

For information, please contact:
Jamie Kalliongis +1 314 651 7497 jkalliongis@rightsandresources.org

RRI update as of 08 May2020

Impacts of Covid for IPs, LCs, and ADs and responses:

- First and foremost, we're happy to share the results of our stocktaking exercise by region (attached) – feel free to reach out to the RRG regional teams if you have specific questions.
- Our Indigenous and community colleagues of AMAN, COICA, AMPB, and APIB have all called for donations to help them organize an effective response in their territories. You can find links to support each campaign [here](#). Feel free to share these within your networks or on social media.
- Gregorio Mirabal of COICA explained the critical situation in the Amazon during an [interview on CNN](#) yesterday (in Spanish). In brief: in the countries comprising the Amazon region, there are only 9 hospitals to attend 3 million IPs. In a month the number of cases and death has increased significantly, now reaching 26,000 and 1630, respectively, as of May 4. None of the 9 countries created a protocol to address the unique needs of IPs in the region; and economic relief packages have not reached the Amazon. COICA created their protocol and measures to safeguard the region and its people, but they need support from the international community and created an [Amazon Emergency Fund](#) to receive donations from allies.
- FECOFUN has been organizing a national response to the virus for communities in need. Here is a [video](#) of their response (in Nepali).
- Indonesia faces a particularly difficult [situation](#), but our Asia Facilitator, Anne-Sophie, has shared some encouraging information about solidarity between urban areas and rural communities that has kept food supplies available. You can read about it [here](#).
- Here's a [great overview](#) by FPP on the impacts of COVID-19 on forest peoples.
- Intercontinental Cry has published an [article](#) to document the spread of COVID-19 amongst Indigenous Peoples in the Americas.

Adapting organizations:

- Maliasili has prepared a simple framework on [adapting workplans and budgets](#) to the COVID crisis.
- Here's a quick [guide](#) for non-profits from The Management Center on how to scenario plan for COVID.

Trends and opinions:

- Companies have been using the COVID crisis as a pretext to weaken environmental and social regulations around the world, in the global North and South alike. This article from [Mongabay](#) illuminates the trend at a global level.
- IPBES lead experts share their [views](#) on how COVID-19 Stimulus Measures Must Save Lives, Protect Livelihoods, and Safeguard Nature to Reduce the Risk of Future Pandemics.
- Here's also two new interesting briefings that provide guidance for institutional investors and companies on how to respect the rights of human rights defenders - [Safeguarding Human Rights Defenders: Practical Guidance for Investors](#), published by the Investor Alliance for Human Rights, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, and International Service for Human Rights and [Responsible Sourcing: The Business Case For Protecting](#)

Update 25 April 2020

The Impact of COVID 19 on Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities, and Afro-Descendants

Global trends

- **Indigenous, community, and Afro-descendant movements have stepped in as a para-state authority in the absence of state relief, and are better able to protect themselves from disease and weather the storm long-term when they have secure rights to their lands.** They are uniquely positioned to provide support to areas where states can or will not; and are also providing additional food support for those in cities (see next section). Communities are better able to ensure the food security and health of their people—including by enforcing lockdowns—where they have strong rights to their lands and territories.
- **COVID-19 has not displaced land rights as a frontline issue, but instead has highlighted its urgency. Immediately responding to communities in need and maintaining the long-term integrity and resilience of rightsholder organizations is critical.** In the long term, recognition of rights and support for communities is a crosscutting issue for all global development goals, including resilience against public health crisis. Communities are a source of food security; a driver of inclusive livelihoods; and guardians of the species that have provided many of the world's medicines. Furthermore, [scientists warn](#) that deforestation and biodiversity loss—both of which [can be mitigated by recognizing indigenous and community rights](#)—increase contact between humans and novel pathogens. Yet indigenous and community organizations are concerned that as massive government budgets are shifted to COVID-19 relief without transparency or oversight, hard-won resources for the land rights agenda will be lost.
- **The COVID pandemic is a “threat multiplier,” leading to a decline in enforcement of rights and an increase in land-grabbing, criminalization, and environmental injustice. Under lockdown, organizations’ capacity to respond to these crises is limited.**
 - In many countries, including [Peru](#), [India](#), and [Brazil](#), extractive industries have continued business-as-usual, threatening communities near mines. Illegal logging in the **Amazon** has increased, with [“wildcat” mining up 51% in Brazil](#) in the first quarter of 2020 compared with last year, likely [a critical factor in indigenous deaths from the virus](#).
 - In [Peru](#), a new Supreme Decree (No 080-2020 PCM) reactivates industry such as mining, which creates significant human rights/environmental violations and contributes to the spread of COVID-19 in community territories. A mine in a remote Andean region near indigenous Quechua communities [reported](#) that over 200 workers contracted COVID-19. As of May 4, there are at least 20 confirmed cases among Peruvian Indigenous Peoples.
 - Environmental regulations are also being prematurely relaxed in [Indonesia](#), [Brazil](#), [Colombia](#), and [India](#) to “spur” the economy. In [Kenya and Uganda](#), actors involved in land conflicts with communities are using the lull in oversight during the outbreak to strengthen their land claims. In [Colombia](#), companies attempted to make [the consultation process virtual](#), which would have allowed communities’ rights to be

trampled. CNTI quickly mobilized to bring a case against the Ministry of Interior, and the decree was withdrawn.

- The outbreak constrains advocates' ability to contest private sector action. When palm oil concessions are up for renewal in **Indonesia**, advocacy requires physical organizing.
- In **Colombia**, [several community leaders have been assassinated during the crisis](#); lockdown leaves victims particularly vulnerable. Lockdown enforcement has also resulted in police violence, noted in **Kenya**, **India**, and by paramilitaries in **Colombia**.
- **Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendants are among the most vulnerable to disease.** Governments often support lockdowns in principle, but do not always enforce them.
 - Community movements in **Brazil**, **Colombia**, **Peru**, **Indonesia**, **DRC**, **Philippines**, **Bolivia** and **Ecuador**, among others, have proactively called for lockdowns, implemented social distancing protocols, and shared information in indigenous languages.
 - As of May 4, there were 26,000 confirmed cases and 1,630 deaths in the **Amazon** region; none of the nine countries have created a protocol to respond to the unique needs of Indigenous Peoples. According to Gregorio Mirabel of COICA, there are only nine hospitals available to serve 3 million indigenous inhabitants. **Brazil's** government put the fate of uncontacted tribes in the hands of a Christian evangelist; Indigenous Peoples' organizations have [mobilized to stop this threat to tribes' very survival](#).
 - In **Indonesia**, AMAN called for all communities to close their doors to outsiders, playing an important role in a country that has refused to act fast and early, and now has [the most confirmed COVID cases in Southeast Asia](#).
 - In **Colombia**, the Guardia Indígena have [taken measures to secure their territories](#), limiting entrance into their communities from outsiders. However, without necessary PPE, they must put themselves and their families at risk to protect their communities.
 - In areas without secure rights, lockdowns are not possible: for example, in **Kenya**, the Maasai are not able to fully lock down their territory, risking an increase in exposure.
- **State-led lockdowns, while a key strategy in preventing transmission, have not been combined with measures to ensure access to food, information, and healthcare.** Since it is harvest season, lockdowns have hit rural economies and food security hard and left migrant workers facing sudden eviction and unemployment in distant urban centers. Given the history of malnutrition among vulnerable communities—especially women, children, and elders—shocks can cause chronic hunger and morbidity. According to ECOWAS, the pandemic [could increase those at risk of food insecurity](#) from 17 million to 50 million people in West Africa between June and August 2020.
 - In **India**, the overnight declaration of a strict lockdown stranded millions of migrant workers in urban areas, forcing many to [walk hundreds of kilometers to their homes](#) while facing police repression.
 - In **Peru**, with strict lockdown measures in place, indigenous communities have been forced to depend primarily on subsistence agriculture to survive while not receiving economic stimulus payments the government has promised.
 - In **Kenya**, while the traditional production system of herding livestock is relatively stable, without cattle markets, pastoralists have no cash income and cannot purchase the equipment required to engage with markets safely. Livestock—particularly camels—are facing an outbreak of MERS, compounding the risks.
 - **Colombian** Indigenous People have not received promised [food support](#), and the virus has reached communities. The government has signed a food aid deal with the USA, and news broke of vast embezzlement of cash transfers and that [90% of relief to agriculturalists went to large-scale farmers](#).

- **Indigenous, community, and Afro-descendant women are particularly vulnerable.** Women are often healthcare providers—either formally or informally—and have other household roles) that may increase their chances of exposure. With the increase in hand-washing, women face an added burden of fetching more water. The lockdown is also [increasing domestic violence](#).

What are indigenous and community organizations and leaders doing to keep their communities safe?

- **Preventing the spread of the virus:** Indigenous, local, and Afro-descendant communities are [locking down](#); distributing PPE and other sanitation equipment; offering physical spaces for quarantine; raising awareness among community members through radio programs and social media; tracking and gathering information; and acting to protect Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation or initial contact. Organizations around the world have also formally called for economic resources from the government and the international community.
 - In **Mexico**, Red MOCAF is distributing health information in the Nahua language and lobbying the Mexican government for support during and after the pandemic. In Brazil, Quilombola communities have begun to produce masks and other PPE for community members working in seasonal coffee harvesting.
 - In **Kenya**, Sengwer women are learning to make soap, which has skyrocketed in price. The Community Land Act Now! Platform has also developed a response to share information on COVID-19, which is critical as national briefs are not provided in local languages. Leaders, comedians, and artists help share these messages.
 - In **Nepal**, FECOFUN arranged more than 1,200 physical quarantine centers and raised awareness among over 5 million people within the first weeks of the crisis.
 - Organizations in **Brazil** have started [tracking](#) the virus to help prevent spread, and in **Indonesia**, AMAN is using an app to monitor cases. In **Colombia**, in addition to mapping the spread, ONIC is releasing [regular reports](#) of cases in indigenous communities while also disseminating key information on which communities are most vulnerable.
- **Addressing the immediate food security and economic crisis:** Community organizations are addressing imminent needs, often without state support, including support for stranded migrant workers and livelihood collapse with the closure of markets. They are tapping community-based knowledge, traditional medicine, and rituals to build community resilience and solidarity.
 - KPA, a national peasant organization in **Indonesia**, is building rural-urban solidarity networks by [facilitating distribution of rice and other basic commodities](#) at affordable prices to thousands of unemployed families through relationships with labor unions.
 - ONAMIAP in **Peru** is developing protocols to deliver aid to communities without risking the spread of the virus. They are acting as a conduit for information between indigenous communities and the [government](#) to seek implementation of such protocols.
 - Emberá organizations in **Panama** are providing weekly food delivery to vulnerable families and deploying health bulletins in the Emberá language.
 - In **India**, communities have set up food distribution, community kitchens, and have worked to ensure food security for migrant families.
- **Coordinating advocacy and ensuring long-term resilience.** Indigenous and community organizations are engaging in advocacy to ensure healthcare and relief needs are met. They also continue to monitor legal threats to forest rights, rollback of rights, criminalization and repression. Media campaigns on public health, the importance of investment in local communities, and the link between disease and deforestation are helping to advance critical narratives for combatting the imminent crisis and long-term threats.

- **COICA** is coordinating a regional response for Indigenous Peoples in the **Amazon Basin**. They have initiated a [fundraising effort](#) to provide food, medicine, and PPE. They have initiated a campaign to disseminate key information in local languages; establish protocols to secure and monitor territories; and advocate with governments. They released a set of [demands](#) to national governments.
- In **India**, an advocacy strategy to ensure government procurement of Non-Timber Forest Products under lockdown, [a lifeline for forest communities](#), was successful in two states after engaging the [Minister of Tribal Affairs \(Maharashtra, Odisha\)](#).
- In **Liberia, Kenya, and DRC**, organizations are working to keep land reforms on track, and in **Indonesia**, organizations continue their efforts to derail the [Omnibus Bill](#). Organizations are also continuing their work online.
- In **Colombia**, where communities feared that the crisis would prevent implementation of the Ethnic Chapter of the Peace Agreement, which safeguards Indigenous Peoples' and Afri-descendants' rights, ONIC secured \$490,000 from the United Nations MultiDonor Fund, a key step in ensuring that implementation continues.

Spokespeople

- **Victoria Tauli-Corpuz**, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Philippines, English
- **Bhartai Pathak**, FECOFUN Secretary General, Nepal, English
- **Stanley Kimaren ole Riamit**, indigenous Maasai leader, Founder-Director of Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA), Kenya, English
- **Charo Mina**, National Coordinator of Advocacy and Outreach for the Black Communities' Process (PCN) and a member of the Afro-Colombian Solidarity Network, Colombia, Spanish
- **Armando Valbuena**, ONIC, Indigenous leader of the Wayuu People, Colombia, Spanish
- **Fany Kairo**, OPIAC, Coordinator of women, youth, and family at OPIAC, Colombia, Spanish
- **Tushar Dash**, Forest Rights Activist, India, English
- **RRI Regional Directors: Patrick Kipalu** (Africa), English/French; **Kundan Kumar** (Asia), English; **Omaira Bolanos** (Latin America), English/Spanish

Spokespeople from additional national contexts may also be available; please reach out with requests.

“COVID-19 has revealed the profound global inequality that social and economic systems are based on. So many speak of returning to normal after the global pandemic, but “normal” for the world’s Indigenous Peoples, local communities, Afro-descendants, and women is environmental and human rights crisis. Health service disparities and lack of access to economic relief packages increase their vulnerability in the current crisis. They also face governments and the private sector using the cover of the pandemic to accelerate land-grabbing and violence against them.

*And in spite of the crisis, communities are providing food, ethnic and gender sensitive information, and other critical services where governments are not able or will not. As scientists note that our destruction of the natural world helped create this pandemic, communities show us a better way to relate to nature. We must stand united for a strong call in solidarity with them during this critical time, a call for recognition of their legal rights to the lands they protect. And we must treat them as development and climate partners moving forward. We can build a post-COVID world that is better than what came before.” - **Omaira Bolaños, Latin America Director at Rights and Resources Initiative***

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The **Rights and Resources Initiative** is a global Coalition of more than 200 organizations dedicated to advancing the forestland and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women within these groups.