



AMAZON
**EMERGENCY
FUND**

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

October 2020



Organización Nacional de los
Pueblos Indígenas de la
Amazonía Colombiana



1. Introduction

The Amazon Emergency Fund (AEF) is a newly-formed coalition of indigenous Amazonian federations and non-governmental organizations working in partnership to deliver humanitarian aid to Amazonian communities impacted by the novel coronavirus in the Amazon basin. The AEF works by collaboratively fundraising with the support of its 40+ partner organizations and distributing funds to communities impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin are faced with multiple threats as the pandemic spreads across the forest, including increased violence, high levels of morbidity and mortality, a lack of access to healthcare and protective equipment, food scarcity, lack of income, and environmental catastrophes including increased deforestation, oil spills, fires and floods. In solidarity with Amazon forest guardians including indigenous peoples' organizations, federations and traditional communities across the nine countries of the Amazon basin, resources are being mobilized to support rapid response grants for the following:

- Emergency communications and evacuation
- Food and medical supplies
- Urgent and immediate COVID-19 prevention and care
- Protection and security for forest guardians
- Food sovereignty and community resilience programs and support

The Amazon Emergency Fund is the largest and most diverse collaboration working to support the peoples of the Amazon in the wake of this emergency.

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, AEF's partner organizations have joined forces to strategically and swiftly deliver aid to prevent the devastating consequences of COVID-19 on indigenous peoples and support their critical role in stewarding Amazonian ecosystems, which in turn has profound implications for the world.

As of October 2020 the AEF has raised two and a half million USD and continues to work to reach its goal of five million by December 2020. 100% of individual donations are channeled directly to indigenous peoples and communities in the Amazon. The AEF is fiscally sponsored by the Rainforest Foundation US, and governance decisions are carried out by the Governance Group which includes leaders of COICA (Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon) and representatives from civil society organizations.

2. The COVID-19 Emergency in the Amazon

As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads across the Amazon basin¹, it threatens the lives and the future of indigenous peoples and traditional forest communities. Often referred to as the guardians of the forest, indigenous peoples are disproportionately vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 and other infectious diseases due to a lack of access to equal and adequate public services—notably, health care. Indigenous peoples also experience lower immunity to infectious diseases due to chronic malnutrition and pre-existing health conditions.

¹ For updated numbers see: <https://ais.paho.org/phip/viz/COVID19Table.asp>; <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

The lethality of COVID-19 amongst indigenous populations in the Amazon is particularly high (averaging about 5% across the nine countries of the region)² due to compounded issues including a lack of access to healthcare, basic shelter and medical supplies including COVID-19 testing kits.³ As of September 2020, there have been almost 65,971 registered cases of COVID-19 amongst 238 indigenous peoples of the Amazon. Reports reveal 1,989 have died.⁴ This is undoubtedly an undercount of the real toll of COVID-19.

Accounting for cases of infection in the Amazon is particularly complicated due to several factors, including a lack of reliable systems to gather reports and accurately record cases due to the remote location of communities. Additionally, communities living in voluntary isolation cannot be accounted for. Additional issues that Amazonian communities face with the spread of COVID-19 are:

- Failure of governments to deliver food aid or medical care
- Lack of functioning and well-supplied healthcare systems
- Precarious food security compounded by the economic crisis
- Increased violence from loggers, miners, ranchers and land and drug traffickers
- Accelerating environmental catastrophes such as floods and fires
- Oil spills and the multiple impacts of extractive industries

Recent reports from satellite data reveal a dramatic increase in deforestation since the spread of COVID-19 caused by accelerated mining, logging, and illegal extractive activity, due to the reduced presence and mobility of indigenous forest guardians and decreased presence of the state.⁵ Elderly populations—wisdom keepers of indigenous communities—are particularly at-risk from the virus. Without immediate, coordinated action, indigenous peoples of the Amazon are facing the very real threat of ethnocide.⁶

Indigenous communities and grassroots organizations across the region have taken a proactive approach since the beginning of the pandemic, organizing at the local level to isolate in their communities and cut off access from outsiders who could spread the virus. Territorial defense committees and community forest monitors have continued to defend their territories from outsiders, blocking roads and rivers and doing their best to monitor large remote areas. Land tenure security, and respect for rights has been a key determinant of the success of those efforts to preserve communities' health and environments.

Regional and national federations have taken the lead in disseminating educational information about the virus, use of face coverings, the importance of hand washing and how to practice social

² Fellows, M.; Paye, V.; Alencar, A.; Nicácio, M.; Castro, I.; Coelho, M.E.; e Moutinho, P. (2020) Não são números, são vidas! A ameaça da covid-19 aos povos indígenas da Amazônia brasileira. Coordenação das Organizações Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira e Instituto de Pesquisa Ambiental da Amazônia. <https://ipam.org.br/bibliotecas/nao-sao-numeros-sao-vidas-a-ameaca-da-covid-19-aos-povos-indigenas-da-amazonia-brasileira/>

³ *The New York Times*. "The Amazon, Giver of Life, Unleashes the Pandemic." Turkewitz, J., Andreoni, M., et al. July 25 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/25/world/americas/coronavirus-brazil-amazon.html#>

⁴ See: bit.ly/Covid19CuencaAmazonica

⁵ National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA): *Reflecting on a Tumultuous Amazon Fire Season* <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/146355/reflecting-on-a-tumultuous-amazon-fire-season> (2020)

⁶ Ferrante, L., Steinmetz, W.A., Almeida, A.C.L. et al. Brazil's policies condemn Amazonia to a second wave of COVID-19. *Nat Med* 26, 1315 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-1026-x>; Oxfam Briefing Paper: Averting Ethnocide Indigenous peoples and territorial rights in crisis in the face of COVID-19 in Latin America, July 2020

distancing, circulating easy to understand graphics in local languages based on public health messages. Federations and national organizations have also taken the lead in gathering resources, from public and private sources and organizing health brigades to assist remote communities with food, medicine, medical care, evacuation of the sick and support for the elderly. They have reached out and worked with local and regional health authorities to help coordinate and deliver aid, and to attend to indigenous peoples trapped in cities with no sources of income or support.

Women's organizations have assumed an increasingly visible role in aid distribution, in addition to taking care of people in cities, towns and villages. All of the national federations of COICA have been coordinating with multiple NGO allies and have spearheaded national fundraising efforts for pandemic response, in addition to interacting with national authorities to advocate for a better funded, planned and executed national response. COICA has launched this international effort to support its national members, and has been taking a lead in raising awareness and reaching out to international donors and supporters.

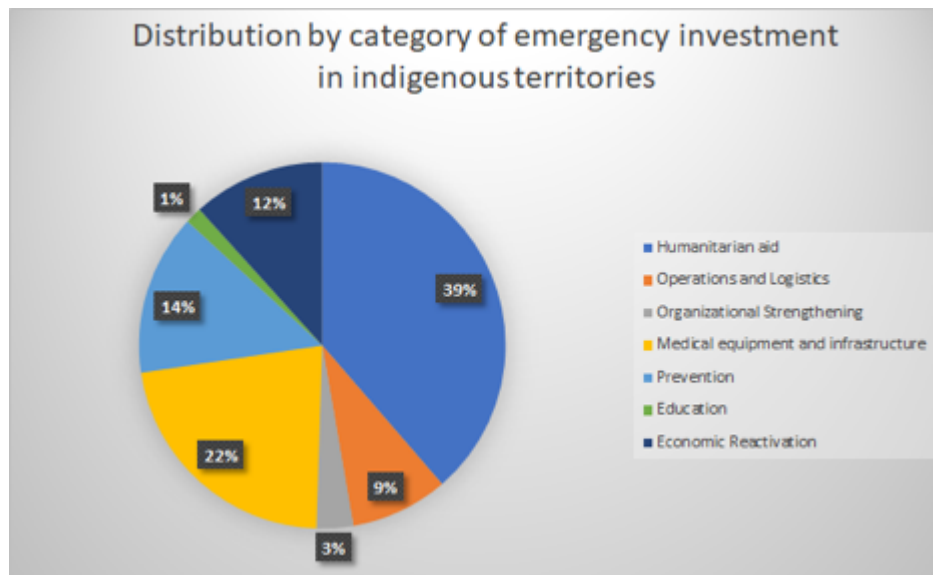
3. AEF's Impact and Accomplishments

Thus far the AEF has disbursed two rounds of grants and is implementing a third. The first nine small grants (\$20,000) were disbursed to each of the national indigenous federations members of COICA. A second a larger round of \$200,000 grants has been disbursed to each federation⁷. The AEF has done this by working with each national organization, leaders and technical teams, to both plan and implement humanitarian response activities, mostly through channeling funds, material and support to sub national and local indigenous community organizations. Additionally, the AEF has worked with each of the national teams to document, gather, and report on all of the activities and expenditures, enabling the expansion of the funding. The third round of funding will be to non-COICA indigenous and community organizations through a Solidarity Fund, relying on proposals already submitted and referrals from the Founding Solidarity Circle. All three rounds of grants are approved by the Governance Group. In an effort to expand indigenous women's access to funding, a minimum of thirty percent of the large grant is being disbursed to women's organizations within each national federation.

We estimate we have delivered aid to approximately 54,350 people through the implementation of the first and second rounds of grants. We further estimate that we have reached only a fraction of the communities in need in all but Guyana and Suriname, where we have reached all or most. As the pandemic has spread in Brazil and the Peru-Colombia tri-border area, indigenous organizations in those countries are not yet reaching much of their populations in need. In French Guiana, the disbursement and implementation of aid has been hampered due to a pending resolution regarding national federation representation. We anticipate that this obstacle will be resolved in the coming weeks.⁸

⁷ With the exception of French Guiana

⁸ We have disbursed a small grant to French Guiana which has not been utilized due to ongoing disputes within the indigenous movement there. French Guiana is not eligible to receive funding from the French Government which supplied the AEF with its largest grant of \$2 million USD.



As the planning and grant-making process with COICA national organizations has progressed from small grants (\$15-\$20k) which were mostly food and medical emergency supplies, to larger grants (\$200k). We see the national proposals often building on plans that are receiving support from a number of allies and sources, and are often being executed in conjunction with local and regional governments, such that the number of larger scale and medium-term activities are expanding. These activities include:

- Repair/upgrade of existing facilities or construction of new ones
- Medicinal and food gardens
- Support for farm expansion
- Upgrading of communications infrastructure
- Greater support for women's organizations and more aid distributed through women's organizations

These emerging strategies require additional support from new donors and the public.

4. Governance

The Amazon Emergency Fund is fiscally sponsored by the Rainforest Foundation US and governance decisions are carried out by the Governance Group, which includes leaders of COICA and representatives from civil society organizations. A Technical Team made up of representatives from participating NGOs and COICA oversees operations. Two Technical Secretaries (one selected by the indigenous organizations and one by the NGO partners) are responsible for daily administration and coordination of the fund. Given the urgency of action embedded in the mission, the fund endeavors to disburse grants as quickly as possible while minimizing bureaucratic hurdles. A simple monitoring and evaluation program is embedded in the grant-making agreement, and conditions additional disbursements of funds based on adequate reporting on activities and expenditures. As fiscal sponsor, Rainforest Foundation US holds a seat in the Governance Group and reports back on a weekly basis on the financial state of the fund. Rainforest Foundation US has provided ongoing staff support to the fund since its launch.



The Governance Group is composed of nine members: four representatives from COICA and affiliate national organizations (currently Colombia, Suriname, Brazil and the Secretariat), one representative of indigenous women in the region, one representative from the donor community (still to be proposed), and three representatives from non-governmental organizations shared between the Rainforest Foundation US, Amazon Watch, Derecho, Ambiente, y Recursos Naturales in Peru and Fundação Amazônia Sustentável in Brazil. NGO representation to the Governance Group was selected unanimously by the Founding Solidarity Circle of organizations that came together to launch the fund, and an Allies Circle, which includes additional individual and organizational supporters.

Deliberations about grant-making are open to input from other affiliate/founding partners, as are meetings of the Governance Group, though voting on grant-approvals is limited to members of the Governance Group. Meeting minutes of the Governance Group and grant information are posted on the AEF website.

5. Finances

The fund has set an initial goal of raising five million USD by December 31, 2020. This goal is based on a rapid assessment of a minimum of five to eight million in needs estimated over a twelve-month period. The first two and a half million USD in the fund was capitalized through contributions from individuals, private philanthropy, public charities, multilateral organizations and governmental sources. Rainforest Foundation US is acting as a fiscal sponsor at nominal cost to the fund. No overhead costs will be assessed from donations received by the fund through its fiscal sponsor for the remainder of 2020 at least. To maximize the fund's impact, the fund will limit its overhead by keeping its operational costs as low as possible and by relying on partners for management and other support necessary to run the fund. Reports on funds received and disbursed are available to the public via the website. The Amazon Emergency Fund will be included in the Rainforest Foundation US annual audit.



For further information on the Amazon Emergency Fund please visit:

www.amazonemergencyfund.org

or contact

amazonemergencyfund@gmail.com

For information on how to donate and/or for wire transfer information please contact:

giving@rffny.org

To donate by check, please address all correspondence to:

*Amazon Emergency Fund
c/o Rainforest Foundation US
P.O. Box 26908
Brooklyn, NY 11202*

To speak with staff of the Fund, please write:

*Sophia Rokhlin at: sophia@rffny.org
Zack Romo at: zack.romo@coica.org.ec*