



Verein für Indigene Gemeinschaften in Paraguay

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ANNUAL REPORT 2021 Overview:

25 YEARS OF SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES!!!

Much has been achieved, some remains to be done:

- The Totobiegosode checkpoint, which we fund, remains indispensable to counter the land grabbing that continues to run rampant.
- High-resolution satellite imagery continues to be, and increasingly is, an effective tool to identify encroachments.
- The Nivaclé-Manjui community in Yacac'Vash has worked its way out of debt and continues to develop.

Dear members, patrons and interested parties

For 25 years we have been actively supporting the indigenous people in the Paraguayan Chaco. Their legitimate land claims are in the foreground. We started with large land purchases. We have been able to finance and transfer a total of 22,614 hectares. A remarkable result. It has triggered great gratitude among the indigenous people. They now have a legal basis for their lives. Because of the rapid increase in land prices, our focus has turned to general support and protection of habitat against deforestation and direct theft. There is still considerable work to be done. Probably most important at the moment is legal help: it is needed to enforce with the authorities the completion of the biosphere reserve by missing large plots, to take invaders and illegal settlers to court, and to represent the indigenous people at United Nations organizations (e.g., the UN Human Rights Commission). Indigenous people need this legal help. They cannot afford it on their own. Not to be left unmentioned is the 'Fondo de Salud', without which the medical care of the indigenous population in the Chaco would be almost impossible.

Without wanting to brag, we can say that thanks to your generous help, some changes have already been made for the better. But this is not the end of the work, on the contrary, the situation is still difficult, the forest is burning, the authorities are hardly moving, poverty and hopelessness are great. We have to stay on it, to work for these people who have almost nothing, for the forest, for nature, for the environment. These issues cannot be seen separately from each other. We continue to count on your support, as we have done for 25 years. Thank you very much on behalf of the indigenous people of Paraguay.

Now to the year 2021

2021 was again a special year, both for the indigenous people of Chaco and for our association. We lacked face-to-face encounters, for example at meetings. Nevertheless, we continued to deepen and expand our efforts for the indigenous people of Chaco. We do not know exactly how many victims the Covid pandemic has claimed among the indigenous people in Chaco. However, Vera Regehr, our commissioner in Chaco, informed us that fortunately there was only one death among the Totobiegosode. People protected themselves as best they could and implemented the recommended measures.

Thanks to your help, we were able to continue financially supporting the Totobiegosode control post in 2021. Just like last year, the constant presence of groups in the north of the area seems to have an effect in a wide area. Now they are trying to establish a second checkpoint in the east.

Our lawyer on the ground, Julio Duarte, remains very important for our activities. He is constantly following the often difficult and lengthy procedure of reporting encroachments and illegal logging. For example, he has filed a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on behalf of OPIT (Leadership of the Totobiegosode) and the NGO Espacios. We expect to get the result in the first half of 2022. We hope that the Organization of Inter-American States will reprimand the Paraguayan government for failing to transfer more land to the indigenous peoples. One of Julio Duarte's complaints to the Public Prosecutor's Office in the Chaco has resulted in the conviction of an illegal settler and payment of damages to the indigenous people.

We have renewed the contract with the satellite company in Berlin; it has even been upgraded to include high-resolution images. Our helpers in Canada and the United States (Peter and Alfred Sawatsky) study the images tirelessly and report to Espacios (Verena and Julio). They, in turn, pass the information on fires and clearing attempts to OPIT (the Totobiegosode Organization).

Fernando Elias, MD, who is on the board of the NGO Espacios, continues to show great commitment and regularly travels to the Chaco to provide medical care to the people. Let's not forget that the trip from Asunción to the Chaco takes Julio or Fernando at least a day. By the way, the Health Fund remains an indispensable support for the communities of Chaidi and Arocojnadi. As before, the funds are used where government facilities are lacking and health care is in short supply. Much life-saving work has again been accomplished thanks to this fund!

The Yacac'Vash community of the Nivaclé Manjui, close to the Neuland Colony, has worked its way out of debt, according to reports from the Neuland Colony. As you know, we financed the land of this community. Crop failures and other consequences of climate change have led to the partial conversion of farming to livestock, with the support of the colony's neighbors. So far, a success story!

Arami Ullón is a Paraguayan filmmaker based in Asunción and Basel. She has made a documentary film (Apenas el Sol / Nothing but the sun). This film was awarded and had its first screening in Switzerland in the fall of 2021. We participated in the subsequent panel discussions.

Financially, it was not an easy year. We feel that the pandemic is having its impact. Fortunately, and thanks to very hard work of some board members, we have received some substantial pledges again at the end of 2021. This gives hope that we can continue our support in 2022.

On our own front, we have some welcome news. Several new volunteers have come forward to serve on the Board during 2021. We will propose them for election to the board at the upcoming annual meeting.

Finally, on behalf of the indigenous people of the Chaco of Paraguay, we would like to thank you all, dear members, patrons and interested parties, most sincerely for your continuous and generous support. It is only thanks to you that we can continue this work for fellow human beings who have had it much less good in life than we have.

With kind regards

Hans Weenink and Rolf Scheibler
Presidium