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Indigenous rights and development: inequality constraints in Brazilian cities

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Abstract

This thesis aims at identifying how indigenous rights, as part of a human rights approach to development, have been addressed by urban welfare policies in Brazil. As a starting point, this desk based study is primarily focused on an analysis of the impacts of urbanisation on indigenous livelihoods. Despite not being a new trend, urbanisation of indigenous people has exposed their situation of deprivation and disadvantage, and the increasing pressures of assimilation policies. Social indicators of urban indigenous communities' wellbeing have pointed to a growing gap between indigenous and non-indigenous population. The access to distinct basic welfare provision is not only determinant in reducing disparities but would also represent the compliance of a state with the indigenous rights framework. This thesis investigates if and how the Brazilian social agenda is in compliance with an indigenous rights framework.

The Brazilian government acknowledged Brazil as multi-ethnic, which is reflected in the domestic legal framework, and also in the ratification of international covenants and declarations related to indigenous rights. However, the need of the urban indigenous population for differentiated service provisions has represented a challenging matter in policy making. The existence of an implementation gap between the indigenous rights framework and their effective application is a relevant theme for analysis and evaluation, in order to identify the factors that are hindering state compliance with the standards that have already been legislated. To this regard, the experience of urban indigenous communities in Brazil is explored in two case studies, related to the Pankararu, in Sao Paulo, and the Terena, in Campo Grande. The outcomes of the mainstream welfare policies are also investigated through the lens of urban indigenous communities. Ultimately this thesis unveils the potential of the Brazilian state, as the duty-bearer of indigenous rights, as capable and responsible to unleash the realisation of indigenous expectations to overcome powerlessness, economic underdevelopment and cultural disruptions.

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