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# Forms of intercultural collaboration between institutions of higher education and indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in Latin America

DANIEL MATO

This article offers an overview of the main forms of intercultural collaboration between institutions of higher education (IHE) and organizations or communities of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in Latin America. This overview is based on research done by the Project on Cultural Diversity, Interculturality and Higher Education (the Project) of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, which I have the responsibility of coordinating. Since 2007, the Project has studied some 40 specific experiences oriented to respond to the needs, demands and proposals of communities and/or organizations of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, and this has been complemented by the analysis of partial information on some 80 other initiatives.<sup>1</sup> The forms of collaboration are context-specific, and therefore varied, including diverse kinds of programs for the inclusion of individuals of those peoples in 'conventional' universities, specific curricular programs created by 'conventional' IHE, partnerships between IHE and those kinds of organizations, as well as innovative models of IHE created either by those kinds of organizations, state agencies, or the Indigenous Peoples Fund, a peculiar multilateral organization.<sup>2</sup>

## Historic and social context

While the importance and the social, political and cultural significance of the indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples cannot be reduced to their quantitative aspects, it is, nevertheless, useful to consider some demographic indicators. As these are often a matter of controversy between those peoples' organizations and national governments, I will refer mainly to the estimates provided by international organizations.

In the case of indigenous peoples, my principal reference is the survey published by the System of Socio-Demographic Indicators of Indigenous Peoples and Populations in Latin America (SISPPI) of the Latin American

and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE) within the Population Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA); it includes data for only 11 countries. According to this source, for the year 2007 the proportion of indigenous population relative to the total population varies from approximately 0.4 per cent in Brazil to 62 per cent in Bolivia. For the remaining countries the rates fall within this range: approximately 5 to 10 per cent in the cases of Chile, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama, about 2 per cent in the cases of Costa Rica, Paraguay, and Venezuela, and 41 per cent in Guatemala. In the case of Ecuador the proportion of 6.8 per cent indigenous population relative to the general population of the country is the result of Ecuador's official 2001 Population Census, which utilized a self-identification methodology. Some experts and indigenous organizations have questioned the way in which this methodology was applied. In contrast to the Census results, the Inter-American Development Bank estimated this proportion as 25 per cent, and more recently the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) estimated it as 35 per cent.<sup>3</sup> For the countries for which there is no SISPPi data, other sources may be considered. Thus, the indigenous population of Peru in 2003 was estimated as 16 per cent of the country's total population.<sup>4</sup> In 2004, the indigenous population in Nicaragua was estimated as approximately 10 per cent of the country's total population.<sup>5</sup> In 2001, the indigenous population in Colombia was estimated as 1.83 per cent of the country's total population.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of Afro-descendant populations there is less data available. Nonetheless, there are some estimates done by CELADE and ECLA/CEPAL. An ECLA/CEPAL publication of the year 2000 estimated the Afro-descendant population in Latin America as approximately 150 million people, of whom roughly 50 per cent lived in Brazil, 20 per cent in Colombia, and 10 per cent in Venezuela.<sup>7</sup> A CELADE document published in 2005, although based on data gathered in the year 2000, estimated that the Afro-descendant population of Brazil represented 45 per cent of the country's total population, 5 per cent of the total in Ecuador, 2 per cent in Costa Rica, and 1 per cent in Honduras.<sup>8</sup>

In order to understand the current situation of the indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in Latin America we must consider at least some of the most salient aspects of their history, otherwise we lose sight of the historic density of existing inequalities and conflicts, as well as of the agenda of the social organizations and movements that have emerged from them, and why to develop higher education initiatives is important for them. As is well known, the history of the American continent has been heavily marked by conquest and colonization, with ensuing massacres, territorial dispossession and forced population movements, social and territorial reorganization of the original inhabitants of this part of the world, and the massive importation of contingents of enslaved African peoples. As a part of those processes, their religions were banned and they were forced to adopt Catholicism. Their languages, too, were generally banned, at least in public spaces, and remarkably within the education system. Ancestral knowledge was also subjected to a similar fate, particularly in the field of healthcare (often

associated to the European idea of ‘witchcraft’), but also in other areas. The foundation of new republics in the nineteenth century in no way put an end to these conditions as the new States continued many of these practices. Through their educational and cultural policies, indeed, these new States developed homogenizing national imaginaries that sought to deny differences.

As a consequence of this history, all the countries of Latin America are currently marked by ‘*de facto* unequal intercultural relations’, in response to which many indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations advance social and political projects that seek what many of them name as ‘interculturality with equity’, based on which they struggle for legal reforms, including constitutional reforms. Thus, they struggle for the recognition of both the multiethnic character of the States in question, and the existence of culturally differentiated forms of citizenship that some term ‘cultural citizenship’, and which I believe we can also term ‘citizenship with equity’.

The national constitutions of the majority of Latin American countries currently recognize the indigenous peoples’ rights to language, identity and other cultural matters. Presently, this acknowledgement is stated in the constitutions of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Guyana, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. Additionally, in practically all of these countries there are specific laws that protect the rights of these peoples, some including specific stipulations for the area of education. In the majority of cases, however, these regulations have few practical effects.

Educational initiatives are vital for indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples and their organizations to be able to count on the political, professional and technical key resource people required to formulate proposals for economic, political, normative, legal and institutional reform, and to ensure their proper implementation, to defend rights, to lend diverse types of services, to put into practice projects that are consonant with their agendas. Their most visible educational initiatives are brief courses and workshops geared towards training the members of the organizations that participate in the movements, as well as social subjects that are directly relevant to their practices. Some indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations have made advances in the educational field, whether on their own or through alliances with other actors, from the elementary levels through middle school, high school and also at the university level.

### Forms of intercultural collaboration

*Programs for the inclusion of indigenous and/or Afro-descendant individuals as students in ‘conventional’ IHE*

Scholarship and/or quota programs for indigenous or Afro-descendant individuals in ‘conventional’ universities constitute modalities of what we may call ‘programs for the inclusion of individuals’. Another modality of ‘inclusion of individuals’ is that of academic and psychosocial support provided to such students. While the focus of the Project has not been the

modalities of ‘inclusion of individuals’, it has, however, registered a few of these experiences. There are programs of this kind in several Latin American countries, although it must be noted that they are insufficient considering the remarkable disadvantage these groups of population have in access to higher education.

Examples of programs fashioned along this modality are the Edumaya Program at the Rafael Landívar University, a Jesuit university in Guatemala, the University of Santiago de Cali’s program, Strengthening of the Academic Quality of Afro-Colombian Students, and that of the Chocó-Kilombo Group at the University of Medellín, both private universities in Colombia.<sup>9</sup> There are other examples, such as the Program for the Inclusion of Indigenous Students of the National University of Colombia. The Ford Foundation, through its Pathways to Higher Education Program, has supported some experiences of academic and psychosocial support in Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

Programs that follow the modality of ‘inclusion of individuals’ provide limited opportunities for intercultural collaboration in the production of knowledge, as well as in the learning and research processes. There are conflicting views regarding these experiences. On the one hand, some assert that programs of this kind not only create opportunities for individuals, but also contribute to increase the number of indigenous and Afro-descendant professionals who in one way or another will serve their respective communities, as lawyers, educators, health professionals, etc. On the other hand, some maintain that these types of programs not only favour a ‘brain drain’ from remote communities toward large urban centres but also tend to ‘Westernize’ students, who lose their native languages, their ethnic values, and thus tend to place less value on their traditional knowledge.

*Programs that lead to degrees or other types of certifications created by ‘conventional’ IHE responding to the demands or proposals of indigenous and/or Afro-descendant communities*

There is a wide variety of modalities within these types of experiences that include associate, bachelor, and engineering degrees, among others, as well as graduate certificates and/or postgraduate degrees. There are some in which intercultural collaboration is not a salient aspect, but there are others that exhibit significant participation of indigenous and/or Afro-descendant organizations and/or communities. In some of the latter, in fact, there is also significant participation of professors who belong to the aforementioned communities, as well as a remarkable inclusion in the programs of the languages, knowledge and modes of learning and knowledge production of such peoples. Many of these experiences are geared to training educators for bilingual intercultural education programs at a variety of levels throughout the educational system. Beyond offering professional training opportunities for individuals from these population groups, these experiences also play an important role in increasing the potential number of indigenous and

Afro-descendant individuals aspiring to pursue higher education. This is another modality in which there are a considerable number of experiences.

The Project has documented several programs of this kind, such as the Indigenous Teacher Training Degree Program of the Matto Grosso State University and that of the *Insikiran* Nucleus of the Federal University of Roraima, both in Brazil, where currently 20 programs of this kind exist.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Colombia, the Project has only studied the experience of the Degree in Ethnoeducation of the University of Cauca, but there are other similar ones in some other Colombian public universities;<sup>12</sup> it has also studied the experience of the Center for Advanced Pedagogical Studies at the University of the Pacific, which offers a 14-month teaching qualification course in Afro-Colombian Ethnoeducation.<sup>13</sup> In Peru, it has studied an experience of higher education for indigenous peoples at the National University of San Marcos;<sup>14</sup> in Bolivia, that of the Program of University Technicians in Community Justice of the Law and Political Science department at the University of San Andrés;<sup>15</sup> in Ecuador, that of the Cotopaxi Academic Program in the Bilingual Intercultural Education training program at the Polytechnic Salesian University.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the Bilingual Intercultural Education Program for the Andean countries (PROEIB-Andes) has a multinational character as it combines the participation of indigenous organizations and universities of several countries in the region, with the support of some of their respective governments, and up until 2008 with the support of GTZ, the German agency for international cooperation. This program, based at the National University of San Simón in Bolivia, has facilitated the training of teachers in bilingual intercultural education for several Latin American countries, which currently apply their learning in their respective countries.<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned above, all the experiences studied are particular, since they respond to several local factors, such as the university teams themselves, the specific indigenous or Afro-descendant peoples with whom they work, and their local or national organizations, the national or provincial contexts, and other locally significant factors. In this sense it is worth adding a few words on at least one of them. Among other activities, the *Literaterras* Transdisciplinary Research Nucleus of the Minas Gerais Federal University coordinates the Language, Art, and Literature area of the Training Program for Indigenous Professors at that institution. Additionally, it also performs significant work in the areas of research, publication and production of videos as well as other audio and audiovisual products in partnership with the communities. In a good number of their productions, researchers and professors from different departments within the university work alongside their students—who in most cases are indigenous educators who are studying at the university—as well as with members of the communities, who take part as advisers and/or as full-fledged members of the design and production team, generally playing a significant role in such productions.<sup>18</sup>

The Registry of Experiences that the *Project* has created has facilitated the identification of many experiences of training programs that lead to degrees or other certifications which could not be studied up to now, but that develop

valuable initiatives. For example, there are the degree programs that since 1992 have been offered at the State University of Bolívar, a public university in Ecuador, in fields such as Education and Intercultural Studies and Intercultural Regional Development. In that experience, similar to what happens in the Degree Program in Community Development at the National Pedagogical University, a public IHE in Mexico, not only are there indigenous students, but also intellectuals/wise(wo)men and elders of the communities are incorporated in teaching activities through different modalities. Likewise, the experience of the Specialty in Bilingual Intercultural Education, a training program for elementary and secondary school teachers offered at the National University for Education Enrique Guzmán y Valle La Cantuta, a public IHE in Peru, incorporates modalities along these lines. There are many more such experiences of this kind.

Before concluding this section, it is important to briefly mention the Program of Regional Centres for Higher Education (known as CERES, in Spanish), a policy of the Ministry of Education in Colombia devised to decentralize and broaden the coverage of higher education in order to serve remote areas around the country. This policy promotes the development of programs of study that are relevant to the social needs and 'productive vocation' of each region. It also promotes the development of alliances with local organizations. It was launched in 2003 and since then it has created a total of 141 centres, in 31 of the country's departments (equivalent to states), benefiting 22,412 students. This initiative is particularly interesting because it is a national public policy within the framework of which some IHE, with the support of, and/or in collaboration with, local organizations, have developed training programs directly related to the demands and proposals of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. Many of these programs, furthermore, have incorporated indigenous intellectuals and wise(wo)men as faculty members.

*Teaching, research and social service programs developed by 'conventional' IHE with the participation of communities of indigenous and/or Afro-descendant peoples*

The group of experiences included in a somewhat forced manner in this third class expresses the diversity of contexts, professional and academic cultures, institutional cultures, and monoculturalist regulations that challenge the creativity of many groups of educators, researchers and other significant actors. The complicated name of this third modality embraces three subsets of experiences; however some of them belong to more than one of these.

A first subset includes experiences focusing mainly on teaching projects and programs, which may also include important research and/or community liaison components. They differ from the ones described in the previous section because they do not lead to degrees. Instead, they consist of one or more courses or seminars that do not offer credit or points towards graduation. Depending on the case, these types of activities characteristically

incorporate the participation of educators who belong to the aforementioned peoples/communities, and/or a significant inclusion of the languages, knowledge and modes of knowledge production and learning that are characteristic of these peoples/communities.

A second subset includes experiences where intercultural collaboration mainly takes place in research programs and/or technology generation projects, some of which include instructional activities while others do not. Depending on the case, these experiences produce knowledge about indigenous or Afro-descendant communities, systematize their languages, knowledge, and/or generate technologies that the scholars proactively share with the communities, or that are products of modalities of collaborative work between scholars and communities.

A third subset includes experiences in which collaboration takes place especially through so-called 'liaison' or 'social services' geared at improving the quality of life of indigenous or Afro-descendant communities. These experiences are not limited to the 'application' of scholarly knowledge (as happens in 'conventional' programs) in the communities since they integrate it with knowledge of the communities themselves. The principal activities in these types of cases are related to service and/or liaison with the communities even though they may include instructional and/or research ones as well.

A salient aspect of the experiences included in any of the three subsets is that in all of them there is a special interest in having significant participation of community members, not as 'ignorant' subjects to be 'civilized', but contributing from their languages, knowledge, and modes of organization of the activities themselves. The Registry created by the Project has made it possible to document basic information on dozens of experiences of this kind. The Project has studied six of them in some depth.<sup>19</sup> Let us briefly touch upon only two of them.

Between 1990 and 2008, the Teaching and Research in Traditional Medicine Program at the National Polytechnic Institute, a public IHE in Mexico, incorporated the participation of an interdisciplinary team of its scholars along with that of teachers and students of elementary schools, traditional physicians, and peasants from the state of Oaxaca. The results of the ethno-medical information gathered over years of collaboration were then offered to the population through different media, such as the development of botanical collections, teaching materials, a manual of phyto-therapeutical resources that was also translated into the indigenous Zapotec language, and exhibitions in schools, markets and other public venues. Furthermore, this experience led to a restructuring of the curriculum of some courses of study at the undergraduate level in degree programs such as Dentistry, Doctor of Medicine in Surgery and Homeopathy, and Doctor of Medicine in Surgery and Obstetrics. In addition, the research team members published several chapters and articles in scholarly journals and books.<sup>20</sup>

The Human Development Interdisciplinary Research Program at the Autonomous Metropolitan University, a public university in Mexico, was launched in 1997 in the state of Chiapas. This program integrates research with professional training and community service. Professors, researchers and



students from different departments have participated in the program along with members of the communities. Some of the students who participated in the Program have gone on to work in social organizations in the area. The activities are carried out in diverse venues such as farmlands, laboratories, ecological reserves, etc., as well as through different forms of partnership with interest groups, communities and organizations. Besides the instructional work within the university, and the certificate programs offered to people interested in the area, the results of the work include publications, memoirs, social service reports, equipment prototypes, videos, and practical courses for members of the communities. Additionally, Master and Doctoral thesis projects have been carried out on different topics related to the program, focusing on the actions that the indigenous population undertakes to find alternatives to health, education, environmental and gender equality problems.<sup>21</sup>

In the particular case of Argentina, the Programa de Voluntariado Universitario (PVU), a public policy of the Secretary of University Policies of the Ministry of Education, promotes and supports social service programs which are articulated with teaching and research activities. Although not explicitly oriented to cases involving the participation of indigenous and/or Afro-descendant communities, the PVU has supported several of them. Notably, 1,200 projects from 40 universities, involving the participation of about 26,000 students, 6,300 professors, and over 2,700 social organizations, have been funded in the first three years of the PVU. The number of projects supported by the PVU that involve the participation of indigenous people has been only 24; they have been developed by teams from 12 universities, with the participation of over 360 students, 100 professors, and 72 community organizations. Although the number of projects involving indigenous peoples is relatively modest, it must still be regarded as an improvement in a country in which these peoples represent a relatively small proportion of the national population, and are rarely the focus of public policies. What is worth highlighting here, similar to the case of CERES in Colombia, is that a certain public policy and IHE are opening the road to improving a situation charged with a shameful history.

*Partnerships of IHE and indigenous or Afro-descendant organizations to offer access to higher education to their communities*

Because of the partnership format, this modality of intercultural collaboration usually does not lead to the creation of permanent programs, but to experiences that have a relatively limited duration. The Project has already identified several experiences of this kind that have already finished. Nevertheless, there currently are significant ones.

One such program is that of the Indigenous Organization of Antioquia and its Institute of Indigenous Education, in association with the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana and the University of Antioquia. It offers the Degree Program in Ethnoeducation, a Specialty in Indigenous Government and

Administration, and the Degree Program in Mother Earth Pedagogy. Two other experiences are partnerships backed by the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle (AIDESEP, in Spanish). One of them is the Bilingual Teacher Training Program of the Peruvian Amazon, which it undertakes in collaboration with the 'Loreto' Pedagogical Institute, and the other is the Training Program for Nurses Specializing in Intercultural Health, which it carries out in partnership with the Public Technological Institute of Atalaya, located in the small Amazonian city of the same name. A fourth experience has been developed by an Afro-descendant research and education NGO, the Manuel Zapata Olivella Institute, which has created professional programs through an alliance with the University of La Guajira, a Colombian public university, such as the Professional Bachelor Degree in Ethnoeducation, with specializations in Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Environmental Education, Linguistics and Bilingualism, and Mathematics.<sup>22</sup>

In spite of its relatively limited duration, this is potentially a very productive modality for the training of professionals and technicians of indigenous communities.

### *Intercultural institutions of higher education*

Intercultural institutions of higher education characteristically incorporate the knowledge, knowledge production and learning modes of different cultural traditions, be they from indigenous and/or Afro-Descendant cultures or from Western modern, this from the 'sciences' and 'humanities', setting them all in a dynamic relationship with one another.

In Latin America, as a result of the historic process of colonization and its enduring traces evident since the foundation of the republics in the nineteenth century, these types of institutions have been established specifically to address the needs, demands and educational proposals of indigenous or Afro-descendant peoples. Such institutions generally incorporate, albeit to a lesser extent, students, needs and demands of sectors that embrace other cultural identifications, including the sectors usually known as 'white' and/or 'mestizo'. We may differentiate between at least three kinds of intercultural institutions of higher education.

One kind is those institutions established by indigenous and/or Afro-descendant leaderships and/or organizations. An example of this kind is the Kawsay Intercultural Indigenous University, product of a network of indigenous organizations of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia; another example is the Indigenous Amazonian Training Center (CAFI), established by the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon, in Brazil; a third example is the Autonomous Indigenous and Intercultural University, an initiative of the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (CRIC), in Colombia; a fourth example is the '*Amawtay Wasi*' Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples, established by some sectors of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador

(CONAIE); other examples are the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (URACCAN) and the Bluefields Indian & Caribbean University, both founded in Nicaragua through the initiative of indigenous and Afro-descendant local leaderships.<sup>23</sup>

A second kind of intercultural institution of higher education is those created by government agencies, such as the Educational and Research Center for the Aboriginal Modality (CIFMA), created by the government of the Chaco province in Argentina; or the 10 intercultural universities that are part of the system of intercultural universities established by the Secretary of Public Education in Mexico, such as the Intercultural University of Chiapas, the Intercultural University of the State of Mexico, that of Guerrero, and that of Veracruz, among others. There are also two other intercultural universities in Mexico, which were initially created by state governments but were later incorporated into the national system, the Autonomous Indigenous University of Mexico and the Community University of San Luis Potosí.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, there are two other types of university. There is an intercultural university founded by a particular international cooperation agency, the Indigenous Intercultural University, created by the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, a multilateral agency which has representation from both governments and indigenous organizations.<sup>25</sup> Finally, there is also an intercultural university founded by a private university, Ayuk Intercultural University, created in Mexico as part of the Jesuit Iberoamerican University system.<sup>26</sup> I should mention that there also exist particular organizations that use the name 'university', but which are not devoted to teaching, and do not grant degrees—such as Universidad de la Tierra, in Chiapas, Mexico—but these sorts of institutions are not part of our research.

The main mission of all intercultural institutions of higher education that currently exist in Latin America is to prepare professionals in ways sensitive to cultural specificities and diversity, a fundamental condition to make effective action and leadership possible in culturally diverse countries. The training these institutions provide takes advantage of both indigenous and/or Afro-descendant peoples' and Western modern knowledge.

Within this whole, however, it is necessary to differentiate the cases of those institutions that indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples/communities have created from those that have been created by State agencies. Those created by indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations respond not only to a generic interest in training professionals capable of being effective in culturally diverse countries, but also more particularly to an interest in training the technicians, professionals and leaders that these organizations and the communities they represent need in order not only to improve the quality of life of such communities, but also to develop and advance their projects aimed at furthering the process of democratization in Latin American societies.

### Final remarks to stimulate the debate

As a result of the histories, contexts, and struggles, mentioned above, as well as different international factors that I have discussed elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> some States, IHE, and private foundations have established special quota and scholarship programs aimed at improving the chances for indigenous and Afro-descendant individuals to access and complete their higher education at 'conventional' institutions. Despite these efforts, however, the actual possibility for indigenous and Afro-descendant individuals to access and complete their education at 'conventional' institutions is dramatically low, as the process is plagued with inequity due to diverse causes associated with long histories of discrimination and the structural conditions of disadvantage in which these are presently expressed. I must point out, however, that these policies and programs are geared towards the 'inclusion of individuals', which, although it may constitute a step forward, does not, however, solve the problem of the exclusion of the histories, languages, knowledge, and projects of those peoples in higher education. For those same reasons, these policies and programs come up short in terms of training technical, professional, managerial, and political key resource people required by those population groups, their social organizations, and the horizons of change forged in the new national constitutions.

Only a few higher education institutions in Latin America incorporate into their educational programs the knowledges, languages, projects and learning modalities of these peoples, and also endeavour to contribute to the valuation of cultural diversity, the fostering of equitable intercultural relations and of modes of citizenship that ensure equal opportunity. The task of 'interculturalizing all higher education institutions'—of making them truly 'universalist' and not monocultural and subalternly following the modern European legacy and/or being guided by global markets—is one that is still to be addressed.<sup>28</sup> However, as a result of the struggles of indigenous and Afro-descendant movements, as well as those of other Latin American and extra-regional social actors with converging transformational agendas, the last two decades have seen the establishment of nearly a hundred institutions and programs of higher education that in diverse ways seek to resolve this void. In Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela there are higher education institutions and programs created and supported by government entities or by 'conventional' universities whose main focus is to respond to the needs, demands, and proposals of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, even though in many of these programs the organizations of these peoples do not play significant roles in their orientation, which of course still represents a shortcoming.<sup>29</sup>

The IHE created by indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations currently existing in Latin America are oriented to prepare professionals in ways sensitive to cultural specificities and diversity, which is a necessary condition to be effective in culturally diverse countries. The training they provide takes advantage of both indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples' and Western modern knowledge. Apart from their interest in training

professionals capable of being effective in culturally diverse countries, these experiences also respond to the interest in training the technicians, professionals, and leaders that these organizations need in order to develop their own practices, particularly their projects to further democratization in Latin American societies.

These IHE, however, frequently stir up reservations among some social sectors that question why indigenous peoples may have the prerogative of providing education based on their particular worldviews and proposals for the future of both local and national societies. The answer that the leadership of many indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples offers is that they have to do so, because State and private higher education institutions do not teach about their histories, languages, systems of knowledge, current problems, and projects for the future, but rather about those of the hegemonic social groups; nor do they focus on developing solutions to their needs.

Moreover, they ask why, if there are Catholic and other religious, business and 'elite' universities, indigenous or Afro-descendant IHE cannot exist too—particularly since they are conceived not as closed and exclusive entities but as institutions of an intercultural character, open to all interested individuals. The peculiarity of these institutions is that, in contrast to State-sponsored intercultural basic and secondary education programs (in which interculturality is thought and expressed from the point of view of the hegemonic social sectors), courses and learning strategies of IHE sponsored by indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations are based primarily on their peoples' notions, worldviews, interpretations of human history, learning and projects for the future, into which they integrate the knowledge, history and interpretation of mainstream sectors of society.

There is a fundamental conceptual difference between the idea of intercultural education adopting as a point of departure the 'official' worldview of States that scantily value the importance of cultural differences, that assume that 'other cultures' are obstacles to development, and that insist that sooner or later all citizens must become 'modern', and the idea that intercultural education is based on the worldview of indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations that assert the importance of differences and the demand that States acknowledge that they constitute expressions of pluricultural societies, as the national constitutions of most Latin American countries acknowledge.

The crucial difference is that the latter involves the active inclusion and recognition of the languages, knowledge, and cultures of those 'others'. That is, it includes learning about their histories, problems, and projects for the future, in the same way that one learns 'official history' and 'modern science', in terms both of acquiring new knowledge and skills and of criticizing what may need to be reconsidered. It entails, among other things, thinking about the future of our societies not in terms of 'Development'—which continues to be understood as a concept closely tied to notions of 'progress' and economic growth, regardless of however much it may have been stylized as 'sustainable'—but instead in terms of 'Well Living'. That is, of living in a way that is consonant with cosmogonies that understand humankind as part

of what we call 'Nature', and not as a purportedly superior species that views, manages, and uses planet Earth as a source of 'Natural Resources'. A few centuries of Western modern worldview hegemony has resulted in desertification, water pollution, global warming, 'climate change', and other disasters that we are still attempting to overcome.

Thus, the transformative value of the higher education experiences that sectors of the indigenous and Afro-descendant movements promote should not be seen only in terms of their role to train technicians, professionals and politicians—which all social movements require, be they progressive or conservative—but also in relation to their ability to facilitate a critical reflection about contemporary societies and their future possibilities. Contrary to the preconceived notions of some sectors, this critique does not tend to imply a 'return to the past', but instead a projection into the future that seeks to ensure not only environmental but also social sustainability, and generally more and better democracy, as well as better standards of living.

We should discuss to what extent, and how effectively, 'conventional' higher education institutions prepare political, technical and professional key resource individuals from those social groups that are the object of any kind of discrimination. Furthermore, we must analyse in what ways, if any, the training opportunities that 'conventional' IHE offer to the population at large (regardless of social group) are pertinent and relevant to the social and cultural diversity of Latin American societies. That is, whether or not these institutions are preparing professionals and technicians whose skills correspond to the cultural diversity of their respective countries, and, concomitantly, to the diversity of worldviews, values, modes of knowledge production, technologies, languages, needs, demands, and proposals that are significant in the respective fields of action.

These aspects should interest not only anthropologists and other specialists within the social sciences. They are also relevant and important, for example, to medical doctors who care for patients from diverse cultures and who, moreover, would be better professionals if their training included knowledge originating from these other cultures. Incidentally, we should call attention to the fact that, while most universities do not include in their curricula these peoples' forms of knowledge, the transnational pharmaceutical corporations are appropriating the secrets of indigenous herbal medicine and then patenting them for their own benefit. Lawyers would also find these aspects of particular interest, especially those who work on cases in diverse cultural contexts where there may prevail modalities of regulation, negotiation, and conflict resolution different from those studied in the 'conventional' universities where they have been trained. Economists and other 'development' professionals could also find it useful to learn from these peoples' 'developmental models'; but to be able to do so, their education should include the skills and tools to think of—and within—other modalities of production and qualities of life. I am not qualified to argue with regard to Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, and Astronomy, but it seems that in most other areas of knowledge all social sectors would find it fruitful to pay

attention to the innovations developed by these IHE created by indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples' organizations.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> With the collaboration of 56 researchers from 11 Latin American countries, the Project has up to now published three books (referred to in this article) which, in addition to thematic and encompassing chapters, include some 40 studies about specific experiences involving diverse forms of intercultural collaboration. Members of the teams that created and developed such collaboration experiences conducted these studies for the Project. In most cases, these colleagues are indigenous or Afro-descendant professionals; to a lesser extent they are professionals who do not identify as such but who have been working for many years in this field with communities and/or organizations of these peoples. This overview is based on those 40 studies, as well as on information about 80 other experiences obtained through analysis of the answers that representatives of the involved institutions provided in a questionnaire included in the Registry of Experiences created by the Project.
- <sup>2</sup> In this article the expression 'conventional' IHE is used just to refer to those which have not been specially conceived to respond to the demands and proposals of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples.
- <sup>3</sup> Daniel Mato, 'Diversidad Cultural e Interculturalidad en Educación Superior. Problemas, Retos, Oportunidades y experiencias en América Latina. Panorama Regional', in Daniel Mato (ed), *Diversidad Cultural e Interculturalidad en Educación Superior: Experiencias en América Latina*, Caracas: UNESCO-IESALC, 2008, pp 23–79, pp 29–35.
- <sup>4</sup> Andrés Chirinos Rivera and Martha Zegarra Leyva, *Educación Superior Indígena en el Perú*, Surco: Asamblea Nacional de Rectores, 2005, p 23.
- <sup>5</sup> Myrna Cunningham Kain, 'Evolución, Tendencias y Principales Características de la Educación Superior Indígena en Nicaragua', in UNESCO-IESALC (ed), *La Educación Superior Indígena en América Latina*, Caracas: UNESCO-IESALC, 2003, p 8.
- <sup>6</sup> Avelina Pancho *et al*, *Educación Superior Indígena en Colombia: Una Apuesta de Futuro y Esperanza*, Cali: Universidad de San Buenaventura Cali, 2004, pp 25–26.
- <sup>7</sup> Martín Hoppenhayn, Alvaro Bello and Francisca Miranda, *Los pueblos indígenas y afrodescendientes ante el nuevo milenio*, Serie Políticas Sociales 118, Santiago de Chile: CEPAL, División de Desarrollo Social, 2006, p 26.
- <sup>8</sup> Marta Rangel, 'La Población Afrodescendiente en América Latina y los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio. Un examen Exploratorio en Países Seleccionados Utilizando Información Censal', paper presented at the Seminar 'Pueblos Indígenas y Afrodescendientes en América Latina y El Caribe', CEPAL, Fondo Indígena, CEPED, Santiago de Chile, 27–29 April 2005, pp 9–10.
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- <sup>10</sup> Sylvie Didou Aupetit, 'Pathways en América Latina: Epifanías Locales de un Programa Global', in Mato, *Diversidad cultural e interculturalidad en Educación Superior*, pp 459–468.
- <sup>11</sup> Fabiola Carvalho and Fabio Almeida de Carvalho, 'A Experiencia de Formacao de Profesores Indígenas do Núcleo Insikiran da Universidade Federal de Roraima', in Mato, *Diversidad cultural e interculturalidad en Educación Superior*, pp 157–166.
- <sup>12</sup> Axel Rojas, '¿Etnoeducación o Educación Intercultural? Estudio de Caso sobre la Licenciatura en Etnoeducación de la Universidad del Cauca', in Mato, *Diversidad cultural e interculturalidad en Educación Superior*, pp 233–242.
- <sup>13</sup> Félix Suárez Reyes and Betty Ruth Lozano Lerma, 'Balance y Perspectiva de la Etnoeducación para la Diversidad en la Universidad del Pacífico', in Mato, *Diversidad cultural e interculturalidad en Educación Superior*, pp 243–254.
- <sup>14</sup> María Cortez Mondragón, 'Experiencias sobre Educación Superior para Indígenas en la Universidad Mayor de San Marcos', in Mato, *Diversidad cultural e interculturalidad en Educación Superior*, pp 413–424.
- <sup>15</sup> Julio Mallea Rada, 'El Programa de Técnicos Superiores en Justicia Comunitaria de la Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Políticas de la Universidad Mayor San Andrés', in Mato, *Diversidad cultural e interculturalidad en Educación Superior*, pp 107–114.

- <sup>16</sup> Marcelo Farfán, 'Experiencia del Programa Académico Cotopaxi, Formación en Educación Intercultural Bilingüe de la Universidad Politécnica Salesiana', in Mato, *Diversidad cultural e interculturalidad en Educación Superior*, pp 285–296.
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- <sup>18</sup> Maria Inês de Almeida, 'Formação Intercultural de Educadores Indígenas na área de Língua, Arte e Literatura na Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG)', in Daniel Mato (ed), *Educación Superior, Colaboración Intercultural y Desarrollo Sostenible/Buen Vivir: Experiencias en América Latina*, Caracas: UNESCO-IESALC, 2009, pp 235–260.
- <sup>19</sup> Mato, *Educación Superior, Colaboración Intercultural y Desarrollo Sostenible/Buen Vivir*.
- <sup>20</sup> Roxana Camacho Morfin, Cándido E Guzmán Félix and Joaquín Díaz Hernández, 'Una Experiencia Intercultural a partir del Conocimiento Etnomédico', in Mato, *Educación Superior, Colaboración Intercultural y Desarrollo Sostenible/Buen Vivir*, pp 65–86.
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- <sup>24</sup> See: Estela Maris Valenzuela, 'Formación docente en contexto de diversidad lingüística y cultural desarrollada en el Centro de Investigación y Formación para la Modalidad Aborigen (CIFMA)', in Mato, *Diversidad cultural e interculturalidad en Educación Superior*, pp 83–92. Sylvia Schmelkes, 'Creación y desarrollo inicial de las universidades interculturales en México: Problemas, oportunidades, retos', in Mato, *Diversidad cultural e interculturalidad en Educación Superior*, pp 329–338. Andrés Fábregas Puig, 'Cuatro años de Educación Superior Intercultural en Chiapas, México', in Mato, *Instituciones Interculturales de Educación Superior en América Latina*, pp 251–278. Ernesto Guerra García and María Eugenia Meza Hernández, 'El corto y sinuoso camino de la Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México (UAIM)', in Mato, *Instituciones Interculturales de Educación Superior en América Latina*, pp 215–250. Salvador Silva Carrillo, 'Universidad Comunitaria de San Luis Potosí', in Mato, *Educación Superior, Colaboración Intercultural y Desarrollo Sostenible/Buen Vivir*, pp 163–182.
- <sup>25</sup> Mario Yapu, 'La experiencia de la Universidad Indígena Intercultural del Fondo Indígena, sede Universidad Mayor de San Simón, Bolivia', in Mato, *Diversidad cultural e interculturalidad en Educación Superior*, pp 449–458.
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