



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE  
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

# Chaco Program 2010 Report

*The Chaco program is a long-term tri-national effort led by CWS to improve the quality of life of the indigenous peoples of South America's Chaco region by strengthening the capacity of communities to promote their right to recover land and live free of hunger and oppression.*

## There are reasons to be hopeful in South America's Chaco...

...a region spanning parts of Argentina, Paraguay and Bolivia, roughly the size of South Africa. While many of the root causes of the chronic poverty, vulnerability and exclusion of indigenous peoples in the Chaco region persisted during 2010, the Chaco program witnessed advances in key land claim processes accompanied by Chaco program partners across the region. This allowed us to place heavier emphasis on sustainable land use and forest management, access to water, food security and empowerment of indigenous youth and women after years of focusing more on land claims.



Despite these signs of hope, the Chaco program continues to support a multitude of isolated, remote communities to gain land titles –in legal and administrative processes that can take up to 20 years- and to stop depletion of their natural resources by outsiders. **At the end of 2010, the five Chaco program partners were accompanying and supporting 47 land claim processes carried out by dozens of indigenous communities for a total of 8,320 square miles (21,550 km<sup>2</sup>), a surface slightly larger than that of El Salvador or Israel.**

This report reflects the variety of challenges and opportunities that indigenous communities must address in order to live with dignity once the issue of land rights improves or is finally solved. We offer examples of initiatives and efforts that range from securing basic human and productive infrastructure (roads, water, education, food production) to learning sustainable forest management to community organizing, mobilization and empowerment, all adapted to the new circumstances.

## During 2010, thanks to the CWS Chaco program...

### A. Forty-seven indigenous-led land claim processes involving 8,320 square miles received ongoing accompaniment and legal and technical advice

We provided technical support, legal training and transportation and food for indigenous leaders for travel from their communities to the cities where government authorities reside.

Examples of land claim cases receiving that received support in 2010:

- The community of San Fernando of the Enxet Sur people in Paraguay secured 10,030 hectares (24,784 acres) for their 65 families when the government of Paraguay finally purchased the land from a private owner, fulfilling a ruling of the Costa Rica-based Inter-American Court of Human Rights. This case took 19 years to resolve.
- In perhaps the largest land claim process in South America today, case “55-14” involving 15,000 people (70% Wichí people, the rest campesino criollos) and 643,000 hectares (1,588,881 acres) made substantial progress in Salta, Argentina. A comprehensive community development plan covering roads, economic development, sustainable forest management, water, education and health is being designed by provincial authorities with local participation. This case is a unique example of dialogue, consensus-building and mutual understanding between the indigenous majority and the criollo minority, both living in extreme poverty.
- In Bolivia, a group of Weenhayek people, one of the poorest in Bolivia, are close to securing title to 23,938 hectares (59,151 acres). Seventeen new communities were established on the lands, reducing intra-community conflicts over natural resources (e.g. water, land, fisheries, honey and wood) and providing greater protection from the constant aggressions by local ranchers who take advantage of unclear land titling. It is now imperative to promote sustainable natural resources management, access to water, education, health and agriculture and livestock production in the new communities.
- The Xakmok Casek community of the Sanapaná people in Paraguay (66 families) secured a favorable ruling from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights regarding its claim for title to 10,700 hectares (26,440 acres). This case will have taken more than 20 years of struggle.
- The Guaraní communities of Vinalito, Argentina made slow progress toward occupation of 11,000 hectares (27,781 acres) of recovered lands, while most of the families still live in urban centers in sub-human conditions. The few families who have been able to move onto the land started small agriculture (corn, pumpkin, beans). Two water dams were built with government support and further road improvement, water infrastructure and electricity are next.
- The Ayoreo Totobiegosode peoples live in Paraguay in voluntary isolation from the Western world. They have claimed 500,000 hectares (1,235,521 acres) in a case involving massive deforestation by a private company in one of the claimed territories. The government of Paraguay’s 2011 budget includes funds to purchase 98,000 hectares for this tribe.

*With five members supporting 47 different land claim processes involving more than a dozen different ethnic groups in three countries, the Chaco program is a unique platform for cross-border capacity-building and skills transfer.*

## B. Indigenous communities used GIS technology to advance sustainable development.

When land rights is “the” issue, and when natural resources are scarce or disputed, reliable maps become crucial. The Chaco program equips communities with GIS software and computer equipment, training and peer-learning for using technology (like GPS). Maps are used for sustainable development plans, to lodge well-documented complaints of natural resource exploitation by outsiders and to shore up land claims (e.g., cemeteries show that ancestral lands have belonged to the communities for multiple generations).

2010 highlights included:

- Seventeen indigenous leaders from communities across the Chaco were trained in our annual workshop on “Use of GIS for the prevention and resolution of conflicts over land and natural resources” and will apply their new knowledge and skills in concrete cases in their communities of origin.
- Wichi groups in Argentina used recently completed maps for community awareness-raising and education and plan to use them to develop sustainable a tourism project.
- A Qom teacher trained by the Chaco program is conducting a mapping project involving the community and his students.



*In Los Blancos, in the Argentinean Chaco, the community is engaged in learning how to map their ancestral territories. GIS technology peer-learning and mapping projects that involve the community are essential to produce reliable maps that are a strategic resource for land claims. Photo credit: FUNDAPAZ*

With the settlement of key land claims, focus now turns to land use: sustainable forest management, food security and diversified livelihoods rank as high priorities.

## C. Indigenous leaders circulated knowledge and lessons learned in peer-learning exchanges.

The Chaco program provides exchanges for indigenous men, women and youth on food security, natural resources management, community organizing, handicrafts, bilingual education and access to water. These intentionally expose those who are just starting the land claim process to those who finished it some time ago.

Examples in 2010:

- In Salta, Argentina, newly formed communities visited established, well-organized, ones to learn about their livestock raising projects.
- In Argentina, indigenous women visited a cooperative formed by women peasants in a neighboring province to learn about their textile production techniques.
- Guaraní people from Argentina visited the Guaraní people in Bolivia. As a result, Guaraní from Argentina will be trained as bilingual teachers and health promoters in Bolivia.

*"It is so powerful for the leaders of the worst-off communities to visit those that have land title, schools, water, or animals. As technical staff, one can tell them a thousand times that they can have goats or manage the forest, but if they see this, their appropriation of it is much faster and more effective."*

*-Chaco program staff in Argentina*

#### **D. Indigenous youth were empowered with access to post-high school education.**

Most indigenous youth must travel far from their communities to go to school. The Chaco program provides material and emotional support to talented indigenous youth pursuing post-secondary school studies, often the first in their communities to do so.

Examples of support for indigenous youth empowerment and education in 2010:

- Twenty-one Qom and Wichi students received room, food, books and emotional support in the heart of Argentina's Chaco region, known for its racism and discrimination, while pursuing degrees in areas like bilingual education and mathematics. The provincial government announced it will now cover food for the student dormitory.
- In Paraguay, one student graduated as a lawyer and five from different ethnic groups are pursuing degrees in Nursing, Law, Political Sciences, Rural Economics and Business.
- A Guaraní student graduated as lawyer in Bolivia and is returning to serve his community and organization. Six more continued to study Psychology, Chemistry, Nursing and Law.
- In Argentina's Jujuy province, twelve Guaraní youth are receiving training in government-certified courses on carpentry and education.



*Milton is an 18 year old indigenous youth from the Enxet Sur people, in Paraguay. With support from CWS and local partner CIPAE, he is the first person in his community to finish high school, and now is studying law at the University of the Chaco.*

*He told us, "Our communities need their own professionals: lawyers who understand our historical land issues, doctors who live in our communities, know about our traditional medicine and can be there any time, teachers so children can keep on studying."*

*Photo credit: Don Engstrom / CWS*

**E. Indigenous representatives dialogued with top level policymakers, civil society and the media during the CWS-sponsored Week of Indigenous Peoples of the Chaco.**

The Chaco program creates opportunities for dialogue between indigenous leaders and policymakers, civil society and media where the former can voice their demands, share their needs, plans and dreams, and hold the government accountable. The Chaco program-funded annual “Week of Indigenous Peoples of the Chaco,” the key event of the year, took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Eighteen indigenous leaders from the three countries met with the President of the Supreme Court, Congresspersons and other high level officials, held public events, and garnered TV and print media coverage. Such high level government contacts at the national, provincial and local levels have been made possible by the long-term process of training and accompaniment in which indigenous leaders have gained experience and insight into effective communication and public policy advocacy.

**F. Twenty-six indigenous “umbrella” organizations were strengthened by technical support.**

During 2010, the Chaco program devoted substantial time and energy to supporting effective indigenous leadership and organizing at the community and at the second and third levels. Program members provide training and technical advice in areas such as community organizing, effective advocacy, legal and civic education, land claims, environment and natural resources management, economic development, and conflict resolution. The program also helps indigenous organizing and organizations to comply with existing laws and regulations that govern them (from initial registration to holding regular election of authorities and assemblies).

*In November 2010, CWS partnered once again with Foods Resource Bank to support a food and nutritional security project in the Chaco. Fifteen communities from Bolivia and Paraguay will be trained in food security, local capacity building, prevention and mitigation of the effects of water shortage.*

**G. Indigenous women were empowered by peer-learning opportunities, training and advocacy events.**

The Chaco program provides ongoing support to local women’s groups, facilitating exchanges between groups of different regions and ethnicities and holding an annual inter-ethnic gathering of indigenous women of the Chaco region. Highlights during 2010 include:

- The Fifth Encounter of Indigenous Women of the Chaco region brought together 64 adult and young women from all ethnic groups to share lessons learned on issues of Land, Education, Health and Livelihoods.



*A flagship of the Chaco program, the tri-national women's meeting is an extremely effective venue for participants to develop their leadership skills, define future peer-learning, improve their self-esteem and exchange visits. Photo credit: CERDET*

- In Argentina, Qom women from L'taraaipi commission were invited by Wichi women from Nueva Pompeya to attend a workshop in legal education.
- Indigenous women across the region received support from the program to pursue tertiary and university studies.

## CWS CHACO PROGRAM PARTNERS

- Center for Regional Studies in Tarija Bolivia (CERDET) in Bolivia
- Churches Committee for Emergency Assistance, (CIPAE) in Paraguay
- Pastoral Ministry with Indigenous Peoples Team, Conference of Catholic Bishops (ENDEPA) in Argentina
- Foundation for Development in Justice and Peace (FUNDAPAZ) in Argentina
- United Board of Missions (JUM) in Argentina.

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