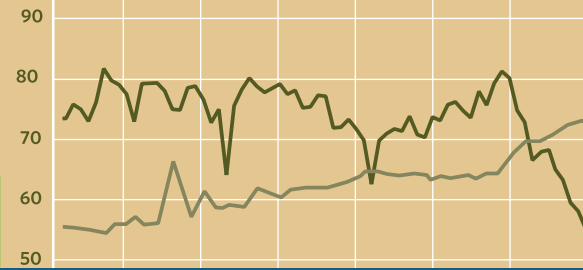




BOLIVIA



Center for Economic and Social Rights

FACT SHEET NO. 2

Making Human Rights Accountability More Graphic

This fact sheet, one in a series, is intended to contribute to ongoing monitoring work to hold states accountable for their economic and social rights obligations. The Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) hopes that it will be helpful to various UN and other inter-governmental human rights mechanisms including the Treaty Bodies, Special Rapporteurs and the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review.

Drawing on comparative socio-economic data regularly published by the UNDP, WHO and other international agencies, as well as national data where appropriate, these country fact sheets display, analyze and interpret selected human rights and human development indicators. Their intent is to highlight possible areas of concern with regard to governments' compliance with their obligations to uphold economic and social rights.

This fact sheet focuses on selected aspects of economic and social rights in Bolivia, on the occasion of the consideration by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the report submitted by Bolivia on its compliance, as a State Party, with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). It is not meant to give a comprehensive picture, nor provide conclusive evidence, of Bolivia's compliance with its obligations under the International Covenant. Rather, it flags some concerns when this socio-economic data is analyzed in light of the various dimensions of Bolivia's economic and social rights obligations. It focuses primarily on one area of particular concern: Bolivia's failure to reduce the striking inequalities in education, nutrition, health and income that exist among various groups of its society. Bolivia's apparent underperformance in this area is at odds with its obligation, as a State Party to the International Covenant, to ensure the equal enjoyment of all people to economic, social and cultural rights.

We hope this fact sheet will contribute to a more substantive discussion between the UN Committee and Bolivia's state representatives to the Committee. We also hope it will contribute to civil society efforts in Bolivia and elsewhere to hold the Bolivian state accountable for its obligations pertaining to economic, social and cultural rights.

VISUALIZING
RIGHTS

A Snapshot of Relevant Statistics about Bolivia

Figure 1 shows that Bolivia still has high levels of child mortality and child malnutrition (with 33 percent of children stunted in their growth), much of the population still does not have access to improved sanitation and 15 percent of children still fail to complete primary school. This suggests that Bolivia has a case to answer regarding its efforts to fully discharge its minimum core obligations under the International Covenant. According to the UN Committee, “a State Party in which any significant number of individuals is deprived of essential foodstuffs, of essential primary health care, of basic shelter and housing, or of the most basic forms of education is, *prima facie*, failing to discharge its obligations under the Covenant.” (CESCR 1990)

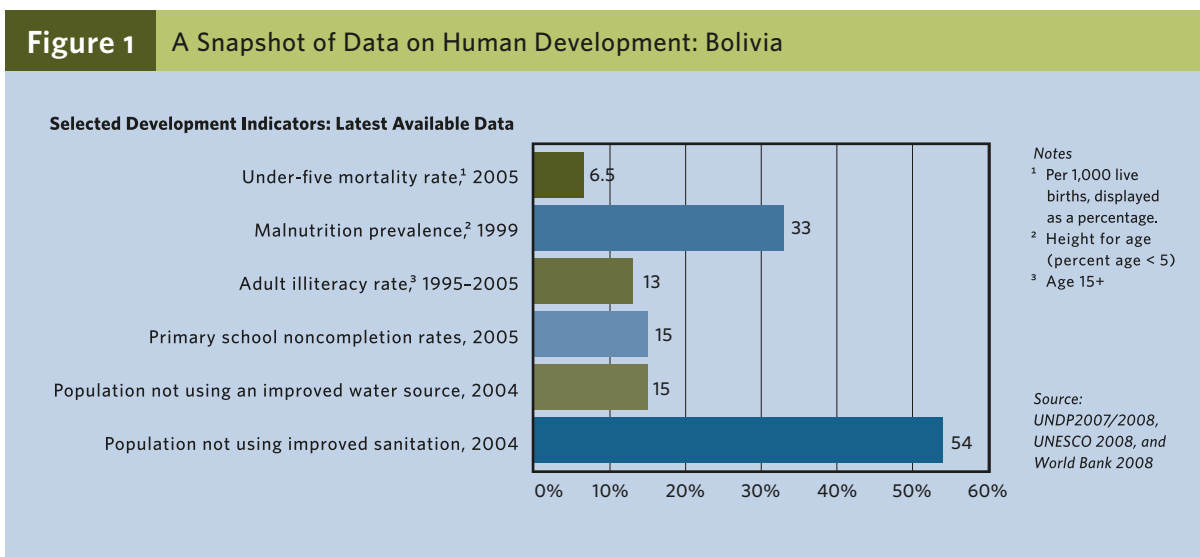
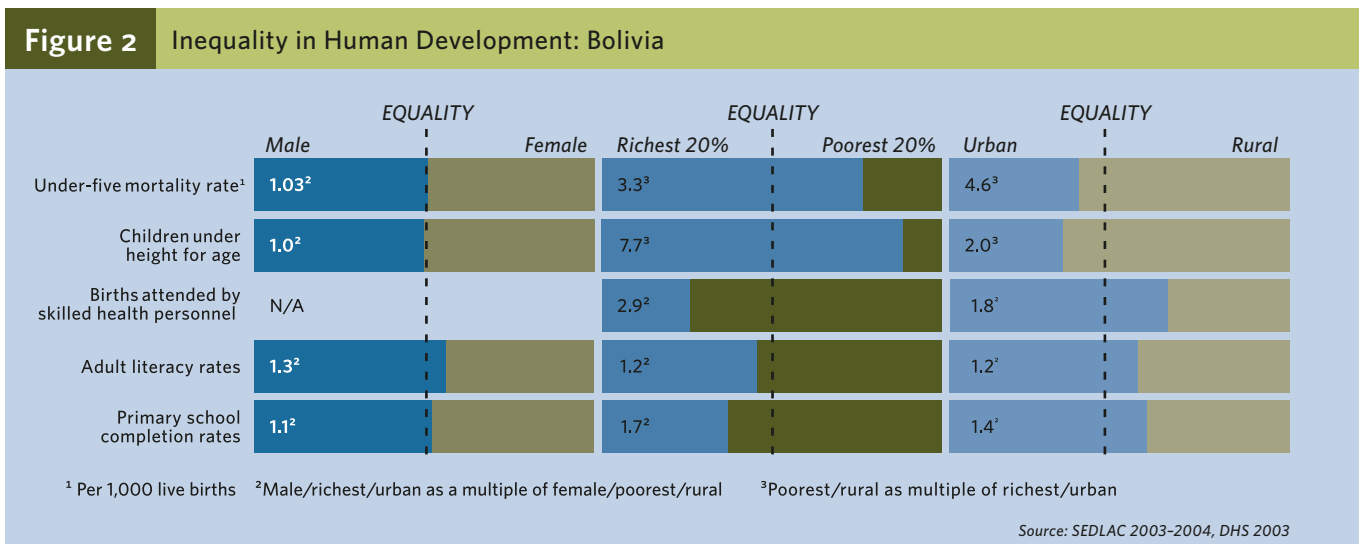


Figure 2 shows multiple disparities on key human development indicators. While there are some gender disparities in adult literacy rates and in primary school completion rates, there are even greater disparities between rich and poor and between rural and urban populations. For instance, out of the total number of children who are stunted as a result of malnutrition, far more come from poor families than from rich families, and the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel is much lower among women living in rural areas than among those living in urban areas. This raises questions about Bolivia’s efforts to ensure the rights of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations.



Income inequality

Bolivia's recent increase in income inequality—rising from a Gini index of 58 in 1999 to a Gini index of 60.1 in 2002—has turned it into the country with the highest income inequality in Latin America and the sixth most unequal country in the world. (Gini is the most widely used measure for income inequality.)

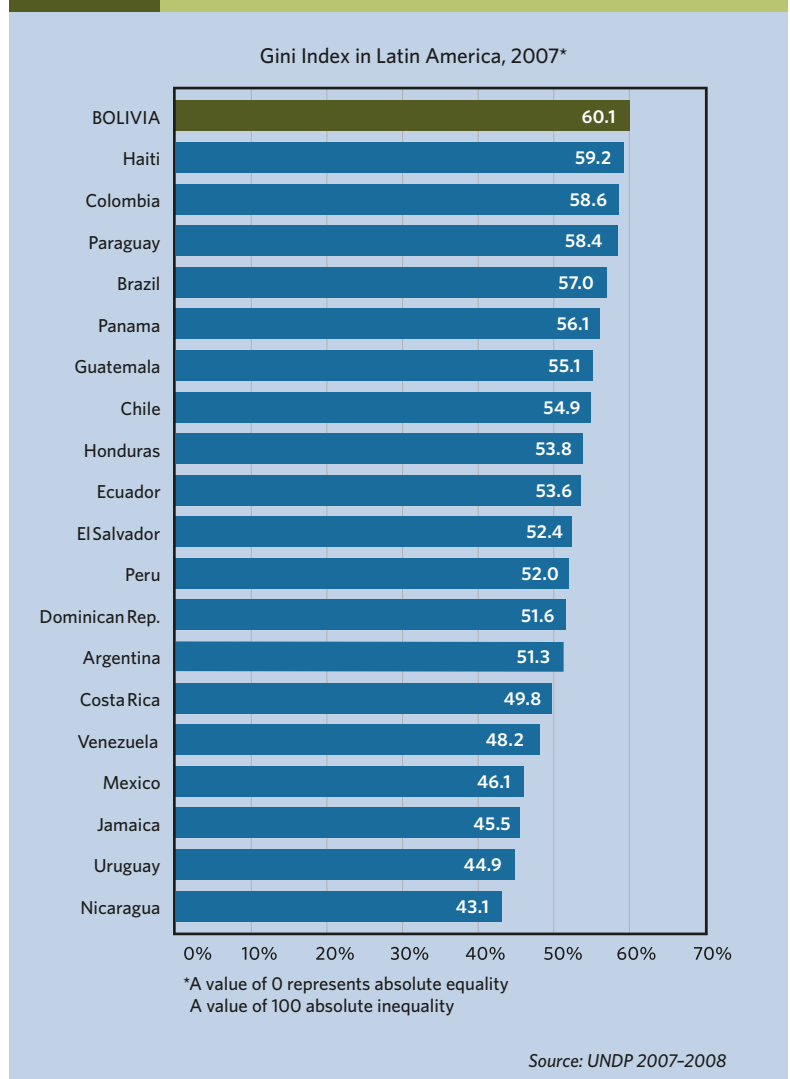
Although the International Covenant does not set specific standards in relation to levels of income inequality, the coexistence of high levels of inequality with extreme deprivation suggests that inequality may be both a cause and consequence of economic and social rights denials. The Covenant recognizes the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family and establishes that “the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights.” (ICESCR, Preamble)

Such pronounced levels of inequality may in themselves be manifestations of economic and social rights deprivation when, for example, they result from a failure to ensure labor rights and social security guarantees to all sectors of the population. Where income inequality is strongly correlated with ethnic disparities, it may reflect the discriminatory effects of government policy or failure to tackle broader societal discrimination on grounds proscribed under international human rights standards.

Persistent levels of extreme income inequality also suggest a failure to redistribute the country's resources to ensure that all sectors of the population are able to access their economic and social rights on an equal footing.

Extreme income inequality thus results in the poorest sectors of the population being denied their right to an adequate standard of living, or equal access to education and health services, with a particular impact on rural and indigenous communities. Furthermore, as the UN Committee points out, the right to food is “inseparable from social justice, requiring the adoption of appropriate economic, environmental and social policies, at both the national and international levels, oriented to the eradication of poverty and the fulfilment of all human rights for all.” (CESCR 1999)

Figure 3 Income Inequality



SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO THE STATE PARTY

- Why has income inequality in Bolivia increased in recent years?
- Which policies is the Bolivian government currently undertaking to reduce such high levels of inequality in the country?
- In light of this high level of inequality, is the Bolivian government adopting any redistributive policies to enable Bolivia to use more resources to satisfy, as a matter of priority, its minimum obligations regarding, *inter alia*, the rights to health, education, food and housing?

Poor children are more than three times more likely to die before age five than rich children.

Health Inequality

Bolivia not only has one of the highest rates of child mortality in Latin America, but it also has other large disparities in child health outcomes. For example, children belonging to the families that are among the poorest 20 percent in the country are more than three times more likely to die before the age of five than those belonging to families that are among the richest 20 percent.

To achieve the full realization of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, the International Covenant requires State Parties, *inter alia*, to take the steps necessary for the reduction of infant mortality and for the healthy development of the child. (ICESCR, Art. 12)

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO THE STATE PARTY

- Why is the child mortality rate in Bolivia much higher among poor children than among rich children?
- Which concrete steps is the Bolivian government taking for the reduction of child mortality in general and of poor children in particular?

Figure 4 Child Mortality—Gaps Between Rich and Poor



Child Malnutrition

Bolivia has one of the highest rates of chronic malnutrition in Latin America (measured as a percentage of children under five who have stunted growth). Moreover, poor children in Bolivia are eight times more likely to be malnourished than rich children: more than 40 percent of children under age five living in the poorest households are stunted in their growth as a result of chronic malnutrition, compared to five percent of children in the richest households.

According to the UN Committee, "the roots of the problem of hunger and malnutrition are not lack of food but lack of access to available food, *inter alia*, because of poverty." (CESCR 1999)

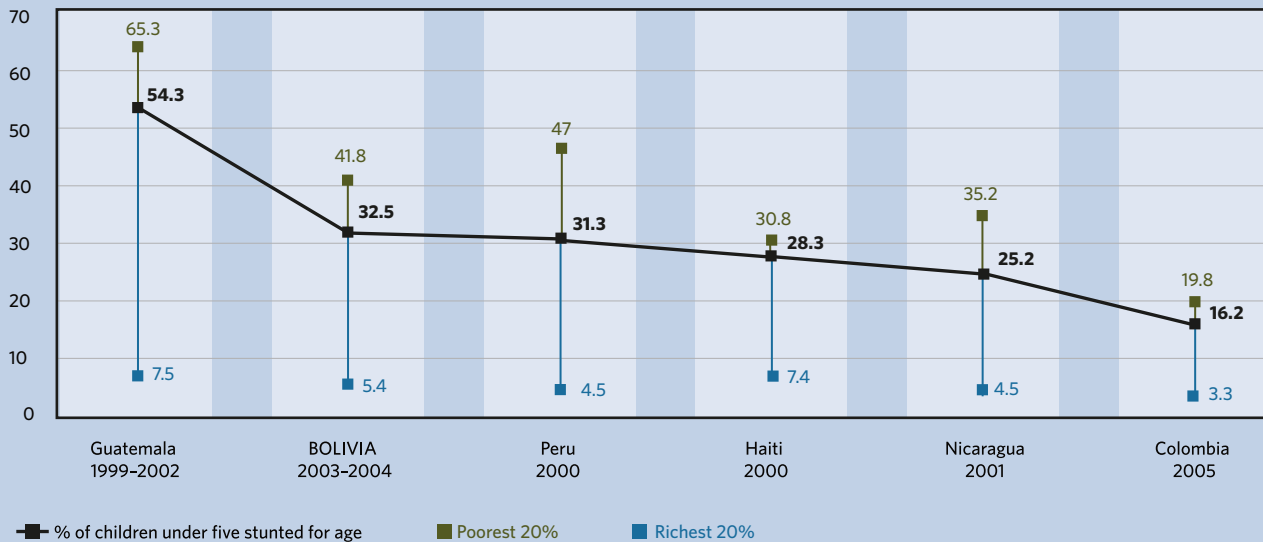
Poor children in Bolivia are eight times more likely to be malnourished than rich children.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO THE STATE PARTY

- Why is the percentage of chronic malnutrition in Bolivia so high?
- Why are poor children so much more likely to be malnourished than rich children?
- Has the Bolivian government recently taken any concrete steps to reduce child malnutrition and improve household food security amongst the poor?

Figure 5 Child Chronic Malnutrition—Selected Latin American Countries

Gap in chronic malnutrition rates of children under five between richest 20% and poorest 20% in selected Latin American countries



Source: WHO 2008

Children living in rural areas are more than five times less likely to complete primary school than children living in urban areas.

Education Inequality

The yawning gender, ethnicity and regional disparities on education turn Bolivia into one of the most unequal countries for education opportunities in Latin America. Figure 6 illustrates the abysmal disparities in literacy rates, one key aspect of education inequalities, showing that while just 2.5 percent of urban adult men in Bolivia are illiterate—a lower rate than the national average in Argentina—a staggering 37.9 percent of rural women in Bolivia are illiterate, a higher rate than the national average in Malawi.

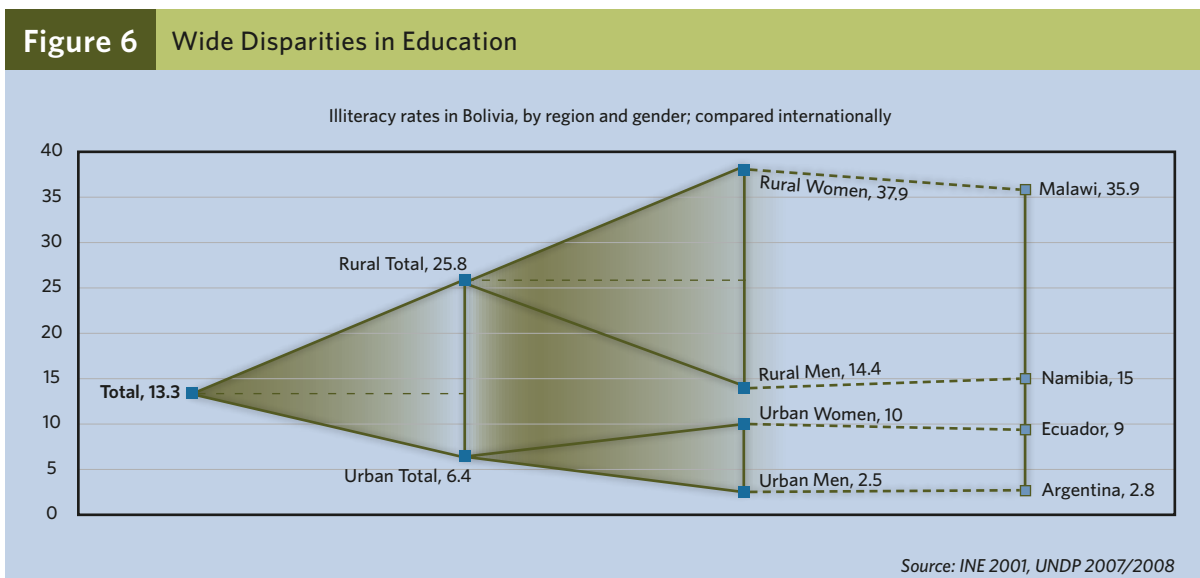
Disaggregated data on another key education indicator—primary school completion rates—also shows wide disparities in Bolivia. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, indigenous children are more than three times less likely to complete primary school than non-indigenous children—the highest gap on ethnic grounds among Latin American countries with a large indigenous population (ECLAC 2005). Similarly, children living in rural areas are more than five times less likely to complete primary school than children living in urban areas. (UNESCO 2004)

Inequality of access to education undermines the cornerstone human rights principle that “all human beings are born equal in dignity and rights.” (UDHR). Persistent inequalities in the enjoyment or exercise of economic and social rights on grounds such as ethnic origin or gender are suggestive of a pattern of discrimination which, according to international human rights standards, includes actions or omissions with discriminatory effects, regardless of whether there is discriminatory intent. (HRC 1989)

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO THE STATE PARTY

- Why there are such high disparities in education opportunities between girls and boys, indigenous and non-indigenous populations and children living in rural areas and those living in urban areas?
- How is this situation, where a significant number of children are deprived of primary education, compatible with Bolivia’s minimum core obligation to ensure the satisfaction of, at the very least, “minimum essential levels” of each of the rights enunciated in the International Covenant, including “the most basic forms of education?” (CESCR 1990)
- What is the Bolivian government doing to reduce the high inequality of access to education that impairs the enjoyment by all persons, on an equal footing, of the right to education?

Figure 6 Wide Disparities in Education



Poor Education Quality

The quality of education in Bolivia is very low, as reflected in Figure 7: When primary students from Bolivia took the same standardized language test as students from other Latin American countries, they had the worst scores. The gap in test scores between students in public schools and those in private schools is also striking, which may suggest that the poor children, whose families cannot afford private education, are getting on average a much poorer quality of education than non-poor children. The inequality in the educational system is also reflected in the fact that in Bolivia, “rural teachers are twice as likely as urban teachers to lack full training and are more likely to abandon teaching.” (PREAL 2006)

According to UNESCO, in the many countries that are striving to guarantee all children the right to education, the focus on access often overshadows the issue of quality. Yet, UNESCO stresses that quality stands at the heart of education. “It determines how much and how well students learn, and the extent to which their education achieves a range of personal, social and development goals.” (UNESCO 2005)

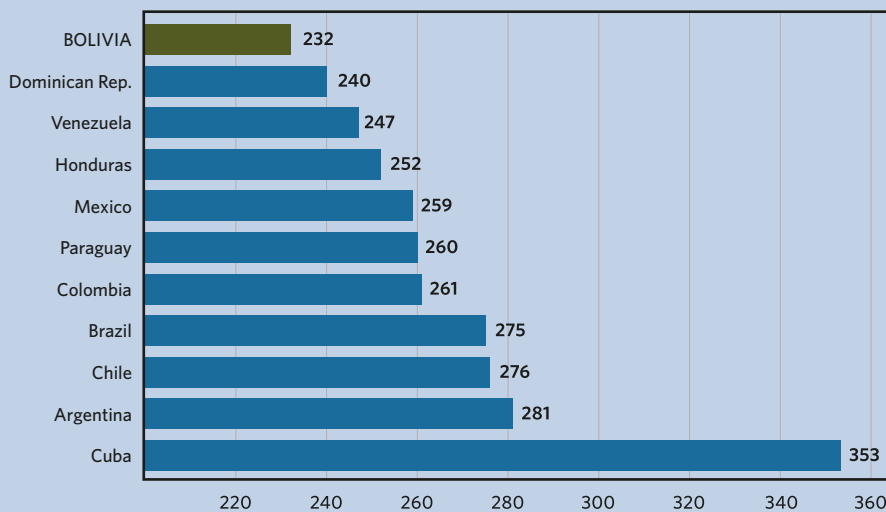
International human rights standards require States Parties to the International Covenant to take positive measures to ensure that education is of good quality for all. (CESCR 1999)

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO THE STATE PARTY

- What is Bolivia planning to do to improve its overall quality of education?
- Which steps is Bolivia undertaking to ensure that children of rural areas and other children from marginalized communities enjoy an equal right to primary education of good quality?

Figure 7 Poor Education Quality


Fourth-grade median language test scores, public, selected Latin American Countries, 1997



Source: UNESCO 1998

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