Brazil’s Position Paper

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Country: Brazil

School: Lower Canada College

European colonists came to Brazil in 1500. Since then, the indigenous peoples of Brazil have been struggling to maintain their way of life. Although they have managed to keep their language and customs alive, the process of colonization in Brazil has pushed them from the east coast to the west, towards the isolated regions near the border. This may seem to be a territorial issue, but it is very much connected to the population’s health and wellness. Over the last decade, nearly all their ancestral lands have been forcefully taken away from them and turned into vast, dry networks of cattle ranches, soya field and sugar cane plantations. As a result, many tribes found themselves homeless, and therefore left no other choice but live in the overcrowded reserves. Living on the reserves also means that they can no longer practice their nomadic way of life, which compromised of hunting, fishing and gathering in the Amazon rainforest known for its biodiversity. Even more troubling, some indigenous communities have begun to seek shelter under tarpaulins by the side of highways. The reverses and tarpaulins are inadequate shelters. They are often isolated, unsanitary and poverty stricken, which can help to the Brazil’s indigenous health crisis.

The lack of education amongst indigenous communities is also a major contributor to Brazil’s poor indigenous health. As mentioned earlier, poverty is common amongst the indigenous communities. This makes it nearly impossible for them to provide their young with an adequate education. Since there aren’t many available jobs on the reserves, once these children grow up, many of them will have to find a in the city. However, as they didn’t receive a proper education, they often lack the skills to enter the workforce. As a result of joblessness, these individuals fall into poverty, unable to afford an education for their young and eventually, this becomes a vicious cycle. Furthermore, these individuals are more likely to fall into depression and in extreme cases, suicide. This helps to explain Brazil’s the appalling rate of suicide within the indigenous Guarani Kaiowá people of Brazil, which is 34 times the country’s national average. Women are especially vulnerable in indigenous communities. They’re more often denied access to education compared to their male counterparts. This is root of the Brazil’s indigenous health problem because women are the primary caretaker of their family’s health and wellness. The struggles that these women must deal with are translated onto their families and their entire community.

The current situation in Brazil is very delicate. Colonization has resulted in mistrust between the indigenous and non-indigenous people. We must expand the outreach of national health systems in a non-invasive way. We must design holistic health and education programs that respect the way of life of the indigenous peoples of Brazil. Incorporating traditional indigenous medical practices into western medicine is a good place to start to regain their trust. After all, Brazilian indigenous people have made substantial and pervasive contributions to the world's medicine with knowledge used today such as the domestication of [tobacco](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tobacco), [cassava](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cassava), and other crops.