

Christian NGO helps indigenous people access accurate information about COVID-19

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(Photo courtesy of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon)

The World Association for Christian Communication has launched a rapid response fund to help support grassroots community media outlets that provide accurate coronavirus-related information to vulnerable people who often cannot access mainstream media.

“The pandemic has reminded us of just how critical access to accurate information and trustworthy communication platforms is,” said Lorenzo Vargas, who coordinates the organization’s Communication for Social Change program. “Many of these communities are not reached by information provided by governments and mainstream commercial or public media.”

The WACC, which normally tackles issues like gender-sensitive reporting and participatory communication for people of all faiths, has members in 120 countries. It currently has 39 community radio partners—many of them attached to hundreds of indigenous and community radio stations working in local languages, which is where they are focusing their pandemic energies.

For example, in Ecuador, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon is bringing crucial information about COVID-19 to local indigenous communities. When the Ecuadorian government issued a state of emergency on March 15 and began issuing information mainly in Spanish, the confederation began translating that information into the languages of various Amazonian cultures.

The group also translated official information about COVID-19 from the World Health Organization.

In Nepal, the Indigenous Community Radio Network said it was prompted to take action because it didn’t see any public service announcements about the disease targeted specifically for indigenous people. Nepal’s indigenous people are especially vulnerable to the pandemic because of economic and food insecurity, as well as being cut off from services.

The ICRN, in partnership with Indigenous Television, jointly produced public service announcements about COVID-19 in 15 different indigenous languages and one in Nepali. These have been distributed not only to 21 indigenous radio stations but to 350 community radio stations across Nepal.

Syrian refugees are also extremely vulnerable to COVID-19, and a community radio station in Amman, Jordan, is making sure their plight is not forgotten. Radio Al-Balad, operated by the Community Media Network, has been using its airwaves to call attention to the impact of COVID-19 on refugees.

“Syrian refugees are largely cooped up in camps and other locations,” said Community Media Network spokesman Daoud Kuttab. “So far, no reports have been made about any Syrian refugee having contracted the coronavirus. However, it is

not clear if the reason is lack of contact or lack of testing.” —World Council of Churches, the *Christian Century*