

News

COVID-19 in the heart of South America

COVID-19 Solidarity Response in the Great American Chaco



The Great American Chaco is an extensive ecological region of more than one million square meters spread over Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil. It is home to more than 300,000 indigenous people. COVID-19 has not skipped this area in the heart of South America either.

ICCO implements in this region the Sustainable Chaco program with the support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Kerk in Actie. The aim is to strengthen economic empowerment and political advocacy. The population already deals with deforestation, extraction of raw materials, and the effects of climate change. They are now confronted by the measures governments are taking to combat the COVID-19 virus. Inequity and vulnerability are growing.

"The approach to the pandemic cannot be carried out only from the health perspective, since the emergency measures generated changes in family dynamics and states of mind, as well as aggravated gender violence, abandonment of the elderly by their own families, child abuse, among others." (JUM, partner organization Sustainable Chaco program)

Bolivia: Prevention and lobby actions

In Bolivia the closing of borders became the main concern for families benefiting from the Sustainable Chaco program. The majority of these families do not have a formal job, so they generated their income with daily activities related to production and marketing of their products. Not being able to generate income and supply have become one of the greatest difficulties.

The health status of indigenous families is also a high risk factor for coronavirus, for example, in the Weenhayek population more than 60% of adults are affected by Chagas disease, about 10% have tuberculosis aggravated by chronic malnutrition in their communities and this year more than a thousand cases of dengue and chikungunya have been recorded in the municipality of Villa Montes alone.

The partners and ICCO of the Sustainable Chaco work from their homes and use online platforms to coordinate meetings, training and the immediate help. Among the actions being carried out by CERDET, a partner in Bolivia, was the dissemination of information to indigenous Guaraní and Weenhayek leaders on virus prevention and government measures to provide basic food vouchers.

In alliance with 15 institutions in the municipalities of Villa Montes, Entre Ríos, Carapaní and Yacuíba, a two-month virtual campaign is being carried out to protect girls and boys against violence in their homes. Likewise, coordinated political advocacy actions are carried out against the municipal government to provide bio-sanitary and disinfection material in community health centers and technical assistance measures to recover agricultural production.

Argentina: Supporting health measures

Likewise, in the Argentine Chaco, no contingency and protection strategies were developed for the communities, which, due to the deplorable health situation, access to water, or connectivity, represent an enormous risk and a lack of preparation for when the virus arrives. The excessive increase in the costs of products of the basic family basket by opportunistic companies is another development that hits the vulnerable population severely.

Partner FUNDAPAZ activated agreements with the International Red Cross and provincial governments to support the distribution of supplies of basic sanitary necessity. On the other hand, JUM accompanies the local health system in the purchase of necessary resources for the adequate care of possible cases of patients with the coronavirus, the protection of health personnel, hygiene items, as well as helping humanitarian aid to the elderly, rural families and independent workers.

Paraguay: Tool to record violations

In Paraguay, the lack of access to basic services, sexual violence, lack of protection, plus the difficulty of the State to give timely and effective responses violate the rights, especially of children, women, and indigenous peoples.

CDIA, a partner that works for children's rights, has been cooperating with both civil society and the State to respond to the emergency situation. For example, they have generated a tool to record cases of violations of the rights of children and adolescents and disseminated friendly materials to provide timely and pertinent information.

"Contexts cannot paralyze us since we are designed to act in them. We are almost certain that the post-pandemic will be more serious than the pandemic itself" (FUNDAPAZ, partner organization Sustainable Chaco program).

Collective responsibility

The repercussions of the coronavirus will be far-reaching. Action protocols, biosecurity teams and the use of technology and the internet are some of the new approaches to be carried out. As stated by JUM: "We have the collective responsibility to redirect in the most humane, creative and timely way our work to provide answers to the needs of the communities".

Photo: Community school in Villamontes (Tarija, Bolivia) empty because of the virus.

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