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South America: Trends and challenges for development

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OVERVIEW

Our first article deals with a difficult topic in Brazil. The first year has passed since a set of affirmative action measures has been used as a bold attempt to reduce racial inequalities. Other countries in the region are watching the outcomes as a potential model, but critics argue that the measures create divisions instead of reduce them. Supporters argue that not trying out innovative policies sanctify an unjust status quo. Nevertheless, Brazil is now one step closer to its self-proclamation as an inclusive and tolerant democracy. Countries with stark social inequalities ought to seize the opportunity to follow-up on the policies initiated in Brazil.

The next two articles show that it is all about the numbers. Indexes have raised awareness about global problems and inserted them into the national agenda. Some are more technical, some more ideological, but they tell a particular history about countries' performance —investors and economic agents follow them closely. Our second article integrates six indexes to tell a compelling history about the development challenges of South American countries. Violence, political and institutional instability, plus relatively high risk of climate change, are among the main long-term challenges where the region needs to heavily invest its gains from economic growth.

It seems true that we can't follow what we can't measure. For example, a topic that emerges from the first and second article in this edition is inequality, and it is also the topic that is causing more stir in the context of post-2015 MDGs. The IDH is a well-known global index, but the version that has been corrected by inequality has been less visible. And some countries, whose economic growth has been impressive in the last decade, rank lower because they have not been able to reduce inequalities.

The third article explains a new set of data that is causing a lot of debate about what Latin American governments are actually doing to reduce inequalities in their countries. A thorough regional study of taxation systems, welfare programs and other social policies in various countries is shining a light on how these systems are helping the poor and more vulnerable citizens. This also opens a window of opportunity to show that it is possible to combine more available indicators in order to create strong and technical indicators about inequalities and government performance on these issues. Maybe this is the second generation of indicators that middle-income countries are looking for to inform the debate of post-2015 MDGs.

—*Fernando Prada*
FORO Nacional Internacional

Affirmative action in Brazil: acknowledging the problem of race

By: Nina Augustsson

Brazil long considered itself a “racial-democracy”, but the stark inequalities say otherwise. The one-year-old affirmative action legislation has critics accusing it of drawing up racial categories and creating divisions. However, sometimes “mestiçagem” hides profound social inequalities, when we need categories to legislate in favor of the rights of the underprivileged.

The Afro-descendant population in Latin America is one of the most vulnerable, excluded and poor on the continent.¹ With historical roots² of racial discrimination, this is a group that despite its size and its social and cultural influence in the region is at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the population in areas such as education, work, health, infrastructure and access to public services. It is estimated that the Afro-descendants make up 23 percent of the total Latin American population —around 120 million people.

Latin American countries are beginning to explore affirmative action strategies to pursue racial justice.³

Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras and Uruguay are addressing discrimination and the unequal economic opportunities that often come with it. [Colombia was the first Spanish-speaking American country to implement affirmative action policies in 1991](#), but Brazil is by far the leader in defining the constitutional right to expand affirmative action. The attention has been on education as a vehicle for upward mobility and integration into the labor market and politics.

In Brazil, the Afro-descendant population represents 51 percent of the total population (table 1). Poverty and a darker skin color often coincide. On average, the income of whites is more than double that of black or brown Brazilians, [according to IPEA](#) (using their own categories). Furthermore, they are twice as likely to be illiterate, to go to prison, to be murdered, and half as likely to go to university. According to the [Annual Report on Racial Inequality](#) in Brazil, infant mortality among whites is 37.3 per thousand live births but among Afro-descendants the figure is 62.3. According to the report, nearly half the children of African descent aged 6 to 10 are behind in the education cycle, but among whites in this age bracket the rate is ten percentage points less at only 40.4 percent. Furthermore, these disparities in opportunities foster social exclusion and contribute to [Brazil’s high crime rate](#), urban violence and favelas.

Better-targeted government spending and a strong jobs market have had a positive effect on Brazil’s poor, whatever their color. Brazil’s government introduced affirmative action programs to hurry change along. In August 2012 legislators enacted “The Law of Social Quotas” (initiated in 2001), which requires public federal universities to reserve half of all new admission spots for public high school graduates who meet the threshold requirement. In addition, the law requires that the 50 percent quota reserve spots for Afro-descendants, mixed race and Amerindians in proportion to their weight in the local population by region.

The Supreme Court decided that they did not contravene constitutional equal-rights provisions —which brought the government to directly pass a law mandating quotas for entry to all of the country’s 59 federal universities and 38 federal technical schools. The first beneficiaries, [cotistas, started their courses](#) this

TABLE 1. Afro-descendants (AD) in selected LAC countries

Country	Year	AD population (million)	% of total population
Brazil	2010	96.7	50.7
Colombia	2005	4.3	10.3
Costa Rica	2011	0.3	7.6
Ecuador	2010	1.0	7.3
Panama	2010	0.3	8.8

Source: [UNDP \(2012\), “Visibilidad Estadística”, Panama: UNDP](#)

¹World Conference Against Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa August 31st to September 8th, 2001; Bello, A. and Rangel, M. (2002), “La equidad y la exclusión de los pueblos indígenas y afrodescendientes en América Latina y el Caribe”, *Revista de la CEPAL* No. 76 (LC/G.2175-P), Santiago de Chile, CEPAL; Hopenhayn M. and Bello, A. (2001), “Discriminación étnico-racial y xenofobia en América Latina y el Caribe”, *Serie Políticas Sociales* No. 47 (LC/L.1546-P/E), Santiago de Chile, CEPAL.

² Bello, A., Paixao, M., “Estado actual del cumplimiento de los derechos civiles, políticos, económicos, sociales y culturales de la población Afrodescendiente en América Latina,” Proyecto CEPAL-Comisión Europea: “Valorización de los programas regionales de cooperación de la Unión Europea dirigidos a fortalecer la cohesión social,” Santiago de Chile, 2008

³ Special government ombudspersons dealing with racism now operate in every LAC country except in El Salvador, Chile and Paraguay.

year. By 2016 half of students admitted will have graduated from public schools. Of these, half will be from families with incomes below 1,017 *reais* (US\$503) a month —a cut-off higher than country average.

The affirmative action law does not apply to private universities, but paradoxically, Brazil's most competitive universities tend to be public (and free of charge), so that the students who are enrolled in public universities disproportionately come from the private secondary schools that Brazil's privileged classes attend. On the other hand, most Brazilians attend the poorly resourced public schools, and those who graduate and go on to college predominately go to private universities, which account for 70 percent of higher education students in Brazil.⁴

The affirmative action debate has split both the left and right. President Dilma Rousseff, and her predecessors Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, have all been in favor of the quotas, but for political controversial reasons have had to move cautiously. Even though it was executed as a top-down action, it was spurred by the black movement⁵ in Brazil and voiced at the U.N. Conference Against Racism in South Africa in 2001.⁶

Affirmative action critics argue that Brazil has never before had public policies based on race, fearing that it is a dividing instrument in society. Brazil has a population built from European immigrants, their African slaves and an Amerindian population that they displaced. But as slavery ended in 1888, "[color in Brazil became not a binary variable but a spectrum](#)". Brazil has a scholarly and cultural tradition of celebrating *mestiçagem* as a pillar in nationalist thought.⁷ And, even though it's clear that racism exists in Brazil, it is, as sociologist Antonio Riserio puts it, "veiled and shamefaced". Brazilians have long argued that society is stratified by class, not race. According to naturalized Brazilian anthropologist [Peter Fry](#), US style affirmative action risks forcing Brazilians into strict black and white categories, which contradicts its national identity of a mixed race population. Some Brazilian academics have led a campaign against quotas, with the argument that "[affirmative action starts with an act of racism: the division of a rainbow nation into arbitrary color categories](#)". However, a growing number disagree.

Opponents of quotas also worry that ill-prepared students will gain entry to tough courses and then struggle to cope. The difference between what the publicly educated youngsters and their privately educated counterparts have learnt is vast. Surprisingly, though, neither the State University of Rio de Janeiro nor University of Brazil —the two earliest to adopt quotas— have found that even when the starting gaps were wide, most *cotistas* had caught up by graduation. Both universities found that the *cotistas* had a higher attendance rate and were less likely to drop out.

Proponents of affirmative action say these arguments sanctify an unjust status quo. [Marcelo Paixão](#), a professor of economics and sociology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, eloquently puts it like this: "Although we haven't had a visible pattern of conflict, we do have a strong psychological association between skin color [...] and the position occupied by each person in the social pyramid."

Brazil, as South America's largest economy and the regional leader, and the fifth most populous country in the world, serves as an important role model for the rest of the region by institutionalizing the fight for a more equal society. The precedent is set. Along with the steps towards a more equal society comes [identifying the roots](#) of the problem,⁸ however difficult it may be to categorize people into different social groups. Brazil is one step closer to its self-proclamation as an inclusive and tolerant democracy —a pillar for development.

⁴ Paixão, M. and Carvano, L. *Relatório anual das desigualdades raciais no Brasil, 2007–2008*. Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2008.

⁵ When the country returned to democratic rule in 1985, the social movements demanded equal rights of black Brazilians. They have gradually achieved the building blocks for today's federal legislation. Brazil's first affirmative action policies were implemented in 1999 in Porto Alegre, where the municipal government passed a regulation that 5 % of the workforce with all publicly funded contracts be "black" [as stated in the official document]. The state of Bahia, with its 75% non-white population, quickly followed.

⁶ The [UN declaration](#) "urges states and financial development institutions to assign particular priority, and allocate sufficient funding, within their areas of competence and budgets, to improving the situation of Africans and people of African descent, while devoting special attention to the needs of these populations in developing countries, inter alia through the preparation of specific programmes of action."

⁷ Cleary D., "Race, nationalism and social theory in Brazil: rethinking Gilberto Freyre", working paper, Harvard University

⁸ Telles E., Paixao M., "Affirmative Action in Brazil": Latin American Study Association Forum, Spring 2013, vol. XLIV: issue 2 .

Commitment to equity: Put your money where your mouth is
By: Fernando Prada

Is the economic success of South America sustainable? Using development indicator indexes as a roadmap

By: Mario Bazan and Marycielo Valdez

Economic growth rates in most South American countries have been above world average during the last 10 years. Integrating a set of development indexes describes a complex picture of the region's future development challenges, although the picture that emerges is not as optimistic as the achievements in economic growth suggest.

Positive growth rates between 2002 and 2012 have been common in the region, even during the financial crisis. Venezuela and Argentina, now experiencing economic crises and macroeconomic imbalances, reached 10 percent annual growth between 2004 and 2006 —as Peru did in 2008 and Paraguay in 2010. High growth rates have brought optimism, investment, and wealth. However, concerns about sustainability of this growth emerge when looking beyond economic data.

We have normalized a set of available development indexes⁹ to provide a broad vision of where the region is heading and why concerns about sustainability of its development process will shape next decade's policies. This approach also describes what information is currently missing from the equation, in the context of the post-2015 MDGs debates.

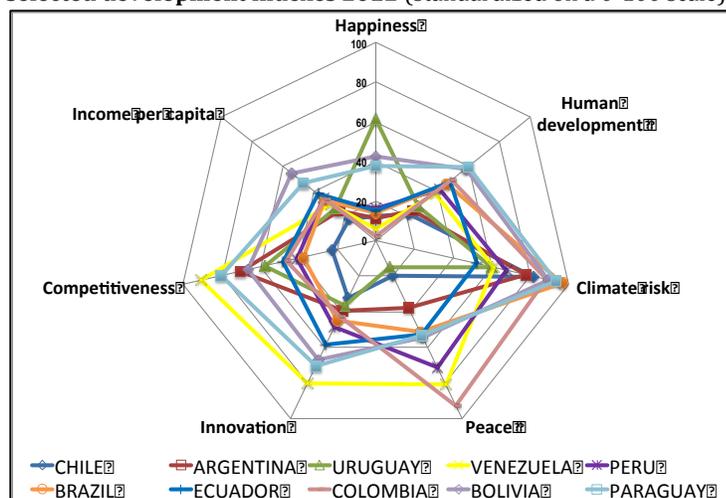
Economic growth has translated into higher per capita income (GNI). Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela has surpassed the US\$11,900 threshold and become high-income countries; and only Bolivia is in the bottom half of the world ranking. Argentina, Chile, Peru and Uruguay at least doubled income per capita between 2002 and 2012.

Whether recent economic growth or a cheerful and optimistic soul, South American countries rank relatively high regarding how happy they are. Seven South American countries are among the 25 happiest countries in the world. The [happiness index](#), prepared by the New Economics Foundation, integrates economic, social and environmental data, with indicators such as economic achievement, a self-rated well-being index and the ecological footprint. Although some indicators contain contradictory signals, perception about happiness is related to [closeness to family and friends, rather than material factors](#).

The human development outcomes show encouraging signs on how South American countries can rapidly climb the happiness ladder by investing public resources wisely. Even though Bolivia and Paraguay are still in the lower half of the table, most countries have progressed rapidly during the last two decades. The [Human Development Index](#) (HDI), prepared by UNDP, integrates income, health and education aspects, and [one version considers the levels of inequality](#) in each country —where the results for the region are less impressive. Again, the region is on its track to higher HDI levels, although challenges related to inequality and social services quality will make progress harder to achieve.

The [ranking of peace](#), prepared by the Institute for Economics and Peace, still shows that conflicts are prevalent in the region. This ranking includes attitudes, institutions and societal structures to create and maintain a peaceful environment. Colombia, with an ongoing, armed conflict, is about to negotiate a peace agreement —but not all the signals show optimism that this time peace will be achieved. Other

FIGURE 1. **Rankings of South American countries according to selected development indexes 2012** (standardized on a 0-100 scale)



Source: Selected development indexes

⁹ Normalizing indexes means to standardize them using a 0-100 scale, because each of these ranking considers a different number of countries.

countries, although in peace, have ongoing domestic conflicts —related to natural resources such as land and water. Institutional weaknesses also reflects in the ranking, linked to the poor capacities to deal with conflicts in countries very prone to authoritarianism, a personalized exercise of political power and influence of military institutions —still a long way to strengthening democratic governance institutions.

When looking at competitiveness, things are less encouraging. Only Chile is among the top quarter in the [competitiveness ranking](#) (by the World Economic Forum) while Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador are among the top half. Although this ranking is based primarily on economic factors and trade openness, private sector investors follow this ranking closely, since it relates to the facility of doing business in a country. One reason that countries in this region rank poorly is their institutional weakness, corruption and low state capacity to enforce laws and contracts. Changes are slow in this area, while Argentina and Venezuela are experiencing setbacks that could negatively impact the region.

Innovation capacities, as measured in the [Innovation Ranking](#) by Cornell University, INSEAD and WIPO, are also a cause for concern in the future. Most countries are in the middle of the table, lower than their economic rankings. The gap between economic success and innovation, including building a conducting environment to it, is still not closing. This gap points to the weak education systems in most countries, with high inequalities in the access to high-quality tertiary education.

An aspect less encouraging is the [climate vulnerability index](#), as measured by Germanwatch. Brazil is among the top 10 vulnerable countries, and all other countries of the region are in the top half. Geography, biological diversity and a variety of climates offer enormous opportunities for resilience, but the region has been slow to build capacities to respond to climatic change.

These six indexes combined, give a comprehensive idea of the future challenges for countries in South America. Gains from economic growth have given the opportunity to a group of countries to invest more in social policies, and particularly natural resource exporting countries will enjoy above average international prices during the next decade. They will need to invest more in creating domestic capacity to add value to their production, while reducing the productivity gaps by providing good education. This should not replace, but go alongside the strengthening of national institutions.

A more educated population and improved health care is the basis to reduce the levels of violence. This situation, fuelled by social inequality, comprise structural factors such as the prevalence of poverty, weak institutions, limitations on the administration of justice and little capacity to enforce the rule of law. It also includes a cultural dimension that emerges from discrimination among citizens, and furthermore, the prevalence of domestic violence and organized crime throughout the region.

Environmental and climate challenges are more complex. Investment opportunities and economic growth put great pressure on natural resources, biodiversity, and food production in rural areas. Industries and global consumption have accelerated global warming, which may be related to the occurrence of natural events with devastating effects on the economies and security. Robust financial resources help to prepare mitigation and adaptation strategies for climate change, and only a few South American countries will be well prepared to face these challenges.

The future of South America is driven by its economy based on a set of comparative advantages, mainly related to natural resources. Things have improved in the last decade, but countries should wisely invest the gains from economic growth. Two central issues emerge from this picture, and countries are making a great effort to include them in the discussion of post-2015 MDGs. The first is peace in a broad sense, ranging from an adequate justice system sensitive to cultural issues, to measures that improve greater social cohesion and a clear political commitment to reduce inequality. The second aspect is reducing climate risk and improve environmental sustainability, including biodiversity conservation, sustainable city development, food security and rural development, and sustainability of water sources.

Miscellany Section

Brazil drafts a legislation to protect privacy on the Internet

After top secret documents from the National Security Agency (NSA) revealed that Petrobras' executives and the President Dilma Rousseff's emails and phone calls were monitored, the Brazilian President is proposing [new legislation](#) that would force Internet companies such as Google and Facebook to store locally gathered data in Brazil. Companies would be required to build data centers in the country to be abided by Brazilian privacy protection law. Additionally, the Ministers of Defense of Brazil and Argentina have agreed to implement a plan for bilateral support in cyber-defense.

If implemented, this law would be a precedent of online data protection worldwide. Nowadays, Facebook stores information in [Sweden](#) and Google has six data centers in the US and four others in Finland, Belgium, Singapore and Taiwan. Because data storage in the Internet is becoming common, Brazilian legislative initiative could spark a round of regulations to global companies over their privacy policies. Moreover, this regulation could become an access barrier if imposes Internet filters such as search words or attempts to control e-commerce. Requiring building data centers in every country is a costlier strategy than negotiating multi-country facilities as part of bilateral cooperation agreements, for instance. Sooner than later, South America's growing middle class will demand data privacy protection measures. Then they will ask their government measures that protect their own private data, not only from the inadequate use of foreign companies but also from their own governments.

Promoting a democratic access to educational resources: Learning languages online

Nowadays people in Latin America no longer need to go to an institute to learn a foreign language. Using expanded access learning programs, people can find several applications, which don't require following schedules or spending money. [Open English](#) is very popular and provides a platform for interacting with English native teachers online. Another example is [Duolingo](#), an online site that teaches a variety of languages free of charge. This software has user-friendly graphics and an app for smartphones.

These methods rely on traditional "top-bottom" teaching. [Poliglota](#), the first social network for learning a foreign language in the world, takes ICTs to the next level. This program is free and does not always require internet connection since it also promotes face-to-face meetings to learn specific language in any city of the world. For example, the meetings take place once a week and participants should provide feedback between new and old participants to continue participating.

These initiatives could have potential as tools to preserve indigenous languages, such as Quechua and Aymara in Bolivia and Peru: Poliglota has already a group collectively learning the former language. The future consist of applying this horizontal teaching model to other academic areas to reach vulnerable populations in South America with poor access to educational resources. Sharing knowledge is the key word in these initiatives and ICTs can help to connect people willing to do this.

New alternatives for cancer prevention and detection

In South America, [breast cancer causes 40 thousand deaths each year](#). Cancer cases have increased, and among them, [breast cancer is becoming epidemic](#) in various countries. South American governments are launching detection and treatment programs aimed at reducing cancer mortality, such as Venezuela and Argentina are doing with their Cancer Control Programs. It is now conventional wisdom that early detection is the most effective way to reduce cancer mortality; and prevention and a healthy lifestyle are more effective than long treatments, let alone less intrusive and more likely to save lives.

Mainstream cancer treatment (such as chemotherapy and surgical interventions) will continue to dominate the official agendas, although alternative prevention methods are finding their way into public policies. International organizations such as [PAHO](#) or [SLACOM](#) are promoting prevention linked to everyday activities such as eating healthy and working out frequently. But there is more in the set of alternative approaches. The BBC recently reported [the case of Pía Hemmerling](#), a blind woman who can detect breast

cancer through tactile examination with similar accuracy such as the painful mammography screening. The [Peruvian National Institute for Neoplastic](#) recommends consuming [cuy \(guinea pig\)](#), [quinoa](#), and [guanabana](#) to prevent cancer. Governments are also promoting other methods such as self-examination for breast cancer and [electronic cigarettes](#) for reducing tobacco use and preventing lung cancer.

What is the main challenge in the next ten years to expand these alternative approaches? Options for cancer prevention and detection already exist, and countries in the region are still lagging behind at developing an information strategy to promote early detection and prevention of different types of cancer. Making alternative treatments available, as well as prevention methods aimed at healthier lifestyles, could help people unable to access expensive cancer treatment if cancer develops. These less intrusive methods could become an early warning for most people, particularly the poor who tend not to seek for treatment and medical advice until cancer has developed. Otherwise, we will be asking in ten years why other types of cancer are following the same growing trend as breast cancer.

Implementation of medical information systems in Brazil

The government of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil [is implementing an integrated health care management system](#) known as InterSystems TrakCare—which aims to transform the health system from a paper-based systems to a digital-based one. This program basically manages medical histories simplifying its administration. Brasilia was a pioneer in this system and it has served as a model for the region and other parts of the world. Chile was the first country in the region to implement in 2009 an integrated health service system known as SIDRA (information system for the health network). So far, these two countries are the only ones in Latin America that have centralized and integrated information systems for health care programs at the national level.

[Bureaucratic procedures and red tape](#) are making health systems inefficient. The use of information systems could help to manage health system records, increase overall productivity and inform public policies on the prevalence of diseases and drug demand. More information could reduce health care costs, although there are important initial costs when launching these projects. Privacy issues concerning the use of data by other health, pharmaceutical and insurance companies may slow the introduction of these information systems. Despite the benefits for health system users of integrating and managing health records, the main incentive to transform paper-based systems to a computer-based one is saving costs. Since ICT costs are reducing, more countries will find cost-effective to initiate similar systems.

Agroecology: a viable alternative for agricultural production

In the [current global food crisis](#), agroecology emerges as an alternative for Latin American countries that need to gradually resort to sustainable local food production. [Agroecology aims at reducing or eliminating the use of agrochemicals](#), and any other inputs used in industrial agriculture. It replaces intensive-use monoculture farmlands in favor of smaller spaces of mixed farming. The application of these methods promise more varied food, lower costs, more production and protection of natural resources.

There are successful examples in the region. Groups of farmers in southern Brazil have implemented an [agro-ecological system for soil treatment](#), in which they plant specific mixed crops by seasons, instead of treating the land with herbicides. In this way the land remains fertile and promotes greater biodiversity and protects ecosystems. Furthermore, the transitional phase from an agriculture model using herbicides to one based on natural pest control can also be profitable, as the Brazilian experience shows. While gross production decreases in the short-term, not using herbicides and agrochemicals reduces costs, while crops develop a greater ability to adapt to all kinds of weather. Cuba obtains most of its food supply from [smallholder organic farms](#). In these cases, the change from an industrial agricultural production model to an agro-ecological one has resulted in a much more diverse, inclusive, and resilient economic model for local food production. Sometimes, [industrial mass production techniques](#) require large investments, high production costs and the intensive use of land and resources. Instead, the alternative agro-ecological model is suitable in rural areas depending on low-scale agricultural production.

Interview with Laura Balbuena: Climate change intersects with gender issues

By: Nina Augustsson

There is a link between climate change and gender issues that government authorities are failing to address adequately. We can find the most pressing situation in indigenous communities where women faces a set of complex issues (race, education, culture) that make them highly vulnerable.

You are currently teaching a class called gender and climate change, why is it important to look at climate change from a gender perspective?

The way I apply a gender perspective when analyzing issues like climate change is a complex one that entails not only the element of gender but also other elements such as race, class, education, religion, sexual orientation, and origin, among others. Looking at these elements together, women in indigenous communities are the most vulnerable ones in terms of climate change. Moreover, they do not hold positions in the decision making process about natural resources or dealing with natural disasters (that are often the result of climate change).

When women don't have control over their lives, they run a greater risk during the consequences of climate change, as they are often house bound and the last to seek shelter. Often in these societies women are, in higher numbers than men, illiterate which gives them a disadvantage when a disaster is being announced or instructions on how to act during it are being given which puts them in a higher vulnerable position than men.

Increasingly intensified droughts leaving populations without access to running water in their houses or communities, is another example. Women are usually in charge of getting water for the house for cooking or cleaning. This means that they have to walk further distances with various consequences: it puts them at risk of being sexually assaulted since they have to be by themselves in patriarchal and violent scenarios; it gives them less time to dedicate to other tasks such as time for themselves or the family; and it gives them physical problems such as back problems since they have to carry water for longer distances, among others. Climate changes can make it difficult for agriculture to be a viable mean of income, which forces men to leave the countryside and go to the cities to work, leaving their wives and children vulnerable at home. We are talking about patriarchal traditional societies where women are, undoubtedly, more vulnerable without the presence of a man that can protect them from other men in the village.

What are the most pressing changes you see for the region regarding gender and climate change?

Our region is being affected in areas of production that impact the lives of the most vulnerable inhabitants, such as agriculture and stockbreeding households, because of flooding and harsh winters. Women are traditionally in charge of the domestic arena and of traditional (not industrial) agriculture. The case of the *heladas* (extremely cold winters) in the region of Puno in Southern Peru is a proof of this relationship: indigenous communities are hit the hardest. They don't have heating systems in their houses or farms, seriously affecting their health and livelihoods as their cattle dies and their crops freeze.

Remember when I said that I look at gender with a more complex lens? This is an example that needs that approach: these women and men are being neglected by the government because of their origin (from the high Andes), their condition of being Quechua or Aymara speakers (it's more likely that an indigenous woman will not speak Spanish), their gender (female) and their class (extreme poverty), their ethnicity



Laura Balbuena is a PhD candidate in Political Science from the New School for Social Research of New York. Ms. Balbuena is a researcher and consultant on gender issues. She is currently a professor at the Political Science Department at the Peruvian Catholic University, director of Programs at the Institute for Study Abroad / Butler University, a visiting scholar at the University of Winnipeg and president of the Association for the Development of Girls, Boys and Adolescents at Risk.

(indigenous) that gives them a second class status compared to an urban non indigenous male Spanish speaking citizen. And because of their female condition, women are more vulnerable in this scenario than men; they have to deal with the sick children, feed the family and take care of them.

What are your projections for the future?

We see more female participation in the public arena in Latin America. We now have female presidents, congresswomen and ministers, among other leading positions. With women at the decision making level may come an improvement in the way we address the consequences of climate change (in prevention and preparation for them); but we need participation of women and men who are coming from vulnerable communities, such as indigenous. It is needed that their voices been heard in order to understand the real impact of climate change in their daily lives.