COVID-19 AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES – THE RAINFOREST FUND -

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Rainforest Fund realized that because of the systemic iniquities and discrimination indigenous communities face, indigenous peoples will suffer disproportionally from COVID19. So getting in touch with them we learnt that they were powerless in front of this new disease because of lack of access to essential services, sanitation, clean water, soap, disinfectant etc. also even if health care posts did exist they were ill-equipped and unable to help the community.

Furthermore, with no timeline in sight for the end of the pandemic indigenous people who already face food insecurity as a result of the loss of their traditional lands and territories, confront even graver challenges in access to food, and the situation of women who are often the main providers of food and nutrition to their families, is even graver.

So since May, the Rainforest Fund took the decision to help them by sending small donations where the situation was very difficult, in Kenya, the DRC and Brazil.

We received photos of the delivery of food and all what they needed as protection masks, soap water, milk for the children, food etc..

This has helped them greatly while also seeking their own solutions to the pandemic. They took action, and using traditional knowledge and practices such as voluntary isolation, sealing off their territories as well as preventive measures in their own language.

As of today, the communities we supported have no COVID cases… and our constant support, advice, according to them has been very helpful to prevent the spread of the disease in their communities.

Indigenous peoples' traditional lifestyles are also a source of their resiliency, but can also pose a threat at this time in preventing the spread of the virus. So they took seriously pieces of advice such as avoiding the organization of traditional gatherings to mark special events , or putting the Elders at risk by isolating them.

The only risky situation concerns the URU WE WAI WAI in Rondonia which have no cases but have been battling hard to keep invaders and the disease out. Kaninde is delivering emergency aid to ensure that nobody leaves the area but with the pressure on them by illegal loggers it may only be a question of time. Rainforest fund support was a one time aid which is being carried out by other entities at the moment and that we monitor in case of urgent help.

So in a nutshell, at the moment our communities have been spared either in Asia or Africa, and the Americas but it is a challenge as the virus is spreading into remote territories across the forests and especially in the Amazon where there is also a surge of land invasions. There indigenous leaders are pleading with the government to adopt urgent measures to head off a catastrophe, with not much success.

My contact with all of them is a daily work.

FRANCA

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