

Indigenous communities: Their vulnerability increases due to COVID-19

CMT Welfare Ecosystem contributes to guarantee rights in indigenous communities

Poor health care, lack of access to essential services, sanitation and food insecurity are some of the deficiencies that indigenous peoples are facing during this pandemic.

Indigenous communities inherited a vast linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as customs and ancestral traditions. Most of them share aspects in the way they interact with their environment; their will to preserve their organizational ways; their cultural, social, and economic values that often differ from the norms in the societies they live in.

Indigenous communities all over the world share similar challenges because they have to fight for their recognition and protection to their fundamental rights. Nowadays, they are between the most vulnerable and affected people all over the world due to gaps in education, health, and also in socio cultural and economic issues; unfortunately these gaps became bigger after COVID-19 pandemic.

According to United Nations (UN) General Assembly, indigenous communities consist of more than 5,000 different groups in more than 90 countries. They are approximately 370 million people, that is to say, more than 6% of world population, but they are on the top of the list of vulnerable and unfavored population because they represent 19% of the poorest people in the world.

In Mexico, the National Institute on Indigenous Communities (INPI) has identified 68 ethnolinguistic groups in Mexico, which are classified according to the main language they speak and the area where they are located; 18 groups of those 68 are located in Oaxaca.

Between the indigenous communities with more population we can find Nahuas with more than 2 million people so, they are the group with more indigenous language speakers in Mexico. Mayas are also on the list with almost 1.5 million people living in Yucatán, Quintana Roo, Campeche, Tabasco and Chiapas; and different regions in Central America.

Zapotecs, with almost 800,000 people can be found in different areas in Oaxaca, for example Sierra Zapoteca, Istmo de Tehuantepec, and Valles Centrales in Oaxaca. Mixtecas live in some areas in Guerrero, Puebla and Oaxaca.

In Oaxaca, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), there are more than 1,165,186 indigenous language speakers older than 5, which represents 34% of the population in the country. The most popular indigenous languages in Oaxaca are: Zapoteco with 371,740 speakers, Mixteco with 264,047 speakers, Mazateco with 175,970 speakers; and Mixe with 117,935 speakers.

Indigenous communities and COVID-19

UN mentioned that while we fight against the spread of the pandemic, it is also important to preserve indigenous communities and their knowledge because their territories host 80% of world biodiversity so, they can teach important lessons about how to find balance with nature, as well as options to reduce risks for pandemics in the future.

The conditions of this sector already considered vulnerable, contribute to worsen all the effects of pandemic such as lack of incomes to workers, limited access to health services, and insalubrious conditions in water, hygiene and sanitation systems.

In México and other parts of the world, indigenous communities are looking for their own solutions. Some of them follow advice and use knowledge from their traditional practices, as they also spread preventive measures in their own languages.

Indigenous communities face this pandemic with deficient sanitary assistance; lack of access to essential services; poor sanitation and other important resources such as clean water, soap, disinfectant, etc. Moreover, most of medical facilities do not have enough equipment or staff, and to make things worse, when indigenous communities may have access to health services, they usually face stigma and discrimination.



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There is much poverty in the world, but there is also enormous wealth in its people”.

Dra. H. C. Catalina Mendoza Arredondo. Founder of Congregación Mariana Trinitaria.



Food insecurity becomes one of the biggest challenges too, because it is the result of the loss of land and traditional territories, and also due to food shortage.

The United Nations General Assembly, with the purpose of recognizing value and cultural diversity, as well as organizational forms in indigenous communities in the world, declared August 9 as the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. This date was chosen because on that specific date in 1982, a meeting took place to start the working group of United Nations on Indigenous Communities, belonging to the Subcomision on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

Actions CMT

For Congregación Mariana Trinitaria (CMT) it is important to contribute to welfare and development of indigenous communities through CMT Welfare Ecosystem, whose integral approach offers impulse to groups and communities. The objective is to join efforts to specific topics through different networks, for example: food, health, education, productivity and financial inclusion.

Some of the actions of those networks are programs called: “suitable water storage”, “liquid and powder milk”, “house improvement”, “backyard gardens”, “improved seeds for the fields”; among many others. Their objective is that communities learn how to develop viable actions in their natural, human, and cultural contexts.

CMT networks match either directly or indirectly to one or more of the 17 Sustainable Development Objectives in the 2030 UN Agenda. The purpose of the agenda is to lead world programs to end poverty, fight against inequality and injustice, and also to face climate change in order to avoid leaving anyone behind by the year 2030.

Did you
know that...?

- More than **86% of indigenous people in the world work for informal economy**, in contrast with 66% of nonindigenous people doing the **same activity**
- Additionally, indigenous people have **three times more probabilities of living on extreme poverty** than nonindigenous people
- **47% of indigenous people working did not receive formal education**, in contrast with **17% of nonindigenous people**. This gap becomes bigger for women

