Importance of Education in Indigenous Brazilian Communities

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Introduction
Indigenous peoples in Brazil are formed by various ethnics groups who inhabited the country's territory prior to its discovery by Europeans. Shortly after the colonization period approximately 2000 Indian nations disappeared. Indians in Brazil made substantial collaboration to the country’s culture such as the domestication of cassava, a major staple food in rural areas. During the 1970’s the population of indigenous people continued to decrease in Brazil through movement to the cities, enculturation and population decline. Somewhat surprisingly, in the past 25 years the population of indigenous peoples is on the increase and many leaders and individuals are concerned about overcrowding on “collected lands” and the loss of land through family division of landholdings.

Purpose
The purpose of this poster is to share perceived educational challenges within Guarani-Kaiowa and Terena communities and strategies used by families to cope with perceived problems.

Methods
In order to determine identify strategies used to cope with challenges by Guarani-Kaiowa and Terena an interview guide was developed. During June 2006, these communities, located at Mato Grosso do Sul state in Brazil, were interviewed by a native Portuguese speaker. The study was authorized by the Brazilian National Foundation for Indians-FUNAI. Twelve respondents were selected using the snow-ball approach. The length of the interviews ranged from half an hour to one hour and 30 minutes. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder; data was transcribed and translated into English by a native Portuguese speaker.

Results
Low household income, lack of agricultural land, child malnutrition, orphan children, male suicide, and alcoholism were the major problems identified. In order to cope with low household income two individuals reported that they cultivate foods like vegetables, cassava, corn and raise chickens. Seven families receive monthly food package from the government and three women produce and sell crafts to tourists. Two respondents indicated that they were learning how to
better cook with the government food in order to avoid malnourished children. Regarding the lack of agricultural land, respondents indicated that the community leadership group needs more land from the state and federal government. Three respondents indicated that it is common for families to raise orphan children, families become responsible for extended family children as they become orphans. No direct strategy was identified when coping with alcoholism and male suicide in the community.

**Implications**

Lacking reasonable household income, native Brazilian women are motivated to perform other activities to help their spouses meet monthly expenditures. Even though some females perceived the importance of producing food to feed their family there is not enough agricultural land in the village. Governmental initiatives like monthly food packages provide immediate assistance, however it does not solve the low household income challenge in the long term. The Brazilian government could provide vocational education for families so that they could perform other economical activities to increase the household income. Government should prioritize the allocation of more agricultural land to the community to increase food production. Women could benefit from nutrition courses since only two out of the seven were learning how to cook with the food given by the government food. The implementation of support groups within the community could help families better cope with alcoholism and male suicide.

**Keywords:** Native Brazilians, social problems, agriculture, Brazil, education