# WHO ARE THE "BOTTOM BILLION"? INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND PEOPLE FROM MINORITY ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

#### INTRODUCTION

Protracted impacts of colonisation, slavery, political domination, and dispossession of land and resources are common causes of poverty, disadvantage and discrimination for Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic and religious groups.<sup>i</sup> Due to the diversity and fluidity of cultural identity, there is no universal definition of Indigenous peoples or minority ethnic groups, and limited comparative data.<sup>ii</sup>,<sup>iii</sup>. This paper includes evidence relating to minority religious groups as well as minority ethnic groups.<sup>iv</sup>

- People from minority groups are recognised as having common identities or characteristics such as language, race, religion, tribe, nationality, or a combination of these, in a country where they are in a socio-politically non-dominant position.
- In modern sociology, the term "minority" does not necessarily mean the group's population is smaller, rather that they experience relative disadvantage compared to people from dominant ethnic groups.
- "Race" usually refers to perceived distinctive physical traits such as skin colour, whereas "ethnicity" refers to cultural expression and identity, though these terms are often used interchangeably. VII Both "race" and "ethnicity" are social constructs without any scientific or genetic basis. VIII
- This brief uses the term "Afro-descendant" to refer to both Black and "mixed-race" people of African descent. The referenced research on Afro-descendants is from Latin America, however there are also significant Afro-descendant populations in Asia (particularly in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), ix the Middle East and North Africa, the United Kingdom, Europe and North America. There is limited data available about Afro-descendants in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. it
- The terms "Indigenous peoples" and "minority ethnic groups" are often used together and not distinguished, considering the importance of Indigenous peoples defining their own identity as Indigenous, and that many governments do not recognise indigeneity.xii
- There are 476 million Indigenous people around the world belonging to at least 5,000 groups in 90 countries.xiii
- Across 16 countries in Latin America there were 133 million Afro-descendants in 2015, close to 24% of the total Latin American population – 91% of those are concentrated in Brazil and Venezuela, and 7% in Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador and Mexico.xiv
- Research from 2016 found that 28% of 198 countries had "high" or "very high" levels of government restrictions on religion, based on the Government Restrictions Index, and 27% of countries had "high" or "very high" levels of social hostilities towards certain religious groups.xv

The following profile summarises current evidence on the links between poverty and indigeneity, ethnic or religious identity, highlighting how Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic and religious groups are





likely to be disproportionately affected by.xvi,xvii How Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic and religious groups define their own development and wellbeing often differs from common measurements of poverty. Self-determination is therefore a critical concept in understanding poverty amongst Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic and religious groups, as for many people, economic growth and market integration has coincided with the loss of land and natural environment, economic and social systems, languages and religious and spiritual beliefs crucial to their identity.xviii,xix Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic and religious groups commonly aspire to choose their own form of development, strengthen their autonomy, and sustainably manage their environments, resources and knowledge.xx Religious minority groups are sometimes not concentrated in particular locations, which can create challenges to demands for autonomy.xxi

The evidence in this profile pre-dates the COVID-19 pandemic. The available evidence suggests that Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic and religious groups in some contexts are at greater risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19 due to their disproportionate employment in high-risk sectors, concentration in overcrowded housing, and/or limited access to healthcare, and many have difficulties accessing public health advice in their native language. In Brazil, as of July, Afro-Brazilians were more likely to have severe respiratory symptoms that were lethal, in and the mortality rate among Indigenous people who contracted the virus was almost double that of the national average by June 2020, killing an older generation of community leaders who play a central role in cultural preservation. People from minority religious groups have also reported being blamed for spreading COVID-19, and experiencing increased violence and increased discrimination in accessing aid and services.

#### **EVIDENCE ON POVERTY AND EXCLUSION**

**Income poverty:** Rates and experiences of poverty are highly context-specific, but recent data shows:

- Indigenous peoples constitute approximately 6% of the world's population but 15% of the world's extreme poor.xxvi
- In some contexts, people from minority ethnic groups experience higher rates of poverty: in rural areas of Laos, the average consumption per capita of people who do not identify as Lao-Tai is approximately 26% lower than that of the Lao-Tai.xxvii In Vietnam, about 6.6 million of the 9 million poor people are from minority ethnic groups, though they only account for 15% of the population, and some minority ethnic groups have poverty rates as high as 70-80%.xxviii
- There are significant racial inequalities in middle-income countries: poverty rates are over twice as high for Afro-descendants in Brazil, three times higher in Uruguay, and over 10 percentage points higher in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, compared to non-Afro-descendants.xxix Afro-descendants represent 38% of the total population of Latin America but about half of all the people living in extreme poverty.xxx In South Africa, 47% of Black South African households lived below the poverty line compared to 23% of people of "mixed race", just over 1% of households headed by an Indian/South Asian South African, and less than 1% of households headed by White South Africans.xxxi

**Health and education:** Indigenous peoples and people from minority ethnic and religious groups commonly experience barriers to health and education such as discrimination, a lack of services in communities, unaffordable services, linguistic and cultural barriers, and a lack of understanding of Indigenous/ethnic cultures and traditional health care or education systems.\*\*xxiii,\*\*xxiii,\*\*xxxiii,\*\*





- More than two thirds of education- and health-poverty is found among households where the head is a member of a minority ethnic group.xxxv
- Indigenous peoples' life expectancy is up to 20 years lower than the life expectancy of non-Indigenous people worldwide.xxxvi There are health disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations around the world across virtually all health conditions.xxxvii,xxxviii
- Research on under-5 mortality rates in 36 LMICs found significant differences by ethnic group in 25 countries.xxxix
- Research across 16 surveys from Latin America and the Caribbean found similar levels of child and maternal health service coverage for people of African and European descent, but in most countries coverage of contraception, antenatal care, and skilled birth attendants was lower among Indigenous women.xl
- The exclusion of Indigenous or minority ethnic and religious group issues, histories and languages from school curricula and education systems can put children at risk of losing part of their identity and the connection with their parents and kin. Education can also be used to assimilate Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic and religious groups, and curricula sometimes denigrate minority ethnic and religious groups and reinforce persecution. These reasons, some Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic and religious groups resist state education. The exclusion of Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic and religious groups resist state education.
- Approximately 40% of the world's population does not have access to education in a language they speak or understand.xlvi
- In Latin America, on average, about 64% of members of Afro-descendant households have completed primary education compared to 83% of non-Afro-descendant households, only 30% have completed secondary education (against 46%) and only 5% have completed tertiary education or more (against 14%).xivii
- Globally, 46.6% of adult Indigenous people in employment have no formal education compared to 17.2% of non-Indigenous employed people, and 53.5% of employed Indigenous women have no formal education.xiviii Only 7.8% of Indigenous people have a university degree compared to almost 20% of non-Indigenous people.xiix Rates of education amongst Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic and religious groups vary by country.
- People from minority religious groups often have lower levels of literacy and education. For example, as of 2011, the literacy rate among Muslims in India was 68.5% (74.7% male, 62% female), compared to 73.2% amongst Hindus (81.7% males, 64.3% females), 84.5% amongst Christians (87.7% males, 81.4% females), and 75.4% amongst Sikhs (80% males, 70.3% females).<sup>II</sup>

**Broader exclusion:** for many Indigenous people and people from minority ethnic and religious groups, issues of land and natural resource ownership and management, environmental degradation, violence, self-determination and civic voice are of high priority.

- Land rights: Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic groups around the world depend on legally recognised ownership and control over land and resources for their cultural, economic and physical survival and wellbeing. Iii, Iiii However, many Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic groups continue to be displaced from their land without their free, prior and informed consent and denied access to or control over natural resources. For example, as of 2013, in Myanmar, 5.2 million acres of land had been awarded to businesses, largely without the consent or consideration of local people, including people from Indigenous/minority ethnic groups. Ivi
- Climate change and biodiversity: Approximately 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity is stewarded by Indigenous peoples, yet in many contexts they continue to play a marginal role in policy-making. Indigenous peoples often depend on the natural resources on their lands, and are the first to experience the impacts of climate change. It is estimated that





- millions of Indigenous Pacific islanders will be forced to migrate and resettle by 2050 due to sea level rises caused by climate change. Iix
- **Political representation:** Indigenous peoples and minority ethnic groups are proportionally represented or overrepresented in Burundi, China (reflecting all ethnic minorities), Guyana, India (House of the People only), Myanmar, Peru, Suriname and Vietnam, but they are underrepresented in at least 12 parliaments. Out of the 923 MPs from Indigenous and minority ethnic groups for which gender-disaggregated data are available, 742 (80%) are men and only 181 (20%) are women. Ixix
- Official recognition: Many governments (most in Asia, and several in Africa) do not officially recognise Indigenous or minority ethnic group identity, and many Indigenous people do not have official identity cards, which makes it impossible for them to access most government services, including education and health services. In some countries, certain minority religious groups are not recognised as citizens; for example Shi'a Muslims in Bahrain, Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea have had their citizenship revoked or denied on the basis of their religious identity. Ixxi
- **Employment:** Across six Latin American countries, on average, Afro-descendants are unemployed at nearly twice the rate of non-Afro-descendants. According to the last census in Brazil (2010), Afro-descendants in professional careers made on average over 40 percent less than their white peers, while those working as skilled agricultural or fishery workers made over 51% less. Axiii Globally, the proportion of Indigenous people working for wages and salaries is only 28% compared to 49% of non-Indigenous people. Axiv, Axiv Discrimination in access to employment is also commonly reported amongst many minority religious groups and is a key driver of poverty.





### CASE STUDY: BATWA/TWA PEOPLE OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION, CENTRAL AFRICA

Sources: IRIN, 2006; UNDESA, 2013; Harper, 2012; MRG, 2013, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e, 2020; Mugarura and Ndemeye, 2003; Mukasa, 2014.

The Batwa/Twa people of the Great Lakes Region in Burundi, DRC, Rwanda and Uganda commonly experience chronic poverty, poor health, discrimination and violence as a result of the forced dispossession of their customary forested lands and displacement. They historically depended on the land and forests for their food, medicines, and cultural and spiritual practices. However it is estimated that of the 70,000 - 87,000 Batwa/Twa people, less than 7000 now have direct and regular access to their customary land after it was cleared for agriculture, development projects and forest conservation from the 1970s to 1990s. Less than 2% of the Batwa/Twa population have sufficient land to cultivate, very few own livestock, and most are either squatters or tenants on other peoples' land, no longer able to practice forestbased livelihoods. Landlessness and living in overcrowded and temporary shelter has led to high prevalence of malaria, alcoholism, and poor sanitation-related diseases. The livelihoods and wellbeing of the few Batwa who still live in the forests have further been threatened by conflict and natural resource extraction, such as logging and mining. A majority of the Batwa people in the DRC were not documented as citizens, which prevented them from legally owning land. Only in June 2020 DRC's National Assembly voted to adopt a Bill to recognise and safeguard indigenous peoples. In Rwanda, Twa people are not officially recognised as an indigenous or ethnic group, chronic poverty and discrimination prevents many Twa children from remaining in school, and Twa people have higher infant mortality rates, shorter average lifespans and higher rates of disease and malnutrition. In Uganda, Batwa people have experienced rape, defilement, torture, abuse, and poor levels of education and political representation, and they are recognised as in danger of starvation and extinction. In Burundi, Twa people are officially recognised, but they continue to be among the poorest people in the country.

## HOW INDIGENOUS, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY INTERACTS WITH OTHER IDENTITIES

There is limited data disaggregated by indigeneity, ethnicity, race, religion and other intersecting identities. However recent data and evidence demonstrate that:

- Women and girls: Women and girls from Indigenous or minority ethnic and religious groups experience compounded discrimination based on their ethnicity and gender. For example, female Afro-Brazilians earn on average 46% less than White Brazilian women, but 32% less than male Afro-descendants. Across 16 countries, the poorest women from minority ethnic groups were the most likely to have been left behind in education and health. Displacement and loss of livelihoods can put women and girls from Indigenous and minority ethnic groups at increased risk of trafficking, economic and sexual exploitation, and can put them at risk of conflict and violence. Women and girls are sometimes used as political pawns or violently assaulted as a mode of persecution in conflicts associated with specific ethnic or religious groups. Indigenous girls tend to be more disadvantaged than Indigenous boys. Women from Indigenous and minority ethnic groups are more likely to die or face complications related to pregnancy.
- Young people: Children from Indigenous and minority ethnic groups experience malnutrition and childhood diseases at higher rates than other children, and higher rates of infant mortality. For example, in DRC, mortality from measles is estimated to be five times higher amongst Ba'Aka children than neighbouring Bantu communities, IXXXIII and in India, child malnutrition is 14-20% higher for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. IXXXIV Across Latin America, child mortality is 70% higher among Indigenous children than non-Indigenous children.
- **People with disabilities and LGBTQI+ people:** There is limited evidence available on people with disabilities from Indigenous and minority ethnic and religious groups. IXXXVI





People with mental health conditions and older people: HelpAge International has reported
on the devastating mental health effects of the cumulative impact of a lifetime of discrimination
experienced by older people from Indigenous and minority ethnic groups. |xxxxvii

#### **CONTEXTUAL FACTORS**

Contextual factors such as rural or urban location, conflict and natural disasters can influence the experience of poverty for people from Indigenous or minority ethnic and religious groups. Key data and evidence show that:

• Rural/urban divide: the situation of Indigenous peoples and people from minority ethnic and religious groups in rural and urban settings varies significantly by context. In Latin America, migration from rural to urban areas has increased, with 49% of the Indigenous population living in urban areas, where they generally have greater access to public services. The life expectancy of Indigenous people is 30 years shorter in the Peruvian highlands than in Lima. Completion of primary education throughout Latin America is 1.6 times higher for urban Indigenous people than for rural Indigenous people, 3.6 times higher for secondary education, and 7.7 times higher for tertiary education.xc

#### MEASUREMENT AND DATA

#### Challenges and limitations of the data include:

- Many international agencies do not collect disaggregated data on people from Indigenous a minority ethnic and religious groups. xci, xcii
- Variations in the definitions of 'Indigenous' and 'minority ethnic group' or reluctance to define these concepts can pose problems in collecting and comparing data.xciii
- In a survey of census questionnaires, the United Nations found that 65% enumerated their populations by national or ethnic group, but they used a diverse range of approaches and terms to classify ethnicity. In some countries what is called 'race' might be called 'ethnicity' in another, and what is called 'nationality' in some contexts is called 'citizenship' in others.xciv
- Religious identity often corresponds to distinct ethnic and/or linguistic identities, therefore it can be difficult to distinguish whether solely religion, ethnicity, or language is the key driver of exclusion and poverty. xcv
- Many countries in Asia and Africa do not define sub-populations as Indigenous or minority ethnic groups because there is limited consensus on the definitions of these identities, and in some contexts political sensitivities.
- Disaggregating data by linguistic groups can be useful but does not accurately capture the heterogeneity of many Indigenous and minority ethnic populations, for example some people no longer speak their ancestral language due to urbanisation, discrimination or other factors.
- There is significantly more data and research on socio-economic inequalities experienced by Indigenous peoples and people from minority ethnic and religious groups in high income countries.
- There is limited global comparative data available on the economic experiences of people from Indigenous or minority ethnic and religious groups. xcix
- In contexts where Indigenous and minority ethnic and religious group populations are concentrated in particular geographic locations, data is often presented by geographic location rather than by ethnicity or religious identity.





 There is limited comparative data available on forms of poverty amongst people from minority religious groups. Many countries do not collect data on religion due to political sensitivities and the danger that data collection and storage can pose to persecuted groups. People from minority religious groups may not wish to disclose their religious identity due to fear of persecution, and there is no global standardised methodology for collecting data on religious identity.

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This profile was produced by the *Disability Inclusion Helpdesk*, managed by *Social Development Direct* (SDDirect). SDDirect is a leading provider of high-quality, innovative and expert social development assistance and research services. We work to build inclusive societies in which people in all of their diversity are valued and empowered to make choices about their own development."

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The Helpdesk is part of *FCDO's Disability Inclusive Development (DID) Programme* under the banner of *Inclusive Futures*, led by *Sightsavers*, which brings together 16 international development organisations, disabled people's organisations and country partners to ensure no one is left behind.

These factsheets were produced for FCDO to enhance knowledge and understanding of how different identities are impacted by poverty. The research was conducted using primarily pre-Covid sources, although the factsheets have sought to summarise the impact of COVID-19 where information is available. The authors of this profile are Jessie Meaney-Davis and Erika Fraser.





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**Cameroon**: only 1.31% of the Indigenous Baka children in the District of Salapoumbé attend primary school. Source: Vinding, D. (Ed.) (2006). Indigenous Peoples and the MDGs: Perspectives from indigenous communities in Bolivia, Cambodia, Cameroon and Guatemala. Geneva: PRO 169/International Labour Organization.

**Chad:** only 1% of boys and virtually 0% of girls from nomadic groups were enrolled in school (IWGIA, 2019).

**Ghana:** while the national average number of years in education is 6.6, people from the Gruma ethnic group have an average of 0.2 years of education. Source: Bhatkal, T., Samman, E. Stuart, E. (2015). Leave no one behind: the real bottom billion. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odiassets/publications-opinion-files/10206.pdf

**Nepal:** the adult literacy rate for all upper castes was 63% compared to 51% for all Janajatis (Indigenous groups) and 38% for all Dalits. Source: UNDP (United Nations Development Program) (2009). Nepal Human Development Report 2009. Kathmandu.

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**Ethiopia:** As of 2008, in the Somali region the literacy rate for female pastoralists was 4.8%, compared to a 22.7% literacy rate for male pastoralists. Source: Kipuri, N. and Ridgewell, A. (2008). A Double Bind: The Exclusion of Pastoralist Women in the East and Horn of Africa. Minority Rights International.

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#### For example:

**DRC:** 94% of Congolese women had access to antenatal care, compared to 37% of Indigenous women. Source: The New Humanitarian (2013). In Congo, few pygmy women have access to reproductive health services. <a href="https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2013/03/01/congo-few-pygmy-women-have-access-reproductive-health-services">https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2013/03/01/congo-few-pygmy-women-have-access-reproductive-health-services</a>

**Kenya:** Maasai women in Kenya are twice as likely to have had no antenatal care (UNPFA, 2018) **Namibia:** San women in Namibia are ten times more likely to give birth without skilled attendance (UNPFA, 2018).

**Panama:** Indigenous women are approximately six times more likely to die in childbirth than non-Indigenous women. Source: MRG (n.d.) Children and young people.

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