



## CHAPTER I

### INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: POVERTY AND WELL-BEING

#### Highlights

**A continuing injustice.** Indigenous peoples suffer from the consequences of historic injustice, including colonization, dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, oppression and discrimination, as well as lack of control over their own ways of life. Their right to development has been largely denied by colonial and modern states in the pursuit of economic growth. As a consequence, indigenous peoples often lose out to more powerful actors, becoming among the most impoverished groups in their countries.

**One-third of the world's poor.** Indigenous peoples continue to be over-represented among the poor, the illiterate, and the unemployed. Indigenous peoples number about 370 million. While they constitute approximately 5 per cent of the world's population, indigenous peoples make up 15 per cent of the world's poor. They also make up about one-third of the world's 900 million extremely poor rural people.

**Suicide, violence and incarceration.** Smoking and substance abuse are more common amongst indigenous peoples; suicide rates and incarceration rates are also higher. These problems are more pronounced in urban areas, where indigenous peoples are detached from their communities and cultures, yet seldom fully embraced as equal members of the dominant society. Indigenous peoples are also more likely to suffer from violent crime.

**A problem in developed countries too.** The well-being of indigenous peoples is an issue not only in developing countries. Even in developed countries, indigenous peoples consistently lag behind the non-indigenous population in terms of most indicators of well-being. They live shorter lives, have poorer health care and education and endure higher unemployment rates. A native Aboriginal child born in Australia today can expect to die almost 20 years earlier than his non-native compatriot. Obesity, type 2 diabetes and tuberculosis are now major health concerns amongst indigenous peoples in developed countries.

**High levels of poverty.** Studies of socio-economic conditions of indigenous peoples in Latin America show that being indigenous is associated with being poor and that over time, that condition has stayed constant. Even when they are able to accumulate human capital [i.e. education or training opportunities], they are unable to convert that to significantly greater earnings or to reduce the poverty gap with the non-indigenous population. This finding holds for countries where indigenous peoples are a small fraction of the overall population, such as Mexico and Chile, as well as in countries where a large portion of the population is indigenous, such as in Bolivia.

*\* More information and data on specific countries is available in the publication and regional fact sheets.*

***The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples was authored by seven independent experts and produced by the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.***

For more information, see: [www.un.org/indigenous](http://www.un.org/indigenous)

