



**COLABORA.Lat**  
Towards a New Model of  
Governance after Covid-19

**POLICY BRIEF # 6**

# **TOWARDS AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

**Analysis of the impact of the pandemic on  
Afro-descendant youth in the Colombian  
Pacific**

---

**Jorge Figueroa and Inge Helena Valencia**



## Team of collaborators

### **Editing**

Antonella Perini, Ignacio Lara, and Jennifer Cyr

### **Communication**

Aniela Stojanowski

### **Design**

Jacqueline Schneider

## Authors

**Jorge Figueroa** is an Anthropologist, Sociologist, and Master in Social and Political Studies from the Icesi University. He is a professor and researcher at the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences and the Department of Public Health of the Icesi University. Areas of work: Social studies of health-disease processes, Community development, Public Health.

**Inge Helena Valencia** is a Dr. In Anthropology from the School of Higher Studies in Social Sciences, France. Director of social studies at ICESI University, professor, and researcher. She is a fellow of the Drugs, Security and Democracy program of the US Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC) and the International Development Research Center (IDRC).

---

This work is available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 license. This work may be remixed, adapted, and built upon, even for commercial purposes, as long as its authors are credited and the new creations are licensed under identical terms. To view a copy of this license, go to <https://creativecommons.org/>



## Colabora.Lat

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought us into uncharted territory. It represents a crisis with health, economic, social, and also political dimensions. Besides, it has exacerbated the inequalities and exclusion suffered by sectors living under conditions of vulnerability. It represents a crisis that has given rise to additional concerns, due to the likely deepening of political discontent and the consolidation of authoritarian practices through the expansion of the Executive Branch's powers and the restrictions of civil rights in a post-Covid-19 scenario.

This reality has shown us that the pandemic poses a challenge to which we cannot respond unilaterally, from the one-sided perspective of a single government or specific community. This is a global challenge with profound impacts on several dimensions of society, as well as differential impacts on the different women and sectors living under more vulnerable conditions. Therefore, it is a challenge that requires a multidimensional solution with an intersectional approach – a solution that is not yet available to us.

This is why we need political practices that promote collective intelligence-oriented collaboration as a way of finding solutions to public challenges, such as the one posed by the pandemic. The premise behind collective intelligence is, precisely, that no one knows everything, but everyone knows something. Translating this fact to the way in which decisions are made in a society represents a significant challenge, and requires collaborative mechanisms involving a variety of actors. It specifically requires collaborative governance.

For this reason, the *Colabora.Lat: Towards a New Model of Governance after Covid-19* project aims at studying and making recommendations on the governance models that have the greatest potential to respond to convoluted crises such as the



Covid-19 pandemic. By collecting quantitative and qualitative data in several Latin American countries, we seek to generate diagnostic and prospective information about the impact of collaboration on the feasibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the responses developed to address the numerous problems that have emerged during the pandemic, especially in vulnerable communities.

The project is grounded in the conviction that defining a framework of good practices in governance, inclusion and gender parity will lay the foundations for a new long-term democratic agreement in Latin America.

**Antonella Perini, Jennifer Cyr, and Matías Bianchi**

---

Colabora.Lat is driven by an Implementation Council comprising universities and think tanks with experience in research and territorial anchoring in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico.

Member institutions:



Funding institution:



Canada



## TOWARDS AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO CRISIS MANAGEMENT

### Analysis of the impact on Afro-descendant youth in the Colombian Pacific

JORGE FIGUEROA AND INGE HELENA VALENCIA

Universidad Icesi

#### Executive summary

Colombia, along with other Latin American countries, has a large Afro descendant population. According to data produced by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) in 2019, the community that currently self identifies as Black, Afro Colombian, Raizal, and Palenquero (NARP Community) amounts to 4,671,160 individuals, which represents 9.34% of the population<sup>1</sup>.

Unfortunately, the Afro descendant populations of the Colombian Pacific and Caribbean have suffered the worst consequences of the health, social, and economic crisis unleashed by the Covid 19 pandemic, since the Colombian government's response has favored an epidemiological approach to decision making. This means that vulnerabilities, resulting from inequalities – which in turn derive from class, ethnic racial, gender and generational conditions – have not been accounted for. In fact,

---

<sup>1</sup> A number of Afro-Colombian organizations and leaders have filed a writ against DANE claiming the protection of their constitutional rights, after the 2018 census reported a 30.8% decrease in the Afro-Colombian population. In the 2005 census, the Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, and Palenquero community represented 11% of the total Colombian population.



vulnerabilities have intensified among already disadvantaged populations: Afro Colombians, indigenous peoples, women, migrants, and informal workers.

This policy brief aims to show how vulnerabilities have deepened for the Afro Colombian population in the context of the pandemic. More specifically, it analyzes the effects of the crisis on Afro Colombian youth in three cities of the Colombian Pacific, who are also faced with the escalation of violence in their territories, obstacles to pursuing their studies, a lack of access to technological equipment and to the Internet, and the increased incidence of mental health problems.

## Key points

- The Covid 19 pandemic has once again brought to light the existence of structural racism and the persistence of inequalities in Colombia. Afro Colombian populations experience profound inequalities in access to education, employment and health services.
- In the face of inadequate state response, Afro Colombian populations have developed their own solutions to deal with the disruption the pandemic crisis caused to their life projects.
- An intersectional perspective in decision making in times of crisis may contribute to bridging some of the inequality gaps through mechanisms of collaborative governance.



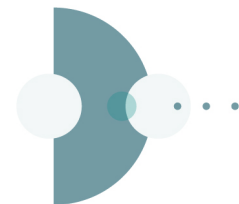
## What is happening in Colombia?

Colombia has not evenly managed the crisis unleashed by the Covid 19 pandemic. Although in some cities the health infrastructure has been improved, through the building of makeshift hospitals, the incorporation of new beds for intensive care or the establishment of mega centers for vaccination, the services provided to the populations have been markedly unequal, exacerbating the nation's structural problems. The Black, Afro Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero (NARP) community – which represents 9.34% of the Colombian population – faces, in addition to racism, increased vulnerabilities due to the pandemic, and persistent violence in their territories. These dynamics stem from a failure to honor the Peace Accords signed with the former FARC EP guerrillas<sup>2</sup>, the presence of criminal groups in their territories, and attacks by state forces against this population.

The following data show that Afro Colombian populations have been subjected to a number of situations that further increase their vulnerability when it comes to confronting the health, social and economic challenges of Covid 19 in comparison with the rest of the Colombian population. It is argued that they are far less protected, because they neither enjoy nor are guaranteed the same rights as those citizens who do not self identify as belonging to a specific ethnic group.

Situation of the Afro-Colombian population to face Covid-19 and its impacts		
	NARP community	Colombian population
Multidimensional poverty	30.6%	19.6%
Illiteracy rate	14%	5.2%
Households with Internet service	27%	43%
Access to drinking water	25% of urban Afro-Colombian populations and 49% of rural Afro-Colombian populations do not have access to	

<sup>2</sup> "FARC-EP" is the Spanish acronym for "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army," the name of the former guerrilla group.



	drinking water, which is essential to preventing Covid-19 infections in the context of the pandemic.
<b>Effects of Covid-19 on Afro-Colombian populations</b>	<p>Considering the first 300 days since the first case of Covid-19 was detected in Colombia, the situation of Afro-Colombian populations, compared to the reality of those who do not self-identify as belonging to an ethnic group, is the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They are 96% more likely to be hospitalized due to Covid-19.</li> <li>- They are 316% more likely to end up in an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) due to Covid-19.</li> <li>- They are 28% more likely to die from Covid-19.</li> </ul>
<b>Violence against social leaders</b>	During the first half of 2021, 6 Afro-Colombian social leaders and human rights activists have been murdered. Since the execution of the Peace Accord, the number of murder victims among leaders has risen above 1,200.
<b>Forced displacement</b>	Between January and May 2021, 48% of the displaced have been Afro-Colombians.
<b>Access to higher education in the Colombian Pacific</b>	<p>In the Pacific region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 out of 5 youth enter higher education.</li> <li>- 6 out of 100 enter a high-quality university.</li> <li>- 5 out of 10 of those of higher education age finish secondary school.</li> </ul>
<b>Youth homicidal violence</b>	80% of violent deaths in men between the ages of 15 and 19 in Cali – the city with the largest Afro-descendant population in the country – are Afro descendants.

Source: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística: [www.dane.gov.co](http://www.dane.gov.co) (Censo 2018), Indepaz, Sistema de Inteligencia Epidemiológica para Decisiones Informadas en los Territorios – SIEDITer, BBVA, OCHA

## Methodology

A number of interviews, conversations and workshops were conducted with groups comprising mainly Afro Colombian women and youth from three territories prioritized in the project (Puerto Tejada, Buenaventura, and Cali, all in Southwest Colombia). The tools provided input on these individuals’ perceptions regarding the impacts of the pandemic at the personal level and on their territories. The work also sought to





understand the response capacity and the collaborative actions of governmental and non governmental actors in the face of the specific problems of Afro Colombian populations during the health emergency.

### Impacts of the pandemic on the Afro-Colombian youth population

Isolation and the health measures did not have the same implications for all populations in Colombia. At the same time, the economic and social impacts were differential in view of the vulnerable conditions certain populations live in, these conditions being marked by ethnicity, gender, and depending on whether people reside in a rural or urban area. Afro Colombian youth have fewer opportunities in terms of access to education and work, and they fall victims to state and criminal violence. The following table presents some of the main impacts felt by Afro Colombian youth in the context of the pandemic.

Main impacts of the pandemic according to Afro-Colombian youth	
Education	<p>The quality of education dropped. Even though there already existed a significant educational divide, the pandemic has further restricted access to primary and secondary education, given that the great majority of the Afro-descendant populations in Colombia does not have the technological resources or Internet access necessary for online lessons.</p> <p>There are indications of lags in learning processes and drops in the quality of education. This has a negative impact on entry to higher education, which encourages dropouts and leads to the closing of opportunities.</p>
Employability	<p>There is a greater perception among individuals that the pandemic is decreasing the already few work opportunities they had, compared to the rest of the population. Youth unemployment in the country hit record figures: over 3 million (29.7%) out of the 10.9 million youth inhabiting the country</p>



	<p>were unemployed. Female unemployment is the highest unemployment rate (at 37.7% compared to 24.1% in the case of men), and considerably affects the Afro-Colombian population.</p> <p>For that reason, Afro-descendant youth or people around them have suffered job cuts. In addition, they have faced financial difficulties at home or relationship problems among household members. Those most strongly affected have been young workers in the informal retail sector, artists, and individuals in the informal transportation sector.</p>
Mental health	<p>Problems associated with stress, depression and anxiety have increased. A sudden alteration of their lifestyles, restrictions on mobility which reduce the possibilities for socialization, few expectations for the future, financial problems, a lack of emotional support programs, and violence in their territories – all of these issues have converged and lead to a worsening of the mental health of this population.</p>
Violence	<p>The crisis was exploited by criminal groups to recruit minor children and connect them with illegal armed groups, trade them in microtrafficking, or use them as informants. Delinquency has become an option in the face of rising unemployment.</p> <p>The word “Afro-youthicides” is being used to refer to a form of systematic violence that has increased with the pandemic and which comes both from illegal armed forces and state forces.</p> <p>Families are confined to their territories, not only due to the isolation measures, but also because of the waves of violence. Confrontations, displacements, disappearances and homicides are heightening insecurity in the territories: Buenaventura has registered 20 homicides only in the days elapsed in July 2021; during the national strikes, youth were threatened by criminals in Cali, and more than 20 people were murdered; in Puerto Tejada – a population of 46,000 – there are 26 gangs, made up of guerrilla dissident groups and paramilitary forces, preying on the urban population.</p>



## Conclusions and recommendations

The Afro Colombian population has felt the disproportionate effects of the health, economic, and social crisis, owing to the lack of an intersectional approach that allows for a recognition of the differences and of the manner in which the class, ethnic racial background, gender, and generational variables interact, deepening the crisis. This perspective makes it possible to acknowledge that the pandemic has different impacts on different territories and population groups.

Colombia has responded to the pandemic resorting mainly to an epidemiological approach based on securing territories. These measures have wound up jeopardizing human rights and democratic principles (e.g., through restrictions on mobility and work, or arbitrary detentions). Cash transfers, subsidies and economic aids have reached numerous Afro Colombian communities. However, they are not enough, they do not solve the problems caused by the pandemic, and they do not redress historical and structural inequalities such as the historic racism seen in the country.

In contrast with the weak response of the state, social and community organizations have acted more quickly and effectively to counteract the aggravation of the situation. However, these organizations do not have the power to scale up and sustain their actions. In addition, local social organizations – such as Cali’s Casa Cultural el Chontaduro, Puerto Tejada’s Fundación Sinecio Mina, and Buenaventura’s Fundación Rostros y Huellas – play a key role as territories of peace where Afro Colombian youth can socialize. These places keep youth away from crime and at the same time offer relevant proposals to face the crisis, contributing to the strengthening of their life projects.

The pandemic provides an opportunity to move forward to a territorial, multilevel, intersectional and collaborative governance approach, prioritizing the needs of local contexts. This view brings to the fore the fact that the response to Covid 19 for the Afro



Colombian population in the Colombian Pacific cannot be the same as the one implemented for the rest of the country. Actions are needed to tackle the structural problems and inequalities of Afro Colombian populations and their territories; deal with long standing health issues in these territories such as the high maternal mortality ratio and the steep infant mortality rate, malaria, child immunization, and malnutrition; invest in infrastructure, medical equipment, salaries and proper training of healthcare professionals; recognize the role of ancient knowledge in Afro Colombian communities; and take into account the specific social determinants of health for this population. In sum, action must be taken to write off a historical debt owed by the nation to the Afro Colombian populations and territories.

