

Protecting Human Rights During and After the COVID-19: Submission by the International Land Coalition

[International Land Coalition](#) (ILC) submits the following briefing in response to the joint questionnaire by Special mandate holders on the impact of the COVID – 19 pandemic on the enjoyment of human rights.

In its recently launched draft paper on “[Building Back Better](#) – How Securing Land Rights will be Critical in a Post-COVID 19 World” ILC highlighted issues which need crucial attention in the present crisis. Below mentioned are those that we believe warrant urgent attention to secure the land rights of the people. The recommendations mentioned capture needed long-term response measures to the pandemic to respect and protect people’s rights to land.

Increased Attacks on Land and Environmental Defenders:

- In a context of lockdown, land and environmental defenders are exposed to threats, attacks and cases of harassment and have less access to local and international support and visibility. Gender-based violence has increased at all levels –affecting women land and environmental defenders both within their families and communities and in the public sphere- and women are exposed to higher risks as protection measures are more difficult to enforce¹ requiring specific attention. Monitoring these incidences is necessary in order to document the nature of these events and provide targeted legal support, particularly at a time when civic space is reduced and access to resources (legal and financial) is limited. (click [here](#) for a few specific examples)
- The Defending Land and Environment Defenders Coalition (DDCoalition) has been [gathering public and sensitive reports](#) of attacks on these defenders in the context of COVID-19. A full report will be made in the future, but [some analysis](#) is already [available](#)

Recommendation:

- Protect the fundamental rights of land and environmental and all human rights defenders and ensure that emergency powers are used in line with international law and not to quash dissent, target particular groups or silence or repress the work of land, environmental and human rights defenders.

Increasing Vulnerabilities of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

- As result of Covid lockdowns indigenous peoples and other communities, who already face food and tenure insecurity as a result of the historical and current land dispossession, become further vulnerable². Contamination by the virus in local territories – particularly those of Indigenous Peoples–could significantly weaken their ability to defend their lands

¹ <https://gbvguidelines.org/cctopic/covid-19/> ; <https://theconversation.com/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-during-covid-19-lessons-from-ebola-137541> ; <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/gender-based-violence-and-covid-19.html> ; <https://www.omct.org/press-releases/statements/2020/05/d25868/>;

² https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/PB_70.pdf

territories and natural resources. In addition, the capacity for emergency services to respond to communities at risk, is reduced by the demands of battling the epidemic

Recommendation:

- Secure and support the traditional knowledge and community resilience practices of indigenous peoples and local communities: Securing and protecting these practices not only ensure their resilience through the COVID19 pandemic and future crises, it is also an integral part of protecting their civil, political and socio economic rights.

Rising land Conflicts and Increased Vulnerabilities among Women

- Land rights are under siege and land conflicts are on the rise due to i) increased competition for land- with a specific impact on *de facto* and *de iure* women's land and land resources – caused by reverse migration of men from urban to rural areas, and Covid-19 related rights' holders deaths³ ii) rise in land grabbing and forced evictions, in particular due to increased policed societies (combined with lower media and international attention); and iii) weakened enforcement/accountability measures, due to lockdowns, to guarantee land rights

Recommendations:

- Support women's land rights as an integral part of their rights to address the higher loss of land during crises, when especially men return from urban areas, or in case of spousal death due to pandemic.
- Reinforce and promote at all levels women's access to financial resources and legal means to claim their rights without having to give up lands that they have been cultivating for years. This carries a broader positive impact on women's economic, social and cultural rights.
- Recognise peoples' right to land as a fundamental human right and acknowledge the importance of transparent and accountable decision making including public participation in decision making processes as essential elements in the post COVID-19 recovery process

*Refer to the ILC [draft paper](#) to learn specific examples of the above highlighted issues and how ILC members around the world are responding to these challenges.

³ <https://allafrica.com/stories/202005280690.html>