**SUBMISSION BY THE ORGANIZATION FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (OCD)[[1]](#footnote-1) TO THE UNSRIP ON THE IMPACTS OF COVID 19 TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PARTICULARLY THE MUKKUVAR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRCT IN THE STATE OF TAMIL NADU, INDIA**

1. ***How does the State collect and analyse information on the impact of COVID-19 on indigenous peoples and individuals? Is disaggregated data on indigenous peoples, including health impacts, available?***

Information is collected on the spread of the COVID-19 infection, the travel history of persons returning from other countries etc. But, the impact of COVID-19 on the people has not been documented by the Government. Several studies on the economic and health impacts on the nation as a whole have been undertaken by private agencies.

To answer the second part of the question – no disaggregated data on indigenous peoples has been collected, documented and made available, and the health and economic impacts have not been documented and made available. It is also highly doubtful that such a task would be undertaken by the state.

1. ***Please provide information and specific examples showing the increased risks and/or disproportionate health impact of the pandemic on indigenous peoples. What measures have been taken to provide health care and other forms or urgent assistance for remote communities?***

Fishing activity is at a stand-still. It badly affects the community where the economy is based on the fishing industry. Groups with special needs such as the elderly, people with pre-existing medical conditions, infants and children are severely affected. Mental health is also affected. Families are staying cramped in close quarters. This is leading to friction and domestic violence.

1. ***How are indigenous peoples supported in their own initiatives to fight the pandemic, protect health and provide assistance in their own communities? What lessons can be learnt from indigenous traditional practices and community-based programs in lock down and emergency?***

Community level initiatives among the indigenous ‘Mukkuvar’ coastal Fisher folk community in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu state are non-existent for the following reasons.

* The community was not prepared for the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown.
* There were no community level mechanisms in place to deal with the present crisis.
* The community is financially backward and without reserves that can be used at present.
* The strict lockdown eliminates any effective interaction between community leaders

1. ***How are indigenous peoples given the possibility to shape the national COVID-19 response to ensure it does not have discriminatory effect on their communities? Is their input sought and respected in the programs that could affect them?***

We are knowledgeable enough to speak only about the indigenous ‘Mukkuvar’ coastal Fisher folk community in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu state, India. They have been provided no opportunity to influence the COVID-19 response to ensure their inclusion and to prevent discrimination. Their input has not been sought at any point by any of the policy makers.

1. ***How is information about COVID-19 and prevention measures disseminated in indigenous communities? Is such information available in indigenous languages?***

General information about COVID-19 and prevention measures is disseminated by the Government over loudspeakers and in few places through wall posters. This is done in the regional language, Tamil, which is understandable to the indigenous community. But the information and recommendations are very general and do not take into consideration the local context of the ‘Mukkuvar’ indigenous people and are less relevant to their living conditions.

Private agencies, including NGOs are forbidden to print any information regarding COVID-19 and hence our NGO is providing relevant information and preventive guidelines suitable to the indigenous community to a limited number of families over the telephone.

1. ***Please provide examples of good practices and targeted measures to redress the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on indigenous peoples’ health. If these are being carried out by State, provincial and local governments, please explain how these measures were designed in consultation and implementing free prior and informed consent with the indigenous peoples concerned in order to ensure that such measures are adapted to the cultural and other specific needs of these indigenous communities.***

No specific good practices or measures were undertaken for the indigenous ‘Mukkuvar’ coastal fisher folk community. The preventive measures that were recommended (and followed as far as possible) were

1. Staying indoors subject to the nation-wide lockdown.

2. Maintaining social distancing (not possible in homes where many houses have only one or two rooms and where many houses are built in a row and washing and other activities are done outside)

3. Frequent hand-washing, wearing face masks etc. ( Not affordable for most families to purchase extra soap and the sanitizers and face masks are new things to them which they do not have the money to buy, especially when they are totally bereft of income)

1. ***Please provide information on the economic, social and cultural impact of lockdowns, quarantines, travel and other restriction of freedom of movement on indigenous communities. Please provide information on measures taken to ensure indigenous communities do not experience discriminatory impacts on their access to livelihoods, food and education. How are indigenous peoples taken into account in the development of assistance and relief programmes? Where are the gaps if any?***

**ECONOMIC IMPACTS:**

1. Fishing activity is at a stand-still. It badly affects the community where the economy is based on the fishing industry
2. The lockdown preceded the fishing- banned season (fish spawning). Therefore fishing will take longer to recommence till the 15th of June and the damage to the community will be increased.
3. Occupations of women, mainly head-load fish vending have been lost. Therefore women headed households suffer greatly.
4. Without financial reserves, families are becoming indebted to local money lenders.

**SOCIAL IMPACTS:**

1. Families are staying cramped in close quarters. This is leading to friction and domestic violence.
2. Due to alcoholics being deprived of alcohol, their frustration takes the form of violence against women and children.
3. Interaction is at a minimum between community members leading to a sense of isolation.
4. Groups with special needs such as the elderly, people with pre-existing medical conditions, infants and children are severely affected.
5. The education of children suffers. Due to lack of continuity, more numbers of children are prone to drop out of school.

**CULTURAL & POLITICAL IMPACTS:**

1. Individuals venturing out to procure essentials are being subjected to police violence.
2. Even the small allocations of relief are not being impartially distributed as the local politicians are partial to their supporters.
3. The ‘Mukkuvar’ indigenous community in Kanyakumari district is a minority community as it is entirely Roman Catholic. In the present context, the community is totally discriminated against.
4. The community has been discriminated against as evident by the fact that farmers (other communities) have been permitted to resume their occupation, but the sea going fishermen are still restricted and only small catamarans are permitted to engage in fishing.

No measures have been taken to ensure inclusion of the indigenous community. Their status as an indigenous community has been totally ignored. The ‘Mukkuvar’ indigenous people have not been taken into account in the development of assistance and relief programs.

1. ***Please provide information on how indigenous women, older persons, children, persons with disabilities and LGBTI persons are or may be facing additional human rights challenges during the pandemic. Please provide information on targeted measures taken to prevent intersecting forms of discrimination, and ensure indigenous women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and LGBTI persons’ access, protection and services with due regards to their specific needs within indigenous communities.***

* Women, especially the head load fish vendors, are subjected to suspension of their livelihoods and so are unable to contribute any income to the family. Their status therefore is lowered. They are subject to domestic violence at a time when frustrations increase due to being cramped up in close living quarters during the lockdown. Alcohol abuse by men is a major cause for domestic violence against women.
* The education of children has been interrupted. Their nutritional needs, especially in the case of very young children are unmet. Children too are the targets of physical abuse by adults.
* Older persons are viewed as a burden on the scarce resources left to the families at the present time. Older persons with pre-existing medical conditions were earlier receiving free medications from the Government hospitals. Now, all such supplies have been stopped. Hence they are in danger of their medical conditions being aggravated and they are also uncared for in case of emergencies as there are no transport facilities and the entire medical infrastructure is preoccupied with the Corona pandemic. The same is the case with persons with disabilities.
* LGBTI persons are not accepted by the families and by the communities. But now, they are forced to stay at home due to the lockdown restrictions. They therefore face neglect and abuse at the hands of family members and the community.

No measures are accessible to deal with the neglect and abuse faced by these vulnerable groups mentioned above. In theory, there are systems to deal with risks faced by these vulnerable groups. In reality, they do not have access to the systems which moreover are just established for name’s sake.

1. ***Please provide information on how States of emergency may contribute to threats or aggravate ongoing human rights violations against indigenous peoples, including with regards to the freedom of assembly and the protection of their traditional lands and resources. What measures have been taken to protect the lands, territories and resources of indigenous peoples against invasions and land-grabbing by external actors during the pandemic?***

Freedom of assembly and the opportunity to plan at community level has been lost due to the lockdown restrictions.

The sole occupation of the ‘Mukkuvar’ indigenous community is fishing and related vending. Their resource is the sea. Hence, they would not lose that resource on a permanent basis as any external actor cannot take away their resource. But, they are now prevented from engaging in their occupation without any consideration for their sustenance during this state of emergency.

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1. a benevolent and non-governmental registered organization working for the holistic development of a marginalized segment of the Indian society without any discrimination based on caste, creed, race, gender, religion, and ethnicity. OCD works with the indigenous ‘Mukkuvar’ coastal Fisher folk community in 43 villages in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu state, India. Their work and observations inform this submission. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)