



**Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation**

Advancing Free Trade
for Asia-Pacific **Prosperity**

Understanding the Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples

APEC SOM Steering Committee on Economic and Technical Cooperation

October 2021



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Executive summary

The primary goal of APEC is to support sustainable economic growth and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. Inclusive and equitable growth has been one of the central aims of APEC since its inception in 1989. Of the approximately 370 to 476 million Indigenous Peoples all over the world, an estimated 70 to 80 percent call the Asia-Pacific region home (ILO, 2015; UNDP, 2021). One of the three policy priorities of APEC 2021 is to increase inclusion and sustainability for recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The primary focus of this research was on the *economic* impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples. This research combined a literature review with a questionnaire completed by nine APEC economies. One of the strongest themes brought to light by the literature was the fact that Indigenous communities all over the world displayed an extraordinary amount of creativity and resilience during the pandemic. Three main themes emerged from the literature and questionnaire responses.

The significant and crucial role of kinship, community engagement, and connections to the land

These networks were the lifelines of certain communities during the pandemic when they were faced with limited external support in the early days of the economic shock. Community members mobilised and used the resources at their disposal to support family and friends facing food insecurity and poverty. There were even cases where communities supported other communities within their own economies.

Many Indigenous communities used traditional knowledge and wisdom to combat the negative health and economic effects of the pandemic. They locked down their communities to prevent outsiders from entering to protect Indigenous elders, who are seen as the messengers of Indigenous culture and ancient knowledge. Isolating entire communities also meant that Indigenous Peoples could continue engaging with community members since kinship was a central concept in the Indigenous worldview. Access to traditional lands helped several communities avoid food insecurity as they were able to support themselves by producing their own food. Such groups were also able to support returning community members.

Importance of inclusive and good quality data

Both the literature and the responses from the completed questionnaires reiterated the importance of inclusive and good quality data, along with challenges faced by the respondents in collecting this information. The economies highlighted the importance of data protection measures to build trust, creating and managing relationships with Indigenous communities, and ensuring that Indigenous Peoples are involved in the decision making process and have access to their own information to make informed decisions.

Employment and incomes of Indigenous Peoples took a real hit in 2020

Evidence from the economies that provided disaggregated information, showed that the employment and incomes of Indigenous Peoples took a real hit in 2020.

However, the size of this impact heavily depended on the sectors Indigenous businesses and individuals were most concentrated in. Tourism based economies were heavily impacted. Many economies noted the difficulty associated with collecting data on Indigenous businesses, as business data collected normally does not have an ethnicity indicator. Also, these businesses are often not distinct parts of an economy and are heavily intertwined with the overall economy of a region, particularly in urban areas.

There is evidence from various economies to show that the global financial crisis (GFC) of 2008 undid years of progress and set Indigenous communities back by several years in terms of economic and social outcomes. The differential impact of the recession on Indigenous Peoples highlights that economic shocks have a disproportionately large impact on this group. The effects of the economic downturn induced by COVID-19 are still ongoing. Evidence to date from several APEC economies shows that the gap between the income and employment of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population increased between 2019 and 2020. Understanding the economic impact of COVID-19 will allow economies to identify the unique vulnerabilities of their Indigenous populations and target policy responses to avoid the negative consequences of past economic shocks.

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1 Indigenous Peoples in the APEC region, introduction and overview

1.1 Indigenous Peoples are important to APEC

The primary goal of APEC is to support sustainable economic growth and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. Inclusive and equitable growth has been one of the central aims for APEC since its inception in 1989. In the 1994 Bogor Declaration, Leaders cited equitable development as one of the three pillars to strong economic development. APEC is working to ensure the benefits of the strong growth experienced by member economies over the past few decades are distributed across all levels of society. In 2015, APEC Philippines launched the theme “Building Inclusive Economies, Building a Better World”. The work focused on increasing the participation of all members and communities.

One of the three policy priorities of APEC 2021 was to increase inclusion and sustainability for recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recovery from the pandemic will take different forms for each economy. However, to build resilience, each economy must design and implement inclusive policies, and use this as an opportunity to support and uplift some of the most vulnerable groups in society, which includes Indigenous Peoples.

1.2 Understanding and Valuing Indigenous Economies within APEC

An APEC report on “*Understanding and Valuing Indigenous Economies within APEC*” was published earlier this year.¹ It highlighted and reinforced the importance of advancing inclusive economic growth by supporting Indigenous economic development in the APEC region.

The report was a New Zealand-led initiative and incorporated case studies from eight APEC economies including Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Mexico, Peru, and Chinese Taipei. The case studies looked at their experiences with measuring their respective Indigenous economies. A key finding from the report was that collecting and analysing Indigenous economic data is a journey, and there is no standardised approach. It also showed that APEC economies are at different stages in measuring and understanding their own Indigenous economies.

The report further highlighted that Indigenous Peoples have long developed a variety of systems to govern their own societies. Their traditional and local economic systems ensure sustainable utilisation of resources, social responsibility and harmonious relationships through cooperation, reciprocity and valuation of their cultural values.

Measuring Indigenous economies is critical to illustrating the economic contribution Indigenous Peoples make to their wider domestic economies. This can help support efforts to address issues of inequality and advance more inclusive models of economic growth.

1.3 Understanding the economic impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples

The global economy contracted by 3.5 percent during 2020 (World Bank, 2021). The recovery following this period is likely to be extremely uneven and unequal. Some economies have managed to contain the spread of the virus and are on the path to a managed recovery. However, some have struggled to contain the spread of new waves of infection and have reintroduced mechanisms to curb this, including further lockdowns.

Indigenous Peoples often fall outside formal social protection systems and many have no access to medical and financial support in times of crisis. As lockdowns continue to expand, or are reintroduced, with no timeline in

¹ The report can be retrieved from <https://www.apec.org/Publications/2021/04/Case-Studies-on-Advancing-Inclusive-Economic-Growth>

sight, Indigenous Peoples face further economic hardship including food insecurity (Wight, 2020). To add to this, many Indigenous Peoples work in the informal economy and have come to rely primarily on income from markets, handicrafts, seasonal work and tourism, all industries which were adversely impacted by COVID-19 (UN DESA, 2020).

Lack of adequate social services, access to support and information in Indigenous communities becomes more evident in the face of a pandemic. It is absolutely critical to ensure that Indigenous Peoples, often among the most vulnerable members of society, are not left behind. Therefore, good quality and up to date data and information will allow economies to identify the unique vulnerabilities of the Indigenous population and target policy responses.

2 The economic impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples

2.1 Methodology

The primary focus of this research was on the *economic* impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples. This research combined a literature review with a questionnaire completed by nine APEC economies. A copy of the questionnaire is attached in Appendix A. In order to gain meaningful insights from the questionnaires, we first categorised the questions asked into some key themes. The first of these was assessing how Indigenous individuals/households and businesses had fared in the aftermath of the economic downturn. The second theme to emerge from the results was that there were significant gaps in economic data disaggregated by ethnicity. Economies also provided responses to what they observed as best practice when collecting and working with Indigenous data. Finally, keeping in mind that over a year after economies in the APEC region first went into lockdown, the pandemic is far from over. Therefore, the full economic effects of the pandemic have not yet been realised and work is still ongoing in this area. Some economies indicated that data gathering and analysing would take place in the coming months.

To supplement the information gleaned from the participating economies, a review of the literature available to date was undertaken. The literature review provided context to the questionnaire responses. Some key themes to surface from the literature included the importance of traditional lands and community support in ensuring food security and stability of income. Moreover, the worsening of outcomes for Indigenous Peoples occurred against a backdrop of high poverty, low education rates, and a high incidence of workforce informality.

The following sections bring these key themes together to provide a portrait of the economy of Indigenous Peoples before and during the economic downturn.

2.2 The survey

An optional and voluntary questionnaire on the economic impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples was sent out to all 21 economies within the APEC region. The aim of the questionnaire was twofold. The first was to understand how the economies of Indigenous Peoples within the APEC region were impacted as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This helped identify some key themes surrounding the differential impact of the pandemic on Indigenous Peoples versus the non-Indigenous population, as well as differences between Indigenous communities. The second aim was to identify gaps in the data and challenges faced by economies when collecting disaggregated data on Indigenous Peoples. Most respondents highlighted the areas of data collection they would like to see improved, and best practice when dealing with Indigenous data, along with work in progress.

Nine economies provided either complete or partial responses to one or more questions. These were Australia, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, and Chinese Taipei. There were significant differences in the quantity and quality of information provided by each economy, which underscores the importance of measuring disaggregated outcomes for Indigenous Peoples to ensure the recovery period is inclusive and doesn't deepen existing divides.

2.3 Literature review

Resilience during the pandemic

One of the strongest themes brought to light by the literature was the fact that Indigenous communities all over the world displayed an extraordinary amount of creativity and resilience during the pandemic. Time and time again, through economic turbulence and disruptions, Indigenous Peoples have turned to nature and community support for guidance. They made use of traditional knowledge and customs to protect themselves and soften the

blow of the economic downturn attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic (Walters et al., 2021). In some areas, official support was slow to arrive or indirectly excluded Indigenous Peoples (Cord & Pizarro, 2021). In such situations, Indigenous communities turned to self-governance and took independent steps to resist infection. For example, Indigenous groups from Chile, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, and the United States restricted the entry of outsiders into their communities and raised awareness about the importance of sanitation and isolation. With basic protection measures like face masks and sanitizers hard to find, Amazonian women used banana leaves as face masks and mobilised to collect and deliver food to their vulnerable community members.

Lugo-Morin (2021) notes that many Indigenous Peoples have based their resilience strategies on their food systems. For the Totonac peoples of Mexico, the health and food systems are intertwined. Their plantations provide them with not just sustenance but also medicinal plants, which they used during the pandemic to build immunity. Cord and Pizarro (2021) state that access to natural, cultural and social capital played a key part in determining whether an Indigenous community was able to successfully resist the pandemic and its effects.

Indigenous Peoples who had access to natural capital were able to farm and collect their own produce and mobilise funds to meet immediate community needs before external help was sent. They were also able to isolate from the outside world to avoid infection. In a Central American survey by the World Bank, 60 percent of respondents said that access to biodiversity was the key to ensure survival for Indigenous Peoples (Cord & Pizarro, 2021).

Cultural capital played an extremely important role in protecting many Indigenous members from food insecurity, particularly those without access to their traditional lands. The Central American survey by the World Bank (Cord & Pizarro, 2021) shows that the communities that faced the most severe food shortages were those who relied on purchasing food from external sources, as opposed to self-production. Indigenous Peoples in Peru traded between one another for essentials such as rice and fish as a measure to prevent food insecurity and provided help to other Indigenous communities. In Rapa Nui (Easter Island), traditional authorities locked down the island by invoking an ancestral law based on a sacred order to protect the health and ancient wisdom of the Indigenous Peoples. When faced with loss of incomes and food insecurity, they produced their own food by fishing and growing vegetables. The Municipality allocated its entire budget towards job creation to re-employ those who had lost their jobs amidst the pandemic (IWGIA, 2021).

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (2020), Indigenous Peoples have stated that the enhancement of their Indigenous food systems offer a long-term solution to food insecurity and dependency on external markets.

High representation in the informal market for the Indigenous workforce

The reason Indigenous Peoples have to take extra precautionary measures to protect their communities is largely because they are often the most vulnerable groups in any society. They are particularly susceptible to significantly worsened economic and social conditions during health, economic and natural disasters. The inequities faced by Indigenous Peoples, even pre-pandemic, can be exemplified by some key statistics. According to the ILO (2020), as of 2020, globally, 63.3 percent of Indigenous Peoples were employed (compared to 59.1 percent of their non-Indigenous counterparts). Indigenous Peoples share in the informal labour market was disproportionately high: 86.3 percent of all employed Indigenous Peoples worked in the informal labour market (compared to 66.3 percent of non-Indigenous workers).

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) describes the informal economy as all those economic activities by workers and business units – in law or practice – that are partially or completely uncovered by formal agreements (ILO & OECD, 2019). Workers in the informal economy are often burdened with high social and economic costs. According to the ILO and OECD (2019), there are several reasons for this. First, the informal economy tends to absorb a higher proportion of unskilled workers and those with no formal education. Second, there is a

productivity gap between formal and informal workers, particularly in sectors such as agriculture. This further contributes to widening the wage gap between the two types of workers. Third, informal workers are highly exposed to workplace risks but do not have access to risk management instruments such as social protection, skills policies and health and safety standards.

Since Indigenous Peoples employed in the informal market often do not have access to social protection, they are more likely to suffer from in-work poverty and face inferior working conditions (ILO & OECD, 2019). According to ILO estimates, Indigenous Peoples were three times more likely to be living in extreme poverty than the non-Indigenous population. Moreover, they comprised 19 percent of the world's extreme poor. 18.2 percent of the world's Indigenous Peoples lived on less than US\$1.90 a day compared to 6.8 percent of the non-Indigenous population (FAO, 2021). Nearly half of all employed Indigenous Peoples did not have any formal education. The comparable figure for non-Indigenous people was just 17 percent.

These pre-existing inequities mean that Indigenous Peoples are already in a precarious economic and social position. The economic downturn induced by the global pandemic has exacerbated these vulnerabilities. According to a survey of Indigenous Peoples within the context of COVID-19 in Latin America (ECLAC, 2021), 32.2 percent of Indigenous youth said they did not have enough economic resources to buy food. 35 percent of youth stated that their employment situation has worsened under the pandemic. This was in addition to the 21.5 percent who were already without a job pre-pandemic. A survey completed by 133 Indigenous respondents from 40 economies, Walters et al. (2021) found that the economic impacts of the pandemic contributed to a loss of livelihood (stated by 21 percent of respondents), changes in the movement of people (19 percent), and disruption to the selling of their products (eight percent).

Unequal social and health outcomes contribute to economic disparities

Apart from deepening the economic divide between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples, the pandemic also threatened Indigenous social structures. According to evidence from the United States, the mortality rate from COVID-19 was 1.8 times higher for Indigenous Peoples than Caucasian Americans. Indigenous elders were particularly hard hit all over the world and many tribes lost their leaders. This has had devastating consequences for communities as often the survival of Indigenous social and cultural practices depends on community leaders who maintain and transmit traditional knowledge and ensure the preservation of languages. This traditional knowledge played an essential role in helping Indigenous communities all over the world build resilience to pandemic shocks. In New Zealand, Māori exercised tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) independent of the official New Zealand response. For example, a Māori organisation called Te Pātaka Inc (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2020) was established to provide food and firewood to Māori communities in the South Island facing hardship due to COVID-19. Māori health providers reached out to those members of society who typically don't receive support. These communities were provided with online mental health support, food packages, care packages including hygiene and cleaning products, and services to meet the spiritual needs of people. Various Iwi² led community responses guided by the Māori worldview and customary practices. They set up checkpoints at entry and exit points into their communities to protect members. Some iwi also distributed grants for home heating, devices to enable digital connectivity and data support (Te One & Clifford, 2021). Given the importance of kinship and community engagement, several online initiatives were launched to ensure Māori maintained regular contact with community members. Karakia (prayer), tangihanga (funeral proceedings), and cultural workshops were conducted online.

Vaccination rates and the uptake of vaccines among Indigenous Peoples has varied significantly between economies but are ongoing. According to Sanchez and Foxworth (2021), as of April 2021, a third of all Indigenous Americans had received at least one shot of the COVID-19 vaccine, compared to 19 percent for non-Hispanic White Americans. However, vaccination efforts in the US faced significant roadblocks ahead since 43

² Iwi is often translated to mean tribe, but is closer to "nation".

percent of unvaccinated Indigenous Peoples reported that they did not wish to get vaccinated. This was the highest of all racial and ethnic groups in the survey. This situation is not unique to the US. There are numerous reports of Indigenous Peoples in rural areas in Mexico not wanting to get vaccinated due to the rapid spread of disinformation (Hegarty, 2021). In Australia, as of July 2021, just seven percent of the Indigenous population had been fully vaccinated. These rates were significantly lower than the 13 percent rate of coverage for all Australians (Brennan, 2021). Conversely, in Canada, as of 9 July 2021, there were ~~minor~~ differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous vaccination rates (Statistics Canada, 2021), with Indigenous adults (18 to 59 years old) having a significantly higher coverage rate at 43 percent than their non-Indigenous counterparts (29.4 percent).

Unfortunately, data on vaccination and other indicators, disaggregated by ethnicity, was extremely sparse. Many economies did not have any official statistics on Indigenous vaccination rates. The availability of this information is crucial to inform policymakers on where resources and information campaigns must be targeted. Low vaccination rates among Indigenous Peoples could threaten to put entire communities at risk, further delaying economic resurgence.

Reliance on agriculture and tourism

Traditionally, Indigenous Peoples' food systems rely on natural resources and communal lands (FAO, 2020). Oftentimes, this requires freedom of movement, which was restricted during the pandemic. This disruption meant that many communities were dealing with widespread food insecurity, whilst juggling a health crisis. To add to this, support provided by officials often did not take into consideration the way of life of Indigenous Peoples, i.e., the importance of community and access to local markets.

Indigenous Peoples have strong connections to their communities, nature, and land. As a result, their economies have traditionally centred on activities such as tourism, food production, mining and, art production (Leach, Baer, & Yu, 2020). These were all industries that bore the brunt of the pandemic. Since Indigenous Peoples also faced barriers to entering the formal workforce, they often did not have access to social protection in the absence of a steady source of income. Indigenous Peoples around the world were unable to access markets to sell their farming, livestock, and handicraft products (IWGIA, 2021). This was mainly due to markets shutting down and transportation being unavailable due to strict lockdown measures. Being stewards for their natural environments, the economies of many Indigenous Peoples depended on tourism and hospitality, which came to a virtual halt beginning in early 2020. The disruption that Indigenous Peoples experienced to the selling of their products at local markets contributed directly to a loss of livelihood for them.

The severe impact on tourism and hospitality also resulted in an enormous loss of income for many Indigenous communities, such as those in Canada and Australia (ILO, 2020). With the decline of tourism due to the pandemic, they lost their source of income and, as a result, had no way to purchase food. The surrounding, much more deprived (with a poverty rate of 48-70 percent) Embera communities came to the rescue and provided food for several months. They were able to do this as they lived within their ancestral territories.

Indigenous knowledge on food management and agriculture depends on the transmission of this knowledge from one generation to another. This knowledge is often embedded into stories, religious practices, dances, festivals, etc. and is taught by community elders. With the passing away of these leaders, this ancient knowledge and practices also face the threat of extinction (UNFPI, 2020).

The significance of Indigenous lands

Indigenous Peoples have a spiritual, cultural, and social connection to their lands, and in most cases have lived off it for generation upon generation.

A recent land area analysis by Garnett et al (2018) revealed that among the Indigenous Peoples and local communities, Indigenous Peoples alone manage about 38 million square kilometres of land across all the continents, covering a diverse range of ecosystems such as savannahs, forests, tropical forests, shrub lands and rangelands. Further research also showed that at least 36 percent of the world's intact forests (large, unbroken swaths of natural forest) are within Indigenous lands. Intact forests play a crucial role in sequestering carbon, as well as in protecting biodiversity, regulating water supply, and providing a range of ecosystem services central to local livelihoods and the wellbeing of society (FILAC, 2021).

Research shows that well-managed forests store significantly more carbon than forests experiencing high degradation. In the Amazon Basin, Indigenous lands have on average higher carbon density per hectare than non-Indigenous areas, partly because their vegetation is in better condition (FILAC, 2021). One of the most salient points that emerged from the literature on the economic impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples was that the communities that had exclusive access to their traditional lands were able to provide security to their peoples and were better able to manage the negative consequences of the pandemic. Widespread lockdowns in urban areas left many Indigenous Peoples jobless and forced those without any social protection to migrate back to their rural communities. This put pressure on the limited resources of those already in such communities (IWGIA, 2021).

Gender disparities

The burden of the economic downturn was disproportionately borne by Indigenous women. Set against a backdrop of limited access to healthcare, social protection and discrimination in the labour market, the pandemic magnified the suffering of Indigenous women (UN Women, 2021). Women experienced an increase in domestic violence and sexual abuse. Calls for help to emergency helplines rose by over 50 percent in some economies. Such forms of violence and discrimination have enormous consequences on a victim's ability to progress in the labour market (ILO, 2020). It leads to reduced worker productivity, increased absenteeism and economic dependence of the victim. Violence against women also exacerbates inequalities between the lifetime earnings of men and women.

Indigenous women were 26 percentage points more likely than non-Indigenous women to be employed in the informal labour market (ILO, 2020). In Latin America, 86 percent of all employed Indigenous women were a part of the informal labour market compared to 52 percent of non-Indigenous women. Moreover, they were often found at the bottom of all socio-economic indicators. Thus, when the pandemic hit, this was one of the factors that made Indigenous women more susceptible to food insecurity and poverty. Results from community data gathered by the Indigenous Navigator framework (IWGIA & ILO, 2020) shows that Indigenous girls were at a higher risk of dropping out of school since the pandemic hit, and there have been numerous reports of early pregnancies in some Indigenous communities.

A study by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2021) stated that 45 percent of Indigenous girls and young women in Latin America reported that they experienced an increase in the burden of unpaid domestic and care work since the onset of the pandemic. Moreover, Indigenous women relied on activities like selling art, handicrafts, and farming produce in local markets to earn a livelihood (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2020). The closure of markets has devastated their economy and resulted in food insecurity and the loss of financial independence for many women.

These gender disparities were not a feature unique to developing economies, a study by Howard-Bobiwash, Joe and Lobo (2021) showed that in some North American jurisdictions, violence against Indigenous women escalated. They stated that pre-existing disparities such as high poverty rates, food insecurity and unexpected expenses make Indigenous women especially vulnerable. According to a survey by Native Women's Association of Canada (2020), Indigenous women were more likely to be financially impacted by the pandemic than the overall Canadian population. Economic insecurity was also correlated with violence against women.

The educational divide deepens

Certain trends that have been accelerated by the advent of COVID-19, particularly the rapid digitisation of educational material and courses, threaten to undo years of progress and leave many behind with worsened outcomes.

Many economies introduced new alternative ways for students to continue learning, despite the massive disruption to education. In one South-Pacific jurisdiction, educational programmes were delivered via radio (World Bank, n.d.). Mexican officials also made digital copies of textbooks across all subjects and levels of education freely available on the website. Peru's Ministry of Education aimed to distribute 800,000 tablets to children in low income areas. These were to be delivered with solar chargers in areas with no electricity.

These were all encouraging measures. However, due to pre-existing disparities, Indigenous Peoples, especially those who were isolated and resided in rural areas, were unlikely to benefit from these measures. Even pre-pandemic, Indigenous Peoples faced significant barriers. They were less likely to hold a degree, diploma, or certificate (UNESCO, 2019).

They also had limited access to technology infrastructure. In the 11 economies surveyed by ILO and IWGIA (2020), on average less than 50 percent of Indigenous communities had access to the internet at home, with some having no access at all. As of 2017, in Canada, just 24 percent of households in Indigenous communities had access to quality, high-speed internet (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission [CRTC], 2018). Sánchez-Cruz, Masinire and López (2021) show that in 2015 in Mexico, less than 10 percent of people in Indigenous zones had access to the internet.

This digital divide may have long-term repercussions on the labour market outcomes of especially Indigenous youth. The survey by ECLAC (2021) showed that post-pandemic, 28 percent of Indigenous youth in Latin America and the Caribbean were not attending school. Moreover, the resources that have been made available by various economies rarely include material in Indigenous languages. In many economies in Asia and Latin America, there are multiple Indigenous groups, each with their own unique language(s). For example, in Mexico alone, 68 Indigenous languages are spoken. Therefore, even if Indigenous communities do get access to material made available to them, they are forced to learn in a language they may not be accustomed to, or may not even be familiar with. Finally, as Sánchez-Cruz, Masinire and López (2021) note, digital material is often provided with the assumption that parents will be able to assist their children in accessing the information and setting up the technology required at any given time. However, given the low rates of literacy and access to technology among Indigenous communities, parents may not always be able to support the younger generation to make use of the help provided, increasing the risk of further exacerbating vulnerabilities.

Issues with data quality and reporting

Data can be a powerful tool to help bring all voices into a narrative to inform decision making that is inclusive. It can shed light on unequal outcomes and helps track progress. It can also be a powerful tool to measure the effectiveness of a policy intervention. The evidence from the disaggregated data above shows that outcomes for Indigenous Peoples were worse, on average, in terms of economic, social and health outcomes. There were very few economies that tracked outcomes for Indigenous Peoples. McBride (n.d.) states that even when economies did have information on Indigenous Peoples, it was rarely put into the hands of those who could create value from it. This highlights the fact that the value of the information collected is enhanced when it is used to effect change.

Indigenous Peoples continue to face disproportionate levels of poverty, are overrepresented in the informal sector, are less educated, and often do not have access to quality healthcare. In order to address these concerns, it is vital to understand the specific drivers of these outcomes. The numerous reports of Indigenous communities collecting

their own data on infection and death rates, and economic outcomes highlight the importance of data stewardship to inform their own pandemic response.

Gathering information from Indigenous Peoples is often not a straightforward process. Davis (2016) outlines some key challenges that were highlighted by Indigenous Peoples. First, varying definitions of the term 'Indigenous' posed significant problems, which meant that the first, crucial step of identification, was lacking. In many cases, respondents were not allowed to record more than one ethnicity, which led to inaccurate reporting of Indigenous identity. Next, the standard form of questions did not take into consideration the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous social and family patterns. In some economies, Indigenous Peoples tend to be largely rural and extremely mobile, which raises concerns about longitudinal comparisons. Finally, since Indigenous Peoples were largely a part of the informal economy, they were underrepresented in official statistics.

Evidence from previous economic shocks

The global economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is not unique in the severe disruption it has caused to the economy of Indigenous Peoples. There is evidence from various economies to show that the global financial crisis (GFC) of 2008 undid years of progress and set Indigenous communities back by several years in terms of economic and social outcomes. Using data from the Canadian Labour Force Survey (LFS) for 2007-2012, Lamb (2015) found that the burden of the GFC fell disproportionately on Indigenous Peoples.³ The results showed that the estimated probability of being unemployed peaked at 6.8 percent in 2009 for the non-Indigenous population. However, in the case of Indigenous Peoples, it peaked at 12.4 percent in 2010, which was 3.2 percentage points higher than their pre-recession unemployment rate. The study also found that these differences would shrink by 31 percent if both groups had the same level of educational attainment.

Gray and Hunter (2017) compared how the outcomes for Māori in New Zealand and the Australian Indigenous Peoples differed in the wake of the GFC. The authors note that the employment rates for Māori have historically been significantly higher than those of Indigenous Australians. Prior to the recession, in 2006, Māori had an employment rate of 69 percent, compared to 51 percent for Indigenous Australians. New Zealand experienced a recession following the crash of financial markets in 2008. However, although economic growth slowed down in Australia, the economy did not slip into a recession. During this period, the employment rates for Māori fell substantially, while those for Indigenous Australians stalled but did not fall. These trends together indicate that major economic slowdowns have serious implications for the employment of Indigenous Peoples. This is largely because Indigenous Peoples are often marginally attached to the labour force or more likely to be discouraged workers than the non-Indigenous because they believe they will be discriminated against upon entering the labour market population (Savvas, Boulton & Jepson, 2011).

Research by ANZ Bank (2021) shows that in New Zealand, the unemployment rate for Māori has always been higher than that of the general population. During economic crises, this vulnerability is further exposed and the gap widens significantly. For instance, post-GFC, the Māori unemployment rate increased by seven percentage points, compared to just three percentage points at a headline level. While there may be a myriad of complexities that creates this outcome, the authors provide two possible reasons. First, on average, the Māori population is younger than the general population of New Zealand. Since younger people are generally less valuable to employers, they are among the first to experience job losses. Second, if the industries that Indigenous Peoples are more concentrated in are hit harder and are slow to recover, unemployment and loss of income for these groups will also be more persistent and take longer to bounce back.

³ It should be noted that these results only include those Indigenous Peoples who do not live in reserves. Indigenous Peoples who live on reserves are more likely to be vulnerable than those in urban areas.

3 Survey results

With the context provided by the existing literature, the results of the survey are split into three broad themes. The first theme centres on the quality and quantity of data. Here the data and responses provided by each economy are summarised, broken down by the themes within the questionnaire. The second theme is the economic impact of the pandemic on the Indigenous Peoples of each economy. This includes information on how individuals/households and businesses were affected in terms of employment, income, and other indicators. The final theme is one that is extremely important to Indigenous Peoples – community engagement and support. Here, we highlight the ways that Indigenous communities protected themselves and one another against the economic shock.

Along with their questionnaire responses, Canada and New Zealand provided additional studies undertaken on the economic impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples which provided a detailed picture of the changes to the economy of Indigenous Peoples as a result of the pandemic.

3.1 Feedback from the respondents

Nine of the 21 member economies of APEC completed the questionnaire. The completed questionnaires varied in terms of the availability of data and information from the respective participating economies.

Two of the nine respondents provided data on the vaccination rates of their Indigenous Peoples against COVID-19. These were Malaysia, which stated that as of 8 August 2021, 33.7 percent of the total population of the Indigenous Peoples in peninsular Malaysia had been vaccinated. In Canada, as of 5 October, 2021, a total of 786,893 doses have been administered, and of that, 348,757 were second doses in individuals aged over 12 years or older in 687 First Nations, Inuit and Territorial communities. Over 92% of individuals aged 12+ have received at least 1 dose and almost 74% have received a second dose.

The economic data provided by the economies was largely collected via official censuses and other tier one statistics such as household and business surveys. All nine economies conducted a census. Seven of these collected some official information on Indigenous Peoples. For example, in Australia, National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) officials coordinate policy development and service delivery for Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders. NIAA has a regional presence and collects on the ground insights and intelligence on emerging community issues and impacts relating to the pandemic. In addition to this, The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collects data disaggregated by ethnicity in its Census of Population and Housing, a rich source of information on economic and wellbeing outcomes. In Chile, the Chile National Socioeconomic Characterization Survey (CASEN) is a survey undertaken by the Ministry of Social Development and records disaggregated information on health and economic outcomes for Indigenous Peoples. While the Philippines collects official statistics on the population of Indigenous Peoples, data on variables such as income, spending and employment was not disaggregated for Indigenous Peoples.

Of the nine economies, two provided sufficient data on the employment outcomes of Indigenous Peoples, and two provided partial information. On the income of Indigenous Peoples, only one economy had sufficient information while three had partial information.

None of the economies indicated that they could identify Indigenous Peoples in the data on the economic impact of COVID-19 all of the time, or even a lot of the time. Seven of the nine economies said identification could be achieved some of the time. Papua New Guinea and Chinese Taipei could only ensure identification at limited times.

Data on the economic impact on Indigenous businesses was sparse. One economy had some information and two had very limited information. None of the nine respondents had any data on how the international trade of Indigenous businesses had been disrupted by the pandemic.

Many economies, including Australia, Canada, and Chinese Taipei noted that the full effects of the pandemic have not yet been realised due to ongoing containment measures having to be imposed to curtail the spread of new variants. Most economies have not yet resumed business as usual. Thus, the full economic effects of the pandemic on Indigenous Peoples will only be revealed once some semblance of normality has returned. Nevertheless, to ensure an equitable recovery and provide timely and targeted assistance, tracking the impact on and recovery of the economy of Indigenous Peoples is crucial.

3.1.1 Gaps identified

Questions four and five of the questionnaire asked respondents to identify data that they would need to accurately assess the impact of COVID-19 on their Indigenous Peoples, and what is needed to improve the data on the economic impact of the pandemic on their economy. Respondents faced certain challenges that limited their ability to accurately measure the disaggregated economic impacts of the pandemic on Indigenous Peoples. All of the respondents indicated that there were data gaps and the majority of respondents stated that further work will need to be completed to improve data gathering and data sources. Some of the gaps and limitations identified by each economy are outlined below.

Australia indicated that they would need data on employment rates. Additionally, financial data on Indigenous businesses could not be reliably gathered and there would need to be improvements in data quality for business financials, particularly with respect to identifying Indigenous Australians in the database. They also said that combining multiple administrative data sources to generate better insights would be beneficial, in addition to having granularity in regional data and gathering economic data from remote sources.

Canada stated that it would like to build Indigenous data capacity and Indigenous-led service design, delivery, and results reporting. Moreover, the Labour Force Survey of Statistics Canada did not include Indigenous Peoples living on reserve, limiting the accuracy of data. Finally, the data collection methodologies in provincial communities was different from that in territories, which limited the comparability of data.

Chile responded that they did not have access to data on Indigenous businesses and data disaggregated by ethnicity, sex and age groups.

Papua New Guinea stated in its response that it did not have access to sufficient funding and faced staff shortages, which limited the ability of officials to collect data.

In Peru, not all tier one statistics were disaggregated by ethnicity. In the case of business financials particularly, there was limited information on Indigenous businesses. They reiterated the importance of including an ethnic self-identifier variable in official surveys.

Malaysia indicated that they would need data on the employment of Indigenous Peoples in the private sector to fully assess the impact of COVID-19 on the economy of Orang Asli. They also highlighted that they would need to establish standard processes while collecting data from Indigenous Peoples on their levels of entrepreneurship and the size and composition of their economy.

In New Zealand, the legislations, guidelines, frameworks, rules, strategies and initiatives that guide the collection of data did adequately consider Māori data needs as the Indigenous Peoples of New Zealand, or incorporate well the articles in the Treaty of Waitangi.⁴ Work still needed to be done to create a data system that was more

⁴ The Treaty of Waitangi is New Zealand's founding document. It is an agreement, in Māori and English, which was made between the British Crown and about 540 Māori rangatira (chiefs) on 6 February 1840.

responsive to Māori. The data and statistics bill is currently being developed and aims to better incorporate Treaty of Waitangi responsiveness, along with a refresh of the data strategy including guidance on Māori and Iwi-owned data.

3.1.2 Best practice

The questionnaire asked respondents what they viewed as best practice when working with Indigenous Peoples in collecting and accessing data. All nine economies provided a response to this question. Some useful insights highlighted by respondents are featured below.

Australia pointed to the importance of improving the cultural competency of staff who worked with Indigenous data. Developing ongoing relationships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and engaging in a coordinated way to build mutual understanding and a shared purpose was also an important step to ensure a smooth data gathering process. In conjunction with this, using culturally appropriate methods of communication can improve trust and efficiency. Returning information to the community in a meaningful way, and providing assistance to help improve the understanding and better use of data ensures that the information gathered from Indigenous Peoples is used to make informed decisions. One of the priority reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap⁵ was to strengthen and establish formal partnerships and shared decision making with Indigenous Australians.

According to Chile, a crucial first step was to define the Indigenous population. Developing a participatory process was key, as was building specialised systems to gather Indigenous information.

The Philippine Statistics Authority used a compilation of statistical standards used by various agencies in the economy to ensure that systems were harmonised and the quality of data was maintained to a predetermined standard. They also suggested that it was best to collaborate with official Indigenous authorities and if possible, have Indigenous team members guide and participate in the data collection process.

Peru reiterated the importance of the application of personal data protection principles, which could make respondents more willing to share personal information.

Chinese Taipei pointed out the importance of integrating data from various sources to develop a broader understanding of the various intricacies of Indigenous economic development.

In Malaysia, direct dialogues and interviews were identified as best practice in obtaining accurate and comprehensive data from the Orang Asli. Additionally, as highlighted by several other economies, Malaysia pointed out that staff who work with Indigenous data should be aware of the social structures, traditional practices and the worldview of Indigenous Peoples.

One of the recommendations of the Data Strategy Roadmap⁶ published by Canada was to recognise that Indigenous Peoples have an inherent right to self-determination. It also stated that Canadian officials should collaborate with Indigenous partners, who are the custodians of their data, to co-develop indicators and data collection strategies.

Canada also recognised the importance of making good use of the data being collected on Indigenous Peoples and ensuring that it be used to provide solutions to those issues that Indigenous Peoples feel are most important to them. It prioritised the use of data to rectify socioeconomic inequities, and supporting Indigenous Peoples to collect, manage, and use the data they need to control and plan the delivery of the services that affect them in the future. As the literature review illustrated, many communities began collecting their own data during the pandemic. This example shows the strategic value of data to Indigenous community leaders to formulate their

⁵ <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement>

⁶ The roadmap can be found at <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/corporate/clerk/publications/data-strategy.html>

own responses. Any data collected from Indigenous Peoples should be made accessible to them to inform their own responses to socio-economic shocks during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

3.1.3 Ongoing initiatives

As noted by several economies, the economic effects of the pandemic have not yet been fully realised. Four of the nine economies said in their survey responses that as of the writing of this report, they were undertaking work to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the economy of their Indigenous Peoples. This section sheds light on some of the work in progress by APEC economies.

In Australia, the latest census took place in August 2021, providing insights on how the pandemic has affected the economic situation of Indigenous Peoples. Results from the Business Longitudinal Analysis Data Environment, which will be made available in 2022, will provide some insight into how Indigenous businesses fared in the pandemic.

Canada stated that it aimed to examine the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses in Indigenous communities by 2022. This will include results from a survey on the financing and growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). There is also an initiative by Statistics Canada to partner with Indigenous Services Canada to measure the impacts on wages and salaries, along with employment.

In New Zealand, regulatory policymakers are starting to take a co-design approach to a multitude of data projects. Thus, Māori are involved from the outset of projects, from design to decision making.

Chinese Taipei has commissioned a survey on the Indigenous enterprises in 2020. This will provide insights on the number of Indigenous employees each enterprise employs, disaggregated by sex, debt levels, research and development, exports, and challenges faced by these firms. The survey will provide illumination on the level of impact that COVID-19 has had on Indigenous enterprises.

3.2 The economic impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples

As highlighted by the literature, Indigenous Peoples were already in a disadvantaged social and economic position before the pandemic wreaked havoc on the global economy. Canada and New Zealand provided detailed evidence of how the economic downturn had, and continues to have, an impact on the employment and incomes of Indigenous Peoples. Papua New Guinea and Peru provided either limited information or valuable examples on these economic indicators.

3.2.1 Employment

Papua New Guinea has limited information available on the economic impact of the pandemic on their population.⁷ According to the World Bank (2021b), the economy of Papua New Guinea is largely informal and there are limited job opportunities in the formal sector for the fast-growing young population of the economy. In their survey response, Papua New Guinea indicated that the pandemic had a huge impact on the employment opportunities of the population, particularly in the case of employees of small and medium enterprises in both the formal and informal sectors.

According to official statistics collected by Peru as part of the National Household Survey (ENAH0) and the Permanent Employment Survey (EPE), the unemployment rate of Indigenous Peoples in urban areas rose from three percent in 2019 to 5.8 percent in 2020.⁸ It should be noted that this data excluded those in rural areas, who are often more likely to be working in the informal sector and have poorer economic outcomes.

⁷ The case of Papua New Guinea is unique in that nearly the entire population of the economy is Indigenous.

⁸ These surveys were not designed to measure the specific impact of the pandemic on economic outcomes.

Evidence from a crowdsourcing survey initiative by Statistics Canada (Arriagada, Frank, Hahmann, & Hou, 2020) showed that Indigenous Peoples were more likely to have experienced job losses or reduced work hours. As of July 2020, of those employed pre-pandemic, 37 percent of Indigenous participants reported experiencing job losses compared to 35 percent of non-Indigenous people. 65 percent of this group of Indigenous Peoples reported a strong to moderate financial impact. It should be noted that crowdsourcing data are not based on sampling principles. Therefore, the findings cannot be applied to the overall Indigenous population. Nevertheless, they offer some valuable insights.

Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) of Indigenous Peoples living off reserve in Canada showed that the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the labour market had widened as a result of COVID-19 (Statistics Canada, 2020). This was especially true in the case of Indigenous youth and women. In addition, the LFS as of August 2020 showed that Indigenous peoples were regaining their pre-pandemic employment levels much slower than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Between August 2019 and 2020, the gap in the employment rate of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population increased from 4.1 to 6.1 percentage points, while the gap in the unemployment rate increased from 4.3 to 5.6 percentage points during the same period. This was despite COVID-19 having a similar impact on employment for both groups early on. For Indigenous Peoples living off reserve, there was an increase in employment in the agriculture, utilities, trade, education services, other services and public administration sectors.

In New Zealand, labour market outcomes are estimated using the Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) conducted by Statistics New Zealand. Between June 2020 and June 2021, the unemployment rate for Māori steadily increased from 6.6 percent to 7.8 percent, peaking at 9.1 percent in the December 2020 quarter. The containment of the pandemic in New Zealand meant that the economy began its path to recovery relatively swiftly. As a reflection of this, the unemployment rates for Māori declined steadily between December 2020 and June 2021. However, there was still a large disparity in the unemployment rates of Māori and non-Māori as of June 2021, with the unemployment rate for non-Māori being just 3.9 percent.

3.2.2 Income

Papua New Guinea indicated that household incomes were severely impacted as a result of the pandemic since a majority of the population was employed at micro, small and medium sized businesses. The massive economic contraction resulting from the external shock of the pandemic pushed many Papua New Guineans into poverty, especially in the case of women and young people (World Bank, 2021c). The decrease in income translated into reduced supplies of basic food items and parents not being able to pay school fees and other utilities.

Estimates from Peru's ENAHO and EPE surveys showed that the monthly income from work for Indigenous Peoples fell by 26.6 percent between 2019 and 2020 to US\$234.

In Canada, over a third of Indigenous participants in a crowdsourcing survey reported a reduction in the ability to meet financial obligations, or even to pay for essentials like rent or groceries, as a result of incomes shrinking.

New Zealand provided data on the median weekly income of individuals, which was collected in the Household Labour Force Survey, disaggregated for Māori individuals. Between 2019 and 2020, for the first time since 2009, the weekly median income for Māori individuals declined. Incomes dropped from NZ\$643 to NZ\$624, a three percent decline. This was less than the six percent fall in median incomes for all individuals. A possible reason for the resilience of Māori during this recession is that Māori employment is skewed towards the retail trade and accommodation, manufacturing and construction industries (ANZ, 2021). The overall labour force is more concentrated in the service sector. The three industries which Māori employment is tilted towards were quick to bounce back, which may explain the relative robustness of the Māori economy in this pandemic.

3.2.3 Indigenous businesses

Disaggregated data on Indigenous businesses was only provided by a handful of economies. Insights from the literature review point to the fact that the economies of Indigenous Peoples largely rely on land-based activities such as tourism and agriculture.

Papua New Guinea's domestic economy was dominated by the agricultural, forestry, and fishing sectors; and these employed most of the workforce, most of which was informal (World Bank, 2021b). In their response to the questionnaire, Papua New Guinea stated that businesses in the tourism and hospitality, transport services, private security industries were particularly hard hit, along with smaller stores and shops.

Chinese Taipei promoted an e-commerce platform for Indigenous goods starting in June 2020, which allowed people to buy these products online. The products sold on the platform ranged from handicrafts such as pottery, jewellery, and weaving material to agricultural products such as rice, beans, and vegetables. As a result, some people were still able to maintain a steady source of income. Since the worsening of the pandemic in Chinese Taipei beginning in May 2021, the e-commerce platform's sales volumes increased significantly. Past monthly averages ranged from NT\$200,000 to NT\$300,000. In just the month of June 2021, sales increased to NT\$1.2 million.

New Zealand did collect official statistics on Māori businesses. Estimates from a report commissioned by Te Puni Kōkiri (the Ministry for Māori Development) showed that as of 2019, there were 10,000 Māori-owned businesses.⁹ The top three industries for Māori businesses were construction, professional services, and agriculture, fishing, and forestry. Official analysis of the financial impact of COVID-19 on businesses had not yet commenced as of August 2021. Nevertheless, a survey of a sample of Māori businesses by BDO New Zealand (2020) provided some insight on the impact of COVID-19. Tourism and forestry were the hardest hit sectors. Several businesses said that they expanded their e-commerce potential, often out of necessity. Importantly, several Māori businesses said that the pandemic helped strengthen the relationships between businesses and their communities. A key insight from the survey was that in the past, respondents valued cultural, social, and environmental outcomes higher than financial outcomes. However, since the onset of the pandemic, the importance of financial performance has risen. This was a reflection of the fact that 40 percent of respondents said that they had been negatively impacted financially, post-pandemic.

In Canada, 1.4 percent of SMEs were majority owned by Indigenous peoples. During the first quarter of 2021, just 18.2 percent of majority-owned Indigenous business stated that, at the current level of revenue, they could only operate for 12 months or more before they would have to make a decision on reducing staff, according to results from the Canadian Survey on Business Conditions (Tam, Sood, Johnston, 2021). The comparative number for all private sector Canadian businesses was 31.5 percent. The same survey indicated that a higher share of Indigenous businesses (41.1 percent) reported being unable to take on more debt compared to all Canadian businesses (39 percent). However, Indigenous businesses were just as likely or more likely to receive or be approved for funding and were more optimistic about the future than all private sector businesses; 24.6 percent of Indigenous businesses expected a decrease in sales in the future, compared to 31.4 percent for all businesses. Fewer Indigenous businesses (40.6 percent) expected a reduction in profitability over the next three months than all businesses in general (43 percent).

⁹ A Māori-owned business is one where at least 51 percent of wages paid to directors, partners, or active shareholders, were to individuals of Māori ethnicity or descent.

3.3 Community resilience

There were several examples of community support and resilience from Indigenous groups in the APEC region within the literature and in the information provided by respondents to the survey. Many communities mobilised their members to distribute essentials like protective equipment and food before formal help arrived. This helped several struggling communities to access support and to curb food insecurity. Such a coordinated response underscores the importance of social capital in the worldview of Indigenous Peoples and plays a major role in shaping their economies, particularly during times of crises. The rest of this section features the experiences of Indigenous Peoples within the APEC region, and the drivers of economic resilience.

In Chinese Taipei, during alert level three, Indigenous communities implemented precautionary safety measures. They prohibited tourists from entering their communities. This had two opposing effects. The first was to protect the community against the spread of the virus, potentially preventing a social and economic tragedy. However, there was a direct reduction of income for those who earned a living through tourism activities.

Māori businesses and community groups in New Zealand initiated their own response to the pandemic. Many hapū (sub-tribes) collectivised and made use of their resources to provide aid to their communities in the form of food such as meat and fish, or by providing direct financial support. Some Iwi used the customary seafood catch allocated to them to provide sustenance to the most vulnerable members of their communities.

In a report submitted to the Public Health Agency of Canada (Mashford-Pringle et al, 2021) the centrality of land to Indigenous individuals and communities was highlighted. Many Indigenous Peoples reported being less reliant on external resources as they were able to produce their own food such as wild rice and meat, often sharing with other community members. This was cited as an extremely positive experience amidst the horrors of the pandemic. Results from the same study show that during the first wave of the pandemic, Indigenous Peoples found ways to support one another by sharing food supplies. Inuit members ensured that the vulnerable, like community elders and single parents, were taken care of. Some Indigenous Peoples created food delivery services to deliver food and other essential supplies to community members.

4 Key Observations

Nine of the 21 APEC economies completed a questionnaire designed to measure the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous Peoples. The respondents were Australia, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, and Chinese Taipei.

In addition to the questionnaire, a review of the existing literature on the economic impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples was undertaken. This was to provide context to the questionnaire results as well as to paint a complete picture of the economic situation of Indigenous Peoples pre- and post-pandemic.

4.1 Main insights

Three key themes arose from the literature review and questionnaire responses. These centred on data availability and gaps, the economic impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples and businesses, and the resilience of Indigenous Peoples. The resilience of Indigenous Peoples was a result of the solidarity expressed by communities with those members who were struggling. Adhering to traditional knowledge and practices also helped curtail the spread of the virus and minimise negative economic impacts.

Only two economies provided sufficient data on the changes to the employment and incomes of Indigenous Peoples as a result of COVID-19. This data showed that many of the pre-existing economic vulnerabilities of Indigenous Peoples were exacerbated during the latest economic downturn.

The literature highlighted the importance and success of Indigenous Peoples in making use of traditional knowledge and practices to build resilience. Many communities imposed lockdowns and mobilised members to distribute food and health resources to the most disadvantaged individuals and households. Community members also provided health information translated to Indigenous languages to spread awareness. Indigenous Peoples relied on their traditional lands to grow their own food and support returning community members who had lost their urban jobs. Access to land helped several individuals and households avoid food insecurity.

4.2 Gaps identified

Despite the efforts undertaken by economies within the APEC region to identify and measure the economic impact of COVID-19 on their Indigenous Peoples, this report cements the fact that there were significant gaps in data, information and challenges to overcome. Only two economies had undertaken research specifically to understand the economic impact of the recent economic downturn on their Indigenous Peoples. Most economies relied solely on tier one statistics such as censuses to collect economic information on Indigenous employment and incomes. The challenge with this was that insights were not readily available to design and implement targeted policy measures.

One area where all economies were lacking was data on Indigenous businesses. While New Zealand and Canada had some data on enterprises owned by their Indigenous Population, there were significant gaps in this information. One of the main reasons for this was that Indigenous businesses did not operate in isolation – their operations were heavily intertwined with the rest of the domestic economy. Moreover, Indigenous Peoples, particularly those in urban areas worked in Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous businesses.

Indigenous Peoples were often not consulted during the design and implementation stages of data gathering processes. This meant that their worldview and cultural practices were not reflected in the data. It also meant that data from rural communities and hard to reach communities was lacking due to access and or low trust in the system.

4.3 Future opportunities

In the responses to the questionnaire, many economies indicated that they were in the process of collecting insights from Indigenous Peoples on how COVID-19 impacted them. In Australia, the latest Census was undertaken in August 2021. Canada completed its most recent census in May 2021. These censuses will provide Australia and Canada with some information on the impact of the pandemic on Indigenous employment and incomes.

Canada, New Zealand and Chinese Taipei stated that they were making progress with respect to the identification and measurement of Indigenous businesses. Canada has partnered with Indigenous businesses and communities to undertake surveys on their experiences during 2020, with a particular focus on exporters. These efforts are promising and will help generate valuable insights for decision makers as the full effects of the pandemic continue to be realised.

5 Recommendations

Based on the above findings from the literature review and questionnaire responses, some key recommendations are outlined below.

The need for better quality data

The lack of data on the economic impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous Peoples was highlighted both in the literature and insights gleaned from the respondents. There is a need for disaggregated data on economic outcomes by ethnicity. In order to generate insights specific to the impacts of the pandemic, economies could conduct smaller data gathering exercises, such as using crowdsourced data or conducting smaller surveys specifically designed for Indigenous respondents. These sources can provide vital information on understanding the successes or failures of existing policy responses and help with designing effective policies for the future.

Sharing findings and methodologies between economies

The questionnaire responses showed that there were large differences between economies on how and if they collected economic information on Indigenous Peoples. Some economies were just starting out while others had established systems and organisations in place to engage with Indigenous communities. It will be mutually beneficial for economies that have made significant progress in this space to share their successes, challenges, and failures with other APEC economies. These lessons will help economies to support their own Indigenous Peoples in dealing with crises such as the one we are currently facing.

Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the data collection process

Indigenous Peoples often have a unique worldview and their economic activities are based on the principles of kinship, access to traditional lands, and guardianship of their natural environments. It is hard to reflect these principles in standard data gathering processes.

To ensure success it is vital that economies consult with Indigenous leaders and experts in this space. Moreover, staff working with Indigenous data, especially in the designing and collection process, must be appropriately trained and familiarised with the Indigenous worldview.

Supporting and enabling Indigenous community responses

The economic resilience of Indigenous Peoples was demonstrated via the collective actions of entire communities. Supporting these culturally distinct perspectives will ensure that Indigenous Peoples thrive in the face of adversity.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this report was to provide an overview of the economic impact of the pandemic on Indigenous Peoples within the APEC region. The results from the questionnaires highlighted that while some economies have made great strides in collecting disaggregated data on Indigenous Peoples and using this information to assess the impact of the recent economic shock, there was still much to be done. The literature review provided some context to what made Indigenous Peoples particularly vulnerable to the economic shock. Over 85 percent of employed Indigenous Peoples all over the world worked in the informal sector. They were also more likely to be living in poverty and less likely to be educated. The literature also shed light on certain features that were unique to Indigenous economies such as the connection to traditional lands and the vital role of community support in displaying resilience in the face of the economic downturn and disruption to livelihoods.

Three main themes emerged from the literature and survey responses. The first centred on the importance of inclusive and good quality data, along with challenges faced by the respondents in collecting this information. The economies reiterated the importance of data protection measures to build trust, creating and managing relationships with Indigenous communities, and ensuring that Indigenous Peoples are involved in the decision making process and have access to their own information to make informed decisions.

The second theme was based on the economic outcomes of Indigenous Peoples before and after the economic downturn. Evidence from the economies that did have disaggregated information showed that the employment and incomes of Indigenous Peoples took a real hit in 2020. However, this impact was heavily dependent on the sectors Indigenous businesses and individuals were most concentrated in. Tourism based economies were heavily impacted. Many economies noted the difficulty associated with collecting data on Indigenous businesses, as business data collected normally does not have an ethnicity indicator. Also, these businesses are often not distinct parts of an economy and are heavily intertwined with the overall economy of a region, particularly in urban areas.

The last theme displayed the important role kinship and community engagement played in Indigenous Peoples economies, especially during crises. These networks were the lifelines of certain communities during the pandemic when they were faced with limited external support in the early days of the economic shock. Community members mobilised and used the resources at their disposal to support family and friends facing food insecurity and poverty. There were even cases where communities supported other communities within their own economies.

This report highlights the uniqueness of the economies of Indigenous Peoples. It emphasised the differences, as well as vulnerabilities of Indigenous communities, and the importance of good data and information. Data (qualitative and quantitative) can be a powerful tool that helps bring all voices into a narrative to inform decision making that is inclusive. It sheds light on unequal outcomes and helps track progress. It is advantageous for economies to understand the differential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Indigenous Peoples. These insights could inform and guide policy responses, ideally in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples. This will ensure an equitable and sustainable recovery for all.

Closing Whakataukī (Māori Proverb)

***“He waka eke noa”
(We are all in this canoe together)***

In the Māori culture, the waka (canoe) is often used as a metaphor for a journey. This whakataukī reminds us of the importance of unity and rowing together in the same direction toward a common goal.

Whether this refers to the partnership economies have internally between regulatory policymakers, data practitioners, academics, Indigenous community leaders and businesses, or the multilateral relationship between APEC member economies, we can accomplish great things when we work together.

Sadly, COVID-19 is having a significant disproportionate economic impact on Indigenous Peoples, and is highlighting pre-existing inequities. As we share information, ideas and experiences and lift each other up, we will be able to move forward together in our waka, ensuring that no one is left behind.

This is also the spirit and intent of APEC New Zealand’s host year theme of “Join, Work, Grow. Together”. Haumi ē, hui ē, tāiki ē!

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Appendix A Questionnaire

1. Has your economy assessed the **economic** impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your Indigenous Peoples?
- Yes -> **Go to Question 2**
 - No -> **Go to Question 4**
- [Please delete one option]

2. What types of data has your economy used to assess the **economic** impact (positive or negative) of the COVID-19 pandemic on your Indigenous Peoples? For example, data about employment rates, business debt, or anything else.

[Please enter your answer here]

3. In your economy, what is known about the impact (positive or negative) that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on each of the following?

a. Employment of Indigenous Peoples

[Please enter your answer here]

b. Household income of Indigenous Peoples

[Please enter your answer here]

c. Any aspect of the viability of Indigenous businesses (e.g., survival rates, debt etc.)

[Please enter your answer here]

d. International trade of Indigenous businesses

[Please enter your answer here]

4. What data does your economy want **but not have** to assess the **economic** impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your Indigenous Peoples? For example, data about employment rates, business viability, or anything else.

[Please enter your answer here]

5. In your economy, what is needed to improve data on the Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Indigenous Peoples? For example, changing how data is collected, building capacity and capability, creating digital asset and infrastructure tools, investment, or anything else.

[Please enter your answer here]

6. How often is your economy able to **identify** Indigenous Peoples in the data that is used to understand the **economic** impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the **general** population?
- All of the time
 - A lot of the time
 - Some of the time
 - A little of the time
 - Never
 - Don't know

[Please delete all **but one** option]

Is there any further comment you wish to make on your answer to this question?

[Please enter your answer here]

7. What does your economy see as best practice (e.g., principles or guidelines) when working with Indigenous Peoples about data?

[Please enter your answer here]

8. We are interested in any successes or lessons your economy has had when using data to assess the **economic** impact of the pandemic on your Indigenous Peoples. We would use this information to produce anonymous case studies for the report.

Are there any specific examples you would like to share with us? If so, please provide details.

[Please enter your answer here]

9. Is there anything else you want to share with us?

[Please enter your answer here]