Inequalities across ethnic groups

The cross-sectional analyses by Marilia Mesenburg and colleagues (August, 2018)[1] represent a welcome contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Countdown to 2030 agenda. In culturally and ethnically diverse countries such as Peru, the statistical invisibility of some excluded populations might lead to violation of their human rights, representing a major challenge for national statistical systems.

In Peru, the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) has become one of the main methods of monitoring major national and subnational development goals. Between 2000 and 2015, the annual DHS in Peru included specific questions about mother tongue, but from 2016, the survey also included specific questions on ethnic self-identification. Other household surveys, such as the annual household survey, have followed a similar pattern, thus ethnic self-identification is already mainstreamed.

Since 2013, following publication of the 2012 DHS results used by Mesenburg and colleagues,[1] the National Institute of Statistics convened a technical committee to mainstream self-identification as a new variable in its main surveys,[2] including the annual DHS, in preparation for the 2017 Population and Housing Census.[3] Thus, in their analysis, Mesenburg and colleagues reported no data for afro-descendants since the data used were based on the 2012 DHS in Peru. However, by 2017, 8·6% of female DHS respondents self-identified as afro-descendant, which was three times higher than former estimates from household surveys. This increase might be explained by the fact that an individual's mother tongue was used as the ethnicity identifier in the 2012 surveys.

The analysis by Mesenburg and colleagues provides a valuable reference to monitor access to reproductive rights by ethnicity; thus future iterations will indicate how ethnicity-driven inequalities explain exclusion of the populations most left behind and how well these inequalities are addressed. This analysis shows how statistical visibility can lead to improved human rights.

WM is Programme Analyst at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Peru Country Office, and the views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of the UNFPA. NH is a technical director of Demography and Social Indicators at the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics. MB is principal researcher of the Group for the Analysis of Development (GRADE), and the views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of GRADE. All authors were members of the National Technical Committee for the inclusion of ethnic self-identification questions in surveys and censuses (2013–17), convened by the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics.

*Walter Mendoza, Nancy Hidalgo, Martín Benavides
mendoza@unfpa.org

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Lima 15036, Peru (WM); Technical Directorate for Demography and Social Indicators, National Institute of Statistics and Informatics, Lima, Peru (NH); and Group for the Analysis of Development (GRADE), Lima, Peru (MB)

1 Mesenburg MA, Restrepo-Mendez MC, Amigo H, et al. Ethnic group inequalities in coverage with reproductive, maternal and child health interventions: cross-national analysis of national surveys in 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries. *Lancet Glob Health* 2018; **6:** e902–13.

2 Instituto Nacional de Estadísitica e Informática. Memoria Institucional. Comité técnico insterinstitucional sobre estadíticas de etnicidad 2013–2016. https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones_digitales/Est/Lib1460/libro.pdf (accessed Nov 20, 2018).

3 Instituto Nacional de Estadísitica e Informática. Perú: encuesta demográfica y de salud familiar 2017. https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones_digitales/Est/Lib1525/index.html (accessed Nov 20, 2018).