



LILAK

PURPLE ACTION FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S RIGHTS



BABAYENIHAN

REPORT 2020

Report on BABAYEnihan in the time of COVID-19 relief program

JULY 2020



ABOUT LILAK

LILAK is an organization composed of women coming from different backgrounds and expertise (ie indigenous women leaders, anthropologists, human rights advocates, environmentalists, lawyers, feminists) bound by the common cause of supporting the struggle for indigenous women's human rights. We believe that indigenous women are among the least heard, but mostly affected by the increasing poverty, inequality, hunger and devastation of the environment and depletion of natural resources. We are part of the struggles against all and different forms of discrimination, violence and marginalization of indigenous women.

CONTEXT

As of July 7, 2020 the Philippines has reached more than 40,000 COVID-19 cases, with a death toll of 1,309 deaths. These numbers are only of reported cases. There are deaths, especially in urban poor communities, which are not reported, or tested, whether these are COVID-19 related cases. With these statistics, the country is far from “flattening the curve”. In fact, on April 12, according to Deep Knowledge Group, Philippines placed ninth in the ranks among the least safe countries in Asia Pacific. Ten days before that, the country was on the 10th rank, indicating the worsening condition in such a short time. Leading the rank was Italy, then the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, France and Sweden. Deep Knowledge determined the risk ranking based primarily on infection spread risk (number of cases and deaths), government management, and healthcare efficiency¹. The Philippines also ranked second in Southeast Asian countries with the most number of COVID-19 cases next to Indonesia².

The Philippines has enforced lockdown in major cities since March 16, 2020. The Duterte government has imposed different levels of quarantine measures in different areas. For the first 3 months, major cities have been under what is called Extreme Community Quarantine, which is basically strict stay-at-home policy, with the government issuing quarantine passes for each household for “essentials” – food shopping, buying medicine, and for those working as “frontliners” in the hospitals. On the fourth month, cities have been moved down to General Community Quarantine. Some businesses and industries have been opened, with only skeleton workforce. However, there was no public transportation allowed to operate. This proved to be very difficult, in fact, impossible for the workers, who are desperate to go to work, but have no means of transportation.

Meanwhile, there is no mass testing for COVID-19 being implemented.

Through all these, as in other countries, people have been made impoverished by the lockdown. This is especially so difficult for those who are working on a “no work-no pay” basis, and those in the informal sector. As part of its COVID 19 response, the government launched its Social Amelioration Program (SAP), which aimed to support 18 million Filipinos who are most affected – senior citizens, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, solo parents, migrant Filipino workers, indigenous peoples, homeless, farmers, fisherfolks, self-employed, informal settlers, and under no work-no pay arrangements (eg, drivers, househelp, construction workers, etc). However, the SAP has been riddled with controversies – corruption, inefficiencies in distribution, politicized implementation – all these causing more distress among the supposed beneficiaries, as they received very little to nothing³.

The common sentiment of the people from different sectors is “sa gutom kami mamatay, hindi sa COVID 19” (We will not die of COVID 19, but of hunger”).

1 <https://www.onenews.ph/phl-riskiest-for-covid-19-least-safe-country-in-asia-pacific-palace-says-total-lockdown-possible>

2 <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/189278/ph-now-2nd-in-southeast-asias-covid-19-count>

3 <https://www.onenews.ph/left-behind-over-300-000-families-yet-to-receive-cash-aid-as-gov-t-prepares-for-second-tranche>

As people recognize that the situation we are in is dire, very different and challenging, they are willing to do their share – to stay home. But the government has failed to do its part – that is to provide leadership in this medical crisis, to show compassion to those who are in difficult situations, and to be inclusive and encouraging for citizen’s participation in dealing with this crisis. The Duterte government opted to its character of governance – that of being militaristic and heavily centralized authority.

In March, Bayanihan Heal as One Act was signed into law (RA 11469), giving the President special powers and P275 billion to combat COVID-19. Despite this, the focus was on locking down the communities, with very little support for food, medical needs and daily sustenance; strengthening the presence of security forces; and penalizing violations of strict quarantine protocols – that is, for poor people found violating protocols. After several weeks of lockdown, and hunger, with no support from the government, there were different groups of people who took the risk of going out – a group of people from an urban poor community who demanded the government for support; a group of vegetable vendors and other peddlers; a group of senior citizen jeepney drivers who were asking for support – these people were arrested and filed cases against. Beginning March 17 until June 14, there have been 60,000 arrests made. Inhumane and humiliating treatment of some of those arrested by police and barangay officials (lowest government unit) were reported – young boys caged and left under the sun, people were made to sit for hours under the sun, and LGBTQIA+ people ordered to dance and kiss⁴.

With this high number of arrests, it does not include those officials who have brazenly violated quarantine protocols. One of the most controversial cases involves the Chief of Police, who had a surprise birthday party, despite the prohibition on mass gathering⁵. There are other cases of violations involving high officials and personalities which have been met with “compassion”, as the Department of Justice said.

The implementation of the COVID-19 quarantine protocols is harsh to the poor people and devoid of any care. People seen walking without masks have been arrested. There was also the killing of Winston Ragos, who was shot to death by 3 policemen in a checkpoint. They allege that he was violating quarantine protocols and was resisting arrest. For women, sexual harassment and rape did not take a backseat during the lockdown. In fact, this was taken advantage of by the police themselves. Prostituted women, desperate to go out and earn something, suffer sexual abuse in the hands of policemen. In exchange for quarantine pass, prostituted women are made to have sex with policemen to be able to get through checkpoints⁶.

Meanwhile, despite huge amount of money that has been donated to, and borrowed by the government for COVID-19 funds, there has been insufficient and ineffective medical response to the medical crisis.

The focus was on militarist response, putting generals and military men at the forefront, and

4 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/08/philippines-uses-humiliation-covid-curfew-punishment>

5 <https://www.rappler.com/nation/260854-sinas-after-apology-nothing-wrong-birthday-party-coronavirus-lockdown>

6 <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/260588-prostitutes-abused-by-cops-first-cross-coronavirus-border>

using the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to pursue its authoritarian agenda⁷. In his June 23rd nation address, Duterte said that the major threat against the country are communists and armed rebels, not COVID-19. The misplaced priorities of the government have generated discontent and criticisms among the public. But the cyber libel conviction of journalists Maria Ressa and Reynaldo Santos, Jr. and the shutdown of media network ABS-CBN have been huge blows to freedom of speech and press freedom. The conviction and the shutdown have had a paralyzing effect on journalists and on ordinary people expressing discontent with the government.

At this time, when the numbers of COVID-19 cases keep increasing, and the support for the impoverished citizens is still wanting, Pres. Duterte signed the Anti-Terror Law. Railroading the process, the bill was passed in Congress with very little debate, but with a broad opposition from the public. This “terror bill” has been widely opposed because of its untimeliness, but also because it poses a major threat to the basic human rights - especially those who are critical of the Duterte administration. With the terms “terrorists” and “terrorist acts” vaguely defined, and leaving the discretion of interpretation to special council of presidential-appointees, the bill will place the country under martial law without actually declaring it⁸.

In response to Duterte’s statements, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) vowed to intensify their anti-communist efforts⁹. Soldiers will be redeployed from areas where COVID-19 lockdown measures are being reduced, to remote areas where there is government-perceived “terrorist” threat. While ordinary citizens call for better government policies in response to COVID-19, the Duterte administration has chosen to allocate a significant amount of its resources to anti-insurgency campaigns. Such government response poses grave threats to human rights defenders who are carelessly red-tagged and persecuted by the Duterte administration.



7 <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/the-philippines-pandemic-response-a-tragedy-of-errors/>

8 <https://web.facebook.com/notes/task-force-detainees-of-the-philippines/groups-condemn-anti-terrorism-act-of-2020-calls-for-mass-resistance/3953539734688649/>

9 https://www.rappler.com/nation/264603-military-vows-more-offensives-duterte-insists-npa-top-terror-threat-philippines?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1592901844

INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND COVID-19

Three months into the quarantine, no confirmed cases of COVID-19 have yet to be reported in indigenous communities. This statistic does not conclude that the virus has not reached indigenous communities because no proper mass testing and contact tracing have been done by the government. Indigenous peoples are barely tested for COVID-19 as they struggle for access to government services even amidst a pandemic. Until now, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the oversight government agency for protecting indigenous peoples' rights, has yet to publish any report or assessment on the situation of indigenous peoples in the pandemic.

FOOD INSECURITY

What we know, and have data on, are among our indigenous women partners. Shortly after Metro Manila was put under lockdown, LILAK communicated with our indigenous women partners to ask how they were faring amidst the lockdowns. For many indigenous communities, the government's implementation of widespread lockdowns has caused food and income insecurity. Many who engaged in contractual labor such as labor work, construction work, and domestic service were forced to stop working either because their employers were afraid of virus transmission or because there were no more means of transportation. Those who were able to farm despite the challenges brought by the climate crisis and severe drought were also unable to sell their crops due to travel restrictions.

EXCLUSION

Despite government pronouncements about Social Amelioration Programs in response to COVID-19, a large number of indigenous families have yet to receive much needed aid. Those who did receive government support reported that the small amount of food and cash assistance were not enough to get them through the lockdown, let alone recover economically. Almost all indigenous women leaders we maintained constant communication with have reported not hearing and receiving help from NCIP.

Being in geographically isolated areas, health service is inaccessible. No proper information, or guidance as to how they can protect themselves from COVID-19, what the status of the country is in terms of COVID-19 cases, and other relevant updates. There is also no proper information on the programs meant to support them through this crisis. This lack of information is disempowering for the indigenous women and their communities.

HATID PROBINSYA (Return to Province Program)

Meanwhile, indigenous communities' vulnerability to COVID-19 seems to only be increasing due to the Hatid Probinsya Program. Since its implementation, there has been a total of 30,495 locally stranded individuals (LSIs) who have returned to their respective provinces¹⁰. This has seen the surge of cases of COVID-19 in those provinces as a significant number of the confirmed cases were those LSIs and overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) who returned to their residences.¹¹ Various local government officials and health workers have already been calling for the review of Hatid Probinsya Program, citing the need to test persons before departing from point of origin, and to ensure the capacity of local government units which will accept and assist the returning residents¹².

According to the report of one of our partners, many of those returning from the National Capital Region to the provinces are indigenous peoples. Based on their experience, the process of travelling home was treacherous. Airports were congested making physical distancing close to impossible. Moreover, upon arrival to their hometowns, they were made to stay in a small room with other people for the mandatory quarantine before being transported to their actual residences.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES - Commodification of Natural Resources

Following the NCIP's announcement last April 2020 of turning IP communities into food production sites¹³, the Commission signed a Joint Special Order (JSO) with the Department of Agriculture (DA) last June 15¹⁴. The JSO formally creates the DA-NCIP National Steering Committee and Technical Working Group on Agri-Fisheries and Agribusiness Development. The JSO also specifically provides for the implementation of the "New Thinking for Agriculture" - which was proposed in 2019 by Agriculture Secretary William Dar in response to President Rodrigo Duterte's vision for agriculture in the Philippines¹⁵. Through this proposed strategy, Sec. Dar said that the private sector will be encouraged to invest in agri-based industries. This is similar to the pronouncement of the president in 2018 that he will find investors who would want to set-up plantations in ancestral domains¹⁶. However, this is something that indigenous peoples have long been opposing.

10 <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2020/06jun/20200622-Report-to-the-Joint-Congressional-Oversight-Committee.pdf>

11 <https://www.rappler.com/nation/263858-spike-coronavirus-cases-northern-mindanao-lanao-del-sur-blamed-on-hatid-probinsya>

12 https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/6/18/Hatid-Probinsya-Program-Eastern-Visayas-COVID-19-cases.html?fbclid=IwAR3ZAxfpAtdsj8gOXhP_hatnzwlpMokHJBwiYdT0sMGhyJC40PJTPIJyhU4

13 <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1099454>

14 https://www.da.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/jso01_s2020.pdf

15 <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1077085>

16 <https://www.rappler.com/nation/195043-duterte-find-investors-ancestral-domains>

In May 2020, shortly after several provinces in the country transitioned into more-relaxed community quarantine protocols, the COVID-19 Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) declared the mining industry essential and therefore must reopen to save the economy.

In June, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) then issued its plans to launch the agency's Responsible Mining campaign as an initiative to spur economic recovery.

The responses of the government are clear threats to the ownership, control and management of the indigenous peoples, giving preference to corporate roles and corporate solution.

Meanwhile, groups who expressed their concerns against the opening of ancestral domains to the private sector and investors are being red-tagged or labeled as terrorists by the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) and the NCIP.¹⁷

Under President Duterte's administration, the Philippines has been considered the deadliest country for land and environmental activists by Global Witness¹⁸. Among the victims of state- and corporate-led violence and killings are indigenous peoples defending their ancestral domains. This, and the thousands of EJK cases, are the backdrop by which Duterte wishes to implement the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020. It does not come as a surprise that numerous civil society organizations and hundreds of concerned individuals took to the streets to protest against the passage of the bill. The Anti-Terrorism Act may as well be more dangerous than the threat of COVID-19. With its vague definition of terrorism and its provisions that effectively allows for further abuse of power, indigenous peoples are especially made more vulnerable and unsafe.

MINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Land-grabbing of mining companies has been a battle long fought by indigenous peoples. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the struggle of indigenous communities against destructive mining did not stop. Rather, the mining industry saw an opportunity to railroad operations while communities are devastated by the threat of the virus and rigid lockdown protocols.

On April 6, OceanaGold Philippines Inc. (OGPI) violently dispersed a people's barricade in the mining-affected community Brgy. Didipio in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya¹⁹. Three diesel tankers, escorted by a hundred members of the Philippine National Police (PNP), forcibly entered the barangay while law enforcements shoved the Tuwali indigenous peoples, handcuffed, and pinned them to the ground. Many of them were indigenous women. The people's barricades in Sitio Verona and Sitio Dinaoyan were built to stop OGPI from continuing its illegal operation after the company's Financial or Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA) that expired in June of 2019²⁰. Indigenous women suffered bruises from the encounter - A Tuwali woman leader had to treat her foot after it split open and bled from having been hit by a police shield.

17 <https://www.facebook.com/ntfelcac/photos/a.211966096908449/221710042600721/?type=3&theater>

18 <https://www.rappler.com/nation/236604-philippines-deadliest-country-environmental-activists-2018>

19 <https://www.facebook.com/katutubonglilak/videos/1130537407281763/>

20 <https://www.alyansatigilmina.net/single-post/2020/06/20/Cancel-FTAA-1-and-Stop-destructive-large-scale-mining-in-Nueva-Vizcaya>

In another part of the country, mining company Sagittarius Mines Incorporated (SMI)²¹ continues its drilling operations in Tampakan, South Cotabato. One of our indigenous women leaders reported that despite community quarantine protocols, not only does SMI continue operations, some of its employees were even reported to be gambling and drinking. The B'laan indigenous community attempted to build a blockade in May of this year to stop mining operations, but the barricade was shortly dismantled after threats of arrests for breaking quarantine protocols were made against the community.

While COVID-19 cases continue to rise without mass testing, the national government deepens its ties with profitable industries such as mining. In April 2020, the national government overrode a decision made by the LGU of Homonhon to allow a foreign ship to dock and load chromite and other mineral ores on the island²². The decision came after the LGU of Eastern Samar banned foreign vessels from docking to protect the province from COVID-19. DENR initially supported the ban but later allowed mining company Techiron Resources Inc. to continue its operations.

Armed forces also continue to threaten the lives of indigenous peoples. In Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, the Mangyan community has seen an increased presence of military and police since the lockdown. In June, an encounter between the New People's Army and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) broke off, according to one of our indigenous women partners. The community, mostly indigenous women, have since been afraid to go outside and tend to their rice fields.

21 <https://www.mindanews.com/special-reports/2020/01/smi-gears-up-to-mine-mammoth-tampakan-copper-gold-project1/>

22 <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/04/philippine-government-flips-local-officials-entry-ban-for-mining-ship/>

Indigenous women carry multiple burdens...

The pandemic has served to worsen indigenous women's already difficult situations. Indigenous women bear the brunt of ensuring the survival of their families and communities as in patriarchal structures they are expected to play the role of primary caregivers. The threat of COVID-19 and lack of access to basic social services in indigenous communities have placed the burden of food security, health, and wellbeing of their families all on their shoulders.

Indigenous women have expressed experiencing anxiety from the uncertainty in their family's health and survival. With all these insecurities, increasing daily needs, extreme weathers made worse by the climate crisis, and threats coming from land-grabbers, armed groups, and COVID-19 itself, the toll on women's bodies and mental health is high.

Indigenous women leaders have expressed worrying not only for their families but for the whole community, especially for fellow women. As leaders they are stepping up to fill in gaps in government responses - coordinating with various groups for support, going to precarious places just to find network signals, going out of their communities to purchase relief, repacking and distributing necessities to their communities. During this time of pandemic, they themselves are exposed and made more vulnerable to COVID-19.





BABAYENIHAN

COVID-19 has worsened food security among indigenous communities. When community quarantines were enacted in several parts of the country, indigenous peoples were forced to stay in their sitio or barangay with little food and resources. Many of them suffered from poor harvest because of the drought and recently from rainstorms as the dry season ended. Those unaffected were unable to sell their crops in the poblacion or in town because of quarantine protocols. Indigenous farmers, fisherfolks, and informal workers are among those who suffered from the abrupt and poorly-planned community quarantines. And since indigenous women in many indigenous communities possess the role of food-providers for their families, LILAK recognized the brunt COVID-19 has brought upon them.

To respond to the urgent needs of indigenous women, LILAK launched BABAYEnihan. A portmanteau of *babaye*, the Bisaya word for women, and *bayanihan* which means solidarity, BABAYEnihan: Women-to-Women Solidarity is a relief operation and fundraising drive to provide the most urgent needs of indigenous women. Using our social media platforms, we posted requests for financial support and expression of solidarity from the public. The money we received from donations and from funders we sent directly to our indigenous women partners. Our partners then used the money to buy, repack, and distribute food packs and hygiene kits (e.g. rice, canned goods, and/or hygiene products such as bath soap, laundry soap and sanitary napkins).

As of June 2020, LILAK has supported 38 indigenous communities and over 2000 indigenous women and families.

LUZON

1. AETA - Brgy. Villar, Botolan, Zambales
2. AETA ABELEN - Brgy. Maporac, Cabangan, Zambales
3. ALANGAN MANGYAN - Brgy. Balite, Naujan, Oriental Mindoro
4. DUMAGAT - Sitio Udlan, Brgy. Marcelino, General Nakar, Quezon
5. HANUNUO MANGYAN - Brgy. San Roque, Bulalacao, Oriental Mindoro
6. KALANGUYA - Sto. Tomas, Benguet

7. ILONGOT - Brgy. Bayanihan, Maria Aurora, Aurora
8. TUWALI - Brgy. Didipio, Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya

VISAYAS

9. ATA BUKIDNON - Don Salvador Benedicto, Negros Occidental
10. ATI - Brgy. Dao, Tobias Fornier, Antique
11. IRAYNON BUKIDNON - Brgy. Lublub, Valderrama, Antique

MINDANAO

12. AGUSANON MANOBO - San Toribio, Esperanza, Agusan del Sur
13. B'LAAN - Brgy. Samlang, Malungon, Saranggani
14. B'LAAN - Sitio Datal Mangisi, Brgy. Tablu, Tampakan, South Cotabato
15. ERUMANEN MENUVU - Brgy. Barongis, Libungan, North Cotabato
16. HIGAONON BUKIDNON - Brgy. Maluko, Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon
17. HIGAONON - Brgy. Bayanga, Cagayan de Oro, Misamis Oriental
18. HIGAONON - Brgy. Tablon, Cagayan de Oro City
19. ILANTUNGÉN MANUVU - Purok 5 Poblacion, Adtuyon, Pangantucan, Bukidnon
20. KALUMANEN MENUVU - Arakan, North Cotabato
21. KIRINTEKEN ERUMANEN MENUVU – Brgy. Taguranao, Matalam, North Cotabato
22. LAMBANGIAN - South Upi, Maguindanao BARMM
23. MAMANWA - Purok 1, Brgy. Pangaylan, Santiago, Agusan del Norte
24. MANOBO - Brgy. Mabahin, Cortes, Agusan del Sur
25. MANOBO - San Luis, Agusan del Sur
26. MANOBO - Kapalong, Davao del Norte
27. MANOBO - Tandag, Agusan del Norte
28. MANUVU and MATIGSALOG - Purok 18, San Jose, Quezon, Bukidnon
29. SUBANEN - Midsalip, Zamboanga del Sur
30. SUBANEN - Poblacion, Lakewood, Zamboanga del Sur
31. SUBANEN - Labuan, Zamboanga City
32. T'BOLI - Sitio Datal Bonlangon, Brgy. Ned, Lake Sebu, South Cotabato
33. T'BOLI - Sitio Tulale, Brgy. Sto Niño, Bagumbayan, Sultan Kudarat
34. TEDURAY - Lebak, Sultan Kudarat
35. TEDURAY - Nuro, Upi, Maguindanao, BARMM
36. TEDURAY - South Upi, Maguindanao, BARMM
37. TEDURAY - Brgy. Saniag, Ampatuan, Maguindanao
38. TEDURAY-LAMBANGIAN - Brgy. Kuya, South Upi, Maguindanao, BARMM



Although the pandemic has limited the capacities of LILAK as an organization, it has led us to refocus our efforts on connecting and communicating with our indigenous women leaders. Together with BABAYEnihan, we launched Kwentong (story) BABAYEnihan and Kwentong IP Lockdown in our social media platforms. From our communications with our partners via text and call, we were able to collect, write, and share stories from their communities [To read the stories, search for the hashtags #KwentongBABAYEnihan and #KwentongIPLockdown on Facebook].

MASS TEXTING

When the island of Luzon was placed under community quarantine in March, indigenous peoples were only told to stay in their homes and were told very little about the coronavirus that has become a pandemic. Many indigenous peoples in the Philippines reside in hinterlands and in far-flung areas; many have no access to television, radio, and the Internet. A lot of indigenous communities also have very poor mobile phone signals. When it comes to information, many indigenous peoples rely on *sabi-sabi*, information passed through word-of-mouth.

The lack of verified information and reliable sources led to LILAK's Mass Texting, an information drive, the name of which was derived from the nationwide campaign on free mass testing. Mass Texting started by sending COVID-19 information - what it is, what its symptoms are, how it is transmitted - to indigenous women leaders. Information is translated into short text messages and is written in Tagalog, Bisaya, and Subanen (translated by one of our indigenous women partners). We then send the text messages to our focal persons, who then send them to at least 10 members of their communities. Our focal persons receive a monthly load allowance.

For communities that have very poor signal, or where many indigenous women have no mobile phones, the focal persons would gather other indigenous women to relay and discuss with them the text messages. In other areas, the focal persons write down the text messages on scratch papers, back of old calendars, and circulate them within the community. Our B'laan partners write the text messages on a piece of paper which they then post in a place in their sitio or barangay where members of their communities can see and read them.

As of June 2020, LILAK has partnered with 17 indigenous women leaders for Mass Texting. We estimate not less than 200 receivers of the information we send. Since April, we have sent over 50 messages, and have expanded the topics we cover from COVID-19 to information on the Social Amelioration Program (SAP), Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, and opening of classes in August, to name a few. These topics were taken from the feedback survey we conducted after hitting our 30th text message mark. Aside from these subjects, the survey also revealed that topics such as the weather, COVID-19 situation in other countries, and mining in the Philippines are of interest to them. They have also expressed wanting to learn more about their rights as women and as indigenous people.

In mid-June we conducted a *kumustahan* (*kumusta* – how are you?) with our focal partners by connecting them in a conference call. The focal persons appreciated the *kumustahan* as it allowed them to report on the situations in their communities and likewise hear from other indigenous communities as well. Although they expressed preferring a face-to-face conversation, they agreed that the conference call was the only viable option given the pandemic.

Both the feedback survey and the conference call provided LILAK with rich information on the ground. This turned Mass Texting into a two-way method of communication.

LILAK recognizes that with the active partnership with the indigenous women leaders,

BABAYEnihan has accomplished quite a lot, given LILAK's limited capacities. However, we recognize the challenges and the improvements that we need to work on. Although text messaging was chosen as a medium, mobile signal remains poor in many indigenous communities. Many indigenous people also do not have cellular phones and rely mostly on traditional methods of communication.

The threat of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 and the crackdown on activists and dissenters by the Duterte government poses a grave threat to Mass Texting. With the conviction of journalists Maria Ressa and Reynaldo Santos Jr., and the cases made against ordinary citizens posting criticisms of Duterte online, we fear the worst for us and for our indigenous women leaders. Red-tagging has intensified since Duterte came to power, and it has become even more dangerous with the COVID-19 pandemic.





Indigenous Women are First Responders...

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many things – the bankruptcy of the Duterte government, the ill state of our health care system, the growing inequality in our society, the unsustainable food policy of the government, among other ugly things. But this crisis has also highlighted something positive – the leadership of indigenous women during times of crisis, marked by compassion and determination; as well as the deep solidarity among indigenous women, and the broader communities of women. BABAYEnihan has shown indigenous women stepping up, while hungry, and worried; They have exhibited courage as they went out despite lockdowns, to purchase food and negotiate their way through military and police checkpoints to reach other indigenous women. As leaders, they not only carry the burdens of uncertainty and anxiety over tomorrow's food for their own families, but of the entire community. Still, they reach out to bring comfort to others, as they seek out other indigenous women leaders for their own needs for comfort.

The fundraising for BABAYEnihan is challenging, but very promising. While there are institutional donations, we are also accepting individual donations from the public. We would receive P100 pesos (USD2) or even P50 (USD1) from individuals we do not know. This for LILAK, raises hope for broader solidarity, and sisterhood among women from different communities, and different identities.

These are what the indigenous women, their families and communities need today, and in the coming days under the authoritarian regime that we are in now – solidarity and sisterhood. COVID-19 crisis and Duterte dictatorship are major threats in our lives, but more so for the indigenous communities. With indigenous women leadership, LILAK commits to be an active part of the collective struggle for building a better tomorrow.

Our ways forward...

To continue BABAYEnihan relief operations, LILAK plans to raise more funds through partnerships. We plan to partner with artists and with ‘influencers’ or personalities whose advocacies align with ours. We will also continue to use our social media platforms to promote BABAYEnihan by sharing stories of indigenous women leadership and sense of community. Just recently, through our social media, LILAK was chosen as one of the beneficiaries of brands Lily and House of Laurel, which allocated a percentage of their sales to our relief efforts.

As COVID-19 worsens in the country and in other parts of the world, accurate information will remain a crucial tool for indigenous women to navigate the health crisis. We will continue our efforts to bring information to them by our Mass Texting. However, we will increase our efforts to shift it into a two-way communication system. In the last month, LILAK has sent feedback questions so that we can improve our ways of sending information. We have also launched our kumustahan call which we hope to do on a monthly basis. Reports have shown that gender-based violence has increased during this time of lockdown. As part of the kumustahan, LILAK will also monitor through our TK3 program or Tanggol Karapatan ng Katutubong Kababaihan (Indigenous Women Human Rights Defenders) cases of gender-based violence that are happening now within their communities. This would inform LILAK as to the next steps of response as part of BABAYEnihan.

Even as the government relaxes quarantine protocols, LILAK has suspended all travel among staff members and among partners for the rest of the year. Maintaining communication with our indigenous women partners and finding alternative methods to continue our programs and advocacies with them are important. More so, with continuous operations of mining and power plants and escalating land-grabbing of ancestral domains, coupled with increasing presence of armed groups, improving our indigenous women partners’ capacities to send out information from the ground is one of our priorities. Right now, LILAK is working on a training module that will introduce online communication platforms to our partners and to their communities. Through our other programs, LILAK will also provide communication packages to our partners, which will include a mobile phone among other necessary devices.

The pandemic is projected to last beyond the year. Even if it eases up, experts believe it will leave lasting impacts on the world. As we continue to provide relief packages for indigenous women, we are in the midst of planning for a recovery program that will capacitate them to not only survive but live meaningfully and in with dignity in the ‘new normal’.

Through sustained efforts and partnerships, we in LILAK hope to rally more support and solidarity for indigenous women as they continue to provide for their families and communities, and navigate this crisis as they continue to defend rights to their lands, to their life.

LILAK WOULD LIKE TO THANK

Thousand Currents

Global Greengrants Fund (GGF)

Swift Foundation

International Union for Conservation of
Nature - Shared Resources-Joint Solutions
(IUCN-SRJS)

Women in Emergencies Network (WENet)

Women's Fund Asia (WFA)

AYNI Indigenous Women Fund

Focus on the Global South

NTFP - EP Philippines

Ateneo Law - IP Rights Class 2019-2020

Asian Music for People's Peace and Progress
(AMP3)

Lily Jewelries

Rajo Laurel and House of Laurel

Deniece del Rio

Cassandra Lynn Dizon

and everyone who has supported
BABAYEnihan

We feel your love!

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BPI

Account Name: LILAK/PURPLE ACTION FOR
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Account No.: 1993 2179 28

GCASH

Account No.: 0945 110 6278

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