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Background

Located between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes mountains, the diverse terrain of Ecuador is perhaps only rivaled by the diversity of its people. The country is divided into three regions: the Coast, the Sierra or Highland, and the Oriente. Ecuador's population is estimated to be roughly 13.5 million.¹ Most of this population is concentrated in two large urban centers – Quito, the capital, and Guayaquil. With increasing migration toward urban areas, 60 percent of the population now lives in cities.² While more than half of Ecuador's residents live in the urban coastal region, most of the ethnic groups are concentrated in the rural highland. In this paper, the word "ethnic" refers to those of non-European heritage; the biggest groups of ethnic minorities in Ecuador are the indigenous Amerindians and the Afro-Ecuadorians.

The official language of Ecuador is Spanish, which is spoken as a first language by over 72 percent of the populace.³ All told, there are 23 living languages in Ecuador,⁴ most of which are indigenous in origin. The most widely spoken language after Spanish is Quicha (an Ecuadorian dialect of the language spoken by Amerindians throughout the continent); this accounts for roughly another 11 percent of the population.⁵

What is now Ecuador once formed part of the Inca Empire until the Spanish conquered the region in 1533. The Spanish

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government established the seat of its colonial government in Quito in 1563 and ruled until Ecuador gained its independence from Spain on May 24, 1822. The Spaniards viewed the indigenous groups in Ecuador as “primitive” peoples and actively pursued eradication of their beliefs and customs, imposing upon them their own religion (Catholicism), customs, and language. Since the end of colonial rule, the indigenous peoples of Ecuador have been fighting to recover their ethnicity, preserve their culture, and obtain equal treatment and rights among the country’s majority white and Spanish-speaking establishment. Among the challenges the indigenous and other non-white ethnic groups face are racial discrimination, poverty, and limited access to education.

Functioning as a democratic republic, Ecuador is today divided into 22 provinces and has more than a dozen political parties, though none of them appears to be dominant. The country has suffered a number of internal and intra-

Ethnic Groups

Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and Caucasian) 65%

Indigenous (Amerindian) 25%

Spanish and Other 7%

Afro-Ecuadorians 3%

CIA World Factbook

Ecuador’s economy suffered a major banking crisis and recession in 1999; however, since the adoption of the U.S. dollar as the national currency in 2000, economic performance has stabilized.⁷ Despite improvements in the economic arena, Ecuador’s growth has yet to be sufficiently leveraged in its own development. Because of a high level of foreign debt and limited tax income,⁸ there has been little investment in human and social capital. As a result, the country suffers from a severely unequal distribution of wealth: 43 percent of resources belong to the wealthiest tenth of the population, while less than one percent of resources are left for the poorest tenth.⁹ This disparity is seen most strikingly among the country’s rural ethnic communities, where poverty is rife.

Much of the progress Ecuador has made in managing its diverse population has come as a result of its highly organized ethnic movement. Historically, the Ecuadorian state could be characterized as mono-ethnic in its approach, favoring the definition of its citizenry as white or mestizo. Both the indigenous Amerindian and Afro-Ecuadorian communities have suffered unequal treatment under hundreds of colonial rules which restricted their activities and rights.¹⁰ In the 1960s, indigenous peoples began to organize in their pursuit of equal treatment. It was not until 1986, however, that the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE)¹¹ was formed, uniting the groups that represented indigenous people and Afro-Ecuadorians. CONAIE is today by far the largest such organization in Ecuador. It is organized by a federal structure to accommodate the very different needs of its founders.

CONAIE’s efforts have met with a large degree of success in the past two decades. The organization led the removal of President Abdala Bucaram in 1997 through peaceful political means.¹² In 2000, CONAIE, along with members of the military, participated in a controversial coup that briefly ousted President Jamil Mahuad. The indigenous people’s movement, following internal debates, entered into politics officially in 1996 with the formation of the Pachakutik-Nuevo Pais political movement, and gained significant representation in that year’s elections. More than 70 indigenous candidates were sworn in as congressmen, mayors, and councilmen.¹³ Perhaps most impressive among its achievements has been CONAIE’s participation in the re-drafting of Ecuador’s 1998 constitution¹⁴ “which codified one of the farthest-reaching regimes of indigenous rights in the Americas.”¹⁵ The constitution now recognizes the rights of indigenous communities to administer their own form of justice in certain circumstances, to be consulted in the use of natural resources in their territories, and to share the same civil and political rights as all other Ecuadorian citizens. Though indigenous representatives in the Constituent Assembly lobbied for the recognition of the “plurinational” nature of the Ecuadorian state, they failed to have this term incorporated; instead, they accepted that the state be termed “pluricultural and multi-ethnic.” Thus the constitution recognized Ecuador’s ethnic diversity, but not the idea that the country was composed of distinct

nations.¹⁶ Prior to this, in 1984, the group had pushed for an amendment to Article 1 of Ecuador's constitution, which now recognizes indigenous languages as part of Ecuador's culture.

Current State of Coexistence

Despite these hard-won victories, the state of coexistence in Ecuador today remains troubled. Many of the changes implemented by the state have carried little force in reality. Ecuador's constitution establishes that all people are equal and seeks to protect their rights and freedoms, expressly rejecting all forms of discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, religious belief, economic status, or nationality. Despite this official position and an amendment to Ecuador's penal code which prohibits discrimination on racial grounds and outlaws offences against constitutional guarantees, indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian citizens continue to suffer discrimination and are somewhat mistrustful of the judicial system.¹⁷

Rodolfo Stavenhagan, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples, stated in May of last year that Ecuador's indigenous people "remain impoverished and lack access to even basic social services."¹⁸ Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian children do not have equal access to education in Ecuador.¹⁹ UNICEF estimates that "90 percent of these children live in poverty and only 39 percent complete primary school (compared to 76 percent of children from other groups)."²⁰ Though CONAIE was successful in its efforts to secure a bilingual intercultural education system (the Department of Bilingual Intercultural Education²¹ was established in 1988), the program's objectives have not been fully realized. The problems include budget shortages and the lack of fully bilingual teachers.²²

Indigenous habitat continues to be eroded by extractive activities in the Amazonian region,²³ which negatively impact the environment and infringe upon the rights of indigenous people.²⁴ Oil and gas resources are an important source of income for Ecuador. While the government has made attempts to include indigenous communities in decisions directly impacting their lands, "the wealth generated by the petroleum production is rarely invested into development of the region"²⁵ and grievances related to oil exploration and logging persist.

Policies and Initiatives

The current version of Ecuador's constitution incorporates a number of protections for the rights of ethnic minorities. Voting rights, which were once dependant upon literacy, are provided for all people under article 27, which states that "suffrage is universal, equal, direct and secret; voting is compulsory for those who can read and write and optional for those who cannot.... All Ecuadorians who have reached the age of 18 and who are in possession of their political rights are entitled to vote."²⁶ Additionally, environmental protection is provided under articles 86 and 91. Any projects affecting the environment are to receive prior approval from the indigenous community, and the government has stated that any contracts which fail to receive such approval will be considered null and void.²⁷

In 1992 the government established the Department of Indigenous Affairs and Ethnic Minorities (SENAIME), which was responsible for advising and coordinating government plans for the development of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. In 1996, the Ministry of Ethnic Culture was created, and an Amazonian indigenous leader appointed as the minister. The ministry, however, encountered a great deal of resistance from ethnic organizations and was quickly dissolved, as ethnic leaders suspected the government and ministry leadership of political opportunism and attempting to divide the indigenous movement. Both SENAIME and the Ministry of Ethnic Culture were replaced in 1996 by the Council for the Development of Ecuadorian Nationalities and Peoples (CODENPE).²⁸ CODENPE was organized with a board of directors made up of representatives from each of the legally recognized indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian national organizations. Its chief task is to advise the state on policies toward ethnic minorities, and it has been granted legal capacity in that effort.

Despite efforts made to include all ethnic minorities in the activities of such organizations, the Afro-Ecuadorian community voiced a desire to have its own space for development. In 1998, the government established the Council for Afro-Ecuadorian Development (CODAE) which is self-governed. "The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) organized various information workshops with Afro-Ecuadorians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and CODAE in early 2002 on the design of a programme to support the preparation of a development plan for Afro-Ecuadorian communities." The IDB continues its work for social inclusion of the Afro-Ecuadorian population today.²⁹

The relationship of ethnic minorities with the Ecuadorian military has traditionally been stronger than their relationship with the state. The armed forces have played a

key role in politics and are commonly regarded as the most respected institution in Ecuador.³⁰ Interestingly, in his doctoral dissertation, Ole Per Christian Steinert³¹ suggests that the military has maintained a measure of covert power by keeping the government at arms length. As a result, he argues, the state has unintentionally offered more political involvement to ethnic organizations. "Ecuador's armed forces have carried out a number of projects for the Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian communities in the following areas: education (12,000 children); health (350,000 persons); housing (650 families); irrigation channels (180,000 persons); afforestation (1,570 hectares); social welfare (2,400 persons); training (800 persons)."³² Notable military contributions to coexistence include the organization of human rights seminars for local military personnel and authorities through the Latin American Association of Human Rights and the Ecuadorian Red Cross.³³ The National Police have also incorporated human rights training into their police college curriculum. Working in tandem with this effort, the Ecuadorian Study and Multidisciplinary Research Centre (CEIME), an NGO, has conducted training seminars for instructors.³⁴

One of the most impressive accomplishments has been the establishment of Proyecto de Desarrollo de Pueblos Indígenas y Negros (PRODEPINE)³⁵ in partnership with the World Bank. Approved in 1998, the project "emerged from indigenous lobbying of multilateral development banks in the early 1990s for development assistance that would ensure indigenous participation and bring concrete benefits for indigenous communities,"³⁶ and was the first World Bank operation in Latin America designed solely for the benefit of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples. A committee was formed to manage the project-preparation phase through a participatory design process; numerous indigenous organizations, Ecuadorian government officials, and Bank representatives were involved. The project focused on ethno-development and sought to reduce poverty levels through regularization of indigenous land and water resources, strengthening of ethnic organizations, financing of rural investments, and support for the Ecuadorian government's ethnic agency (CODENPE).³⁷ A second generation of the project (PRODEPINE II) has been approved and is meant to build upon the success of its predecessor.

Complementary Approach

PRODEPINE is likely the best example of a complementary approach to coexistence employed in Ecuador. The structure of the project incorporated numerous cooperative efforts between ethnic organizations, the state, NGOs, and international institutions. The World Bank's country

manager in Ecuador, McDonald Benjamin, has said:

PRODEPINE I developed skills in project management among indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian professionals which will be valuable in implementing future development projects to benefit their communities . . . Thus the project has served as a model both for similar initiatives in other countries with indigenous and Afro communities, and to continue building on the positive results in Ecuador.³⁸

CONAIE's approach to the promotion of its interests also provides a noteworthy example of effective organizational structure. Its position as a nationally recognized political body allows it to promote "the interests of its constituency in all areas like any traditional political party would do, but with an unconventional emphasis on the ethnic discourse."³⁹ CONAIE has also effectively incorporated regional input by maintaining open communication with constituent ethnic organizations. Most importantly, an impressive amount of momentum is generated and sustained through grassroots efforts aimed toward cultural celebration and preservation.

CONAIE does have its critics, however. One risk involved in subsuming ethnic identity under an umbrella as broad as CONAIE's is that ethnic identity may begin to become somewhat homogenous in character. According to S.H. Beck,⁴⁰ research suggests this can result in the creation of new stereotypes which mirror those the dominant portion of society has imposed; the very same stereotypes these organizations seek to eradicate. CONAIE has also been accused of attempting to block rival organizations' access to the state and sources of funding.⁴¹ This competition for millions of dollars of funding from agencies like the World Bank comes at a price and is, of course, counterproductive to the establishment of coexistence.

Conclusion

Melina Selverston-Scher in *Ethnopolitics in Ecuador: Indigenous Rights and the Strengthening of Democracy* writes, "in order to build democracy, it is essential for the various ethnic groups in a country to believe that the government is equally loyal to each of them."⁴² This seems to be the largest challenge in a situation like Ecuador's. While projects like PRODEPINE can be structured to maximize effect and can be designed to incorporate a complementary approach to coexistence, this is arguably a more difficult task for any given ethnic organization, especially one as large as CONAIE. There is something of a contradiction implied in the promoting of collective ethnic diversity by an organization that is

internally diverse. Despite the inherent challenges, Ecuador's manifold approach to coexistence - its successes and failures involving the efforts of both the government and the ethnic movement at various levels of society - provides an excellent model for other countries coping with a diverse populace.

Endnotes

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- 3 Gordon, R.G. Jr. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2005). www.ethnologue.com
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 This conflict was resolved in 1998.
- 7 Ibid.; Since 2000, growth has averaged over 5% per year.
- 8 United Nations, Country Programme Outline for Ecuador (2004-2008). Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and of the United Nations Population Fund (New York: UN, May 23, 2003). www.undp.org/rblac/documents/cpo/Ecuador-cpo0408.pdf
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 "Until 1857, the colonial and postcolonial State had administered people labeled as 'Indians' through a bureaucratic apparatus designed to collect Indian tribute, a form of taxation that accounted for about 30 percent of the state budget. Guerrero argues that the abolition of Indian tribute created citizens who were equal before the law, although only literates could vote. To belong to the nation and to have rights, indigenous people needed to be transformed into mestizos, and for Guerrero the category 'Indian' marked the boundary between who was included and excluded." Torre, C. de la. "Ethnic Movements and Citizenship in Ecuador," *Latin American Research Review* 41 (June 2006)
- 11 <http://conaie.org>
- 12 Bucaram was voted out of office by Congress on the grounds of mental incapacity. Schemo, D. J. "Ecuador's Crisis Over Presidency Ends Peacefully," *The New York Times* (February 10, 1997).
- 13 Escobar, G. "Indians of Ecuador Coalescing in Quest For Political Power," *The Washington Post* (July 23, 1996). ecuador.nativeweb.org/96elect/washpost.html
- 14 <http://www.presidencia.gov.ec/modulos.asp?id=109>
- 15 van Cott, D.L., *Latin American Politics and Society* 44 (Autumn 2002).
- 16 Article 83 now recognizes indigenous peoples as part of the state (1998 constitution).
- 17 An example of which is given by the following: "In August 1996, the major daily newspaper in Quito, *El Comercio*, reported that at a Yamor festival in Otvala, a woman was prohibited from competing in the contest for the queen of the fiesta because she was an indigena. According to the brief article, the festival committee justified its position by referring to a municipal ordinance banning participation in the pageant by indigenous women." Steinert, O.C., *Ethnic Communities and Ethno-Political Strategies – The Struggle for Ethnic Rights: A Comparison of Peru, Ecuador and Guatemala*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.).
- 18 "Ecuador's Indigenous People Lack Adequate Access to Social Services, UN News Service (May 5, 2006).
- 19 UNICEF, At a Glance: Ecuador. www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ecuador.html
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 DINEIB - <http://www.dineib.edu.ec/>
- 22 UN. Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 9 of the Convention (2002).
- 23 "This region was inhabited almost solely by indigenous communities until oil exploration and drilling began in 1967, bringing roads and rapid colonization by settlers from the Highland." (Steinert, 98)
- 24 UN News Service. "Ecuador's Indigenous People Lack Adequate Access to Social Services" (2006)
- 25 Steinert, 98
- 26 UN. Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 9 of the Convention (2002).
- 27 UN. Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination Concludes Review of Ecuador's Periodic Reports on Compliance with Convention (2003).
- 28 CODENPE-<http://www.codenpe.gov.ec/>

- 29 See the IDB website for further information: www.iadb.org/countries/home.cfm?id_country=EC&Language=English.
- 30 Steinert.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 UN Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 9 of the Convention (2002).
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 <http://www.codenpe.gov.ec/prodepi.htm>
- 36 Griffiths, Thomas. World Bank Projects and Indigenous Peoples in Ecuador and Bolivia. (Washington, D.C. May 2000), p. 22
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- 40 Beck, S.H. "Indigena Self-Identity in Ecuador and the Rejection of Mestizaje" in Latin American Research Review, Volume 35, number 1 (2000).
- 41 van Cott.
- 42 Selverston-Scher, Melina. Ethnopolitics in Ecuador: Indigenous Rights and the Strengthening of Democracy (Miami, FL 2001), p.9

About Coexistence International

Based at Brandeis University since 2005, Coexistence International (CI) is an initiative committed to strengthening the resources available to policymakers, practitioners, researchers, advocates, organizations, and networks promoting coexistence at local, national, and international levels. CI advocates a complementary approach to coexistence work through facilitating connections, learning, reflection, and strategic thinking between those in the coexistence field and those in related areas.

What is Coexistence?

Coexistence describes societies in which diversity is embraced for its positive potential, equality is actively pursued, interdependence between different groups is recognized, and the use of weapons to address conflicts is increasingly obsolete. Coexistence work covers the range of initiatives necessary to ensure that communities and societies can live more equitably and peacefully together.

About the Series

In 2006, more than ninety percent of countries have populations made up of multiple identity groups. This rich diversity, full of promise and possibilities, also presents some of the most common and difficult challenges facing states today. Governments continue to wrestle with coexistence issues such as the dimensions of citizenship, constitutional and political designs that reflect the diversity within state borders, language and minority rights, land management, equality and cultural issues, and democratic participation. Understanding how diverse communities get along peacefully and equitably within a State is critical. If we can understand how some societies address issues of difference in constructive ways, then we might develop a repertoire of policy and programmatic options for countries experiencing inter-group violence or growing tensions.

With this publication series, CI seeks to describe the state of coexistence within different countries, and compare diversity and coexistence policies from countries around the world. CI has made no attempt to assess the implementation or success of such processes, or to endorse any of the initiatives mentioned in the report. We believe, however, that the documentation of the existence and scope of such efforts can contribute to a wider understanding of the variety of approaches for addressing issues of coexistence and intergroup conflict.

Other CI Publications

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What is Coexistence and Why a Complementary Approach?

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Focus on Coexistence and Democracy-building

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With this publication series, CI examines where and how certain fields intersect with coexistence work. What challenges and opportunities exist when disciplines work together toward the common goal of a more peaceful, just world? This series illustrates the possibilities of effecting positive coexistence through cooperation among related fields.

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