

## **Review of online discussion on Indigenous Experiences with Covid-19**

Moving accounts and experiences from our indigenous guests from Indonesia, Canada, and Uganda touched participants at the discussion event „*Indigenous Communities Experiencing and Responding to Covid-19*“ on June 8, 2021. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on indigenous communities in remote areas of East Kalimantan, the northwest coast of Canada, and Karamoja in northern Uganda is as diverse as the indigenous cultures and ways of life in these regions. In all regions, however, the pandemic has exacerbated existing crises, economic deprivation, lack of social support, and inadequate health care, limiting opportunities for sustainable community development.

Kelly Brown from the Heiltsuk Nation vividly described how assembly bans and social distancing have made it impossible for community members to come together and hold ceremonies. This has had a dramatic impact on the spiritual and mental health of the people, especially the youth, who otherwise draw vital empowerment from socio-cultural customs and gatherings. Because of their seclusion, the Heiltsuk were able to protect themselves to a large extent from outside 'intruders' who might also bring illness. However, their isolation also limited their ability to negotiate with the government, for example, regarding the control of fishing areas. For smaller companies, the pandemic often meant economic ruin.

For the Karamojong migrant herders in northern Uganda, the pandemic represents another crisis in an already crisis-ridden region. Simon Peter Longoli, a previous guest at an early 2021 event, reported that the second wave of Covid particularly affected the Karamoja region. In 2020, the effects of climate change, the locust infestation, as well as conflicts still prevailed, but now the pandemic overtook the region, exacerbating an already extremely challenging situation. Medical care and education are not reaching the remote Karamojong communities, and children have been unable to attend school for more than a year. The Karamojong now have to make do with even less land and water resources, which in turn creates conflict. It is a vicious circle that, given the few available resources and the tense situation, can hardly be broken.

Kresensia Laura Lisari, a Dayak representative from East Kalimantan, described how the pandemic affected food prices and had a particularly negative economic impact. Medical care provided to communities by the government, however, is free of charge and traditional medicine has received good acceptance from the government as well. Both natural and traditional medicine are combined in the treatment of the ill. The remoteness of the rural Dayak communities has provided some protection against infection and has also led to an intensification of local agriculture and a revival of traditional knowledge about nature and in education for children. In this context, women play a crucial role as driving forces and bearers of knowledge. The sustainable practices of the Dayak communities are proving to be

a strength and must be officially recognized by the government and legally secured to ensure long-term protection and strengthening of the communities.

For the Heiltsuk, their resilience also lies in community cohesion, mutual support and solidarity. Mindful and wise leaders who provide guidance in community decision-making processes are central to preserving cultural values and practices and in strengthening cultural identity. Thus, despite the internal social upheaval of the pandemic, the Heiltsuk Nation has managed to stand strong as a community and assert its rights and culture.

For the Karamojong in Uganda, on the other hand, it is also much more difficult to promote cohesion among communities and reach them with medical care and educational activities due to the geographical scale, the ecological conditions of their living area as well as their nomadic way of life. What's more, pastoralists are also not a priority population group for the government and are discriminated against in terms of care. Under the given conditions, the Karamoja Development Forum tries to carry out educational work in the remote communities, to provide sanitary equipment and to negotiate in conflicts.

For more information on the situation in Karamoja and the work of the Karamoja Development Forum, please click [here](#).

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