



OCTOBER 2020

The impact of COVID-19 on indigenous communities:

Insights from the Indigenous Navigator



INDIGENOUS
NAVIGATOR



Families receive relief goods assistance with hygiene kits and vegetables seeds from the initiative of Timuay Justice and Governance in partnership with Tebtebba, in the Philippines.
CREDIT: TEBTEBBA

“The traditional livelihood of indigenous peoples has been severely impacted by COVID, because they cannot go out to continue the gathering of non-timber forest products, but also during the quarantine illegal loggers have been taking advantage of extracting the resources of indigenous peoples in their community”

(INTERVIEW 10).

Acknowledgements

The report relies on data and information collected and shared by indigenous communities in 11 countries that have participated in the Indigenous Navigator initiative, which benefits from the support of the European Union. The report was written by Gabriela Balvedi Pimentel and Maria Victoria Cabrera Ormaza, from the Gender, Equality and Diversity & ILOAIDS Branch of the International Labour Organization, and Pedro Cayul, a consultant to the Indigenous Navigator project. The report includes contributions and feedback from the Indigenous Navigator consortium partners and local partner organizations in the 11 countries, as well as the Indigenous Peoples Major Group. The views expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Cover photograph: Indigenous women work at field in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit ILO

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIPP	Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact
ALAPA	Association for Law and Advocacy for Pastoralists
CAT	Convention against Torture
CECOIN	<i>Centro de Cooperación al Indígena</i>
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEJIS	<i>Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social</i>
CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CIPO	Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization
COICA	Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DIHR	Danish Institute for Human Rights
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FPP	Forest Peoples Programme
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ILEPA	Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners
ILO	International Labour Organization
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
LAHURNIP	Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples
MPIDO	Mainyoito Pastoralists Integrated Development Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
ONAMIAP	<i>Organización Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas Andinas y Amazónicas del Perú</i>
ONIC	<i>Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia</i>
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PINGO's Forum	Pastoralists Indigenous Non-Governmental Organization's Forum
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
Tebtebba	Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education
VIDS	<i>Vereniging van Inheemse Dorpshoofden in Suriname</i>
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the basis of a collaborative, community-led data-gathering effort and testimonies from indigenous communities, this report provides first-hand information on the situation of indigenous peoples in 11 countries where communities have participated in the Indigenous Navigator initiative. It highlights the differentiated impact that COVID-19 is having on indigenous peoples, which also varies from community to community. On the one hand, the report identifies how pre-existing barriers in access to health, social security and education are fuelling disproportional impacts of the pandemic on indigenous peoples. It also indicates a rise in food insecurity, related to loss of livelihoods and lack of access to land and natural resources. On the other hand, it underlines the central role played by communities in building the response and recovery to the global crisis resulting from the pandemic. The analysis and recommendations presented in this report seek to contribute to the design of COVID-19 response and recovery measures that are respectful of the rights of indigenous peoples and support their livelihoods, economies and resilience.

Firstly, efforts should be increased to provide indigenous communities with the necessary means of prevention in relation to COVID-19, including preventive mechanisms, access to adequately equipped and culturally appropriate healthcare facilities, and information in indigenous languages. Secondly, inclusive and community-based assessments of risks and needs should be undertaken in order to understand the specific situation of indigenous peoples. State institutions in charge of indigenous issues should be strengthened, including mechanisms for the participation of, and consultation with, indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples' participation in the management of health and educational services, including the return to school, should also be ensured and distance learning opportunities provided. Furthermore, measures for the protection of indigenous peoples' lands and access to natural resources which are essential for their traditional activities are urgently needed. Indigenous entrepreneurial initiatives should be maintained and promoted, and indigenous peoples' livelihoods and local economies should be strengthened in order to ensure the sustainability of their communities. Lastly, indigenous peoples' labour rights must be ensured at all stages of crisis response and recovery measures.



1. THE INDIGENOUS NAVIGATOR: A USEFUL TOOL AT THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The Indigenous Navigator is a monitoring framework that enables indigenous communities to track progress in the implementation of international standards concerning indigenous peoples, which are contained in the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and other relevant human rights instruments.¹ It also gives indigenous communities the opportunity to assess by themselves the degree to which the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have been met. The Indigenous Navigator initiative started in 2014, when a conceptual framework and related tools were developed and pilot-tested in six countries,² with support from the European Union, by a consortium of partners including the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR), the Forest Peoples Programme (FPP), the Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), the Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education (Tebtebba Foundation), and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Since 2017, the consortium partners have been working with local partners in 11 countries³ across the world to support indigenous communities' efforts to increase understanding and awareness of their rights, as well as to voice their most pressing demands.

1. Namely, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the Convention against Torture (CAT).

2. See: <http://nav.indigenoustravel.com/index.php/en/about>.

3. Kapaeeng Foundation, from Bangladesh; *Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social* (CEJIS), from Bolivia; Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization (CIPO), from Cambodia; Association OKANI, from Cameroon; *Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia* (ONIC) and *Centro de Cooperación al Indígena* (CECOIN), from Colombia; Mainyito Pastoralists Integrated Development Organization (MPIDO) and Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA), from Kenya; Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP), from Nepal; *Organización Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas Andinas y Amazónicas del Perú* (ONAMIAP) and *Peru Equidad – Centro de Políticas Públicas y Derechos Humanos*, from Peru; Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education (Tebtebba Foundation), from the Philippines; Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname (*Vereniging van Inheemse Dorpsvoerden in Suriname – VIDS*), from Suriname; Association for Law and Advocacy for Pastoralists (ALAPA) and Pastoralists Indigenous Non-Governmental Organization's Forum (PINGO's Forum), from Tanzania.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic consequences are dramatically changing the trajectory towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including for the more than 476 million indigenous and tribal peoples throughout the world⁴ (ILO 2019). In this context, the need for high-quality data on the situation of indigenous peoples, which can support targeted interventions for this group, becomes even more striking. So far, accessing disaggregated data on such groups has been a challenge, as the collection and disaggregation of data on indigenous peoples tends to be inadequate or even non-existent (UN n.d.).

The Indigenous Navigator framework was developed in response to the lack of qualitative and quantitative data on the situation of indigenous peoples at the local and community level. It was designed in accordance with guidelines on measurement and implementation of human rights indicators of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights' (OHCHR) (OHCHR 2012) and encompasses over 150 indicators (IWGIA 2020) grouped into 13 thematic areas, namely: (i) general enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination; (ii) self-determination; (iii) cultural integrity; (iv) lands, territories and resources; (v) fundamental rights and freedoms; (vi) participation in public life; (vii) legal protection, access to justice and remedies; (viii) cross-border contacts; (ix) freedom of expression and media; (x) general economic and social development; (xi) education; (xii) health; and (xiii) employment and occupation (Indigenous Navigator 2020). As of 2019, over 200 indigenous communities have taken part in the data collection process⁵ (IWGIA 2020).

Data collection was coordinated by the Indigenous Navigator's local partners,⁶ which comprise indigenous communities, NGOs, civil society organizations, indigenous lawyers' associations, and also indigenous women organizations. Data was collected by indigenous peoples themselves through various methods, all respectful of communities' internal processes. The information collected provides valuable insights into the living conditions of indigenous peoples in the communities covered by the initiative.

Furthermore, the partnerships and contacts reinforced through the Indigenous Navigator project have also proven to be beneficial in times of crisis, as will be shown in this report. Having such an established network, the project has been able to collect up-to-date and first-hand information on the challenges indigenous communities are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on the measures they are taking to cope with this situation. This timely information is essential for producing responses to the COVID-19 crisis that are inclusive and take into account indigenous peoples' voices, aiming to reach a "better normal" (ILO 2020f).

On the basis of the data provided by the Indigenous Navigator and the testimonies of indigenous communities and local partners, this report aims to shed light on the conditions of indigenous peoples before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following sections will provide a snapshot of the situation of indigenous peoples in the 11 countries that participated in the Indigenous Navigator initiative before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis and recommendations presented in this report seek to contribute to the design of COVID-19 recovery measures that are respectful of the rights of indigenous peoples, and support their livelihoods, economies and resilience.

4. In this report, for practical reasons, the term "indigenous peoples" is understood as including tribal peoples.

5. As indicated below, however, the data relating to 146 of these communities will be used in this report.

6. *Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social (CEJIS), Organización Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas Andinas y Amazónicas del Perú (ONAMIAP), Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (ONIC), Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP), Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization (CIPO), Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA), Kapaeeng Foundation, Centro de Cooperación al Indígena (CECOIN), Association for Law and Advocacy for Pastoralists (ALAPA), Mainyoiito Pastoralists Integrated Development Organization (MPIIDO), Association OKANI, Peru Equidad – Centro de Políticas Públicas y Derechos Humanos, and the Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname (Vereniging van Inheemse Dorpschoufden in Suriname – VIDS).*



Indigenous Navigator data collection in Peru.
CREDIT: IWGIA PABLO LASANSKY

2. USING INDIGENOUS NAVIGATOR DATA

2.1 INDICATORS

The Indigenous Navigator's indicators derive from the 13 thematic areas of the UNDRIP, for which key attributes⁷ and indicators were defined (Indigenous Navigator 2020a). The indicators selected to compose the framework connect directly with the UNDRIP, Convention No. 169 and other human rights instruments.⁸ The Indigenous Navigator uses three types of indicators (Indigenous Navigator 2020a, 6):

- a. Structural indicators: reflecting the country's legal and policy framework;
- b. Process indicators: measuring the State's ongoing efforts to implement human rights commitments (e.g. programmes, budget allocation);
- c. Outcome indicators: measuring actual enjoyment of human rights by indigenous peoples.

In order to gather data on these indicators, two questionnaires were developed: a national questionnaire, based on structural and process indicators and answered through desk research conducted by partner

7. An attribute covers the main aspects that compose a right.

8. Namely, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention against Torture (CAT), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Indigenous Navigator 2020a).

organizations of the Indigenous Navigator project ([Indigenous Navigator 2020c](#), 1); and a community questionnaire, based on process and outcome indicators and answered through collective assessments and data collection on the ground by the communities themselves. The community questionnaire aims at assessing the impact of state policies and programmes in communities (e.g. practical outcomes for particular indigenous communities, budget allocations, actual enjoyment of rights) ([Indigenous Navigator 2020b](#), 3). This report will focus mainly on data gathered through community questionnaires, in order to highlight the voice of the participant indigenous communities and also their experiences regarding the implementation of their rights.

Of particular relevance for this report are indicators on (i) health (e.g. general access to health, water and sanitation); (ii) freedom of expression and media (e.g. access to culturally appropriate information in particular); (iii) general economic and social development (e.g. food security, poverty, access to social protection); (iv) education (e.g. access to education); and (v) employment and occupation (e.g. employment, migration, fundamental rights at work).

2.2 COVERAGE

To date, over 200 communities have been engaged in the data-gathering and analysis process of the Indigenous Navigator ([IWGIA 2020](#)). The report is based on data from 146 questionnaires in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Figure 1) with respect to which the communities gave their free, prior and informed consent concerning its use and which went through a validation process in accordance with the initiative’s methodology. In Africa, 35 questionnaires were answered by communities in Cameroon, 6 in Kenya and 5 in Tanzania. For Asia, there were 25 answered questionnaires in Bangladesh, 11 in Cambodia, 10 in Nepal and 2 in the Philippines. Lastly, 18 community questionnaires were answered in Bolivia, 17 in Peru, 12 in Suriname and 5 in Colombia. As demonstrated in Table 1, one questionnaire may have covered one or more communities. In addition, one questionnaire may have covered more than one indigenous people.

Figure 1: Number of community surveys

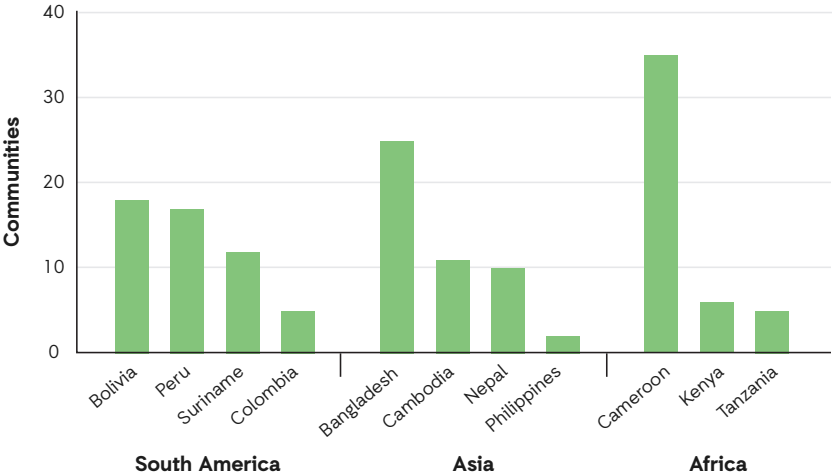


Table 1: Coverage by questionnaire

Country	An entire indigenous people	One village/ community of one indigenous people	One village/ community inhabited by several indigenous peoples	Several villages/ communities of one indigenous people	Several villages/ communities inhabited by several indigenous peoples
Bangladesh	0	44	4	48	4
Bolivia	0	50	6	44	0
Cambodia	0	91	0	0	9
Cameroon	0	97	0	3	0
Colombia	40	0	0	60	0
Kenya	0	0	0	83	17
Nepal	0	30	10	60	0
Peru	24	76	0	0	0
Philippines	0	50	0	50	0
Suriname	0	8	83	8	0
Tanzania	0	100	0	0	0
TOTAL	4	60	9	25	2

Note: Table created using question T2-V9-1

The responses to the questionnaires provided by communities covered by the Indigenous Navigator do not represent the reality of the entire indigenous population in the countries concerned. They do, however, provide a snapshot of the realities of indigenous peoples in the different countries. Table 2 presents a comparison between the total indigenous population in a country and the total indigenous population covered by the Indigenous Navigator in the respective country. It therefore provides an estimate of what percentage of the indigenous population in the country was covered by the project. Suriname is the country with the greatest coverage, with almost 18 per cent, while coverage is lower than 10 per cent for the other countries. No information on the total indigenous population in Tanzania was available.

Table 2: Indigenous population covered by the community surveys

Country	Total population ⁹	Population covered by questionnaires	Proportion
Bangladesh	1,726,715	64,211	3.72%
Bolivia	3,240,947	9,862	0.30%
Cambodia	471,708	1,039	0.22%
Cameroon	339,724	10,675	3.14%
Colombia	1,690,538	2,118	0.13%
Kenya	4,621,280	55,650	1.20%
Nepal	10,055,726	107,657	1.07%
Peru	6,599,073	6,818	0.10%
Philippines	14,846,263	1,104	0.007%
Suriname	21,836	3,841	17.59%
Tanzania	-	17,556	-

9. Estimates based on national censuses and household surveys compiled by the ILO in connection with the report *Implementing the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169: Towards an inclusive, sustainable and just future (ILO 2019)*. The estimates cover total population except for: Bolivia 15 years and above; Peru 12 years and above; Cameroon 15-49 years for women and 15-59 years for men.

2.3 DATA

The Indigenous Navigator data is based on information provided by participant indigenous communities, which answered the questionnaires collectively as part of a collaborative process. Communities gave their consent to be part of the data collection process and undertook the work themselves ([Indigenous Navigator n.d.; 2020b](#), 4-5). Consequently, the data collected through the Navigator provides first-hand information on the community's perception of the implementation of indigenous peoples' rights. It should be noted that the situation of indigenous women has been mainstreamed throughout the Navigator monitoring framework. When possible, data has been disaggregated by gender ([Indigenous Navigator 2020c](#), 2).

The collection of data has been conducted in different ways, as demonstrated in Table 3, which reports the percentage of communities for which each kind of data collection method was implemented. The most frequently used method was focus group discussions, but indigenous communities also gathered information through communal assemblies and consultations with community authorities. To a lesser extent, individual and household surveys were undertaken. Other methods, such as interviews with key informants, were also deployed. Furthermore, communities frequently used more than one data collection method. In Suriname, for example, local researchers made households visits and the results were subsequently verified and validated during a village meeting (Interview 8). In Peru, both individual and group interviews were conducted ([Indigenous Navigator 2020](#)). In some communities in Cameroon, data collection was undertaken in two phases: one with groups of women and another with groups of men (Interview 4).

Table 3: Method used for data collection. Percentage of communities by country

Country	Household survey	Individual survey	Focus group	Communal assembly	Consultation with community authorities	Others
Bangladesh	0	0	88	0	12	0
Bolivia	0	0	44	83	17	17
Cambodia	18	55	100	0	9	0
Cameroon	0	0	100	0	0	0
Colombia	0	20	80	20	40	0
Kenya	0	0	100	100	100	17
Nepal	0	10	90	90	80	0
Peru	0	24	82	65	12	0
Philippines	0	0	100	100	50	100
Suriname	58	92	0	17	33	0
Tanzania	0	0	100	0	100	100
TOTAL	6	16	79	32	24	8

Note: Questionnaires were completed as a collective process and often answered using more than one method. Table created using question T2-V4-1

The data collected through the Indigenous Navigator does not represent official statistical data but indigenous peoples' perceptions and experiences. It is based on indigenous peoples' self-perceptions in relation to the framework's indicators. In addition, statistical representations presented throughout this report indicate the country average. Considering these elements, the data presented here should not be understood as representative of all indigenous groups in a certain country, but as the country mean exclusively for those communities for which validated data is currently available in the Indigenous Navigator database.

The analysis for this report of the data collected through the Indigenous Navigator framework was supplemented by a survey inquiring about impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in partners' activities and by in-depth semi-structured interviews with local partners in July and August 2020. In total 11 interviews were conducted, with partners from each of the participating countries (Annex I). For confidentiality purposes, respondents' identities have been anonymized.

The information collected through these interviews complements the information previously gathered through the questionnaires, allowing for an initial assessment of how COVID-19 is affecting the communities in the 11 countries that have used the Indigenous Navigator. Furthermore, the report is informed by relevant material produced by the International Labour Organization, other United Nations agencies and entities, national governments and organizations of indigenous peoples, including Indigenous Navigator partners.

2.4 LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Though the data presented in this report has undergone a validation process together with the communities and national partners and has been made publicly available, the report presents only preliminary findings of the Indigenous Navigator project. Surveys which have yet to be validated have not been included. Indigenous Navigator data will be used in this report in an illustrative manner, presenting indigenous peoples' testimonies with regard to pre-existing inequalities which have shaped the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on indigenous communities.

The amount of information provided by indigenous communities in responding to the questionnaire within the context of the Indigenous Navigator is not equal for all partners. Communities have the rights to and ownership of the data and were therefore able to select the questions to be asked. Consequently, there are gaps in some indicators with regard to certain countries. Accordingly, figures and tables in the report, which aggregate or set out the data, do not include countries where communities did not provide responses. Furthermore, answers were provided with varying degrees of detail. In view of these factors, this report does not aim to make comparisons between countries or communities but rather to bring different experiences to light.

As will be demonstrated, the Indigenous Navigator's contribution is twofold. Firstly, it provides policymakers, academia, development actors and the public at large with insights into indigenous peoples' realities, perspectives and needs. Secondly, it acts as an important tool for empowering indigenous peoples and their organizations to monitor their rights and development. Throughout this process, some indigenous communities have established important alliances and identified and established communication channels with strategic partners for action (IWGIA 2020a).

Respondents from Bangladesh, for instance, have indicated that the data gathered through the Indigenous Navigator has been an important tool for evidence-based advocacy. They have also established a partnership with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, which has agreed to include the issues of ethnic identity in the upcoming national census. In Cambodia, partners have reported the development of a closer relationship with different federal ministries. Through the dissemination of the results among government authorities, participants in Bolivia have reported that alliances were achieved at the municipal and state

level. Participants from Kenya have collaborated with local authorities in assessing the implementation of the SDGs (IWGIA 2020a).

As will be further demonstrated in this report, the Indigenous Navigator has also proved to be an important instrument at a time of crisis. For instance, in the absence of official disaggregated data on indigenous peoples, Indigenous Navigator data has helped organizations to better understand the situation in which various indigenous communities were living before the pandemic. Having such information, these organizations managed to identify which communities were in a situation of more vulnerability and thus needed more urgent support from local authorities (Interview 3).



Indigenous Navigator training in Bolivia.
CREDIT: CEIIS



Indigenous Navigator data collection with youth group in Cambodia.
CREDIT: CIPO

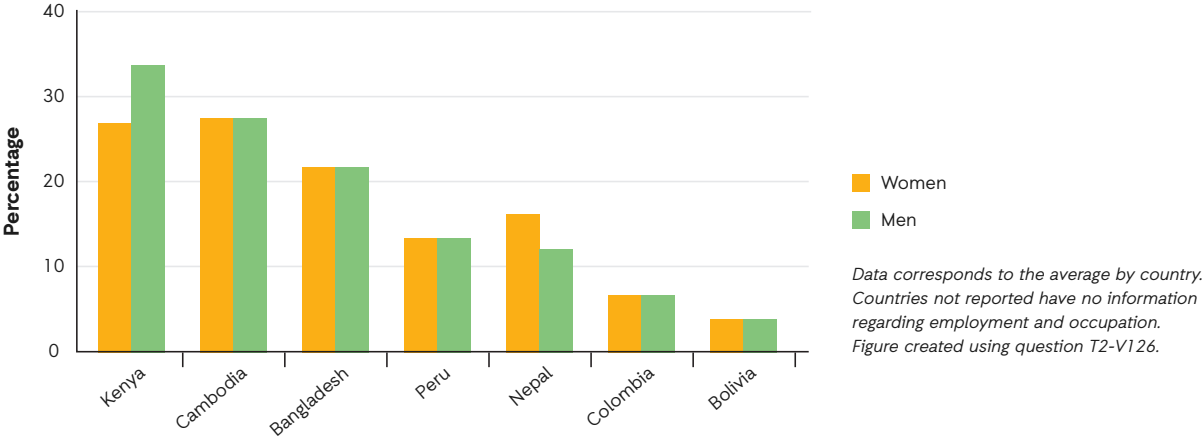
3. PRE-EXISTING INEQUALITIES IDENTIFIED

3.1 EMPLOYMENT AND WORKING CONDITIONS

An ILO report published in 2019 shows that indigenous peoples continue to experience inequalities despite progress made in terms of legal recognition of their rights. This is reflected in particular with regard to employment. Globally, 63.3 per cent of indigenous peoples are in employment, compared to 59.1 per cent of the non-indigenous population, but substantial differences in working conditions persist. The share of indigenous peoples in the informal economy is particularly high, with 86.3 per cent compared to 66.3 per cent for non-indigenous counterparts (ILO 2019). Indigenous women, in particular, appear to experience difficulties to enter the labour market, as 49.3 per cent of indigenous women are employed compared to 77.1 per cent of indigenous men (ILO 2019). Additionally, indigenous women are 25.6 per cent more likely to be working in the informal economy than non-indigenous women. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these numbers are particularly worrying, considering that incomes of those working in the informal economy are expected to fall by 80 per cent as a consequence of the crisis (ECLAC 2020). For those in the informal economy, staying at home means losing their income and livelihoods (ILO 2020a).

Indigenous Navigator data also indicates that in all the countries covered, indigenous peoples are underrepresented in the formal economy. Figure 2 shows that indigenous communities in all countries reported a significantly low percentage of formal employment, normally below 30 per cent. For the countries of Latin America, the data shows the lowest participation in formal employment. Interestingly, the majority of countries did not report a stark difference in employment of indigenous men and women in the formal economy, with the exception of one country in Africa (a greater number of men) and one in Asia (a greater number of women).

Figure 2: Indigenous population employed in formal sector

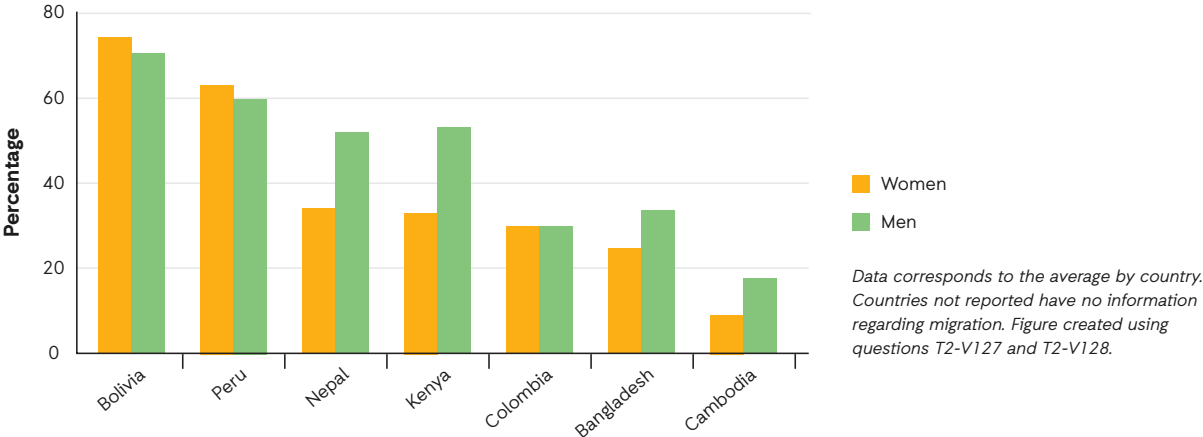


In terms of wages, indigenous workers globally earn 18.5 per cent less than non-indigenous workers, and this pay gap is highest in Latin America and the Caribbean, where it reaches 31.2 per cent (ILO 2019). As a result, indigenous peoples receive lower benefit amounts from contributory pensions, on average, than the non-indigenous population of their respective countries (UN 2018).

In rural areas, where indigenous workers continue to predominate, international labour standards are frequently not respected. Globally, 55.0 per cent of the employed indigenous population work in agriculture, compared to only 26.9 per cent of the non-indigenous population (ILO 2019). The provision of labour inspection services that effectively monitor compliance with the labour rights of indigenous workers is often sparse or non-existent in rural areas owing to the lack of human and financial resources (ILO 2011).

Over the years, many indigenous peoples have migrated to urban areas in search of livelihood alternatives, including as a consequence of land insecurity (World Bank 2015). Indigenous Navigator data shows that in four countries in three different regions, more than 50 per cent of the indigenous population is reported to have migrated in the search for work. Two Latin American countries present the highest percentages of young women migrating (Figure 3), while in countries in Asia and Africa, this percentage is higher for men.

Figure 3: Population that migrated in search of work



Even though some indigenous peoples that migrate have been able to engage in non-traditional economic activities, including construction and services (ILO 2019), indigenous peoples continue to experience inequalities. According to a World Bank report, in Latin America approximately 36 per cent of indigenous urban dwellers are relegated to slums, where they often face extreme poverty, inhabiting insecure, unsanitary and polluted areas (World Bank 2015).

These factors contribute to the challenges indigenous peoples face when attempting to escape poverty. According to ILO data, indigenous peoples living in 23 countries, representing 83 per cent of the global indigenous population, constitute 18.7 per cent of the extreme poor¹⁰ (ILO 2019). This situation, as the UN special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples warns, seems to be intensifying as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic (OHCHR 2020a).

Considering that different societies and cultures may have different views on a number of concepts, including poverty (IPMG 2015), the Indigenous Navigator adopted a holistic interpretation of poverty. For indigenous peoples the perception of poverty may go beyond income, and include factors such as land access, well-being, spirituality and dignity (Carling et al. 2017). In that sense, communities were asked about their self-perception regarding how many men and women are poor in their community, as well as regarding the main characteristics of poor men or women.

As Figures 4 and 5 show, the majority of communities reported that over 30 per cent of their community are considered poor, and for some this number reached 50 per cent. Furthermore, while in some Latin American countries the situation of poverty between men and women is similar, in the majority of reporting communities more women are considered to be poor than men. For both men and women, some of the main elements of poverty in indigenous communities were health problems, unemployment, low level of education, landlessness and low income (Tables 4 and 5). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these are particularly worrying factors, as they demonstrate that a large number of indigenous peoples are not only affected by lower incomes but also by poor access to healthcare. This particular topic will be further analysed in the section on access to healthcare.

Furthermore, indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable to forced labour (ILO, 2014), including trafficking for sexual exploitation, as in the case of indigenous women and girls (ILO 2019). Indeed, the cases of human trafficking reported by Indigenous Navigator respondents refer to indigenous women. All these cases took place in Asia and involved cases of trafficking to other cities or countries, either to work as housekeepers or in the sex industry. Furthermore, cases of prostitution of indigenous girls were reported in Latin America and Africa. Equally disturbing is the persistence of child labour among indigenous peoples (ILO 2019a). In the context of the Indigenous Navigator, some respondents reported cases of slavery and recruitment for illicit activities or for armed conflicts.

10. Defined as people living on less than US\$1.90 a day (ILO 2019).

Figure 4: Men considered poor

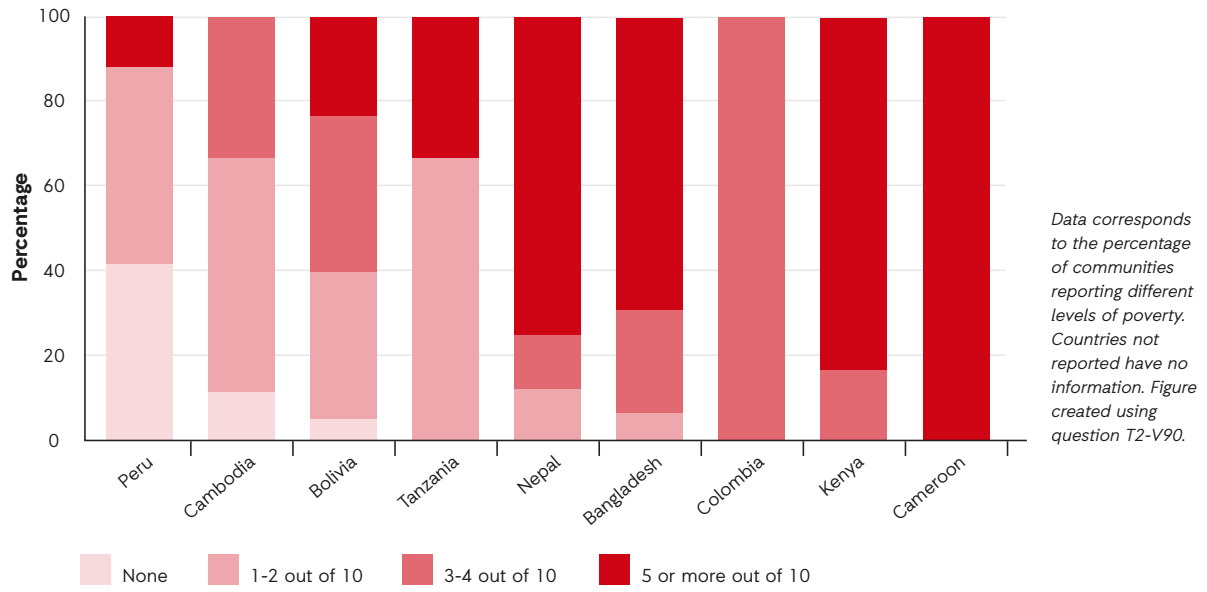


Figure 5: Women considered poor

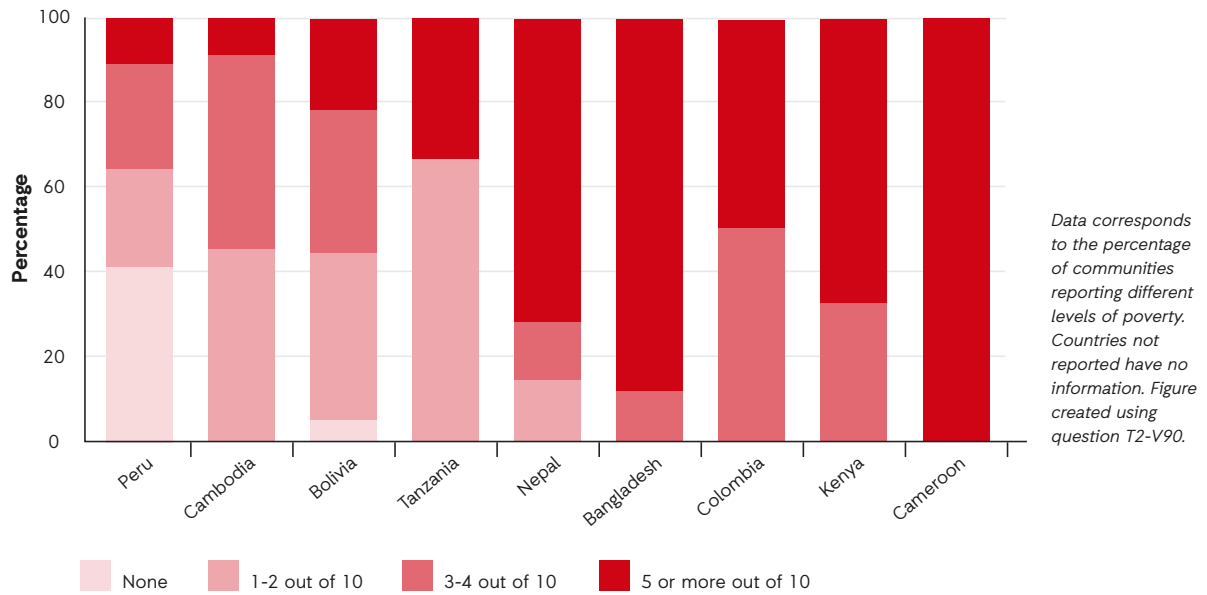


Table 4: Characteristics of men considered poor

Country	Landlessness	Limited access to land or resources	Low monetary income	No monetary income	Illiteracy	Low level of education	Unemployment	Irregular or under-employment	Food shortage	Malnutrition	Health problems	Other
Bangladesh	96	88	92	84	92	96	96	100	88	92	84	8
Bolivia	22	28	61	28	44	83	56	61	39	22	83	17
Cambodia	55	55	100	55	91	91	82	36	45	55	100	9
Colombia	80	40	20	40	40	40	20	0	20	40	80	0
Kenya	83	33	83	67	50	50	83	0	83	50	33	33
Nepal	90	90	80	80	80	100	100	70	90	30	60	0
Peru	78	22	44	44	67	44	67	11	22	44	78	33
Philippines	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Tanzania	60	60	0	60	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0
TOTAL	65	52	65	57	63	72	70	53	56	45	70	22

Notes: Data corresponds to the percentage of communities reporting each characteristic. Table created using question T2-V91

Table 5: Characteristics of women considered poor

Country	Landlessness	Limited access to land or resources	Low monetary income	No monetary income	Illiteracy	Low level of education	Unemployment	Irregular or under-employment	Food shortage	Malnutrition	Health problems	Other
Bangladesh	100	92	92	92	88	96	84	96	88	96	88	12
Bolivia	28	33	44	44	44	61	50	50	33	11	61	28
Cambodia	64	64	91	36	64	91	64	64	73	73	100	9
Colombia	20	0	60	0	40	40	20	0	20	0	0	40
Kenya	67	33	67	83	17	50	100	0	83	67	83	33
Nepal	90	80	90	90	70	90	100	60	80	30	70	0
Peru	78	44	44	33	67	33	78	0	22	44	78	22
Tanzania	60	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0
TOTAL	64	54	65	56	57	66	65	49	57	46	71	21

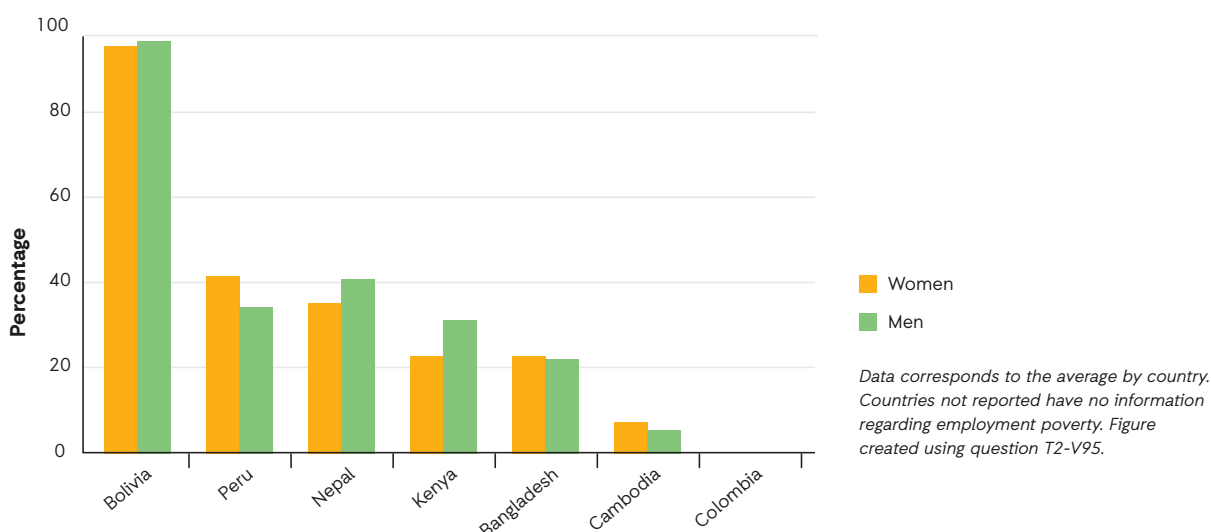
Notes: Data corresponds to the percentage of communities reporting each characteristic. Table created using question T2-V93

3.2 SOCIAL PROTECTION

As demonstrated above, indigenous peoples are overrepresented amongst the poorest segments of the population and are mainly engaged in the informal economy. While international instruments provide guidance on the extension of social protection to indigenous peoples (ILO 2018), indigenous peoples remain amongst the groups that have limited access to social protection, partly owing to broader patterns of marginalization, discrimination and exclusion (ILO 2017). Existing policies and measures to promote access to social protection for indigenous peoples are considered insufficient and do not always secure their full and effective participation (ILO 2020b).

Information from the Indigenous Navigator corroborates these findings. Figure 6 presents the scope of social protection programmes in the indigenous communities covered by the Indigenous Navigator. While communities in one Latin American country report wide coverage, in all other countries less than half the members of the communities consulted have social protection. In some countries, this rate is even lower than 10 per cent. If no strategies that focus specifically on indigenous peoples are built, these groups are bound to be disproportionately affected by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as they are unable to resort to existing social protection programmes (ILO 2020b), including health protection.

Figure 6: Population covered by social protection programmes



3.3 ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Lack or limited access to quality education denies indigenous peoples access to the labour market and making progress in it (ILO 2019). UNESCO has indicated that indigenous peoples still encounter more obstacles to the completion of primary education and are less likely to obtain a diploma, certificate or degree than non-indigenous persons (UNESCO 2019). Globally and across regions and income groups, indigenous peoples' education levels remain well below those of the non-indigenous population. Approximately 46.6 per cent of adult indigenous persons in employment have no education compared to 17.2 per cent of their non-indigenous counterparts, which means that the likelihood of no education for indigenous peoples is almost 30 percentage points greater than for non-indigenous peoples (ILO 2019).

In the context of the Indigenous Navigator, the percentage of completion of primary education varied. While in Latin America some communities demonstrated a relatively high level of completion of primary education, of around 80 per cent, in one African country only 30 per cent reported completion of primary schooling.

Figure 7: Percentage of completed primary schooling

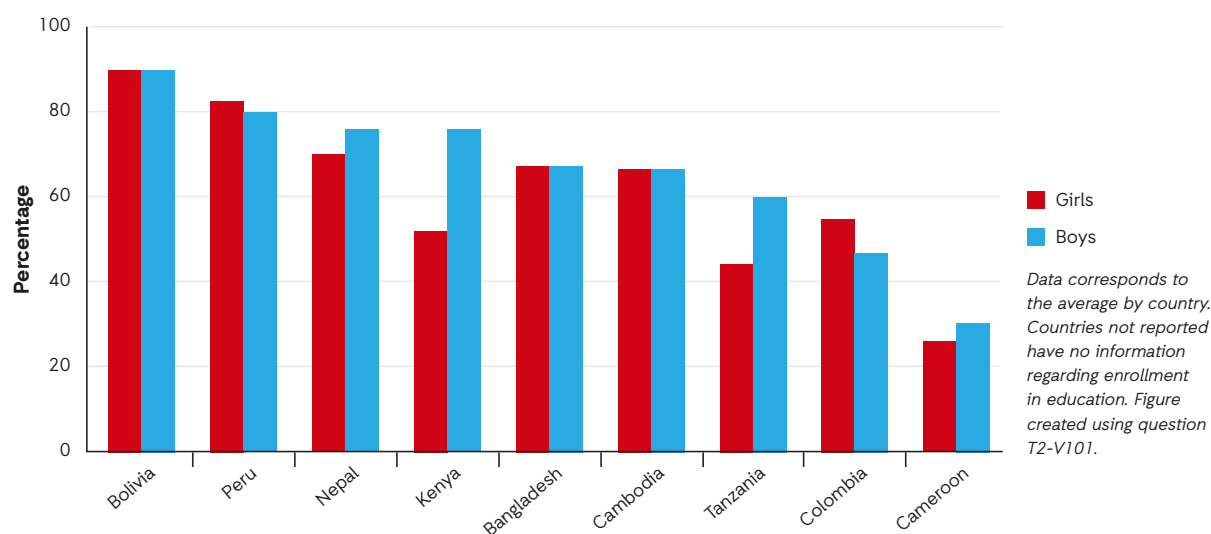


Table 6 shows how accessible primary school facilities are by country. While 56 per cent of communities report that the facilities are highly accessible or accessible, 44 per cent report some level of inaccessibility of primary school facilities. Africa appears as the worst region in this sense with no communities in two countries reporting accessibility, by contrast with South America, where some countries reported over 70 per cent in this category.

Table 6: How accessible are primary school facilities for children of your community?

Country	Highly accessible	Accessible	Moderately inaccessible	Inaccessible	Highly inaccessible
Bangladesh	12	36	32	4	16
Bolivia	50	22	22	6	0
Cambodia	0	27	45	27	0
Cameroon	34	29	14	11	11
Colombia	50	0	0	25	25
Kenya	0	0	67	33	0
Nepal	30	10	60	0	0
Peru	29	47	24	0	0
Philippines	100	0	0	0	0
Suriname	58	33	0	0	8
Tanzania	0	0	0	100	0
TOTAL	29	27	25	12	7

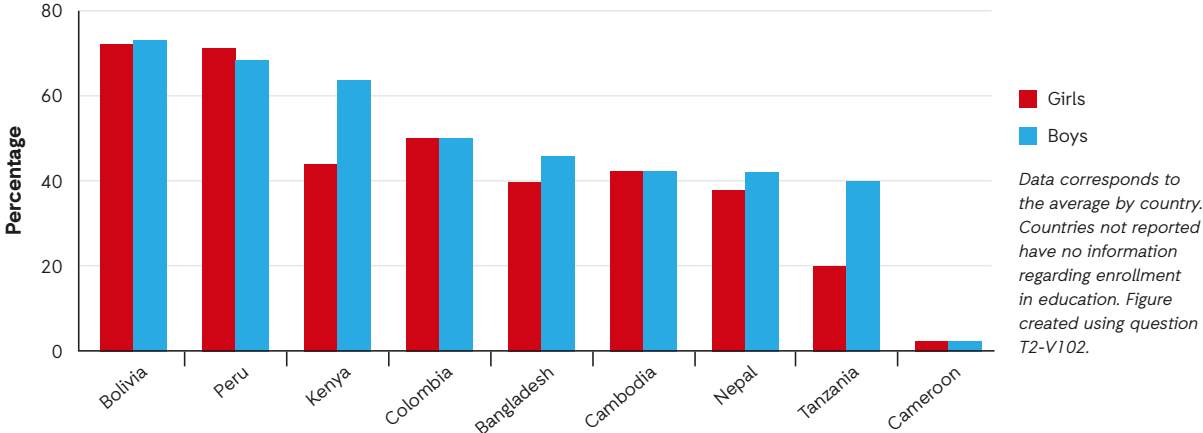
Notes: Data corresponds to the percentage of communities reporting different levels of accessibility by country. Table created using question T2-V107

As the main obstacles to concluding primary education, indigenous communities mentioned long distances and lack of transportation, poverty, lack of education in indigenous languages, precariousness of school infrastructure and lack of interest from parents. As one respondent emphasized:

“There is a significant dropout rate. Reasons for dropping out [are] distance of school from community, where children have to cross a river twice and when the water rises the children do not go to school (...) There is available transportation except horse but that is expensive to hire. The only way for the children is by foot.”

With regard to access to secondary education, the overall mean of indigenous persons that have completed secondary education is lower than the percentage of those that have completed primary education. In other words, the percentage of indigenous persons that have concluded primary education is higher in all countries than the percentage of those that have completed secondary education. Countries in Africa report the greatest gender gaps for both completion of primary and secondary education.

Figure 8: Percentage of completed secondary schooling

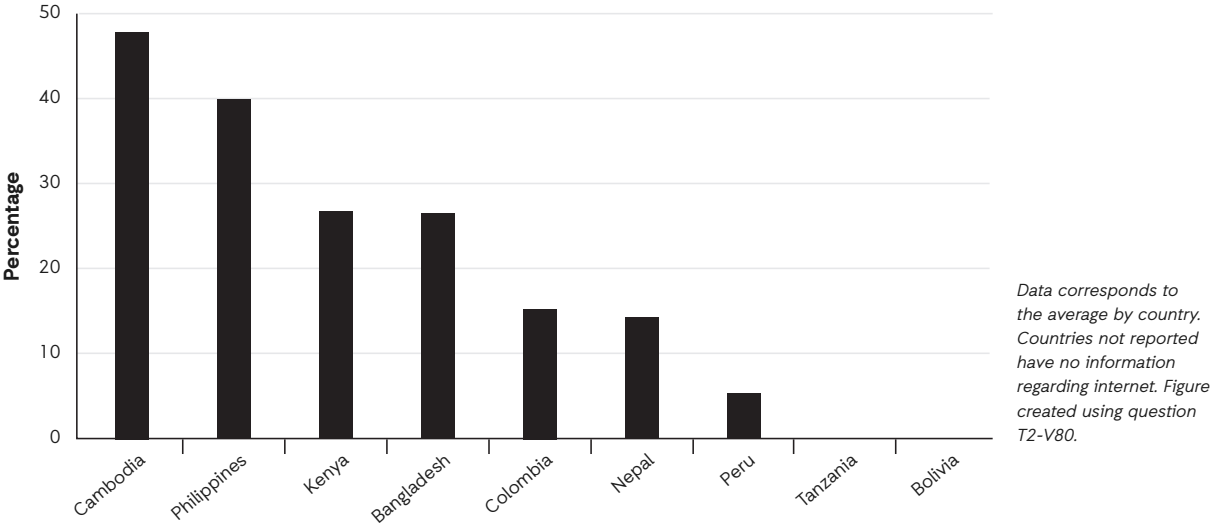


In secondary and tertiary education, respondents referred to obstacles such as adolescent pregnancy and the need to work in relation to access and completion. The distance from educational centres was also cited as a major obstacle by several respondents. An exception is one community in Latin America, where 20 per cent of young persons reportedly attended university. This positive result is attributed to the existence of scholarships for the best students, which is a decisive incentive to indigenous young women and men in the community who need to migrate to other cities, at least 400 km away from home, to pursue university-level studies. This distance also presents difficulties in terms of increasing costs of living which cannot be borne by their families and community.

The COVID-19 pandemic is imposing additional challenges in this already complicated scenario. As the Director-General of UNESCO has stated: “With more than 90 per cent of the global student population affected by COVID-19 related school closures, the world is in the throes of the most unprecedented disruption in the history of education” (UNESCO 2020). This situation threatens to aggravate the exclusion of indigenous children and young persons, particularly those living in rural areas, who cannot access distance learning programmes put in place during lockdowns because of limited access to infrastructure, such as internet connectivity and electricity (López 2020).

Information from the Indigenous Navigator demonstrates that, in the indigenous communities covered, access to online learning platforms represents a major challenge, as less than 50 per cent of the population has internet access at home in all communities. In some countries, no communities reported having internet access at home.

Figure 9: Access to internet at home



Among those who confirmed having internet access, several respondents said that their connectivity is limited to access via smartphone and is inconsistent. Having access to a smartphone, however, does not necessarily mean that the internet is easily accessible. As a respondent from Asia highlighted:

"[The] Internet may be accessed if the person has mobile data and they go to a point in the village where there is [a] signal. Thus, even if approximately 40% (...) use [a] mobile phone in the community, it is not a guarantee they have access to [the] internet. 1% use [a] laptop and none of them use [a] desktop."

Another respondent from Asia stated that:

"As of [a] survey in 2017, 70% of males and females use [a] mobile phone, 80% of youth, both male and female, use [a] mobile phone, 50% of households use [a] mobile phone, 0% use [a] desktop or laptop."

Finally, Table 7 shows the percentage of communities reporting access to a number of facilities at school. Only 9 per cent of communities report access to the internet, while 11 per cent report access to computers. These two facts imply that most of the communities would have problems in implementing an online teaching system, which is an adaptation measure to the COVID-19 pandemic that has been adopted in many countries. Additionally, 45 per cent did not report any access to electricity and less than 50 per cent reported access to handwashing facilities at school.

Table 7: Access to facilities at school. Percentage of communities by country

Country	Electricity	Internet (teaching)	Computer (teaching)	Disability infrastructure	Separate toilets	Handwashing facilities	Drinking water	None of these
Bangladesh	36	0	4	8	48	64	88	4
Bolivia	94	12	18	12	35	18	6	0
Cambodia	18	9	0	9	9	27	18	64
Colombia	50	50	25	50	25	25	25	50
Kenya	100	0	0	0	83	0	17	0
Nepal	50	0	30	0	10	50	90	0
Peru	88	13	0	0	75	75	25	13
Philippines	50	0	50	0	50	100	50	0
Suriname	60	40	20	0	80	40	40	20
Tanzania	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0
TOTAL	55	9	11	8	45	41	44	13

Notes: Data corresponds to the percentage of communities reporting access to facilities. Table created using question T2-V108

3.4 ACCESS TO HEALTH

The WHO Director-General has asserted that indigenous peoples are more vulnerable to COVID-19 and related consequences because of their “high burden of poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and both communicable and non-communicable diseases” (WHO 2020). As medical infrastructure in rural areas is generally precarious (ILO 2020c), existing medical facilities might be at a higher risk of collapsing as indigenous peoples are returning from urban to rural areas at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of access to medicine, hand sanitizers, water and soap in some indigenous communities also increases their exposure to the virus and its negative health consequences (Kapaeeng 2020). In some countries in the Americas, the number of deaths of indigenous peoples from tuberculosis has already been higher than for the rest of the population. Child and maternal mortality have also been persistent problems among indigenous peoples in that region (PAHO 2009).

In the context of the Indigenous Navigator, 72 per cent of respondents reported some degree of inaccessibility of health facilities (Table 8).

Table 8: How accessible are health facilities for your community?

Country	Highly accessible	Accessible	Moderately inaccessible	Inaccessible	Highly inaccessible
Bangladesh	0	4	24	28	44
Bolivia	17	44	39	0	0
Cambodia	0	0	18	55	27
Cameroon	14	26	29	26	6
Colombia	25	25	0	25	25
Kenya	0	0	50	0	50
Nepal	10	10	50	30	0
Peru	0	11	56	11	22
Philippines	0	0	100	0	0
Suriname	36	36	18	0	9
Tanzania	0	0	0	100	0
TOTAL	10	18	31	24	17

Notes: Data corresponds to the percentage of communities reporting different levels of accessibility by country. Table created using question T2-V117

As a respondent from Latin America explained: “The nearest health post is two hours away [by] *peque-peque* [river boat] and we do not always have [money] for gasoline or what drivers charge us.”¹¹ Similarly, a respondent from Asia shared that because of long distances to health facilities, pregnant indigenous women are unable to get to hospital to give birth.

However, as one respondent highlighted: “[Sometimes it] is not distance that is the issue but the quality of service delivery and completeness of the services.” Even when health facilities are accessible, they are often poorly equipped, are not culturally appropriate and fail to take into account indigenous languages, values and beliefs. In practice, this has led to problems related to health staff performance, service hours, or physical positioning and technical procedures applied (PAHO 2009). Furthermore, some respondents have reported suffering discrimination on account of their indigenous origins when accessing health facilities. In Africa, many indigenous women lack access to reproductive health services and are at high risk of HIV infection because of interaction with neighbouring communities (UN 2018a). In Africa as well as in Asia, health data specific to indigenous peoples is practically non-existent (UN 2018a).

Furthermore, very few communities in the context of the Indigenous Navigator have indicated that their institutions manage their own health programmes, indicating low access to culturally appropriate health services.

11. Translated from Spanish.

Table 9: Do your indigenous institutions manage health programmes?

Country	Fully	To a considerable extent	To some extent	To a limited extent	Not at all
Bangladesh	0	0	12	20	68
Bolivia	6	11	22	39	22
Cambodia	0	18	9	9	64
Colombia	0	0	50	50	0
Kenya	0	0	50	0	50
Nepal	0	0	10	0	90
Peru	0	0	11	0	89
Philippines	0	0	0	0	100
Tanzania	0	0	0	0	100
TOTAL	1	4	17	17	61

Notes: Data corresponds to the percentage of communities reporting different levels of independence in managing health programmes. Countries not included reported no information. Table created using question T2-V24

3.5 FOOD AND LAND SECURITY

The COVID-19 crisis also has implications for the realization of the right to adequate food in indigenous communities (OHCHR 2020). While governments' attention is mainly focused on preventing the spread of COVID-19, indigenous peoples' long-standing claims for land entitlement over their traditional territories continue to wait for a response. In recent years, subsistence farming activities of indigenous communities have been affected by the growing demand for land for large-scale cash crops (IPMG 2019). This leads to conflicts concerning access to land and water (FAO 2017; IFAD 2018). Furthermore, there are documented stories of some indigenous communities in Asia that have been forced to transform their livelihood options, from land owners and self-sufficient forest gatherers and farmers to low-paid factory workers (IPMG 2019). In the context of the Indigenous Navigator, the majority of the communities have indicated at least some limitation in the recognition of their right to land, territory and resources, as Table 10 demonstrates. A respondent from Asia indicated that at least 52 per cent of their community's households have experienced dispossession of land. Communities in two countries – Cameroon and Suriname – have not answered this question. In the case of Suriname, the question has not been answered as indigenous peoples' right to land is not recognized in national legislation.

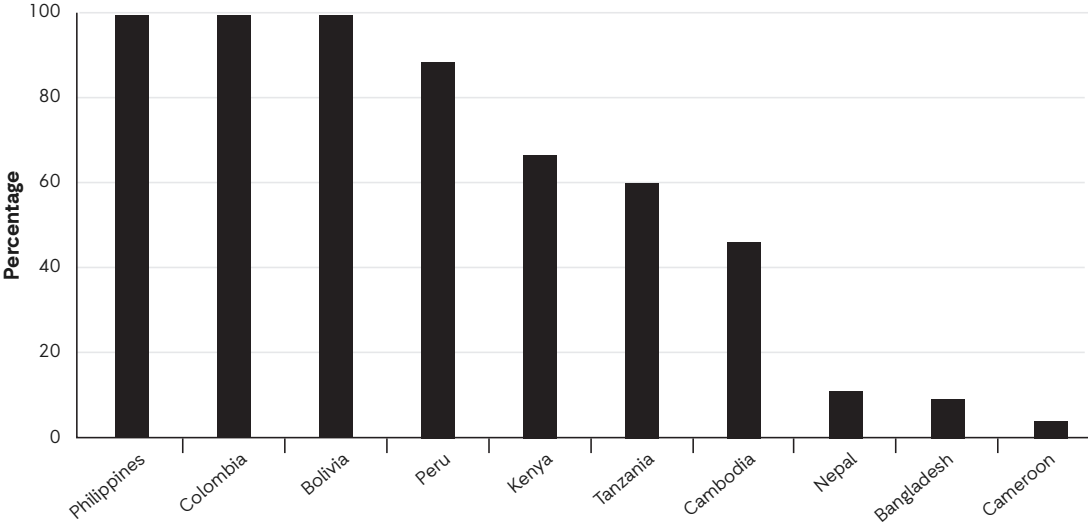
Table 10: Right to lands, territories and resources recognized by the government

Country	Fully	To a considerable extent	To some extent	To a limited extent	Not at all
Bangladesh	24	4	20	32	20
Bolivia	89	11	0	0	0
Cambodia	9	27	0	18	45
Colombia	0	0	50	50	0
Kenya	0	50	17	33	0
Nepal	0	0	10	0	90
Peru	33	0	44	22	0
Philippines	100	0	0	0	0
Tanzania	0	0	0	100	0
TOTAL	31	10	14	23	21

Notes: Data corresponds to the percentage of communities reporting different levels of government recognition. Countries not included reported no information. Table created using question T2-V41

Indigenous peoples’ collective right to land is recognized in international human rights instruments such as the UNDRIP and ILO Convention No. 169. Data collected through the Indigenous Navigator demonstrates that, from the three evaluated regions, communities in Latin America are the ones with the greatest proportion of collective land titles.

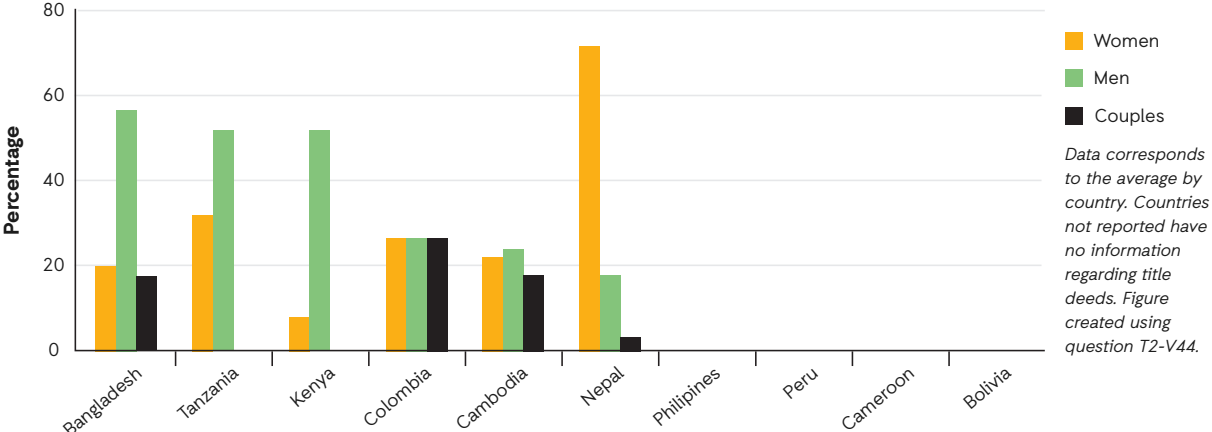
Figure 10: Title deeds in the community



Data corresponds to the average by country. Countries not reported have no information regarding title deeds. Figure created using question T2-V42.

In other regions, such as Asia and Africa, a large number of respondents reported that indigenous peoples own individual title deeds. It is interesting to note that communities in Asia, which in some cases reported a very low percentage of title deeds in the community (below 10 per cent), report larger percentages of population with title deeds. Considering the information disaggregated by gender, it is interesting to note that in only one Asian country women are reported to own a high percentage of title deeds, while in other countries there is either a very small difference between genders or a clear majority of men hold title deeds.

Figure 11: Percentage of population with title deeds



Access to land and resources has an important connection to food security. In the case of indigenous peoples living in rural areas, for example, a community that cannot produce on its own land is more likely to rely on food produced outside the community (FAO 2009). Table 8 presents Indigenous Navigator results regarding the importance of food not produced in the community, an issue of great significance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As demonstrated in the next section, according to reports from Indigenous Navigator local partners, communities that rely on food produced outside their territories are facing rising food insecurity. According to Indigenous Navigator data, for 70 per cent of the communities food not produced by them is regarded as being of high or considerable importance.

Table 11: Importance of food not produced in the community

Country	Very high importance	Considerable importance	Relative importance	Minor importance	Negligible importance
Bangladesh	20	28	24	24	4
Bolivia	44	56	0	0	0
Cambodia	45	45	9	0	0
Colombia	25	75	0	0	0
Kenya	50	33	0	17	0
Nepal	0	40	40	10	10
Peru	33	44	22	0	0
Philippines	0	50	50	0	0
Tanzania	0	40	20	40	0
TOTAL	28	42	17	11	2

Notes: Data corresponds to the percentage of communities reporting different levels of important for food produced in communities. Countries not included reported no information. Table created using question T2-V85

Several Indigenous Navigator respondents reported cases of food insecurity. Many cited lack of income and resources as the main reasons for this. According to a respondent from Asia, in their community:

“Most (...) live hand to mouth. During the working seasons they eat good food, but [in] other seasons they eat but do not measure its [nutritional value]. They said they sometime[s] eat little, or 2 times out of 3.”

In contrast, in a community that can cultivate on its traditional land, the situation is different. According to a respondent: *“There was always family subsistence food due to the existence of agricultural crops, without the need for money.”*¹² In the context of the Indigenous Navigator, almost all communities report having experienced all the listed food insecurity incidents at least once. This is a strong indicator of the level of vulnerability under which the communities live and how likely they are to suffer from food restrictions arising from the pandemic.

Table 12: Communities have experienced the following incidents of food insecurity at least once

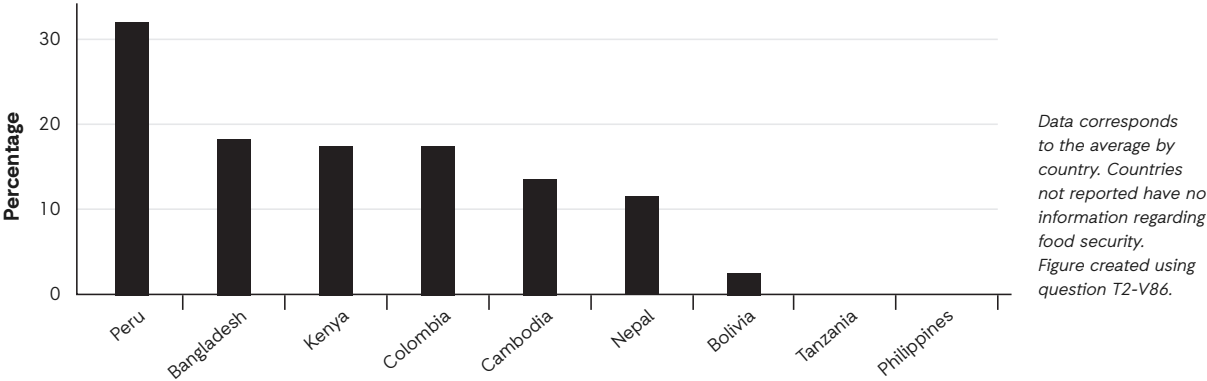
Country	Not enough food to eat	Unable to eat healthy and nutritious food	Limited choice of food	Skipping a meal	Eating less than you thought you should	No food left in the household	Hungry but no food available	No food for a whole day
Bangladesh	96	92	100	76	100	96	68	60
Bolivia	83	78	78	78	72	72	50	6
Cambodia	100	100	100	60	70	60	25	20
Colombia	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Kenya	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Nepal	100	100	86	100	100	100	88	75
Peru	100	100	88	88	88	88	63	50
Tanzania	100	100	100	100	100	100	60	50
TOTAL	95	93	93	83	89	87	65	48

Notes: Data corresponds to the percentage of communities reporting incidents of food insecurity. Table created using question T2-V87

In connection with food insecurity, malnutrition has also been a major problem affecting indigenous peoples before the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a report published by the FAO, PAHO, WFP and UNICEF in 2018, the prevalence of stunting among indigenous children in Latin America and the Caribbean remains high (FAO et al. 2018). According to Indigenous Navigator data, stunting is a major problem for several of the communities covered, which is particularly serious in the context of a pandemic. Tackling this problem is thus necessary to build indigenous communities’ resilience to COVID-19.

12. Translated from Spanish.

Figure 12: Children suffering from stunting



Indigenous Navigator Training, Colombia.
CREDIT: IWGIA ENA ALVARADO MADSEN



Indigenous women at work during the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh.
CREDIT: ILO

4. INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES TRANSFORMED BY THE PANDEMIC: **LIVE STORIES FROM THE NAVIGATOR**

4.1 AN INITIAL DIAGNOSIS

The global crisis generated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus has exacerbated the unfavourable living conditions and multiple vulnerabilities of indigenous peoples (ILO 2020b). Many indigenous peoples live in remote areas where government social assistance programmes are practically absent (OHCHR 2020). They may also have a higher risk of infection with irreparable consequences on account of a poorer baseline health status and less access to healthcare and sanitation services (WHO 2020). Indigenous day or seasonal labourers, who have lost their incomes as a result of lockdown measures, are at higher risk of falling into extreme poverty (ILO 2020b). Indigenous communities that rely on the ecotourism sector have also been heavily affected by the travel restrictions associated with the pandemic (Currea, Egan 2020). Others have been unable to sell their agricultural products in big cities and markets because of the lack of means of transportation for goods and the closure of markets in indigenous areas (ACHPR 2020).

Indigenous livelihoods and territories were already disproportionately affected by environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, conflicts and expropriation before the COVID-19 pandemic (OHCHR 2020). It is feared that further encroachment on indigenous lands will result in significant mortality because indigenous persons already have poor access to health services (UN 2020; OHCHR 2020).

Furthermore, certain segments of the indigenous population face particularly challenging situations owing to the COVID-19 crisis. Indigenous women and girls, for instance, are affected simultaneously by multiple forms of gender discrimination, racism and xenophobia, and are at higher risk of falling into poverty (UNFPA 2020; CARE International, UN Women 2020; IANWGE 2020). Indigenous women are also more exposed to gender-based violence as a result of lockdown measures (OHCHR 2020). In addition, they are facing increased difficulties regarding access to sexual and reproductive health services (OHCHR 2020) and, in some cases, access to obstetric care for pregnant indigenous women has been constrained because of lack of transportation (UNFPA 2020a). Moreover, disruption of food systems by COVID-19 are likely to reinforce women's greater vulnerability to hunger and malnutrition (WFP 2020).

COVID-19 has a devastating impact on older persons generally and on indigenous elders in particular. This may have serious consequences for the survival of the social and cultural practices of indigenous communities, as indigenous elders play a key role in maintaining and transmitting traditional knowledge, including indigenous languages (UN 2020). Indigenous young persons are also likely to experience additional challenges closely linked to discrimination which are exacerbated by the pandemic, translating into fewer educational and employment opportunities (Rivera 2020).

At special risk are uncontacted indigenous peoples or indigenous peoples in initial contact, as contact with the virus could lead to their extinction (PAHO 2020; OHCHR 2020; UN 2020). In this sense, targeted action undertaken in partnership with local organizations has proven to be a valuable tool (WHO 2020a). An example is the agreement concluded between PAHO and the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin (COICA) to provide a coordinated response to the COVID-19 crisis in the Amazon (PAHO 2020a, 3).

According to information provided by Indigenous Navigator's local partners, indigenous communities have been experiencing multiple challenges that pose enormous risks to their physical and cultural existence, including, among many others: lack of access to relevant information in local languages on how to prevent and prepare for the rapid spread of COVID-19; drastic restrictions on the exercise of their cultural practices; loss of livelihoods, jobs and means of subsistence; limited access to food supplies and safe, clean water; absence of healthcare facilities and social security; and lack of remote learning opportunities for indigenous children and youth.

Loss of livelihoods and return to communities in rural areas

As described in the previous section, indigenous peoples are disproportionately represented in the informal economy and experience inequalities in the labour market, despite the recognition of their rights (ILO 2019). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, indigenous peoples' livelihoods are being severely impacted, as they work in sectors, such as tourism and commerce, that have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic (ILO 2020b). This reality was reflected in the responses of local partners from all regions. Indigenous peoples are now unable to sell their products in local markets (Interviews 1, 9 and 10) and local tourism is hampered. As a respondent from Africa put it:

"Cultural-based tourism is (...) the livelihood system that supports these communities. But tourism has collapsed with the cessation of movement and halting of international flights and so on (...) The multiplier effect and opportunity sometimes this creates for communities to have additional revenue streams [is] also affected (...) and for women particularly they were really the beneficiaries, because they would sell the ornaments, they would sell beads (...) to the tourists, and now that is disrupted." (Interview 1).

In addition, indigenous peoples who work as day labourers or in the informal economy have also been strongly affected:

“They are suffering most because they cannot go outside for their daily businesses. They cannot do their regular jobs, [those] who are small traders or the day labourers or all the farmers who used to go to the agricultural fields.” (Interview 3).

As a consequence of the loss of jobs and livelihoods, many indigenous persons who had left their communities are now coming back. This phenomenon causes not only personal distress but also raises issues in the communities as to how these persons will have access to food¹³ and housing. Furthermore, the mass return of indigenous persons from big cities to their communities has increased the danger of spreading COVID-19 among indigenous communities. As one respondent from Asia stated:

“It is estimated that almost half of the working people, the migrant workers, they went back to their homes, because it was very difficult for them to survive in the cities. All these people went back home, but these huge (...) number[s] of people are now unemployed and living in the village.” (Interview 3).

The loss of livelihoods by indigenous peoples who have migrated for work is not only having a severe impact on them economically but also affecting their mental health because of heightened levels of stress (Interview 5). Additionally, in a country in Asia, indigenous peoples trying to return to their homes are said to have faced police violence (Interview 3). To date, it is not clear whether such reverse migration will translate into a permanent return to communities or if indigenous peoples who have returned home will migrate again to the cities once the pandemic is over.



Community demarcation
in Wit Santi, Suriname.
CREDIT: VIDS

13. This topic is further discussed in the section on rising food insecurity.

Lack of access to social security

The loss of livelihoods is compounded by the lack of social security programmes in general, and of programmes specifically directed at indigenous peoples in particular. In Africa respondents said that no social security programme was in place (Interviews 1, 4 and 7) but in Asia and Latin America there were some reports of support measures provided by governments. These, however, were either deemed insufficient (Interviews 5, 6, 9 and 10), inaccessible (Interviews 3 and 6) or inappropriate (Interviews 2, 8 and 9):

“Now, in the middle of the pandemic (...) they have given bonuses, individual and personal bonuses (...). But we have also demanded, we have been demanding that a communal bonus is also important (...) for the communities.” (Interview 2).¹⁴

“The government supplied villages with a food package. (...) I think they received it once or twice (...) they receive products that they don’t even know, they usually don’t have (...) canned sardines.” (Interview 8).

In the case described in Interview 8, the selection of products delivered in the food packages was based on food products used by the urban population, such as canned sardines, oil, peanut butter, sugar, salt and biscuits. These food packages were deemed unsuitable as they are not culturally appropriate and are inconsistent with indigenous peoples’ eating habits.

Impacts on access to education

A negative impact on indigenous peoples’ access to education was reported throughout regions, at all levels of education. As schools closed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries adopted strategies to transfer classes to online methods or to give classes through TV channels. These strategies, however, do not meet the needs of communities that lack access to the internet or even to electricity, as was the case for several respondents (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 9, 10 and 11). Despite these difficulties, some countries are still planning to conduct national examinations according to a pre-defined schedule:

“These communities hardly have electricity, let alone a network-enabled infrastructure to access education. Yet the system of education is the same, (...) the exit exam for primary and secondary school is the same for all the kids.” (Interview 1).

As indigenous children have no proper access to the preparatory material, there are significant chances that they will be left behind, and the effect of the pandemic will endure throughout their academic and working life. Indigenous persons at the university level are also facing major constraints as regards staying in education. As respondents from Latin America and Asia said:

“Many young people who were attending university, in the big cities, they had to return to the territories. (...) In these territories there is no internet access, so it has been very difficult, many have had to postpone the semester, others in that new semester that began do not have enough resources to enrol again because the economy is paralyzed.”¹⁵ (Interview 9).

“The youth are really impacted, (...) for instance, those in the tertiary level also. They cannot go back. The cost of home-based education is not affordable to many of our communities so that’s it, and then of course there are no jobs any more.” (Interview 10).

14. Translated from Spanish.

15. Translated from Spanish.

Lack of access to healthcare and culturally appropriate measures

Indigenous peoples worldwide do not have appropriate access to health facilities and social services (WHO 2020). Communities covered by the Indigenous Navigator face this same reality, as the project data has shown. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, local partners have confirmed this situation and indicated that it has even been aggravated. Health facilities are often located at great distances from the community (Interviews 4 and 9) and may lack qualified personnel (Interview 2).

Furthermore, some respondents reported that no information on COVID-19 is transmitted in indigenous languages, which places indigenous peoples in a particularly vulnerable situation, as they may not have access to information on the spread of the virus and on how to adopt preventive measures (Interviews 4 and 5). In an Asian country with a variety of more than 120 languages, information on COVID-19 is just being transmitted in one language (Interview 5). A similar situation was reported in Africa, where the dissemination of information that is accessible to indigenous peoples is actually being conducted by the indigenous organization itself:

“In fact, (...) we translated all the social distancing and prevention and coping messages into [name of local indigenous group] language, (...) even the graphics, using graphics that are culturally appropriate that communities identify with, (...) placing these banners in community open spaces and using the vernacular radios to disseminate messages in [the] indigenous language.” (Interview 1).

The lack of appropriate services in indigenous languages, combined with discrimination, has also been identified as an obstacle for indigenous peoples in terms of accessing healthcare. As a respondent from Asia indicated:

“There’s also that aspect [of] discrimination now on access for example, (...) even before COVID when somebody gets sick, when a member of their community gets sick, and they go to the hospital, they’re given [the] least attention (...) in terms of medical services. And many of them (...) don’t have the transportation also (...) to be able to go to the hospital (...), some have clinics in the villages, but there are no doctors in most instances.(...) It’s also the language (...) the difficulty in communication because some of them don’t speak (...) the language of the majority.” (Interview 10).

Another major problem raised in interviews throughout regions was the lack of access to prevention mechanisms, such as masks, soap and running water, and the difficulty of implementing certain preventive measures. The AIPP has stressed that indigenous communities living in the Asia-Pacific region are not fully equipped to combat infectious diseases like COVID-19 (AIPP, NIWA 2020). As these respondents stated:

“We learned that the State is putting in place measures to fight COVID. But we, as indigenous communities, have not really seen that. We have not received the material from the administration to support us.”¹⁶ (Interview 4).

“[There are] families that have just two plates, you know, and two spoons and it’s a family of fifteen (...) so they eat together. And (...) that’s one of the things that they talk about with us. (...) Everyone needs to have his own plate, and his own spoon and his own can to drink.” (Interview 8).

Apart from the lack of access to means of prevention, a respondent reported significant restrictions in accessing natural resources that are essential for the production of traditional medicines that could be used in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic:

16. Translated from French.

"In most forest areas today, there is this conservation problem. When communities want to resort to traditional pharmacy, there is this limitation of access to the forest. Suddenly, this means that we cannot have access to modern measures, masks, etc., [or] tests in hospitals. And when resorting to the forest, we have this limitation of access to the forest because the areas are protected."¹⁷ (Interview 4).

Furthermore, a lack of disaggregated data on how the pandemic is affecting indigenous communities was reported (Interview 6, 9 and 10). To fill this gap, in one Latin American country, indigenous organizations themselves are using their networks throughout the country to gather information on cases of COVID-19 in indigenous communities (Interview 9).

Rising food and land insecurity

As Indigenous Navigator data has shown, indigenous peoples were already more vulnerable to food and land insecurity before the pandemic. Interviews with local partners demonstrate that the exposure of indigenous peoples to food insecurity is increasing throughout regions. The imposition of lockdown measures had a direct impact on communities' livelihoods, as they were unable to perform customary activities. They were also hampered in their pursuit of activities in urban areas, such as selling and buying food in local markets:

"Food production systems are equally constrained, in the pastoralist contexts for example, pastoralism is a mobile livelihood system. People move from place to place (...) to follow pasture and water. And now we are told to stay at your (...) village and the spread of grass and pasture in these dry lands does not respect social distancing. Water will get finished when it should get finished, pasture will be depleted and people need to leave (...). So mobility, livelihood and production systems are affected." (Interview 1).

"How to survive in times of pandemic regarding food sovereignty (...) since indigenous peoples do not have their own economy? They used to go to the closest municipalities to exchange their products and to buy and now with the pandemic they do not have the opportunity to go directly to the urban centres and collect the different foods."¹⁸ (Interview 9).

"The communities are dependent on cash crop production (...), that means that they depended on the market force or their force [for] the greater part of the[ir] income." (Interview 10).

Especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to land plays an important role in guaranteeing indigenous peoples' livelihoods and food security. As one respondent from Asia explained, indigenous peoples who can produce in their own territory are much more resilient than their counterparts living in urban areas:

"We are dependent on our own resources. [In](...) our economy and our culture, [we are] not depending on others, [we are] depending on ourselves much more. For example, if [in] one community they have their own food (...), they have their own vegetable farming, they can harvest from their own resources. So there's not much impact from (...) globalization (...) they still have something to eat (...). That's our way but if (...) in the city now the food price increase[s], everything is price soaring up (...) so also income is going down." (Interview 11).

On the other hand, as a respondent from Latin America put it, the current crisis sheds light on the worrying fact that many indigenous communities are no longer self-sufficient in their food production:

17. Translated from French.
18. Translated from Spanish.

“They were not able to go out of the village to obtain food (...) one of the things that became more clear is that a lot of villages are not self-sufficient any more. And they depend on food from the store (...). Stores were (...) almost empty, the villagers couldn’t obtain food from the stores any more, there was a lack of food.” (Interview 8).

Respondents in all regions raised the problem of restricted access to land and resources being linked to current food shortages (Interviews 1, 4, 5 and 8). A respondent from Asia reported that indigenous women in particular are being harassed and stopped from entering the forest to access resources (Interview 5). Other respondents linked the rise in food insecurity to the loss of jobs and to the return to the community of indigenous persons who were living elsewhere (Interviews 2 and 5). In this context, a respondent from Latin America expressed her concern that the food produced in the community would be insufficient to feed all returning community members (Interview 2).

Two respondents from Asia pointed out that although indigenous peoples are not yet suffering food shortages in their countries, the situation is likely to change (Interviews 3, 5 and 11). Although the harvest season is approaching, they believe that in the coming months their production will not be enough to feed the entire community owing to the lack of sufficient land. This lack of land has meant that their food production often has to be complemented with purchased products. As community members have lost jobs and mobility is restricted, their ability to complement their food production may be hampered. The timing of these individuals’ return to their communities is also of concern. In some cases, they are returning in time to plant and work their lands, in other cases they are returning after the planting season, which raises the likelihood of food insecurity. In addition, according to a respondent from Latin America, communities whose land was affected by large fires before the end of last year are also suffering, as their agriculture and small-scale livestock activities were severely impacted (Interview 6).

With regard to land security, respondents across regions reported that initiatives to enter indigenous territories have not stopped, especially in territories that were already affected by disputes related to conservation initiatives, development projects, illegal activities (e.g. illegal logging) and armed conflict (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 9, 10 and 11). As two respondents from Asia explained:

“They suppose now [that] everything is closed, nobody is there, [the] media [are] not there, [that] this is a disadvantage (...), [that] if they were [to] grab land nobody will know, or [the] media will not come to cover [this] news, or [there] will not be [any] protest against this type of land grabbing.” (Interview 3).

“The traditional livelihood of indigenous peoples has been severely impacted by COVID, (...) because they cannot go out to continue the gathering of non-timber forest products, but also during the quarantine illegal loggers have been taking advantage of extracting the resources of indigenous peoples in their community and this is what’s happening in one of our IN [Indigenous Navigator] communities.” (Interview 10).

In this context, one of the respondents reported being particularly worried about how the “economic recovery” will be built and afraid that a recovery programme may entail new development projects that affect indigenous lands (Interview 2).

Specific impacts on indigenous women

In the context of COVID-19, indigenous women are facing specific challenges. As reported for indigenous peoples more generally, indigenous women’s livelihoods have also been severely affected as they are prevented from selling their products in local markets and because they work in industries particularly hit by the pandemic. As a respondent from Asia reported:

“As the pandemic started and many parlours closed, so thousands of indigenous women who were working in their different beauty parlours, now they are also jobless. They went to their home; it was the same scenario with the garment industries. So the female workers working in the beauty parlours, it was also difficult for them to afford the house and the daily expenses because there is no work no pay. That’s why they were bound to go back to their homes.” (Interview 3).

In addition, indigenous women have also experienced a rise in the demand for activities traditionally performed by them in some communities, such as collecting water (Interviews 1 and 3). The loss of jobs and the additional burden in traditional occupations is deemed to cause mental distress and indigenous women are also reported to be increasingly suffering from gender-based violence (Interviews 5 and 2). It has been reported that indigenous women are having difficulties in accessing reproductive health services during the pandemic (Interview 5). Furthermore, older indigenous women are said to be in an especially vulnerable situation, as in many cases their families have migrated and they are currently alone without assistance (Interview 6).

Disruption of traditional practices

Indigenous Navigator local partners have referred to the difficulties experienced by indigenous communities in maintaining physical distancing and staying at home, as these practices are seen as being disruptive of their traditional ways of life (Interviews 1, 4 and 8). As a respondent from Latin America described, these difficulties become especially clear at funerals. In accordance with their traditional practices, indigenous people gather in such situations, which leads to a rapid increase of COVID-19 cases in the community.

A respondent in Africa highlighted the severe disruption that COVID-19 is causing with regard to traditional practices. On the one hand, physical distancing measures are affecting the transmission of indigenous knowledge, as this is highly dependent on social gatherings and on the contact between generations. On the other hand, rites of passage are being interrupted:

“In a nutshell, COVID (...) has disrupted the social order. This coming together, like even indigenous knowledge, the informal systems of transmitting indigenous knowledge, of generating and sharing indigenous knowledge, is within groups of elders and youth interacting together on a daily basis. But here we are told (...) stay at home (...) And (...) the rites of passage are actually interrupted, which affects issues of cultural identity, especially among (...) the young ones who are supposed to go through these processes (...) If these rites of passage [are] associated to [a] chronological, a biological age, what [does it] mean if it is delayed by a year?” (Interview 1).

Human rights violations¹⁹

Three respondents from different geographical regions indicated that indigenous peoples have been suffering serious human rights violations during the pandemic. While these were not necessarily triggered by the pandemic, they have not stopped happening during the crisis. One respondent indicated that as a result of military operations in indigenous lands, indigenous peoples are being harassed, attacked and exposed to both sexual and physical violence. In this context, indigenous activists are bound to stay away from their home localities for fear of attempts to criminalize them.

19. The issues clustered in this section have been presented by the respondents as extremely sensitive. In order to protect respondents’ identities, we have presented the issues in this short section in a form that avoids the use of direct quotations.

In another country, a respondent stated that severe constraints on civic space are placing indigenous peoples' rights defenders in dangerous situations. The respondent said that indigenous peoples in the locality are afraid to engage in discussions about their rights. Lastly, a respondent indicated that serious human rights violations are happening as a result of the presence of armed groups (e.g. paramilitaries) in indigenous territories. In this area, even during the pandemic, killings of indigenous persons have been reported.

4.2 INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RESILIENCE

Notwithstanding the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, indigenous organizations around the world have been quick to respond and indigenous peoples have turned to traditional practices (UN 2020) and community-based initiatives to help them during the pandemic (Rivera 2020). Many respondents reported that communities were undertaking "self-imposed lockdowns", based on traditional practices (Interviews 1, 5, 6 and 8). In Bangladesh, indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) have been putting their traditional lockdown practices into place to deal with the pandemic (Kapaeeng 2020).

The Indigenous Navigator's local partners have also developed their resilience capacities and worked to find ways to support indigenous communities, while providing them with logistical and technical support to cope with the crisis. In the Philippines, communities are building on previous experiences of crisis (e.g. droughts and rat infestation) and increasingly retrieving traditional seeds and crops, as well as rejuvenating traditional food production systems, as they have realized that reverting to their food production systems and practices makes the community more resilient. In Tanzania, for instance, the Pastoralists Indigenous Non-Governmental Organization's Forum (PINGO's Forum), in collaboration with community health workers, has trained indigenous community members in the use of sanitation supplies. In Peru, the National Organization of Indigenous Women has embarked on awareness-raising campaigns relating to the risks associated with COVID-19 in indigenous communities, including through community radio. In Colombia, the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) has been working on monitoring cases of COVID-19 infections within indigenous territories. In Cameroon, the indigenous Baka-led Association Okani has provided sanitation supplies and awareness-raising on COVID-19 to 50 indigenous communities, including developing awareness-raising materials in indigenous languages for local radio stations.

In a Latin American country, a respondent reported:

"Something we've done is a kind of section called "Our sisters report in real time." Basically it has been to focus on being able to have direct communication with the grassroots sisters so that they can tell through an audio how they are experiencing the state of emergency in their communities, how it has affected them on the issue of access to health, in the education issue with their girls, on the issue of whether or not they have cases of COVID."²⁰ (Interview 2).

In various instances, local partners have emphasized that COVID-19 responses proposed and implemented by governments are often blind to local realities and therefore rejected by indigenous groups. A respondent from Latin America highlighted that the government's lack of involvement of indigenous institutions in the response to COVID-19 is actually having negative effects on the community. The respondent stressed that community leaders are key actors in ensuring that the community adopts preventive measures to halt the pandemic (Interview 8). Similarly, a respondent from Asia highlighted that indigenous communities and organizations hold knowledge that would be essential in the design of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. By conducting data collection under the Indigenous Navigator initiative, for example, many communities gathered relevant information in order to diagnose which communities are in a situation of greater vulnerability. As this Asian respondent clearly explained:

20. Translated from Spanish.

“Government should engage indigenous representatives and also indigenous-led institutions and traditional institutions in all government public response programmes. Government do not engage indigenous leadership, traditional leaders. So it will be [a] mess, they will not find out who (...) need[s] to go first, who should get priority, which community needs urgent support.” (Interview 3).

Community engagement has also been identified by various UN organizations as crucial to ensuring the effectiveness of responses to COVID-19 (IANWGE 2020; WHO 2020b). Indigenous young persons, in particular, have also shown themselves to be important actors in building the response, as they articulate demands and innovate community-based solutions that build on traditional knowledge (Rivera 2020). As a respondent from Asia explained:

“They [indigenous people returning to their communities] had to maintain quarantine, so they have to build some quarantine houses, apart from their familiar houses. So, (...) in the case actually then local villagers and also youth (...) help them to build some house[s] (...).” (Interview 3).



Interaction with Santhal People, Jahada Morang, on the SDGs and indigenous peoples rights.
CREDIT: LAHURNIP



5. BUILDING INCLUSIVE COVID-19 RESPONSES WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

5.1 ESTABLISHING INSTITUTIONS TO TACKLE THE COVID-19 CRISIS WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

As this report has shown, the COVID-19 crisis has sparked drastic changes in the lives and livelihoods of indigenous peoples. The disruption of cultural and economic activities that accompanies the health crisis endangers the survival of many indigenous communities across the world. The OHCHR has observed that “States are failing to adopt specific policies and at times neglecting even to include indigenous peoples in general COVID-19 responses” (OHCHR 2020). Unfortunately, this finding resonates with the experiences of the Indigenous Navigator’s local partners.

The pressure for targeted measures to address the current needs of indigenous peoples – which go beyond health needs – should lead, first and foremost, to the establishment or improvement of state institutions in charge of indigenous issues. This is essential to ensure that government measures adopted to tackle the pandemic are coordinated and consistent with international standards on indigenous peoples. Moreover, it ensures that their actions are responsive to their indigenous peoples’ realities and reach out to the most remote indigenous communities. In light of Article 33 of ILO Convention No. 169, such institutions should have the necessary means for the proper fulfilment of their functions and should administer programmes in cooperation with the peoples concerned.

Undertaking an inclusive risk and needs assessment of the COVID-19 crisis is equally important. The experiences and testimonies collected through the Indigenous Navigator have brought to light the differentiated impact that COVID-19 has had on indigenous peoples, which also varies from community to community. Such an assessment should be community-based, while being an integral part of government mitigation plans. Legislative or administrative measures that are to be developed, in response to identified needs of indigenous peoples, should be subject to consultation with the peoples concerned, in line with Article 6 of ILO Convention No. 169 and Article 19 of the UNDRIP.

5.2 STRENGTHENING PROTECTION OF LAND POSSESSION

The information emerging from the Indigenous Navigator suggests that progress in terms of securing land rights of indigenous peoples has been slow. A significant number of communities covered by the Indigenous Navigator have indicated that they lack title deeds for recognizing their ownership over their traditional lands. As recently emphasized by the ILO, “identification of lands traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples, and ultimately the recognition and protection of their rights to ownership and possession, continue to be critical issues” (ILO 2019b).

As many indigenous communities are relying on their land and natural resources to survive during the COVID-19 crisis, it becomes urgent to establish mechanisms to ensure protection of indigenous peoples against encroachment on their traditional lands, particularly during the pandemic, when land grabbing or illegal extraction of natural resources tends to intensify. Furthermore, indigenous peoples should have access to natural resources that are essential to their traditional activities, such as the production of traditional medicine. In this regard, Article 8 of the UNDRIP calls on States to provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for, any action which has the aim of dispossessing indigenous peoples of their lands, territories or resources. According to Article 14 of Convention No. 169, this protection should extend to lands which, though not exclusively occupied by indigenous peoples, have been traditionally used by them for their subsistence and traditional activities.

5.3 EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT FOR TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS

In the midst of a global recession triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused the loss of a huge number of working hours in the first half of 2020 (ILO 2020d),²¹ governments are expected to search for ways to stimulate their labour markets, as well as to address the challenges posed by informality and limited safety nets (World Bank 2020). In this regard, it is critically important to protect vulnerable populations. The Indigenous Navigator has recorded cases of indigenous persons who have lost their jobs in urban areas in the context of the pandemic, including in industrial sectors. It has also revealed the difficulties that indigenous agricultural workers face with regard to selling their products on account of lockdown measures and restrictions on transportation.

In addition to adopting measures to maintain and promote entrepreneurship, avenues should be found to stimulate the participation of indigenous workers in economic activities that can be more easily adapted to the “new normal”, taking into account their cultural and living realities and with their close collaboration. To achieve this aim, actions should be put in place to ensure access to distance learning opportunities for indigenous men and women, particularly young persons. In this regard, vocational programmes should be designed in such a way that indigenous peoples can potentialize their skills taking into account the new labour market demands. At the same time, it is important to strengthen indigenous peoples’ livelihoods and local economies in order to ensure sustainability of their communities and securing resilience and

21. According to the “ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Fifth edition”, there was a 14 per cent drop in global working hours during the second quarter of 2020, equivalent to the loss of 400 million full-time jobs (ILO 2020e).

self-reliance, as also suggested by the UN Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues ([UN-IASG 2020](#)). As shown in this report, Indigenous Navigator data can provide useful information for governments in the preparation of baseline studies on the labour situation of members of indigenous communities (both before and after the COVID-19 outbreak), so as to ensure that employment policies, as well as economic recovery programmes, are responsive to their specific realities.

At all stages of the implementation of labour recovery measures, it is important to ensure respect for the labour rights of indigenous peoples, particularly the four ILO fundamental principles and rights at work: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of forced or compulsory labour; the abolition of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. The latter principle is reinforced by the UNDRIP, which states the right of indigenous individuals “not to be subjected to any discriminatory conditions of labour”. Equally important, as required by ILO Convention No. 169, is to protect indigenous and tribal peoples from working conditions that are hazardous to their health.

5.4 INVOLVING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN CONTROLLING TRANSMISSION OF COVID-19

Local partners of the Indigenous Navigator have mentioned that access to health and sanitary services during the pandemic has been inadequate. Before the pandemic, local communities covered by the Indigenous Navigator had already indicated that they have experienced limitations in accessing quality health services, and that this lack has affected indigenous women in particular. As a matter of priority, governments should increase efforts to provide indigenous communities with the necessary elements to prevent further transmission of COVID-19, including masks, soap, an adequate water supply and safe drinking water, as well as support for the community-based production of sanitary and hygiene products.

The majority of communities covered by the Indigenous Navigator have reported having no participation in the management of health programmes. The WHO, however, has emphasized that “the community is not a passive actor but, rather, has an active role in addressing and helping to resolve the health issues” ([WHO 2020b](#)). Also, the UN calls on governments to “include indigenous peoples’ representatives, leaders and traditional authorities in emergency and health entities in their communities, overseeing responses to COVID-19” ([UN 2020a](#)). Article 25 of Convention No. 169 requires that health services shall, to the extent possible, be community-based. In the context of the pandemic, this is crucial to ensure that preventive measures are communicated and applied in a way that is respectful of indigenous peoples’ cultures.

In the particular case of indigenous peoples, the COVID-19 pandemic could also be seen as an important moment to promote research on traditional medicines, practices and customs, ensuring that access to this knowledge is based on their free, prior and informed consent and respects community protocols.

5.5 OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO EDUCATION FACED BY INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DURING THE PANDEMIC

The Indigenous Navigator data gives us a picture of the limitations of infrastructure and equipment in schools in indigenous areas. A considerable number of communities across the world have reported the absence of internet access in schools, and only a few have indicated that schools have infrastructure that is responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities (See Figure 9 and Table 7).

As has been highlighted in this report, many indigenous children and young persons have had their education interrupted during the pandemic through school and university closures. Even though

governments have tried to ensure continuity of education by promoting the use of distance learning methods, many indigenous peoples are excluded from this option because of the absence of adequate technical equipment or proper internet connectivity ([UNESCO 2020a](#)).

One of the underlying elements of the human right to education is accessibility. Under “accessibility”, it is understood that education must be accessible to all (non-discrimination); physically accessible or via modern technology (physical accessibility) and affordable (economic accessibility) ([UN 1999](#)). Article 26 of ILO Convention No. 169 calls on governments to ensure that members of the peoples concerned have the opportunity to acquire education at all levels on at least an equal footing with the rest of the national community. Leaving unaddressed the specific needs of indigenous peoples to access education at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic impedes the full enjoyment of their right to education, exacerbating existing inequalities.

Pending the re-opening of schools or the provision of the necessary tools for online education, alternative solutions to guarantee continuity of education for indigenous peoples may include the use of other traditional means of communication such as community radio stations, which are still the most effective means of mass communication in several communities. Some countries have re-opened schools in rural areas where remote education is not possible ([Government of Peru 2020](#)) and UNESCO has issued guidelines for this purpose ([UNESCO et al. 2020](#)). In such cases, it is important to guarantee the necessary safety conditions (clean water, soap, hand sanitizer and proper sanitation facilities) and ensure that teachers, students and parents are all ready to adapt to measures aimed at reducing the risk of transmission. In this context, it is important to ensure the participation of indigenous peoples in the organization of this transition and its monitoring, which is in line with the right of indigenous peoples to establish and control their educational system, set out in Article 14 of the UNDRIP.



Advocacy training in Cameroon.
CREDIT: FOREST PEOPLES PROGRAMME / VIOLA BELOHRAD

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Pre-existing inequalities shape the way indigenous peoples' lives and livelihoods are being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a context of lack of qualitative and quantitative data on indigenous peoples' realities, the information collected through the Indigenous Navigator Initiative provides valuable insights into the conditions of life of indigenous peoples before and during the public health crisis. It provides elements for the identification of key components for the construction of a targeted response to the pandemic that is anchored in indigenous peoples' realities and their needs. Indigenous Navigator data has shown that significant gaps in access to adequate and culturally appropriate health, social security and education run the risk of leaving indigenous peoples further behind. Furthermore, the loss of livelihoods and obstacles in access to land are among the causes of rising food insecurity among indigenous peoples. Considering the indigenous realities described in this report, the following recommendations are presented:

1. Increase efforts to provide indigenous communities with the necessary elements to prevent further transmission of COVID-19, including masks, soap, an adequate water supply and safe drinking water, as well as appropriately equipped and culturally appropriate healthcare facilities and services, including access to information in indigenous languages.
2. Ensure that communities participate in the management of health services and preventive measures are communicated and applied in a way that is respectful of indigenous peoples' cultures.

3. Undertake inclusive, community-based risk and needs assessments of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on indigenous peoples and include indigenous peoples as an integral component of mitigation strategies.
4. Establish or strengthen state institutions in charge of indigenous issues and ensure that government strategies to tackle the pandemic are respectful of indigenous peoples' rights and responsive to indigenous peoples' realities.
5. Adopt measures to ensure protection of indigenous peoples against encroachment on their traditional lands and ensure indigenous peoples' access to natural resources that are essential to their traditional activities.
6. Ensure respect for the labour rights of indigenous peoples, including in the context of crisis response and recovery measures; maintain and promote indigenous entrepreneurship and strengthen indigenous peoples' livelihoods and local economies in order to ensure sustainability of their communities and achieve resilience and self-reliance.
7. Ensure access to distance learning opportunities for indigenous men and women, particularly young persons, taking into consideration infrastructure obstacles to their access to the internet.
8. Ensure the participation of indigenous peoples in the organization and monitoring of the return to school, and guarantee the necessary safety conditions for teachers, students and parents alike.

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ANNEX 1

Interview details

Interview number	Interview partner	Region	Language	Characteristics of the interview
Interview 1	Team Leader; Coordinator of the Indigenous Navigator project in the country	Africa	English	Videoconference 5 August 2020 Duration: 01:03:03
Interview 2	President; Project Coordinator; Communications Officer	Latin America	Spanish	Videoconference 5 August 2020 Duration: 01:48:01
Interview 3	Executive Director	Asia	English	Videoconference 6 August 2020 Duration: 01:08:08
Interview 4	Lawyer	Africa	French	Videoconference 7 August 2020 Duration: 01:16:00
Interview 5	Two Lawyers	Asia	English	Videoconference 7 August 2020 Duration: 00:55:22
Interview 6	Project Coordinator	Latin America	Spanish	Videoconference 7 August 2020 Duration: 01:05:25
Interview 7	Executive Director	Africa	English	Videoconference 11 August 2020 Duration: 01:36:59
Interview 8	Project Coordinator	Latin America	English	Videoconference 11 August 2020 Duration: 01:31:58
Interview 9	Coordinator of the Indigenous Navigator project	Latin America	English	Videoconference 19 August 2020 Duration: 52:16
Interview 10	Project Manager and Project Team Leader	Asia	English	Videoconference 28 August 2020 Duration: 01:52:33
Interview 11	Executive Director	Asia	English	Videoconference 31 August 2020 Duration: 01:42:13

ANNEX II

Questions from the community questionnaire used in the data analysis:

- **Table 1** (T-2V1-9): What is the coverage of your assessment?
- **Table 3** (T-2V1-4): Which methods were used for data collection (tick as many boxes as relevant)?
- **Figure 2** (T-2V126): Approximately how many young men and women (24-15 years) in your community/people are employed in the formal sector (i.e. have jobs with normal work hours and regular wages, that are recognized as income sources on which income taxes must be paid)?
- **Figure 3** (T-2V127 and T-2V128): Approximately how many young men (24-15 years) in your community/people migrate from your traditional territory and lands in search of work? / Approximately how many young women (24-15 years) in your community/people migrate from your traditional territory and lands in search of work?
- **Figure 4** (T-2V90): Approximately how many men in your community/people do you consider poor?
- **Figure 5** (T-2V92): Approximately how many women in your community/people do you consider poor?
- **Table 4** (T-2V91): What are the main characteristics of the men that you consider poor (tick as many boxes as relevant)?
- **Table 5** (T-2V93): What are the main characteristics of the women that you consider poor? (tick as many boxes as relevant)
- **Figure 6** (T-2V95): Approximately how many men and women of your people/community are covered by social protection programs (social health protection, old age pension, unemployment benefit, benefits during maternity leave)?
- **Figure 7** (T-2V101): Approximately how many girls and boys of your people/community complete primary school?
- **Table 6** (T-2V107): How accessible are primary school facilities for the children of your community/people?
- **Figure 8** (T-2V102): Approximately how many girls and boys of your people/community complete secondary school?
- **Figure 9** (T-2V80): Approximately how many of your people/community have access to the internet at home?
- **Table 7** (T-2V108): Do(es) the school(s) in your community/ies have the following facilities?
- **Table 8** (T-2V117): How accessible are health facilities for your community/people?
- **Table 9** (T-2V24): Do your indigenous institutions/authorities manage health programmes or institutions?
- **Table 10** (T-2V41): Is your right to lands, territories and resources recognized by the government?
- **Figure 10** (T-2V42): Do(es) your people or community/ies have title deeds or other binding agreements in recognition of their collective right to lands or territories?
- **Figure 11** (T-2V44): Approximately how many women and men (or couples if titles are held by both spouses) of your people/community have title deeds or other binding agreements in recognition of their individual rights to land?
- **Table 11** (T-2V85): What is the importance of food items not produced (or harvested, caught, gathered or hunted) by your own community/people today?
- **Table 12** (T-2V87): Have your people/community experienced any of the following incidents of food insecurity over the past 12 months?
- **Figure 12** (T-2V86): Approximately how many children under five years of age suffer from stunting in your people/community?



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