

# INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM: ASSESSMENT WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATORS OF THE WAKYWAI NETWORK IN RORAIMA





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# 1. LIST OF ACRONYMS

## **IHA**

Indigenous Health Agents

## **AIPB**

Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil

## **RSSITCC**

Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous Training and Culture Center

## **ICR**

Indigenous Council of Roraima

## **MIC**

Missionary Indigenous Council

## **CIOBA**

Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon

## **DIE**

Diagnosis of the Information Ecosystem

## **SIHDs**

Special Indigenous Health Districts

## **Funai**

National Indian Foundation

## **UNICEF**

United Nations Children's Fund

## **GPSIT**

Group for the Protection and Surveillance of Indigenous Territories



## **BIGS**

Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics

## **Imazon**

Institute of Man and Environment of the Amazon

## **IIEB**

International Institute of Education of Brazil

## **SEI**

Socioenvironmental Institute

## **WHO**

World Health Organization

## **IOM**

International Organization for Migration

## **NAO**

Native Amazon Operation

## **ONGs**

Non-Governmental Organizations

## **SSIH**

Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health

## **IL**

Indigenous Lands



## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The state of Roraima is the least populous state in Brazil and is home to the highest concentration of indigenous people; 11% of the total population identifies as indigenous. According to estimates by the IBGE and the Socio-environmental Institute (SEI), a total of 605,000 inhabitants live in the 224,000 km<sup>2</sup> that make up the state, with more than half of them residing in the capital, Boa Vista<sup>1</sup>. Of this total, there are an estimated 56,000 self-identified indigenous people, 83.2% of whom live in areas of demarcated Indigenous Land.

In territorial terms, the state encompasses 33 indigenous Lands (ILs) recognized under Brazilian law, one of which has not yet been demarcated. These represent 46.20% of the state's territory, and are home to at least 11 indigenous peoples, according to official records from the National Indian Foundation (Funai). Despite the territorial dimension and ethnic diversity of the state of Roraima, indigenous peoples of the region face several challenges that jeopardize their rights. These range from constant incursions of their territories by landowners, to illegal extraction of minerals and wood to the pressure exerted by local and national political leaders for the approval of a series of laws to regularize these violations. One such proposed bill, “Marco Temporal”, suggests the revision of the current policy of recognition and demarcation of indigenous territories.

In terms of journalistic coverage, Roraima is one of the states with the highest rate of news deserts in the country, i.e., regions with no local and/or independent press. This means that few local journalistic vehicles cover the reality of indigenous communities, most of which reproduce national and international news. In addition, the relationship between indigenous peoples of the region and the mainstream media is tense and fraught with conflict, mainly because most traditional media outlets in the region are owned by politicians and their families whose interests run counter to indigenous rights. This prevents indigenous people from relying on major local newspapers as sources of information.

This so-called anti-indigenous agenda, fueled by the state press, is the reason why indigenous leaders in Roraima believe that mainstream media does not adequately represent the reality of their communities.

In this context, the indigenous peoples of Roraima have organized their own strategies to guarantee the defense of their rights and territories. In terms of communication, the creation of the Communication Department of the Indigenous Council of Roraima (ICR), the largest indigenous organization operating in the state since the 1970s, stands out. The collective of indigenous communicators linked to the ICR, called the Wakywai Network (“Our News”, in the indigenous Wapishana language) is another communication initiative focused on indigenous communities. Created in 2019, the Wakywai Network has already trained around 30 indigenous communicators working in different indigenous territories with the aim of meeting the demands of the Indigenous Movement for communication and dissemination of its own activities. This was particularly important during the pandemic period, when ILs were in isolation.

Indigenous leaders, represented mainly by the Tuxauas (the main indigenous political leadership) and their community and collective associations, such as the Indigenous Council of Roraima (ICR)<sup>2</sup>, are the most trusted sources of information for the indigenous people of Roraima. The ICR has focused on communication through social media networks, as these are very prevalent among the indigenous population of Roraima, despite the difficulties in access to the internet that impact a large part of this population. Other indigenous organizations, such as CIOBA, were identified as reliable sources and partners for the indigenous people of Roraima.

Government institutions, such as Funai and the Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health (SSIH), were identified as unreliable sources of information. The indigenous people interviewed by Internews said the data released by public institutions on the COVID-19 pandemic did not correspond



<sup>1</sup> The last census conducted was in 2010 and the estimate refers to the year 2019. Available on <<https://www.ibge.gov.br/cidades-e-estados.html?view=municipio>> and <<https://indigenas.ibge.gov.br/estudos-especiais-3/o-brasil-indigena/download>>, and also on <[https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Localizacao\\_e\\_extensao\\_das\\_TIs](https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Localizacao_e_extensao_das_TIs)>.

<sup>2</sup> The CIR does not only act directly with the Yanomami, who have their own association called Hutukara, although it always maintains dialogue with the Yekuana and Yanomami ethnic groups.



## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



FOTO: JACYR SOUZA

to their lived reality and said that these institutions are not in dialogue with indigenous communities, especially given the various public statements made by their leaders during President Jair Bolsonaro's administration (2019 – 2022). This has the potential to affect the relationship of communities and the Indigenous Health Agents (IHA), who are normally

members of the communities in which they work, but are affiliated to the SSIH, an agency linked to the Ministry of Health.

The information collected for this study was done in partnership with indigenous communicators from Roraima

who were responsible for conducting interviews with key interlocutors in their communities, and supported the development of the questionnaires used in the interviews. Indigenous communicators also participated in focus groups to express their points of view on the dynamics of information circulation among indigenous communities in the state.



## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 2.1 KEY FINDINGS

**1.** Indigenous peoples greatly value their local social relationships, which are established and maintained face-to-face, and the most common form of communication is word of mouth. Community leaders often organize conversation circles and meetings to discuss relevant issues. In addition, General Assemblies are organized annually by the ICR and are considered one of the most important political events for providing communication between different ethnic groups.

**2.** Indigenous leaders, represented by the Tuxauas and their associations, mainly the ICR, are the most trusted sources of information for indigenous people of Roraima.

**3.** Indigenous people have developed their own communication strategies, which involve radio programs, local newspapers, WhatsApp groups, and communication groups such as the Wakywai Network, made up of young indigenous communicators.

**4.** In the face of incursions on indigenous lands in Roraima, state communicators, especially indigenous communicators linked to the ICR, act not only as transmitters of information but also as channels of denunciation.

**5.** Most indigenous communities in Roraima have difficulty accessing the internet. Despite this, many people still use social media networks, especially WhatsApp.

**6.** Indigenous government institutions, such as Funai and SSIH, are not seen as reliable sources of information. The information they disseminated during the pandemic was not in line with recommendations agreed upon by international health organizations, nor was it contextualized to the realities of different indigenous communities.



**7.** The pandemic has had many consequences on communities, including deaths, social distancing and isolation, unemployment, and economic hardship. All this has resulted in an increased demand for mental health support services.

**8.** Trust in ancestral empirical knowledge of traditional medicine was emphasised given the information overload about the COVID-19 pandemic and uncertainty about the validity of information on contamination, symptoms, and treatment.

### 2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Recommendations for the humanitarian sector:

**1.** Support trusted community actors in networked organizations and collectives specifically focused on communication and information. This should be done through 1) events and workshops on communication and community engagement; 2) linkages between communities and media actors 3) training and capacity building for communities; and 4) allocation of resources, funding, and grants that can instrumentalize and qualify community communication.

**2.** Train journalists and academics from the Social Communication field on indigenous issues, creating a convergence between indigenous and non-indigenous communicators and journalists regarding the reality of the indigenous challenges. Adequate training and engagement of these actors on the realities of local traditional communities has the potential to establish a relationship between indigenous peoples and communication professionals, creating space for partnership actions that develop more sensitive communication faithful to indigenous issues and demands, and give visibility to indigenous agendas.

**3.** Articulate strategies to challenge incursions on indigenous territories, including providing support to communicators involved in the coverage and reporting of these cases.

**4.** Support the provision of basic health services, in dialogue with the realities and contexts of communities and with respect for traditional medicine. This will support communities in future health crises.



## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

5. Prioritize the mental health support, as requested by the communities, ensuring contextualized care that considers the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of these communities.

6. Assist with local, regional, and national meetings between indigenous and indigenist communicators to share experiences and knowledge. Such meetings are still not organized in a coordinated manner. These meetings can contribute to the definition of strategies and joint action between indigenous communicators across the country.

7. Strengthen the network of indigenous communicators as the one linked to the Indigenous Council of Roraima (Wakywai Network), ensuring its sustainability and the development of the communicators involved.

### Recommendations for the media, journalists and communicators:

1. Co-produce journalistic and informative pieces involving the press and networks of local community leaders to re-establish trust between citizens and communicators. Proposals for journalistic or informative productions (communicative projects, articles, reports, etc.) that are participatory, that value the socio-cultural reality of communities, and promote community engagement and the dissemination of safe, up-to-date and reliable information will be well received.

2. Encourage the sharing and creation of news targeted at communication channels that are more widely used and accessible in remote indigenous communities,

such as WhatsApp and community radios. The use of these communication channels should promote access to reliable and secure information, and ensure that information reaches the most remote indigenous communities or those without full access to information transmission technologies.

3. Develop communication strategies that go beyond text, video, and audio formats and include face-to-face approaches to dialogue with communities, such as listening groups, meetings and home visits. Given that face-to-face and “word of mouth” is seen as one of the most recurrent and reliable ways of establishing communication, strategies and approaches that favor this format will be well received by communities.





# 3. ROOTED IN TRUST

The Rooted in Trust project was developed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its aim is to strengthen information ecosystems through actions that promote community engagement and listening in the areas of information, rumor circulation, COVID-19, and vaccination. In Brazil, Rooted in Trust 2.0 has worked with indigenous and quilombola communities in the states of Amapá, Pará, and Roraima since February 2022. The Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) is the first step in understanding an community's information ecosystem. This assessment was developed in partnership with the International Institute of Education of Brazil (IIEB) and involved indigenous communities from eight ethnic regions

in Roraima.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of the IEA is to understand the relationship between indigenous communities and the information circulating in these states about COVID-19. It investigates different sources of information and means of communication available locally to understand how communities receive, consume, demand, and share information about the COVID-19 pandemic. The IEA also provides a brief contextualization of indigenous communities in Brazil and the state of Roraima, along with the vulnerabilities and specificities around traditional peoples' rights.

Based on knowledge of indigenous communities' information ecosystems, the Rooted in Trust project identifies information needs and challenges. This knowledge aims to help strengthen communication between indigenous communities in the Brazilian Amazon and other actors, such as humanitarian organizations, media actors, and health professionals, especially in a context increasingly marked by misinformation and difficulty accessing news and information.

## 3.1 METHODOLOGY

The IEA takes a people-centered approach, working with trusted local partners to co-create and develop the assessment. The IEA was developed collaboratively, with the active participation of the communities at all stages of the assessment cycle. Recognizing that quantitative approaches that do not involve Indigenous communities have a history of mistrust, Internews prioritized qualitative data collection.

To understand the media in northern Brazil and Roraima, the communication challenges faced by the indigenous communities involved in the IEA, reliable sources of information, and the ways in which information is received, shared and disseminated, this assessment also conducted a bibliographic review of reports on indigenous issue in the region. This was complemented by remote and face-to-face interviews with key interlocutors, such as the IIEB team, journalists from the Roraima press, and indigenous people from the ICR Communication Department.

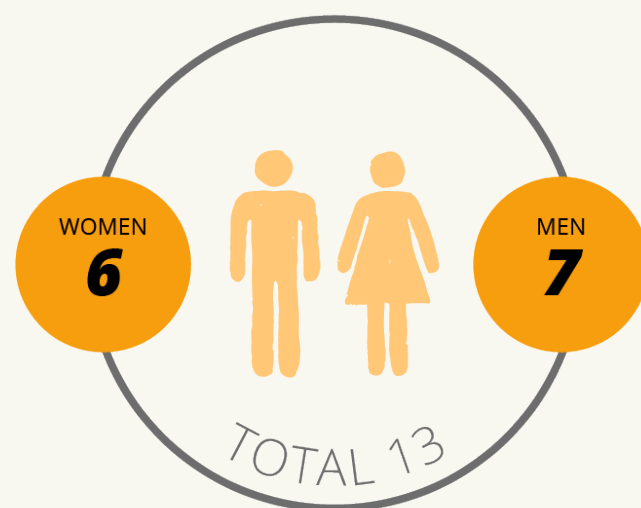
<sup>3</sup> The ethnoregions included were: Raposa, Tabaió, Surumu, Serra da Lua, Amajari, Murupu, Baixo Cotingo, and Serras. Some indigenous people identified as coming from the Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous Training and Culture Center (CICRSS), which is not an ethnoregion.





### 3. ROOTED IN TRUST

#### COMPOSITION OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS



#### RORAIMA (RR)

##### PACARAIMA

ETHNOREGION SURUMU,  
COMMUNITY BARRO  
COMMUNITY RESIDENT AND TEACHER

ETHNOREGION SURUMU,  
COMMUNITY TACHI  
COMMUNITY RESIDENTS

##### NORMANDIA

ETHNOREGION RAPOSA,  
COMMUNITY JAUARI  
COMMUNITY RESIDENT, TUXAUA AND  
INDIGENOUS HEALTH AGENT

##### BOA VISTA

ETHNOREGION MURUPU,  
COMMUNITY SERRA DA MOÇA  
INDIGENOUS HEALTH AGENT

##### BONFIM

ETHNOREGION SERRA DA LUA,  
COMMUNITY CACHOEIRINHA DO SAPO  
COMMUNITY RESIDENTS

##### NOT INFORMED

ETHNOREGION SERRA DA LUA,  
COMMUNITY SÃO DOMINGOS  
COORDINATOR OF GPSIT

##### UIRAMUTAM

ETHNOREGION SERRA DA LUA,  
COMMUNITY JURUMUTÃ  
TUXAUA

##### NOT INFORMED

ETHNOREGION NOT INFORMED,  
COMMUNITY JURUMUTÃ  
BARATA

Thirteen face-to-face interviews were conducted with community members, leaders and representatives, Indigenous Health Agents (IHAs) and teachers by eight young indigenous communicators who were trained during a workshop on interview methods with key interlocutors, and who participated in the co-construction of the interview questionnaires. A total of 27 young indigenous communicators were trained. The interviews were conducted between August 31 and September 26, 2022, and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

In addition to the interviews, three focus groups (audio-recorded and transcribed) were held. The groups were divided by the ethno-regions of the 27 indigenous communicators and conducted in person on 26 July 2022 by the Rooted in Trust team and with support from the IIEB team. The division into ethno-regions was done following IIEB's recommendation.

After transcription, all interviews and focus groups were analyzed by the Rooted in Trust researcher. Preliminary findings were shared with IIEB and indigenous communicators for validation and feedback, and then incorporated into the final version.

### 3.2 LIMITATIONS

As this study is based on qualitative data, the findings of this report are indicative and should not be considered representative.

Limitations in the literature review included lack of up-to-date data on indigenous communities in Roraima, especially due to the delay of the Brazilian Census, which was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report used data from the Atlas da Notícia and official government data for the media analysis and to determine the number of information sources available in Brazil (TV and radio). The data between the two do not match, in part because the Atlas da Notícia is a platform still under construction, so some information was not complete at the time of writing. The federal government's databases are not centralized or systematically updated, which means they likely include TV and radio stations that may be inactive.

#### Limitations on primary data collection include:

- Sample size and distribution. Due to limitations such as lack of equipment and internet access, only eight indigenous communicators among the training participants conducted interviews in their communities. As a result, only some of the project's ethno-regions were included in the interviews, and some key community participants (leaders, health agents, teachers, etc.) were left out, making it difficult to compare data across communities.
- Lack of experience on the part of the data collectors. Primary data collection was successfully carried out by young indigenous communicators involved in the Wakywai Encounters event, who received training to conduct interviews with key interlocutors. However, as this training is still in progress and will require more workshops. Many interviews could have benefited from more in-depth questioning.

Despite these limitations, the data collected provides valuable insight and was based on the participation of the communities in almost all stages. Although the data cannot be used to create comparisons between communities, it can be used to provide an overview of the situation in indigenous communities in Roraima.



## 4. BRIEF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES OF RORAIMA

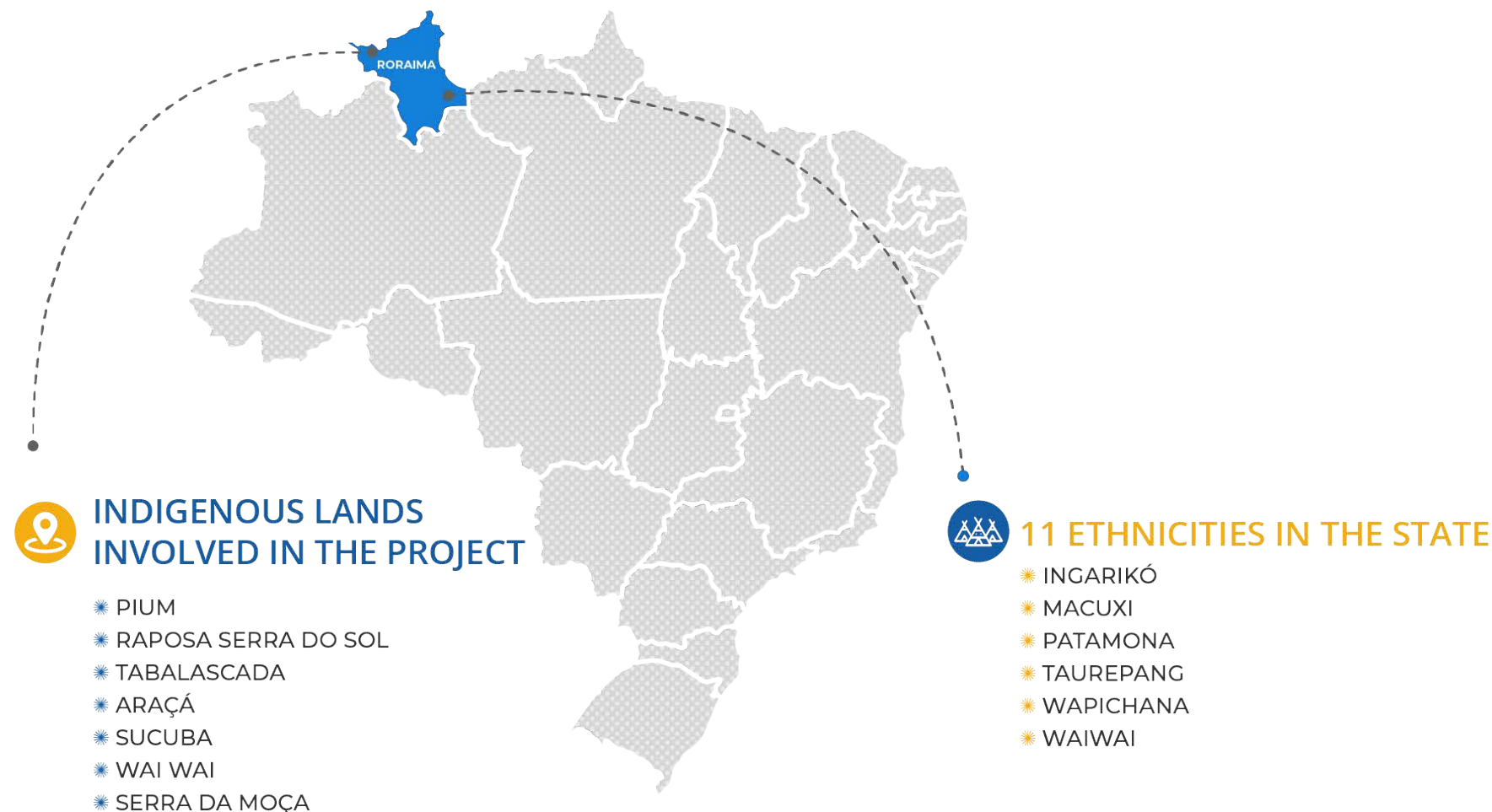
**T**he state of Roraima has 33 Indigenous Lands and about 11 indigenous peoples. Most of these peoples (Ingarijó, Macuxi, Patamona, Sapará, Taurepang, Waiwai and Wapichana) are represented by the Indigenous Council of Roraima (ICR). The ICR is an indigenous organization that was formalized as a non-profit association in 1990. Since its origins in the 1970s, the ICR has been directly involved in various actions and struggles of the Indigenous Movement in the state, such as the articulate campaigns in defense of the demarcation and homologation of the Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous Land, and for the implementation of projects that guarantee the self-sufficiency of the communities. In addition, the ICR provides legal, environmental, educational and socioeconomic services to the communities.

The ICR develops its activities in Roraima through regional councils, organizing its base of action in ten ethnoregions: Serras, Surumu, Baixo Cotingo, Raposa, Amajari, Wai Wai, Tabaio, Serra da Lua, Murupu and Alto Cauamé. “Ethnoregion” is a political, geographic and territorial category, used to delimit a specific area through various criteria, such as geographical proximity and the relationships between indigenous inhabitants. It is important to point out that this is a specific definition used by the ICR, and other indigenous peoples in the region, such as the Yanomami, use different classifications. “Ethnoregions group communities that are geographically close”, and through them “the indigenous people themselves define their limits and the way they manage these areas” (Garzoni; Bethonico, 2019, p. 177).

<sup>4</sup>This number should only be considered only for indicative purposes. Official records do not include the possibility of the existence of other indigenous peoples in the region and are not considered the only demographic and cultural database of indigenous populations in Brazil. Given the territorial and cultural vastness of the country, and the fact that some peoples have managed to remain in voluntary isolation from non-indigenous people, it

is possible to state that the Brazilian State has not yet identified all the original peoples in its territory. Anthropological literature published on the region registers the Ingarijó, Macuxi, Patamona, Sapará, Taurepang, Wai Wai, Waimiri-Atroari, Wapichana, Yanomami, Ye’kuana and Pirititi peoples, but with variations on the Arekuna and Kamarakoto, for example, due to their occupation in the Venezuelan region, which borders Roraima. The

definition of these borders has never taken into account the political and social organization of the indigenous peoples who have inhabited these regions for centuries, such that quantitative and geographic data based on elements external to the indigenous peoples in question must be considered only as estimates with the aim of providing an overview for non-indigenous people.





# Glossário

### PEOPLES OR ETHNICITIES

Terms used to distinguish different indigenous peoples from each other and from non-indigenous peoples. The same ethnic group can be present in several communities and Indigenous Lands. Ethnicities are self-defined and share the same language, stories, rituals, and other cultural aspects that create a sense of unity in relation to other groups.

### COMMUNITIES, VILLAGES, OR LOCALITIES

These terms usually refer to the geographic and cultural grouping of people who live together. Their geographic location may or may not be permanent, or may change over time (months or years).

### INDIGENOUS LANDS (IL)

Land occupied by indigenous peoples and legally recognized by the Brazilian State. An IL can contain many communities, villages or localities, and several peoples and ethnic groups.

### TUXAUA

“Tuxaua” is the indigenous term used to designate the main indigenous political leaders among the peoples of Roraima, with generally one Tuxaua for each of the different communities. Although each of the indigenous peoples has its own political organization, it can be said that, in general, the Tuxauas are elected by their communities. Among indigenous peoples of other regions of Brazil, this political figure of leadership will vary in nomenclature and definition.



### DEMARCATION OF ILSS

The demarcation and homologation of ILs is the formal recognition by the Brazilian state of the presence and occupation of indigenous peoples in each area (Terras Indígenas, 2022). It is a long process and often marked by conflict. But, once the demarcation is done, it guarantees legal security for the indigenous peoples. Currently, 32 ILs have been demarcated and approved in the state of Roraima. IL Pirititi has already started its demarcation process, but still has many phases to complete.



# THREATS TO THE TERRITORY

### TIME FRAME

The legal thesis of the “Temporary Milestone” was defended in 2009 by a Minister of the Federal Supreme Court (MFSC) at the time, during the trial of the demarcation of the Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous Land in Roraima. He argued that the territorial rights of traditional peoples provided for in the Constitution should be interpreted differently, taking into account only the claims to lands that were occupied by indigenous people after the date of enactment of the 1988 Constitution, thus ignoring the historic expulsion of the indigenous peoples of their lands and current processes of violence to which they are still subjected. For this reason, this thesis has been heavily criticized by indigenous movements and humanrights organizations (AIPB, 2022). Indigenous peoples also emphasize that, as native peoples of Brazil, they have the right to demarcate their territories as a guarantee of their

ways of being and living. The Marco Temporal thesis is not in force in Brazil and is still being judged by the STF.

### ILLEGAL MINING

Illegal mining in ILs is one of the most serious threats to these territories. In Roraima, the advance of mining coincides with reduction in quality of life (IPS, 2021) and an increase in regional crime (IPEA, 2021). Mainly in the Yanomami IL, illegal mining has resulted in increased deforestation and mercury contamination of watersheds, increased cases of malaria and other diseases, and an increase in crime and violence against indigenous peoples (ISA, 2022a).

### DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The so-called “Linhão de Tucuruí” refers to the construction plan for an electric power transmission line, which would pass through several cities and states in the North. This project has been the subject of conflict because it passes through several protected areas, such as Conservation Units and, in the case of Roraima, the Waimiri Atroari Indigenous Land (Mapa de Conflitos, 2019).



# 5. COVID-19 AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF RORAIMA

Since the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in Brazil, in March 2020, indigenous communities in Roraima have been looking for ways to protect their relatives and their territories. “The most important issue for me is to prevent family members and people in the community where I live [from getting sick]. We are seeking more information about this disease to better understand what we can do to protect ourselves” (Interview with an indigenous woman from the Cachoeirinha do Sapo community, Serra da Lua ethnoregion, Bonfim/RR, on 09/24/2022).

To limit the movement of people and prevent the spread of the disease, the communities themselves closed their territories; in March 2020, 12 indigenous communities in Roraima had closed access and movement of people. The maintenance of these barriers was ensured by a Group for the Protection and Surveillance of Indigenous Territories (GPSIT), organized by Tuxauas and other leaders.

The closure of communities was communicated to government agencies that work directly with indigenous people, such as Funai and the SSIH. Communities eventually reopened, in part because of the need for indigenous people to travel to cities to access resources and services. With the availability of emergency aid, some indigenous people moved to cities, exposing themselves to the virus and bringing it back to their communities (Barbosa, 2020).

The first case of COVID-19 among the indigenous peoples of Roraima was registered on 7 April 2020 (Correia, 2020). A 15-year-old Yanomami boy was the first to test positive and died a few days later (Hamdan, et al, 2020). Since then, several

<sup>5</sup> Among indigenous peoples in Brazil, it is common to use the expression “relative” to refer to another indigenous person, without necessarily existing a kinship relationship by consanguinity or affinity.

<sup>6</sup> Not many reports of closures of indigenous communities were found in other regions of Brazil. The only other case identified was among the indigenous people of the Kuikuro ethnic group, in Alto Xingu, in the state of Pará (Uchoa, 2021).

indigenous leaders in Roraima have died from the disease, such as Fausto Mandulão, a pioneering teacher of indigenous education in the state (Costa, 2020), and important leaders in the demarcation process of the Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous Land, including Dionito, Bernaldina José Pedro, Alvino Andrade da Silva, and Luciano Peres (Souza, 2020). At the time of this publication, 4,222 indigenous people have contracted COVID-19, and 98 have died (data from SIHD East of Roraima). This data does not include the Yanomami.

When vaccination against COVID-19 began in the state on 19 January 2021, the first person vaccinated was an indigenous

woman of the Macuxi ethnic group (Fernandes, et al, 2021). Indigenous people were included as a priority group in vaccination across the country. Since then, 36,714 indigenous people of different ethnicities have received the first vaccine, and 30,770 have received their second dose or a single dose vaccine (data from SIHD East of Roraima, which does not include the Yanomami). However, as in the rest of the country, the government only considers indigenous people living in demarcated and approved ILs, whether registering cases and deaths or including them in the priority vaccination program. This leaves out indigenous people who live in urban centers and those who live in lands that are not yet regularized.

## POPULATION

Population Brazil

214.791.902

Indigenous population

Brazil

896.917\*

Roraima indigenous population

53.114\*\*

## COVID-19 CASES

Number of COVID-19 cases in Brazil

36,81 milhões

Number of indigenous COVID-19 cases in Brazil

62.995

Number of indigenous COVID-19 cases in Roraima

4.222

Sources: Ministry of Health; Our World in Data; Indigenous Emergency.

Data obtained in: 31/01/2023.

## DEATHS FROM COVID-19

Number of deaths from COVID-19 Brazil

696,000

Number of indigenous COVID-19 deaths in

Brazil

829

(federal government data)

928

(indigenous emergency data)

Number of deaths COVID-19 indigenous

Roraima

98

\* Of the total vaccinated, 706,236 were considered as only the indigenous population aged 3 years or more assisted by SASISUS were considered.

\*\* Of the total number of vaccinated, 49,616 were considered as only the indigenous population aged 3 years or more assisted by SASISUS were considered.



## 5. COVID-19 E OS INDÍGENAS DE RORAIMA

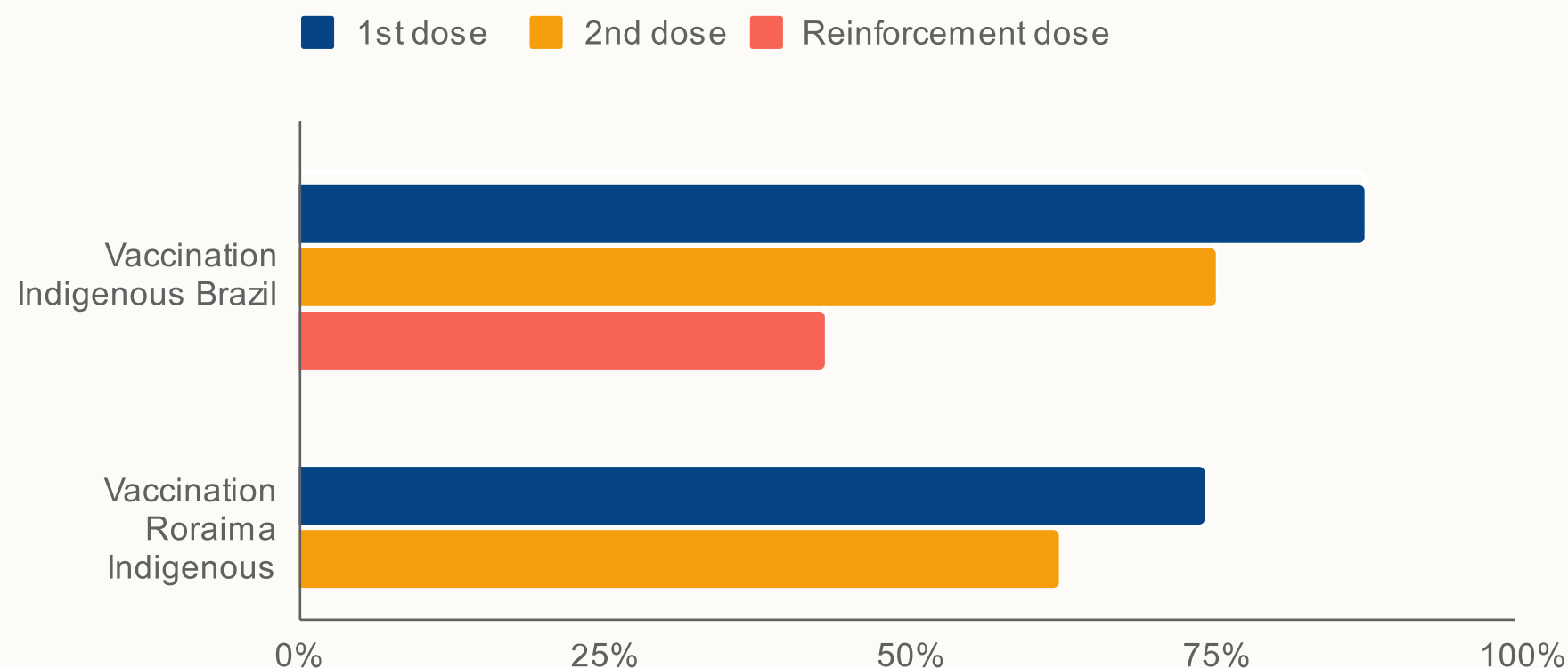
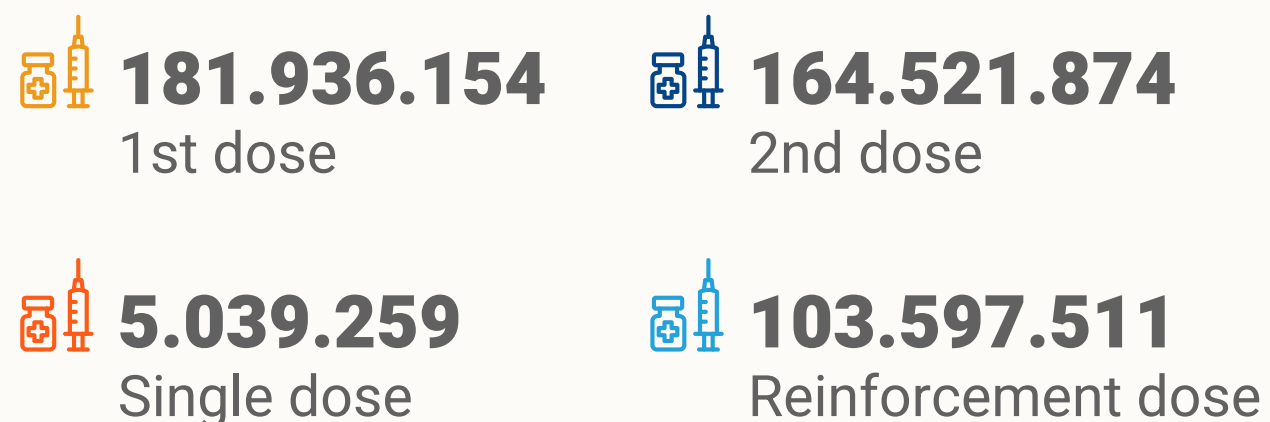
“This issue that we, indigenous people, are not a priority group for the vaccine because we are living in an urban context, is a demand that we make of the state to respect our identity and actually guarantee our rights, because when we move from the village to the urban centers we don't stop being indigenous.”

(Lima, 2021, p. 56).

In this context, indigenous peoples have organized themselves politically, whether to denounce political neglect in the face of the pandemic, the advance of mining in indigenous lands, the lack of psychological support for communities, or to combat the spread of false news about the pandemic (Susui & Almeida, 2021; Montel, 2021; OBIND, 2021).

The Special Indigenous Health Districts (SIHDs) are units linked to the SSIH that organize the health care network and health practices. They are part of the federal health policy and are divided according to territorial criteria that do not follow the state borders. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they were responsible for recording cases and deaths caused by the disease among indigenous people, and for implementing the vaccination program.

### VACCINATION BRAZIL POPULATION





## 6. MEDIA IN NORTHERN BRAZIL

In Brazil, Rooted in Trust works with communities in three states in the north of the country. This region is made up of seven very diverse states. Nevertheless, some issues are prevalent across the region.

The southern and southeastern regions of Brazil are where the main communication vehicles that produce news about the rest of the country are concentrated, including for the northern region (Intervozes, 2017). As a result, there is a disparity between the journalistic productions of the northern region to the northern region. “Despite occupying 45% of the country’s territory and being home to 18 million Brazilians, it is rare to see the northern region in the headlines of newspapers or represented in television programs — unless the news is about the devastation of the Amazon or something extraordinary.” (Lavor, 2021).

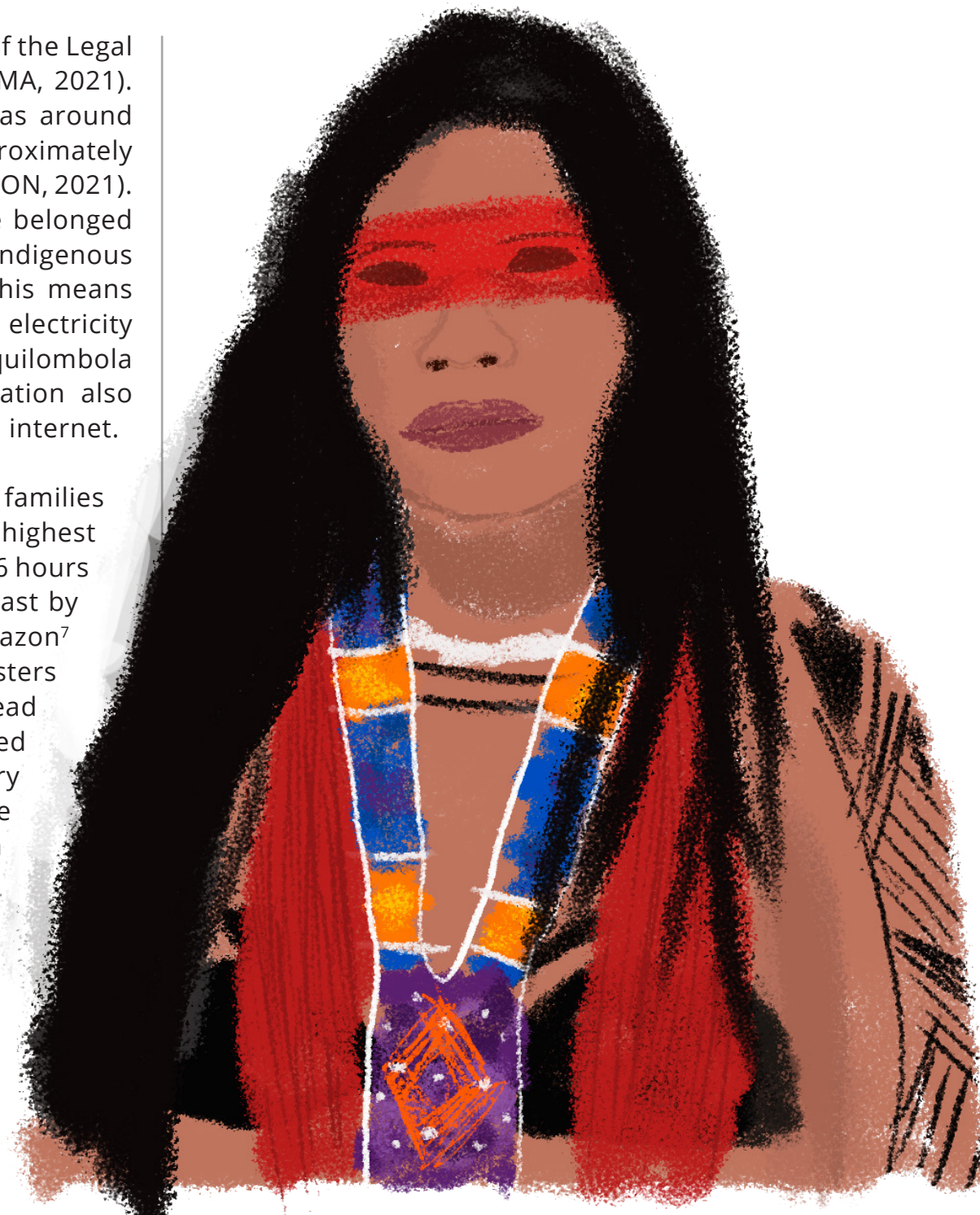
Local media are dedicated to covering news at the municipal and regional level. Local journalism is essential as it provides residents with greater access to information about local contexts and challenges, and ensures that these situations are covered in real time. Without a local press, the population does not have access to information that allows them to monitor public authorities, actively participate in discussions and political decisions, or receive information relevant to their daily lives. In general, this population is more vulnerable to disinformation, which is the dissemination of false or incomplete news to mislead or propagate a false reality and to intentionally manipulate in favor of private interests. Regions that lack local press are called news deserts. Most of Brazil’s news deserts are in the northern region (Botelho, 2022).

Despite the improvement of access to electricity in the country, the northern region is home to the largest concentration of people living “in the dark”. Between

2018 and 2020, about 3.5% of the population of the Legal Amazon did not have access to electricity (IEMA, 2021). At the time, the population of this region was around 28 million inhabitants, which means that approximately 990,000 people lived without this service (IMAZON, 2021). Most were people living in rural areas. Some belonged to traditional communities: 78,388 were indigenous and 2,555 were quilombolas (IEMA, 2021). This means that around 8% of the population without electricity in the Legal Amazon were indigenous and quilombola communities. Without electricity, this population also does not have full access to television and the internet.

Television is still very present in the homes of families in the northern region. This region has the highest rate of television consumption in the country: 6 hours and 30 minutes per day, ahead of the southeast by just one minute (Kantar, 2020). The Legal Amazon<sup>7</sup> has special legislation for television broadcasters that allows them to create local content, instead of transmitting programming from the affiliated network, as is the case in the rest of the country (Lobato, 2017). While this encourages more local newspapers, much of the Legal Amazon is still considered a news deserts, as these papers do not cover local news or only broadcast national news.

Several media outlets in Brazil are owned by politicians and religious groups, which influences the circulation of information benefiting particular interests (Terço, 2022b). —Although it is legally prohibited for politicians to own media outlets in Brazil, one report indicated that of the 1,737 TV channels in the Legal Amazon: a) 373 belong to politicians; and b) more than 170 channels belong to Catholic and Evangelical churches (Lobato, 2017).



<sup>7</sup> The territory of the Legal Amazon comprises the entire North region of the country and two states: Maranhão in the Northeast and Mato Grosso in the Center-West.



# 7. MEDIA IN THE STATE OF RORAIMA



Roraima has low rates of access to information and communication, according to the Amazon Social Progress Index (ASPI)<sup>8</sup>. In contrast to the municipalities in the interior, where the ASPI for Access to Information and Communication varies between 1.65 (municipality of Uiramutã) and 15.37 (municipality of São João da Baliza), the capital Boa Vista has better indices, scoring 41.14 (IPS Amazônia, 2021). Not coincidentally, Uiramutã, the municipality with the largest indigenous population in the

state, has the lowest index. Although a large part of the population has access to electricity and the internet, the precarious conditions of these services are one of the main barriers that prevent people from having reliable and regular access to TV and the internet (IEMA, 2021).

Roraima is the state with the lowest number of local journalistic vehicles in the country, both in absolute values and proportionally. The state capital concentrates most of the

media, and is the only municipality that cannot be considered a news desert (Botelho, 2022). The state's traditional media, heavily concentrated in the capital, is present on TV, radio and online news portals. These channels maintain pages on social media networks as a way of reaching the local population.

In addition to traditional media, there are also independent journalistic initiatives. Examples include Correio do Lavrado and Rede Amazoon, which focus specifically on the state of Roraima. Other portals that deserve mention are Amazônia Real, Agência Pública, InfoAmazônia, and De Olho Nos Ruralista. These portals produce a great deal of content about the state's indigenous communities, though not exclusively about Roraima. However, they have relatively low numbers of followers on social media and do not consistently reach the local population and indigenous peoples.

Traditional media still have a wide reach among the local population. However, a study identified a growing mistrust of these traditional communication vehicles among the population (Erbeta, 2021). More and more, this population seems to be looking to “blogs” for information. The study points out that these “blogs” tend to spread misinformation and are often funded by the local political elite. It was not possible to map such blogs for this study. However, it seems necessary to differentiate them from independent journalism portals which, in addition to not having political ties or funding, follow journalistic standards and best practice (Manual da Credibilidade, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> According to the IPS website, the Social Progress Index is an index that maps and measures the social and environmental performance of nations, regardless of their economic development indices (such as GDP and HDI, for example). Created in 2013 by the Social Progress Imperative (SPI) with the support of international specialists in public policies, in the specific case of mapping the Brazilian Amazon, the choice of indicators was based on the reliability of the data sources, accessibility, scope and updating. Its calculation uses recent public indicators relevant to the specificities of the municipalities in the Amazon (available at <https://ipsamazonia.org.br/>).



## 7. MEDIA IN THE STATE OF RORAIMA

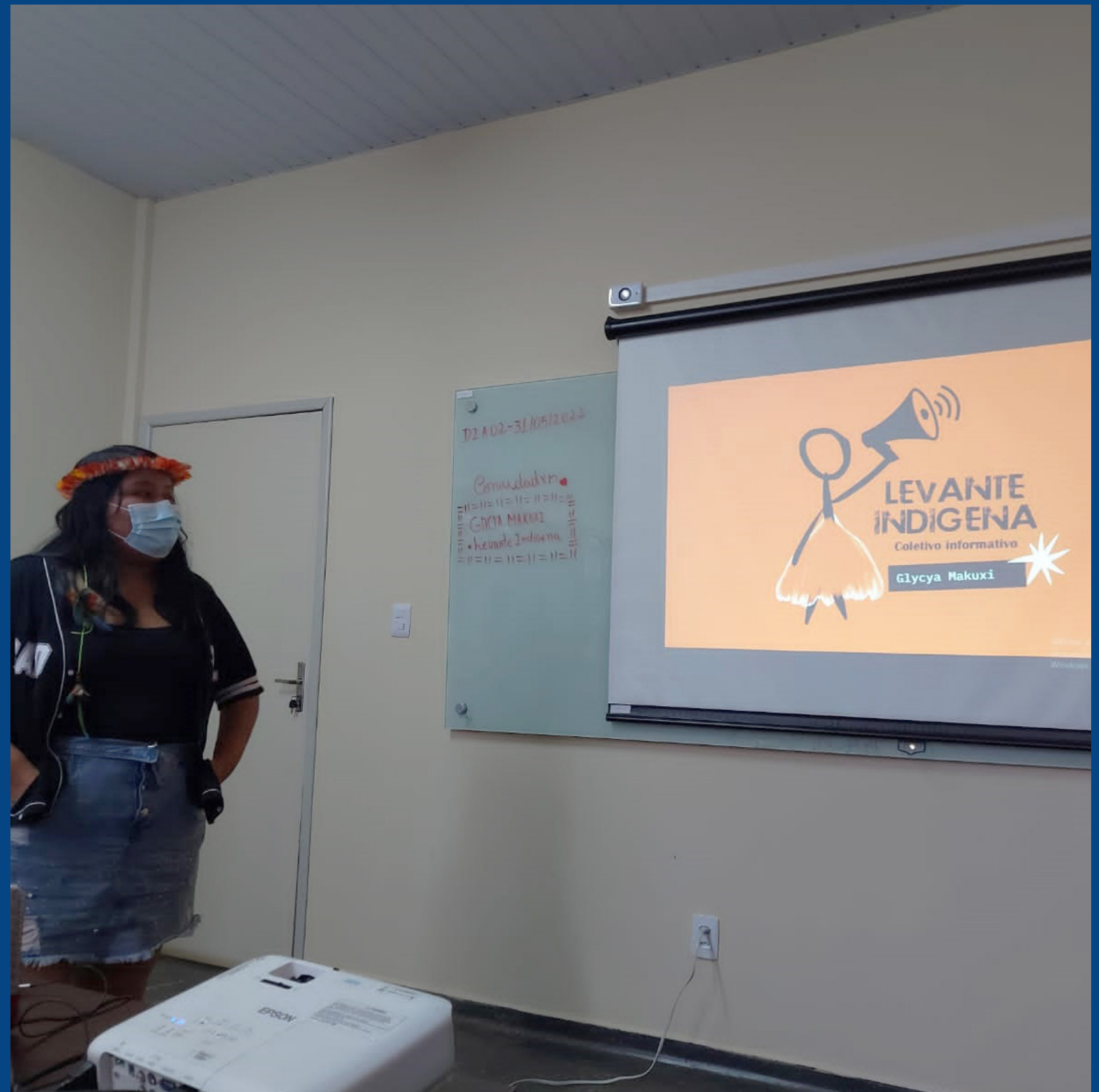
### **TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND THE INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT IN RORAIMA**

The indigenous movement and sectors involved in the cause do not always provide a positive evaluation of the traditional media's coverage. According to a 2022 study, the sectors of the population most involved with the indigenous cause understood that there had been an improvement in the way traditional media communicated about indigenous peoples, but there was still room for improvement (Ancestral Narratives, 2022).

In Roraima, indigenous peoples have sought to create their own forms of communication, such as the Wakywai Network. This arose as a response to the silencing produced by the traditional media in the state and in the country. In Roraima, the newspaper Folha de Boa Vista is the best example of this, since the news published by this newspaper diverges profoundly from the demands and reality of indigenous peoples (César, 2017).

The state of Roraima follows the national trend where many traditional press vehicles belong to politicians or former politicians and their families (Intervozes, 2015).

Include the data: of the 1,737 TV channels in the Legal Amazon, 373 belong to politicians and more than 170 channels belong to Catholic and Evangelical churches (Lobato, 2017).





# 8. TV, RADIO, AND ONLINE NEWS PORTALS

Television plays a large role in the lives of the indigenous communities of Roraima. Among the indigenous people Rooted in Trust spoke to, 71% said they watched TV frequently. Television news was one of the main mechanisms for disseminating information about the pandemic. Throughout 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was the main agenda on all channels and news programs. Some indigenous people even commented on how the excess of news on TV affected their mental health. The most mentioned newscasts were those linked to Rede Globo, such as Jornal Nacional and Jornal Hoje. Band newspapers and local newspapers from the state of Roraima were also mentioned.

In some contexts, where access to television is limited by economic problems, radio is the fastest way of accessing information. Some programs and radio stations were mentioned in the interviews and focus groups, such as the national program “A Voz do Brasil,” and the local stations Rádio Roraima, Rádio FM 93 and 94. Another program mentioned was “A Voz dos Povos Indígenas de Roraima”, broadcast by ICR on Radio Monte Roraima FM. This program is broadcast on Saturdays, and since March 2020 it has also been retransmitted on the radio and CIR’s social media networks.

Originally created in 2002 under the name “Todos os Povos”, the history of the ICR radio program is intertwined with that of Radio Monte Roraima FM 107.9 MHz, which is responsible for its transmission. It is the only Catholic broadcasting station in the state.

(Araújo, 2021, p. 170).

Since there are no print newspapers in Roraima, online news portals have gained space. Even so, few indigenous people mentioned this source of information. In one focus group, the G1 portal linked to Rede Globo was mentioned.

In 2020, two print newspapers – Folha de Boa Vista and Jornal Roraisul – had their paper editions interrupted during the pandemic of the new coronavirus.

(Observatório da Imprensa, 2021, p. 42).

The radio is also very present. For example, my mother doesn’t even have a television, but she has a radio. Every day she listens to the Voice of Brazil. Since childhood we have listened to that station [...]. So, radio is still a very important thing, even though we have the convenience of having a cell phone and television.

(Statement by an indigenous communicator during a focal group held in the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).

At other times, indigenous people created printed communications, such as newspapers and pamphlets. One example is the Anna Yekaré Newsletter, which was founded in 1990, and has produced a total of 38 editions. Currently, in addition to the radio and websites, the indigenous people of Roraima are also present on social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.





## 9. INTERNET AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

**A**lthough internet access has increased in rural areas, it is still highly concentrated in urban spaces (IBGE, 2019a). In the north of Brazil, the preferred way to access the internet is through mobile phones, usually through mobile data packages (IBGE, 2019b). In 2019, more than 87% of the population of Roraima used messaging apps (IBGE, 2019b). This was confirmed in conversations with indigenous people: 57% of the indigenous people interviewed said that they use social media networks to share information, citing mainly WhatsApp.

WhatsApp groups are channels for the rapid exchange of information. Community groups are common, bringing together members of various families, leaders, IHA, teachers, shamans, religious leaders and other important community actors. Groups can also include members from different communities, from indigenous organizations such as the ICR and members from entities that work in partnership with the communities. Other social media networks mentioned by respondents were Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Kwai.<sup>9</sup>

Some indigenous people access the internet when they move to other communities or cities. Such movement is common, including to receive their salaries as teachers or health agents, pensions, and social benefits. Despite this, Rooted in Trust's partners found that the use of social networks is widespread among indigenous people, especially among the younger population.

**“The type of device through which the internet is accessed is also relevant to analyze existing inequalities, since access only by cell phone can impose various restrictions on user usability - such as lower speeds, lower deductibles and the use of screens reduced.”**

(IDEC, 2022).

<sup>9</sup>O Kwai is a social network for creating and sharing short videos.





# 10. GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND NGOS

State agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), International Organisations, religious entities, and indigenous organizations produce and disseminate information relevant to the indigenous communities of Roraima. Frequently, information disseminated by traditional media and independent news portals includes studies, reports and other materials produced by these organizations. Some of these organizations operate nationwide and sometimes report on the local reality of Roraima. Others focus their attention entirely on the local context, or develop noteworthy initiatives in the state.

The indigenous people of Roraima with whom Rooted in Trust 2.0 spoke said that the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (CIOBA), the Missionary Indigenous Council (MIC), and the IIEB were important sources of information about the COVID-19 pandemic. These organizations also worked in partnership with indigenous leaders to support the production of information on the pandemic. Other organizations mentioned, but with less emphasis, were the World Health Organization (WHO), the Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (AIPB) and the IOM (International Organization for Migration).

**Early on, I did a lot of research regarding COVID on the World Health Organization website. I researched at SSIH, I researched on the AIPB, CIOBA website, and we scoured everything.**

(Statement by an indigenous person during a focal group held at the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).

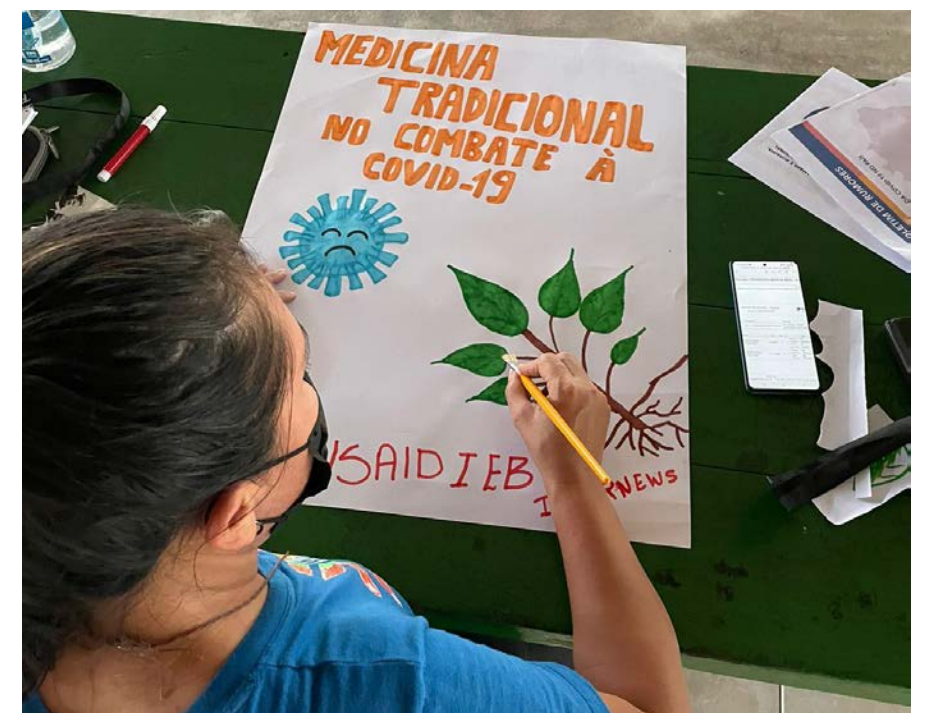
**“So, we can say with certainty that there were very few or none that carried any type of information, whether it was combating the pandemic – that we did not see either the federal or state government take information into the communities – or from any organization [...]. So, the ICR really had to do this work facing the danger of bringing the disease to the community, but, at the same time, either we think that we are going to bring the disease or we think that we are going to bring information.”**

(Interview with a Wapichana indigenous journalist from ICR, female, 36 years old, in Brasília, on 10/07/2022).

Indigenous Health Agents (IHA) are responsible for communicating important health information to indigenous communities, acting as intermediaries between health policy and the reality of communities. This means that the IHA maintain contact both with the SSIH, in the implementation of the National Health Care Policy for Indigenous Peoples, and with the indigenous community in which they operate. On a daily basis, they must visit the families' homes, collect information about the health of residents, pass on information, answer questions from the population, and promote lectures.

**“Indigenous health agents in Brazil are part of a strategy developed over the last two decades to promote a model of differentiated care for indigenous health. Their role aims to meet various aspects of the differentiated care policy, such as the link between the health team and the community, and the mediation between medical-scientific and indigenous knowledge.”**

(Diehl, 2012, p. 819).





## 10. GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND NGOS

### INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (AIPB), founded in 2005.  
Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (CIOBA), founded in 1989.  
Indigenous Council of Roraima (ICR).  
Hutukara Yanomami Association, founded in 2004.

### RELIGIOUS ENTITIES

Missionary Indigenous Council (MIC), created in 1972.  
Brazilian Caritas, founded in 1956.  
Diocese of Roraima.  
Indigenous Pastoral of Roraima.

### GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Funai, created em 1967.  
Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (BIGS), founded in 1936.  
Government of the State of Roraima.  
Federal Public Ministry of Roraima (MPF-RR).  
SIHD Yanomami e SIHD Leste de Roraima.

### NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS)

Institute of Man and Environment of the Amazon (Imazon), created in 1990.  
Native Amazon Organization (NAO), created in 1969.  
Socioenvironmental Institute (SEI), created in 1994.  
International Institute of Education of Brazil (IIEB), founded in 1998.

### INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS (IO'S)

International Organization for Migration (IOM).  
World Health Organization (WHO).  
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), founded in 1946.

During the 20th century, the **Catholic Church**, which at first supported totalitarian regimes in Latin America, gradually changed its behavior with indigenous peoples. This is thanks to the expansion of Liberation Theology, the most progressive aspect of the Catholic Church, which preaches social justice and the need to support the poorest and most oppressed. In Brazil, during the period of the military dictatorship, several missionaries opposed the way in which indigenous peoples were treated (ARAÚJO, 2021). This gave rise to an important indigenous missionary movement. Currently, Catholic indigenist organizations and entities, such as the Conselho Indigenista Missionário and Cáritas, play a very important role with indigenous movements, especially in the Amazon.

**Funai** is the government agency responsible for a large part of indigenous policies, including the process of land tenure regularization in Indigenous Lands.

It also acts as a channel for the dissemination of news about indigenous peoples. However, since 2018, the agency has undergone changes in its management in the current political context, and has even been called an "anti-indigenous" body, which undermines its position as a source of information of interest to indigenous people (Inesc, 2022).

The **Socioenvironmental Institute (SEI)** maintains databases such as "Indigenous Peoples in Brazil" and "Indigenous Lands in Brazil". These databases are interconnected and contain various data on this population. All indigenous peoples of Roraima are included in them. Both have been used to monitor the realities of indigenous peoples in the country.



# 11. INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Indigenous people in Roraima have criticized local traditional media for not giving visibility to their needs and demands (Pereira, et al, 2016). Indigenous peoples have organized their own communication strategies, both for dialogue with an internal audience that is, between indigenous peoples of different ethnic groups in Roraima, and for communication with an external or non-indigenous audience.

## 11.1 TUXAUAS AND THE INDIGENOUS COUNCIL OF RORAIMA

Community leaders play an important role in indigenous communities, including in disseminating information, and were an important source of information during the pandemic. Tuxauas are the main leaders among indigenous people of this region and represent their communities. It is customary to elect the Tuxauas and vice-Tuxauas, and this position is often held by men, although since 1999 it has also been held by women (CIR, 2020). Their work includes traveling between the capital and nearby cities and within the community to seek information and share it with other indigenous people. In some emergencies, this leadership can send news via WhatsApp, as long as their community has good internet access and uses this channel. In other contexts, the Tuxauas call meetings and conversation circles to share information with the community.

ICR's Department of Communication is also an important source of information. Thanks to its work, several communities have young communicators, who act as a bridge between the local reality of the community and events at a regional and national levels. These

communicators are part of the "Wakywai Network," which means "our news" in the Wapishana language. This network emerged from a series of workshops held by the ICR Communication Department in 2019, and gained even more strength and importance during the pandemic period, when communities were in isolation, by facilitating meetings and technical training on communication.

“Since then, the consolidation of the Wakywai Network has taken place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This explains, on the one hand, the difficulties faced in carrying out the work, while the need for communication and the circulation of information has become even more urgent.”

(Lima, et al, 2022, p. 112).

In the ICR Communication Department, journalists and indigenous communicators work with these young communicators from the Wakywai Network, as well as with the Tuxauas, the IHA, and other important organizations across the country, whether indigenous, governmental or non-governmental. The ICR also has an online page and social media networks, such as Facebook and Instagram, and members of the Communication Department are present in WhatsApp groups with leaders from the various ethnoregions of Roraima, which facilitates the dissemination of information. The ICR also produces materials and printed booklets that are

distributed at events, as well as posters that are sent to the communities.

“Social networks have become tools for making indigenous agendas visible and for notifying indigenous groups affected by COVID-19. ICR has used its pages to publicize internal actions, including the commemoration of indigenous people who died from COVID-19 in Roraima, the expansion of social criticism regarding the advancement of the disease and the quantification of official data released by the Secretary of State of Health of Roraima (SSH/RR) and by the Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health of the Ministry of Health (SSIH/HM).”

(Guimarães & Ferreira, 2020, p. 230).

The scope of the CIR Department of Communication and the Wakywai Network is not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, one of the main agendas of these networks is covering incursions on Indigenous Lands. According to indigenous leaders in Roraima, the State has been unable to guarantee the protection and inspection of indigenous lands (IHU UNISINOS, 2019). In light of this, Groups for the Protection and Surveillance of Indigenous Lands (GPSIT) was created and indigenous communicators have been



monitoring and denouncing incursions. Recognizing that this action entails risks for those involved, the ICR has been discussing ways to guarantee the safety of GPSIT members and indigenous communicators – for example, the names of the authors of the reports are often not disclosed.

### 11.2 ORAL COMMUNICATION

Word of mouth is probably the most important form of transmission of knowledge and information among indigenous communities, including in the state of Roraima. It is not by chance that the General Assemblies promoted by the ICR are considered one of the most important political events among the communities. Usually held annually, but also with special editions held on demand, these Assemblies allow for the exchange of information among the members of the ten ethnoregions in which the ICR operates, as well as providing many other political, social and cultural benefits,

In addition to assemblies, community leaders often organize conversation circles and meetings to discuss relevant topics. Conversations among family and community members are also common ways of disseminating information and transmitting news. During the COVID-19 pandemic, isolation and distancing measures posed barriers to this important form of communication, as described by indigenous anthropologist Yara Macuxi. “The very process of circulating information relevant to everyday life, which consists of ‘word of mouth’ propagation. Social isolation recommendations made this practice, so necessary in the indigenous way of life, unfeasible due to the high risk of contagion” (Lima, 2021, p. 54).





## 12. NEEDS AND GAPS OF INFORMATION

For 35% of the indigenous people interviewed, there was no longer any need for more information, or there was no lack of information, on COVID-19. According to them, after almost three years of the pandemic, the communities had already received all the necessary information. “I believe that, during the pandemic, a whole educational work was done with clarity for the entire population. And I believe there is no doubt today about this disease called Covid.” (Interview with an indigenous man, 37 years old, from the Jauari community, Raposa ethnoregion, Normandy/RR, on 09/22/2022). However, nearly half of respondents disagreed, saying they had not received up-to-date and reliable information about the pandemic. The remaining 15% did not respond or were unable to respond.

The origins of the COVID-19 virus is a recurring question. Many people said they never quite understood how the virus came about or how it spread so widely. The end of the pandemic is similarly surrounded by questions. With the loosening of pandemic containment measures and the expansion of the COVID-19 vaccination policies, some people believe the pandemic is over. Death rates from COVID-19 dropped significantly in 2022 in Brazil – in March 2021, the country recorded more than 1700 deaths in a single day, while in September 2022 it recorded about 50 cases per day (G1, 2021; Vilela, 2022). It is also worth mentioning that Roraima is still the Brazilian state with the lowest vaccination rate; only 53.87% of the population is vaccinated with the second dose, according to a survey carried out by the consortium of press vehicles of Brazil with state health departments.

Nevertheless, authorities say it is still not possible to declare the pandemic over (G1, 2022). According to the director of the World Health Organization, Tedros Ghebreyesus, we are close to the end of the pandemic, but it is not over yet (Agência Brasil, 2022). Among the indigenous people of Roraima, the perception is different.



Part of the population is still scared and maintains precautions such as wearing a mask, using hand sanitizer, and ensuring social distancing, while others have returned to living normally, even with the emergence of new cases of COVID-19 in the communities.

“Is it really going to end only when everyone takes the vaccine? The big question is when will it end?” (Statement by an indigenous person during a focal group held in the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).

“In my community, I think it needs to be reinforced again, so that we have an idea of how dangerous the pandemic is and how it is still among us. Because two weeks ago,

my community school stopped because almost all the teachers tested positive. Then the community said, ‘why are you stopping? The pandemic is over. Numbers mean nothing. I think we need to reinforce [the message], to tell them that the pandemic is not over yet.’ (Statement by an indigenous person during a focus group held at the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).

Some people who spoke with Rooted in Trust also said that the way in which COVID-19 and its many variants were reported raised a lot of questions. The use of different names for the variants was confusing. “I wanted to understand better... because they say that COVID-19



## 12. NECESSIDADES E LACUNAS DE INFORMAÇÃO



has other viruses, other different names. This part left me a little confused. I needed to understand this type of virus better.” (Interview with an indigenous teacher, woman, 49 years old, from the Barro community, Surumu ethnoregion, Pacaraima/RR, on 09/20/2022).

Another point that raised doubts among the indigenous people of Roraima is the long-term effects and consequences that COVID-19 has on a person’s health. Not only is it unclear which effects are due to the disease, but indigenous people have not been instructed on how to treat these long-term effects.

“There’s something I’ve always wanted, to this day I keep asking how we should do it, people who suffer, who have been contaminated, have lost a little memory, I don’t know how to deal with it, what to do, what kind of information, or if you have to seek some kind of therapy.” (Statement by an indigenous person during a focus group held at the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).

The effectiveness of the vaccine is another issue on which indigenous people need more information. Studies have shown that vaccination compliance reduces hospitalizations and deaths from COVID-19 (Moisés, 2021; CNN, 2021b; Tokarski, 2022). However, this information does not always seem to reach the indigenous communities of Roraima. Many of the indigenous people reported that their relatives, friends or themselves are still unsure about the effectiveness of the vaccine. A young communicator reported: “In the community we received the vaccine as a salvation, but there are still these doubts because there are people who die of COVID after having taken the third, fourth dose. I have these doubts about the vaccine, if it really works, if we are really going to be protected, if it really is going to let us die less, but there are still some dying” (Testimony of an indigenous person during a focal group held in the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 26/07/2022).





# 13. MAIN BARRIERS TO ACCESSING INFORMATION

Indigenous communities in Roraima face several obstacles accessing information about the pandemic. These range from problems related to internet access, to language and education issues. All these elements are detrimental to indigenous peoples as they are barriers that stand between them and safe and quality information about the pandemic.

Access to electricity and the internet is precarious throughout the state of Roraima, but the indigenous communities that live further away from the capital, Boa Vista, face even greater obstacles. Some communities have no service at all, while others receive poor quality service which worsens on rainy days. Among the communities that have more frequent access to the service, indigenous people tend to use the internet via cell phones, using mobile data connection packages.

“Our internet access is very slow; we don’t have high quality internet. And sometimes, when we don’t have internet, it’s difficult for us to pass on [information].” (Interview with an indigenous health agent, woman, from the Serra da Moça community, Murupu ethnoregion, Boa Vista/RR, on 09/09/2022).

Language is also a barrier. Although most indigenous people in Roraima speak Portuguese, there are members of some communities who only communicate in their native languages. If materials are not produced in these languages, these people depend on the oral translation of the materials received. There are also indigenous people who speak Portuguese, but are not literate, making written information inaccessible.

“Over time, this newsletter appeared in the Wapishana language and it was then possible to explain it better. We called these people, so I think it helped a lot. In leadership too, because there are many leaders who speak Wapishana, they cannot understand if they are speaking in Portuguese. They can understand some things, but not everything. Because there are communities where you get there and most of them hardly hear Portuguese.” (Statement by an indigenous person during a focus group held at the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).





# 14. TRUST

**T**he National Indian Foundation, the government of Roraima, the Municipal Health Secretariat, and the Indigenous Health Secretariat and the SIHDs, were identified as institutions that could not always be trusted. Indigenous people pointed out that, during the pandemic, the data released by SSIH did not match reality, implying that there was a clear underreporting of cases and deaths from COVID-19. “And many times, the city hall, through the Municipal Secretariat, passes on information that is totally different from what is happening there. Then we have this distrust of them”. (Statement by an indigenous person during a focus group held at the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).

In addition, even though SSIH released notes announcing the receipt of funds to carry out investments, the indigenous people said they did not perceive any improvement in the

service. The impressions of the indigenous people are echoed in reports that criticize how the indigenous health policy has been implemented in the country. The budget allocated to indigenous health in 2020 was the lowest in 8 years (Merlino, 2021). The East SIHD of Roraima had five different coordinators in less than two years, these being military and political appointees who generally did not have the knowledge or experience to occupy the position (Merlino, 2021).

Although these are institutions responsible for indigenous health, they do not seem to be in dialogue with the needs of this group and, in the case of Roraima, they do not seem to inspire confidence. This can impact the relationship between communities and Indigenous Health Agents, as they work in close contact with public agencies and communities. It is noteworthy that IHA were not

mentioned as much in interviews and focus groups. Of the thirteen interviews carried out, the IHA were mentioned in only four. In a focus group, an indigenous participant mentioned that, during the pandemic, there was a “change of health agents”, that is, the person responsible for the work was replaced several times. This turnover of professionals can be a sign of political instability, which generates insecurity in the community.

These elements do not allow us to state that the IHA are not relevant sources of information for the indigenous communities of Roraima. However, considering that these actors have the potential to act in the dissemination of information about the pandemic, it is noteworthy that they were rarely mentioned in interviews and focus groups. In light of this, the reality and challenges faced by IHA need to be studied more deeply. These professionals can also benefit from projects and partnerships that support their work and promote training on the topic of misinformation around COVID-19.

The Tuxauas are the main sources of information for the indigenous people of Roraima, mentioned by 71% of interviewees. Other actors and institutions that act as leaders are also seen as reliable sources, such as the ICR and the indigenous people who work in its Department of Communication.

“The Indigenous Council of Roraima has helped us - not just our community, but other communities as well. They are a very strong partner - I certainly congratulate them for this initiative too, because other bodies, such as Funai, should be doing this for us, for the communities, we know that Funai was practically absent - no helped us at all” (Interview with an indigenous person, coordinator of GPSIT, from the São Domingos community, Serra da Lua ethno-region, Uiramutã/RR. Interview date not informed).





# 15. INFORMATION SHARING

**A**mong the indigenous people of Roraima, three ways of sharing information were identified: orally in face-to-face meetings, through social media networks and through written information. The oral transmission of information occurs both in everyday life, in conversation between neighbours, through “word of mouth”, and in a more organized way, such as in conversation circles promoted by leaders or in meetings and assemblies between various communities. The information shared in these dialogue spaces promoted by the leaders is usually seen by the indigenous people as safe and reliable. Many rumors circulate in conversations between friends, relatives, and neighbors.

Social media networks are also spaces for exchanging information, especially WhatsApp. Like oral communication, it is seen as a channel for reliable news and information, but it is also a space conducive to the circulation of false news and unreliable information. The use of WhatsApp is hampered by problems involving internet connectivity.

“Our leaders have been very concerned, especially in terms of health in relation to COVID, with providing information. ICR has been helping a lot with information, with posters, banners that we have handed out a lot, folders in the Wapishana language, others in the Macuxi language. And that, thank God, has contributed a lot.” (Statement by an indigenous person during a focus group held at the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).





# 16. IMPACTS ON REALITY AND DAILY LIFE

## 16.1 CIRCULATION OF RUMORS ABOUT COVID-19 AND VACCINATION

The circulation of false news in the indigenous communities of Roraima occurred even before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indigenous people with whom Rooted in Trust spoke indicated that this is an existing issue and they have already organized themselves to deal with this problem, especially with misleading representations about the indigenous reality and their struggles for access to rights in the rest of Brazil.

“People from the outside look: there is a lot of land. This is fake news that we are trying to fight, and it will be constant. Because we, as an indigenous people, defend the territory, because without the territory we are nothing. The other non-indigenous people, they think that the land can be very profitable, they want to use it. Then they end up calling our people lazy, they have a lot of land, and they don’t want to do anything. It’s not like that. We want land to have a river to fish, bathe, plant, to survive.” (Indigenous testimony during a focus group held in the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).

The circulation of rumors and false news represented a serious problem for indigenous communities. Data on cases and deaths from COVID-19 in the municipality, according to the indigenous people, did not match reality. That is, the indigenous people indicated that there was underreporting of this data, which generated insecurities and distrust among the indigenous communities.

With the start of the vaccination plan, the circulation of rumors about the COVID-19 pandemic intensified. News about the possible risks of vaccination, or even information that the vaccine would transform the person into an

alligator, represented a bottleneck in the acceptance of the vaccination program. The effectiveness of the vaccination has also been questioned due to rumors surrounding its production process. The speed of production of vaccines was the subject of rumors that claimed that important safety protocols of the vaccine had been skipped. Likewise, the side effects of vaccination have been widely speculated.

“What was most talked about was the issue of the vaccine, that it mutated the DNA, the person became infertile, and also the rumor that it turned into an alligator too. Then it says that the life rate of the person also decreased, it says that they took the vaccine now, in five, six years, the person would die because of the vaccine that was what was most talked about.” (Testimony of an indigenous person during a focus group held in the Community Lake Caracaranã, on 07/26/2022).

In addition, there were rumors that indigenous people would be used as “guinea pigs” for vaccines, and that is why they were included as a priority in the national immunization plan (Oliveira, 2021). This rumor persisted, despite the fact that the inclusion of indigenous people in the national immunization plan was the result of the mobilization of indigenous leaders across the country (Oliveira, 2021). However, messages explaining the reasons why the vaccine was produced at this speed did not arrive in accessible languages and by reliable sources to the indigenous communities of Roraima.

“What generated debate was the fake news that we heard a lot, that many of our population did not want to be vaccinated, refused because they heard a lot of fake news through the WhatsApp group, and saw a lot of information that they did not like, and they had this doubt about wanting to be vaccinated.” (Interview with an indigenous health agent, woman, from the Serra da Moça community, Murupu ethn- region, Boa Vista/RR, on 09/09/2022).

“Many people did not have access to information. And especially this fake news, because there are many people who still don’t believe in the vaccine. There are many people in the region who, unfortunately, have not received a vaccine, not even one dose. So that’s more or less it.” (Testimony of an indigenous person during a focus group held in the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).

Another example of the impact of misinformation revolves around the emergency aid offered to vulnerable families by the federal government. This aid should be accessed through an online application. In the midst of this, many indigenous people received messages about false applications and advertisements for “kitchen gas vouchers”. These apps and advertisements were scams, which spread widely among these communities.





### RUMORS AND FALSE NEWS THAT CIRCULATED AMONG THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES INVOLVED IN THE DIAGNOSIS.

<i>"Vaccine causes DNA mutation"</i>	<i>"Vaccines make people infertile"</i>
<i>"Vaccines were created too fast, and therefore are not safe"</i>	<i>"Vaccines turn people into alligators"</i>
<i>"Vaccines decrease people's life expectancy"</i>	<i>"Indigenous people are being used as test subjects for the creation of vaccines"</i>

### 16.2 MENTAL HEALTH

In interviews and focus groups, reports emerged of how the pandemic affected the mental health of indigenous peoples. For some, this was due to the distancing measures and social isolation, for others, it was the anxiety surrounding the emergence of cases among indigenous communities, or the volume of rumors about the pandemic. In many cases, all these factors together contributed to the need for psychological support.

"We often take care of everything and end up not strengthening what is essential and most important for our mind. A lot of people, I met some friends who got very sick just thinking that their father was sick, their mother was sick,

they could catch it, they could die. And it even triggered the onset of depression, anxiety. And that happens because we don't take care of the mind." (Statement by an indigenous person during a focus group held at the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).

ICR has an indigenous psychologist on its team, who during the pandemic worked with members of various communities. "When she [the psychologist] was doing this work, [she noticed] the increase in cases of people suffering from depression within indigenous communities. So, she noticed that right when she entered, because she always says: she is not having a mourning ritual, which is the most important thing. There is no time for crying, that time for mourning because you have to try to survive so you can cry. [...] And this affected, has psychologically affected many

families within the communities. So much so that, according to her record, she made more than 2,000 calls". (Interview with a Wapichana indigenous journalist from ICR, female, 36 years old, in Brasília, on 10/07/2022). The demand for psychological care is much greater than what the CIR can support, and the leaders demand public policies aimed at the mental health of the indigenous population.

### 16.3 TRADITIONAL INDIGENOUS MEDICINE

"The knowledge of the ancestors has always been very important for the healing of indigenous peoples from various diseases, in this period, the ancient practice of the ancients is more than essential in the fight against the new virus. That is why several communities have sought refuge in traditional medicine remedies, communities in the Serras region since the beginning of the pandemic began to perform rituals for protection and also the production of syrups and baths."

(Aleixo & Lima, 2020, p. 294).

Traditional indigenous medicine was very present during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pajés and shamans, people from the communities who usually hold this knowledge, together with the Indigenous Health Agents, promoted meetings to



## 16. IMPACTS ON REALITY AND DAILY LIFE



transmit knowledge about “medicines and herbs from the forest and the woods”. “Despite the difficulties, we monitored the families that fell ill, we followed up - despite not having much medicine, we also used traditional medicine, which is our traditional medicine.” (Interview with an indigenous health agent, woman, from the Serra da Moça community,

Murupu ethnoregion, Boa Vista/RR, on 09/09/2022).

During the pandemic, traditional indigenous medicine became much more widely used within communities. Faced with a new virus, the indigenous people used the situation to promote the appreciation of their medicinal knowledge. “In the period

before the pandemic, medicine was not very valued, and then after the pandemic came, people had a more focused look at medicine [...]. Not to say that the pandemic was a good period but gave more visibility to medicine”. (Testimony of an indigenous person during a focus group held in the Lago Caracaranã Community, on 07/26/2022).



# 17. CONCLUSION

The experiences of indigenous peoples during the pandemic in Brazil show the continuity of the tense relationship between indigenous peoples and the Brazilian State, characterized by distrust and denial of the guarantee and recognition of their rights since colonization. This is evidenced by the fact that, during the creation of this Assessment, no state actor was considered a reliable source by indigenous peoples for information on COVID-19.

Indigenous communities have long been organizing and fighting for their rights. This was evident during the pandemic, when indigenous communities put in place their own mitigation and treatment measures. Collective action was key, and Indigenous leaders and communities worked together, whether mobilizing to ensure Indigenous communities were prioritized for vaccines or simply by sharing information.

Living in a region marked by a lack of infrastructure for access to the internet and electricity, a shortage of local communication vehicles, and the political use of traditional media, the indigenous peoples of Roraima have had to appropriate the means of communication that are more accessible to them and mobilize the production of reliable information about their realities, especially with regard to health. As a result, the media mobilized in the community prioritized mainly oral communication, in contact with local leaders, in meetings and assemblies. In addition, where possible, radio programs, newsletters and, to a limited extent, social media, were also important sources of information during the pandemic.

The indigenous peoples of Roraima faced several challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the state and federal government's neglect of indigenous health, indigenous peoples of Brazil experienced an



widespread violation of several other rights during the Bolsonaro government (2019-2022), such as ongoing violations of their territorial rights. Moreover, they faced a paralysis of processes for the demarcation of Indigenous Lands, an increase in violence against this population by civilians and public security forces, and incursions on their land aimed at illegal extraction of natural resources.

In addition to issues related to *stricto sensu* health, such as the lack of an emergency plan, lack of safety and health equipment, insufficient testing and even the irresponsible distribution of medicines that had been proven ineffective, the production and sharing of false information and other rumors spread through communities like the virus itself, posing a huge challenge to the indigenous peoples of



## 17. CONCLUSION

Roraima. This disinformation campaign was an aggravating factor in the pandemic, where lives were lost and an irreparable series of social, environmental, and economic damages were recorded.

Faced with this situation, the indigenous peoples of Roraima had to incorporate their own strategies, whether to address the COVID-19 itself or to address the spread of misinformation that exacerbated the spread of the virus.

With governments, markets, and media contributing to an anti-indigenous agenda, fueling prejudices and stigmas, and with no space to give visibility to their demands and rights, indigenous peoples had no choice but to build their own communication strategies for dissemination and sharing their realities and challenges.

In light of these multiple adversities, associations such as the Indigenous Council of Roraima (ICR) bravely carried out various initiatives to prevent both the spread of COVID-19 and the misinformation that accompanies and feeds the pandemic. Bypassing huge structural obstacles, such as the absence or poor quality of electricity and internet supply in indigenous communities, the ICR was able, with great creativity and resilience, together with communicators and indigenous leaders and other partners, to produce campaigns of delivery of PPE, COVID-19 tests, and cleaning materials, as well as campaigns against disinformation, such as awareness newsletters, health protocols, and radio programs. They also used social media networks intensively, where they connected with partners and indigenous organizations. These initiatives were crucial for indigenous communities to resist yet another episode of violence, attack and contamination.

The importance of the ICR and its Department of Communication stands out here, which, with the help of its partners, such as the Rooted in Trust team, contributes to the strengthening of the Wakywai Network of indigenous communicators, and to the fight against disinformation. They also ensure the construction of their own communication inseparable from the struggle of the indigenous movement for a good living. These communication actions not only fill information gaps, but also contribute to the production and dissemination of quality, reliable and vital content for communities, for the indigenous peoples of Roraima and for the indigenous movement in the country.





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## 20. ATTACHMENTS

**TABLE 1: COMPOSITION OF THE CONDUCTED FOCAL GROUPS**

ETHNO-REGIONS INVOLVED	TOTAL
CIFCRIS, Raposa	8
Tabaio, Surumu, Serra da Lua, Amajari	10
Murupu, Baixo Cotingo, Serras	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27</b>

**TABLE 2: TELEVISION IN RORAIMA**

MAIN TV RETRANSMITTERS IN RORAIMA	LOCAL JOURNALISTIC OR POLICE PROGRAMS (SOURCE: ATLAS DE NOTÍCIAS)	AFFILIATION
	Jornal de Roraima (2 editions daily)	
	Mete Bronca Cidade Alerta RR	
	Roraima Urgente Roraima em Dia	
	(Does not have local programming)	

**TABLE 3: RADIO IN RORAIMA**

MAIN RADIOS	LOCAL AND NATIONAL NEWS PROGRAMS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Voz dos Povos Indígenas</li> <li>• Jornal Brasil Hoje</li> <li>• Jornal Amazônia é Notícia</li> <li>• Monte Roraima Notícias</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Café com Notícias”</li> <li>• “Rádio Verdade”</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bom Dia Roraima</li> <li>• Jornal 100.3</li> </ul>
	(None identified)



TABLE 4: NEWS PORTALS

MAIN LOCAL NEWS PORTALS MAPPED	SOCIAL NETWORKS AND FOLLOWERS
Folha de Boa Vista	 87,6 mil followers
Roraima em Tempo	 26 mil followers
Roraima 1	 19,7 mil followers
G1 Roraima	 16,8 mil followers
Roraima na Rede	 2.071 followers
Correio do Lavrado	 1.101 followers
Jornal Roraisul	 500 followers
Rede Amazoon	 426 followers
Roraima em Foco	Does not have social networks
Data on social media followers queried in 30/06/2022.	





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