



INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WHO DEPEND ON THE WILL OF FARMERS TO SURVIVE

The pandemic worsened the conditions of poverty of the community La Patria del Pueblo Angaité [The Homeland of the Angaité People] in Puerto Pinasco, where the indigenous people are subject to the will of farmers as to whether or not feed them.



FACTSHEET

CASE: Individuals' restrictions to subsistence activities of indigenous people of the Angaité people of the La Patria community, Chaco

LOCATION: La Patria Community, Puerto Pinasco district, Presidente Hayes department, Chaco.

SUBJECT/HUMAN RIGHTS

AFFECTED: 2—Agribusiness/2.3—Titling and land issues.

JUDICIAL/GOVERNMENTAL/

INTERNATIONAL STATUS OF THE

CASE: State intervention was limited to food assistance on only two occasions during the entire pandemic.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE

AFFECTED: 1000

BRIEF DESCRIPTION: The income of the indigenous people of the Angaité people of the La Patria community depended on temporary jobs given by ranch owners before the pandemic. Hunting and gathering to survive also depends on their authorization, despite them being in ancestral territories.



When indigenous people from the La Patria del Pueblo Angaité marched in August 2020, it was because they were starving in the Chaco. For five days, men, women, girls, and boys demanded food from a government that asked them to stay at home, but did not give them

alternatives for subsistence. Four months had passed since the authorities had last brought them food. Remain at home, but do not go out for food.

The covid-19 pandemic was not the most troubling thing for the thousand families that were left without a source of income during the confinement in this community of Puerto Pinasco, Presidente Hayes, located 462 kilometers from Asunción, capital of Paraguay. Since March, the ranch owners stopped paying them. They also limited indigenous people in the access to establishments, to fish, shellfish (hunt), or to collect honey.

La Patria has 22,520 hectares, and it is surrounded by ranches. The ancestral lands of the Angaité are beyond the limits of their community, which means that the ranches are in their former domain. The law guarantees the indigenous people access to these lands so that they can carry out their subsistence activities, but in practice, they depend on the goodwill of the ranchers.

The boys go out once a week. The ranchers have beautiful lagoons. If the boys are allowed to enter, they do so, if not, they do not enter,” Aman-
cio Pinasco, leader and com-
municator of Karoa’i village,
husband and father of three
children, comments.

Situations like this violate the rights of indigenous people to exercise their traditional livelihood. As provided for in Law 234 that approved Convention 169 on indigenous peoples in its article 14: “In appropriate cases, measures shall be taken to safeguard the right of the people concerned with use of lands that are not exclusively occupied by them, but that they traditionally had access for their traditional activities and sustenance.”

The authorities simply do not intervene. Compliance with the laws that seek to safeguard the rights of the indigenous people are thus at the discretion of the owners of agricultural establishments. Researcher Tina Alvarenga explains that on one hand, in these cases the police, the prosecutor’s office, and INDI, Instituto Paraguayo del Indígena [Paraguayan Institute of the Indigenous People], should intervene. “But if the institutions that must enforce the law do not, it is very difficult,” she laments.

On the other hand, the resources to supply the subsistence economy disappear as extensive cattle ranching and agribusiness advance. Deforestation for pasture has a high impact on the loss of forests and biodiversity: the Chaco covers 78% of all the deforested area in 2019. Meanwhile, the effects of this extensive agricultural and livestock production model entail a great change in use of land and maybe climate.

This implies the decrease or loss of habitat for biodiversity. The change in land use, in turn, is linked to extreme weather events such as intense droughts, floods, high temperatures and recurrent forest fires.

Whether hunting in the woods or working on the farm, the indigenous people depend on ranchers to a great extent. “I work for food when something comes out. What are we going to do? I have seven children, the youngest is two years old and the oldest is 15,” Felipe Fernández from Tres Quebrachos village, one of the 18 villages in the community, and president of the Asadec adds. Asociación Angaité para el Desarrollo Comunitario [Angaité Association for Community Development] He named the village in honor of three quebracho trees that were there when he arrived.

Felipe and his neighbors walk at least five kilometers to reach a lagoon or pond where they can still fish. They have to be satisfied with fish dying in the quagmire to bring their food home, “because there is nothing else.”

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE HAVE NO GUARANTEES TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO SUBSISTENCE





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POVERTY IS A RISK CONDITION IN THE PANDEMIC

Until December 5, La Patria did not register confirmed cases of covid 19. The most common illness is still the common cold. The indigenous people emphasize that they have an working health post in La Leona which is one of the community's villages, but that it lacks regularly present doctors and medicines.

According to data from FAPI, Federación por la Autodeterminación de los Pueblos Indígenas [Federation for the Self-Determination of Indigenous Peoples], the department that has been affected the most by covid 19 has been Boquerón, Chaco, where 20 out of the 25 deaths from the disease were registered until December 2020. With an indigenous population of 117,150 people, confirmed cases reach 250 in 14 of the 19 indigenous groups.

FAPI points out that, although the spread of the virus and deaths among the indigenous communities of Paraguay are among the lowest in the region, the pandemic has had a severe impact on them due to pre-existing conditions such as poverty. In the country, 6 out of 10 indigenous people live in poverty. This has compounded the precarious food insecurity during confinement.

The prolonged drought of 2020 worsened the situation in La Patria; the cisterns were empty as it barely rained in a year. The indigenous people say that the government tanker trucks brought water to load the reservoirs, but it turned out that it was from water that is not drinkable, as if they would not notice. That is why they stopped asking for help and they went to the lagoons for so called cutwater themselves.

“We, the chaqueños [Chaco residents] know what cutwater is like. Pyre (fish), yacaré, a ky’a kua (dirty) are tamed in it. If you are not used to it, you will not drink it. But that’s how the fellows serve themselves, there is nothing else,” Amancio says.

The recommendation of the Ministry of Health to wash hands constantly to prevent contagion is impossible in La Patria. However, the community shutdown implemented since March has been successful in keeping the virus out. They only allow the ‘maceteros’ to enter, who are the street vendors who bring them supplies.

To buy food and basic products, the community depends on these maceteros who come every 15 days. They sell five kilos of rice at G. 20,000, a bag of noodles at G. 25,000, half a liter of oil at G. 10,000, and fuel at G. 10,000. The latter is very important for motorcycles. For the families of La Patria, products are expensive.

“The macateros are coming, whoever has money buys, whoever doesn’t, watches,” Amancio jokes, although he later clarifies that this is the case in real life. He comments that there are villages so inaccessible that not even the vendors dare to go there.

Moving within the community itself is difficult, especially for the villages away from main roads. There are almost no internal roads or trails; there are only grounds that are worn by use. This is the case of the Laguna Teja village, where the maceteros do not even venture. The same thing happens in Monte Cue, Carpincho, Tatare, Colonia 24, and Laguna Hu. To get to these areas, you must cross the González stream, something impossible when there is a flood, this is the reason why the indigenous people ask for the construction of internal roadways.

The need for decent housing is another pre-existing condition prior the pandemic. The National Constitution itself establishes that access to decent housing is a right of “all the inhabitants of the Republic”, and that seeking the mechanisms to make that right a reality is a duty of the State by their own decree.

However, the indigenous people demand that MUVH, Ministerio de Urbanismo, Vivienda y Hábitat [Ministry of Urbanism, Housing and Habitat] previously SENAVITAT, finish the houses in the nine remaining villages. They decry that the work was stopped more than two years ago. Explaining that the organization built houses in the villages that are visible from the road, “so it seems that the community is doing very well, but it is not so.” Most are made of roofing is patched of karanda’y, veneers, and tents, yes tents. They continue to request electricity six villages

WATER, PATHWAYS AND HOUSING: RIGHTS THAT ARE PRIVILEGES IN LA PATRIA

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HONEY AND SUBSIDY FOR MOTHERS GIVE THE COMMUNITY A BREAK

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Amancio says that some families were able to cope with the pandemic thanks to cash transfers from Tekoporã. This social program of the Central Government consists of a family bonus of G. 450,000 (USD 68) paid every two months while the current minimum wage in Paraguay is G. 2,192,839 (USD 331). So mothers buy groceries for their children, although payments are delayed for up to three months.

The incidence of this subsidy, however, is minimal for the need that exists in La Patria. That is why the indigenous people claim that the Government forgot about them: the SEN, Secretaría de Emergencia Nacional [National Emergency Secretariat], brought them supplies twice in nine months: 18 kilos per family in April, and 40 kilos per family in August after a week-long protest march, nothing more has been delivered.

From September, families of La Patria began to collect honey. Amancio says the “angaité” (immediate) multifloral honey became a source of income for the people. “We are only dedicating ourselves to honey. The companions go to the ranches to ask permission to collect; some ranchers refuse, but most of them allow us to enter. This is how people are making it now.