient training of Afro-descendants in productive development**

Formal education, training and technical assistance by public and private institutions and NGOs does not often respond to their needs. It does not consider the time available to them to attain the necessary knowledge. Moreover, there is no follow-up to training processes, and formal education does not facilitate insertion in the labour market.

### **Few social programs for Afro-descendants**

In many cases, universal social programs do not reach rural and urban Afro-descendant populations, partly due to their employment situations and low incomes resulting from low-skilled work. In this sense, they remain in inadequate housing, with poor quality education and restricted access to quality health services, among other things. Consequently, this situation is becoming increasingly precarious, for which universal policies are not enough. Indeed, affirmative action policies are required.

### **Limited markets for products made by rural Afro-descendants**

The market for products of Afro-descendants is often limited or moderately restricted, while in other cases products are only sold informally. In addition, they are not able to access markets in urban areas, resulting in agricultural and livestock products being sold on the streets and pavements; thus diminishing their marketability, driving up prices, and making them less competitive.



08



## **Conclusions and recommendations to guarantee the rights of people of African descent in the rural world**



Possible actions aimed at ensuring the right to development for Afro-descendants are considered for discussion, aimed at promoting effective measures for protecting and owning their ancestral territories, given that this is the cornerstone for fostering their well-being in the rural world. In this respect, it is essential to promote territorial rights, basic sanitation and the expansion of their territories to design and implement effective actions for productive development, reforestation, access to water, sanitization of water sources and watershed management. It is a matter of establishing policies that make it possible to recover and strengthen governance structures and cultural identity in their territories.

Recognizing the collective territorial rights of Afro-descendants involves promoting responsible land governance and community land administration systems, either individually or collectively, equitable and inclusive access to land ownership, and the guarantee, effectiveness, and enjoyment of these rights.

Afro-descendant communities have historically faced complex challenges in terms of land tenure and preserving their territorial rights, directly impacting their economic, social and cultural development. In general, Afro-descendants in the Americas face persistent problems associated with structural racism, weak political processes, the lack of representation in political bodies and low institutional involvement, which in turn leads to limitations in the administration of their territories, land fragmentation and scarcity of resources, thus increasing their vulnerability to external pressures. Other threats to their territorial rights include the socioeconomic instability of families and communities, the lack of inclusive policies, and the absence of effective governance in their territories. Land tenure processes in particular are weak and virtually non-existent in some places.

Currently, Afro-descendant organisations from 11 countries in the region, in collaboration with the RRI initiative, are building the 'International coalition for the defence, conservation, protection of territories, environment, land use and climate change of Afro-descendant peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean', a global coalition of grassroots organisations to work towards the search for security and recognition of collective territorial rights, an issue that so far has made little progress on the international agenda. One of this coalition's achievements is that, since 2020, a roadmap for advocacy is being developed at the national level to advance towards recognizing the rights of Afro-descendants, who wish to be present in



the debates on climate change and environmental conservation. This same coalition, in collaboration with the Rights and Resources Initiative and the Observatorio de Territorios Étnicos y Campesinos (Observatory of Ethnic and Peasant Territories) of the Universidad Javeriana of Colombia, has developed a mapping information system of Afro-descendants in the selected countries. The system makes it possible to demonstrate the coexistence of Afro-descendants in ecosystems with a rich biodiversity, in addition to identifying areas affected by climate change, thus justifying their demand for participation in specialized forums and decision-making on these issues.

Afro-descendant communities, like Indigenous communities, are trusted stewards of the land and protectors of biodiversity. They are key natural allies in climate change mitigation efforts in the region, thanks to their ancestral knowledge and collective territorial practices. Although historically, they have contributed the least to climate change, they are the first to be affected. They are the most vulnerable when it comes to natural disasters and climate-related impacts (such as environmental degradation and deforestation) affecting agriculture and food. This is a stark reminder that climate justice and racial justice are interconnected and interdependent issues. These groups also face the threat of encroachment on their lands, logging and the presence of external illegal groups, among others; often sanctioned by governments.

In the strategy to better promote Afro-descendant rights in the rural world, statistics play an essential role. They must contain questions that allow for quantifying and characterizing rural Afro-descendant populations, including the identification and delimitation of their ancestral territories. To this end, the lessons learned in population and housing censuses can contribute to improving agricultural censuses, where little progress has been made in including self-identification and culturally relevant questions. Therefore, greater attention should be paid to agricultural data that not only allows for the disaggregation of data for Afro-descendants, but which also provides an intersectional approach to gender and life cycles. It should be noted that in many countries, there are significant differences in the agricultural practices of different ethnic groups that are important to measure in an agricultural census (FAO, 2016).

Given that it is crucial to implement more effective measures for the legal protection of ancestral territories, it is necessary to conduct further



research to learn about the current state of territorial rights in each of the region's countries. In this sense, it is also important to strengthen administrative records. In particular, it is essential to have timely and high-quality information on the progress of collective land ownership and tenure rights, including indicators that account for the time it takes to complete each process, as these sometimes occur at slow rates, posing risks and setbacks for the legal protection of their land.

Strengthening Afro-descendant organizations and communities in rural territories is another challenge in the region. One possible line of action to address this is to promote continuous training programs on issues of legal protection of their territories, land ownership, food security and sovereignty, the commercialization and protection of genetic resources and biodiversity, among others. It is also important for international cooperation agencies and other actors to support Afro-descendant organizations that promote collective land rights and the legal protection of land, so that rural Afro-descendant communities are empowered, and at the same time, able to exert political influence at the national, regional and international levels.

As a result of the “Regional technical workshop on Afro-descendants and rurality, the following lines of action and elements were recommended to be included in public policies aimed at guaranteeing the well-being of Afro-descendants in rural areas:

### **Multisectoral and participatory approach aimed at possible alternatives to overcome rural poverty.**

Based on the evidence of the national censuses shared in this report and many others that precede it, the situation of vulnerability of Afro-descendants in rural areas is clear and is directly connected to the processes of discrimination and historical exclusion, ranging from the lack of disaggregated data in many areas to the absence of inclusive policies. Overcoming this situation is impossible without the participation of all relevant actors, public and private, at the local, national and regional levels. Government actors are also called upon to foster opportunities for participation in the design of potential lines of action, the necessary investments that allow for participation in the economic, social, political and cultural sectors, as well as the improvement of livelihoods, the promotion of more efficient value chains and the improvement of markets for production in Afro-descendant communities.



### **Promotion of the territorial and cultural rights of Afro-descendants.**

The objective is to promote and improve knowledge of the territorial rights of Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean. This could be done through research on the status of their rights, fostering rights through cultural activities, and leadership training schools. The civil society organizations themselves could be tasked with this, in coordination with government agencies in charge of promoting the rights of Afro-descendants.

### **Institutional strengthening for governance and ancestral authority in ancestral territories.**

Afro-descendants pursue their life plans and well-being in their ancestral territories, often combining their traditions with elements of modernity. Ancestral authority is exercised over the territories and peaceful justice is practiced. The social structure is strengthened by ensuring the preservation of cultural life, and with it, their heritage. In any case, it is important to note that these practices and governance exercises are gradually disappearing due to different conflicts in the territories, many of them arising not only from poverty but also from the influence of external capital, which leads to extractive activities, deforestation, single-crop farming and the illegal purchase of land. It is thus necessary to foster capacity building in leadership and grassroots organizations, with a special focus on women and youth, to act at the local level and in decision-making arenas at the national and international levels.

### **Recovering ancestral knowledge and heritage within the territory.**

The aim is to bring awareness to and protect traditional knowledge, know-how and practices that Afro-descendants have maintained in their ancestral territories. This requires actions related to cultural education, research in traditional medicine and the promotion of knowledge related to forest management and environmentally friendly production practices, as well as research for new and innovative solutions, among other things.



### **Promotion of economic incentives, access to financing, strategic alliances and innovative mechanisms for the sustainable development of the territory.**

As mentioned, territory helps guarantee '*el buen vivir*' – the good life – for communities, peoples and nations. This line of action aims to encourage the traditional forms of productive development that communities have maintained for centuries, ensuring food security and sovereignty, safeguarding their heritage and strengthening their identities. It is essential to strengthen inclusive financing mechanisms and establish strategic alliances with public, private and international cooperation actors.

### **Visibility to Afro-descendants in coastal and oceanic areas.**

A mapping of the presence of peoples in the Greater Caribbean is being developed by the Coalición Afrodescendiente (Coalition of Afro-descendants). The Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and OTEC - Universidad Javeriana are working on a spatial display of the Greater Antilles and Lesser Antilles, including the Central American Caribbean coast, which Garifuna, Creole and other Afro-Caribbean communities heavily inhabit. Governance of the sea for navigation and fishing, in addition to other cultural practices, should be considered an integral part of their claim to rights, and their presence in the Convention on the Law of the Sea and other protection and safeguard instruments must also be considered.

In conclusion, given the challenges related to protecting the collective rights of Afro-descendants, it is essential to work on the governance of land tenure and territorial rights of Afro-descendant communities in the region. This constitutes the basis for a more equitable and just society, where the right to development of Afro-descendant men and women is guaranteed. Implementing universal inclusive policies must be accompanied by affirmative action policies that foster cultural preservation, education and access to resources as crucial steps to ensure sustainable development and equity in the region. Working together to ensure the full recognition of and respect for Afro-descendant rights, and particularly land rights, is an investment in a more inclusive and sustainable future for all.



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## ANNEX

### Key concepts

The following are outlines of some of the key concepts considered to mobilize the political identity processes of Afro-descendants, which can serve as models for the design and implementation of public policies for the development of these groups and their communities. Concepts such as race, ethnicity, identity, peoples, Afro-descendants and reparations facilitate the formulation of strategies and policies for Afro-descendants. These statements are not fixed categories but instead respond to political contexts in the evolution of ideas, institutionalized knowledge and social practices.

**African Diaspora in the Americas** ♦ This is the name given to communities descended from enslaved Africans. It implies the expression of a new culture that has been shaped by world views, nuances and conditions that are very different from those of other peoples, such as Indigenous peoples and Mestizos. It is the result of a long-lasting historical process shaped by the circumstances of enslavement, colonization and exclusion that have lasted for half a millennium. During this long period, people of African descent have been subjected to discriminatory attitudes and have had to face the barriers of structural racism, inequality and poverty that hinder their full development (Lao Montes, 2007).

According to Rosa Campoalegre Septien (2017), the category “Afro-descendant” deconstructs the colonial term “Black”, as a political subject in resistance, a subject with full rights and not only victimized; as an Afro-diasporic community extending beyond national borders (ECLAC, 2018b).

**Afro-descendant culture** ♦ According to Jesús Chucho García, what is known today as “Afro-American culture” or “Afro-descendant culture” in the Americas and the Caribbean is “the result of a long process of preservation-recreation and transformation, by the sociohistorical and economic conditions in which the descendants of the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean have lived” (García, 2001).

**Afro-descendant peoples** ♦ This term indicates Afro-descendant populations in Latin America and the Caribbean that identify as such. It is a political and sociological status that has allowed them to obtain collective rights, as supported by ILO Convention 169 and other binding international legal instruments in the countries where they are citizens.



**Afro-descendant tribal people** ♦ Under ILO Convention 169, tribal status is attributed to communities that inhabit their ancestral territories in accordance with their traditional production practices. This status demonstrates that the community is legally an ethnic community with an identity and thus entitled to collective ethnic rights.

**Ancestral territories** ♦ For rural Afro-descendant communities, beyond the physical aspects, the land is where the principle of territoriality is applied; that is, the constant practice of ownership, authority, belonging, settlement and the struggle for a strategic space to fulfill their life plans. It connects the cultural and spiritual realms, development and the land (García and Walsh, 2009).

**Black community** ♦ According to Colombia's Law 70 of 1993, this community is defined as "a group of families of Afro-Colombian descent with their own culture, who share a history and have their own traditions and customs within the rural-urban context, which reveal and preserve an awareness of identity that distinguishes them from other ethnic groups".

**Black community lands** ♦ These are rural lands where Afro-descendant people and communities have settled, where their identity and traditional production practices have been shaped, and where they carry out agricultural, agro-ecological, fishing, mining, livestock and conservation activities in harmony with the ecosystem, contributing to food security (García and Walsh, 2009).

**Cultural identity** ♦ This refers to a distinct collective trait involving a long-lasting process that develops through the psychogenesis and sociogenesis of peoples (Norber, 1997). It is important to emphasize that the concept is not a defined category but rather an evolving and flexible one, under permanent development, which is achieved through long-term projects. It is connected to the historical trajectory of a cultural group that reflects certain conceptions of life and the universe (Wade, 1997).

**Denial of racism** ♦ In some nation-states, the issue of racism is still denied. Many people, and even institutions, consider that racism does not exist, reflecting the liberal principles of "equal opportunities for all". Thus, public policies aim to tackle social inequalities rather than racism, without considering the nature and history of such inequalities.

**Ethnicity** ♦ Ethnicity refers to the character attributed to a cultural group that uses its identity for political purposes. It could be an attribute of a group of people who share a culture and whose members are united by a historically established sense of common identity (Antón, 2023).





**Historical reparations** ♦ The Afro-descendant social movement seeks reparations for slavery, and their main argument is based on the historical discrimination they have suffered for over five centuries due to slavery and colonialism. They propose declaring slavery a crime against humanity, which has prevented Africans and their descendants from achieving full citizenship and development in the context of Western modernity. This entails a claim for historical reparations and social justice, entitling them to cultural and collective rights and basic human rights. In short, Afro-descendants seek inclusion and full guarantees for their development by defining a new framework of collective rights as a people (Barcelos and Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, 2007).

**Interculturality** ♦ Strictly speaking, it is an anthropological concept still in the process of being defined. It is adapted to meet the needs of different multi-ethnic nations that seek an approach to provide a rational solution to the problems of inter-ethnic conflicts between immigrant and minority cultural groups and the dominant culture. However, its nature and significance today are subject to pluralist planning that seeks to balance the existing social power relations between culturally distinct actors in the context of liberal democratic states, whose nations have been established from a multicultural point of view (Agudelo, 2005).

**Intersectionality** ♦ Intersectionality is an approach and methodology of social analysis that seeks to recognize the different types of inequality, because of the intersection of social dimensions that shape the lives of individuals and groups (AWID, 2004). This approach makes it possible to recognize and address the simultaneous presence of different dimensions of a society that often distribute power inequitably and, therefore, limit the full exercise of the rights of individuals and groups. Gender, racial-ethnic origin, age and territorial origin are categories that do not exist in isolation, nor can they be separated from the historical, social and cultural context in which they are embedded. These categories can interact in such a way as to increase the burden of inequality, resulting in differing experiences for individuals and their opportunities for well-being. This does not mean, however, that these categories are a social disadvantage. For example, it is not a disadvantage to be of African descent, to live in a rural area or to be a woman; but what is clear, according to current data, is that the intersection of these characteristics has meant that there are less opportunities for certain people, also affecting their access to well-being (FAO, 2022).





**Multiculturalism** ♦ This is understood as the new face of Western modernity, or an expression of its post-modernity. It is an idea that refers to the cultural and ethnic differences that challenge the concept of identity of many nation-states. It is further accentuated by the processes of globalization and the weakening of borders. This in turn stimulates migratory flows from urban or rural areas, or even transnational flows within the same states (Wade, 2000).

**Race** ♦ Introduced in the 16th century as a category of classification based on biological distinctions related to genotypes and phenotypes, especially about skin colour, the notion of race was “developed to justify the superiority, discrimination and domination of some groups over others, i.e., ‘racism’, and continues to be used to this day, despite its scientifically proven non-existence” (UNDP, 2013).

**Right to ancestral territory** ♦ According to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the fact that Afro-descendants own ancestral territories allows them to apply Article 21 of the American Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees the right to communal property of Indigenous, tribal or native peoples, such as the Afro-descendant Garifuna or the Saramaka Maroon peoples (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2008).

**Self-determination** ♦ Self-determination for Afro-descendants is at the heart of their social and ethnic movement in the Americas. It is the application of autonomy, of making one’s own decisions without external interference. It is not the concept as outlined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the strict sense that applies to nation-states. Rather, it is intended to recognize and promote the development of full and real capacities of an ethnic community or national minority to make decisions regarding their life plans and future.

**Slave trade** ♦ The historical process in which Western modernity was ushered in, and in which the European powers enslaved millions of African people during the period of the slave trade (16th to 19th century). Approximately ten to eleven million people are estimated to have been forced to migrate from Africa to the Americas. Of these, between 50 and 60 percent were forced to disembark in Latin America, in ports as geographically distant as Salvador and Veracruz (Borucki, Eltis and Wheat, 2015; Klein, 2010).



**Statistical invisibility** ♦ This refers to an expression of institutional discrimination in which Afro-descendants are not represented in official statistics and therefore “do not count” for public purposes. This situation ranges from the absence of racial-ethnic self-identification in the different data sources or inadequate inclusion (based on how the question is asked) to the non-disaggregation of data, and limitations in access and accessibility to information.

**Territory** ♦ This concept goes beyond geographical, ecosystemic and administrative aspects to include human, social and spiritual elements. Their territory is where the spiritual and material worlds are found, and where harmony is sought, by maintaining balance and peace among the different elements. It is not about managing resources solely for production, but rather a special type of management that maintains reciprocal relationships, storytelling, origin beliefs and natural resources, while producing food and preserving biodiversity (FAO, 2021). In their territories, communities exercise their land ownership rights, traditional production practices, territoriality and the implementation of their own development decisions.

**Triple discrimination against Afro-descendant women** ♦ The lives of Afro-descendant women in Latin American and Caribbean countries have been historically and structurally affected by the violation of their rights, which is evidence of the differentiated nature of their gender, racial-ethnic and class status.

It should be noted that the lives of women of African descent in Latin America are characterized by situations that differentiate them from other groups of women in the Caribbean, considering that the Afro-descendant population in the Caribbean subregion is in the majority, unlike the countries of Latin America; except Brazil (ECLAC, 2018b).

The physical, psychological and moral violence suffered by thousands of Afro-descendant women demonstrates that they are still subjected to strong discrimination and domination, even more so in rural contexts with high levels of conflict. Inequality and structural exclusion, along with the historical resistance that Afro-descendant women have developed, have led them to fight for their rights in their search for economic, physical and decision-making autonomy (ECLAC, 2018b)





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