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## Leading Article

### Indigenous communities and the fight against desertification



Counseling by Wise Men and Spiritual Guides in the Southern Hemisphere. At Sacred Ceremony, AMTA WARPE and AGUARIP (Aimara Spiritual Guide who handed over the Commander's Baton to Evo Morales, President of Bolivia

"When you leave your home town and start uphill, the horse pushes forward and your soul pulls back"  
*Atahualpa Yupanqui, Argentine singer-songwriter*

**P**otholes, shortcuts to reach town, large avenues, the location of shopping malls. The inhabitants of big cities have a different awareness about their environment compared to those who live in faraway regions. The former know about superficial things, those that are placed on and cover the land with artificial sounds, colours and lights. The others are fully aware about the land, understand its soul and meet its requirements. The problem of desertification is therefore invisible to city dwellers and devastating for those who are always kept in the background.

## AGENDA

**21-23 January:  
CEPAL, Santiago,  
Chile**

Enhanced Tools to Combat Desertification and Drought – Integrated Systems for Agro-forestry and Water Resource Management in Latin American Arid and Semi-Arid Zones.

**26-31 January:  
Mendoza  
International LADA-L  
Workshop.**

## Desertification, owner and master of the land

The *Instituto Nacional de Asuntos Indígenas* (National Institute for Indigenous Affairs, INAI) is the National Institution responsible for creating inter-cultural channels to enforce the rights of Indigenous People as set forth in the Constitution (Art. 75, Para. 17).

“To recognize the cultural and ethnic pre-existence of the Argentine Indigenous peoples. To guarantee respect for their identity and their entitlement to bilingual and inter-cultural education; to recognize the legal personality of their communities and the community’s possession and ownership of the land these peoples have traditionally occupied; and to regulate the delivery of sufficient land suitable for human development; none of those plots of land can be disposed of, transferred or suffer liens or attachments. To ensure their participation in the management of their natural resources and any other interests that may affect them. The provinces may concurrently exercise the powers set forth herein”.

Art. 75, Para. 17 **Constitución Nacional**

INAI was created in September 1985 as a decentralized body with indigenous participation. One of its missions is to create participatory forums for these communities to become involved in topics which call for their interest, such as natural resources, biodiversity and sustainable development.

As reported by INAI, the aboriginal communities –beyond their peculiarities- have a livelihood-based economy which entails a clear disadvantage with regard to other sectors of society. This kind of economy is based on small scale cattle raising, family farm crops, fishing, crafts and temporary jobs. Desertification hinders even further the livelihood and development of these communities and brings about an over-exploitation of natural resources. Moreover, there is a lack of drinking water and infrastructure which leads them to migrate. With a view to alleviating the situation of the indigenous communities, INAI seeks to organize their members to ensure self-management and team work; to implement activities aimed at preserving the environment by promoting the rational use of natural resources; to carry out adequate livestock management, geographically planning the activities, optimizing animal stock and production for self-consumption and marketing; etc.

In the publication *“El desarrollo participativo como herramienta de lucha contra la desertificación”* (Participatory development as a tool to combat desertification) Viviana Failde de Calvo (INTA EEA Salta) and Diego Ramilo (a forestry engineer at INTA AER Seclantás) provide an overview of the indigenous people’s reality and of their livelihood-based economy, particularly in the case of the Coya and Diaguita groups. These communities that live in the Puna and Arid Valleys raise goats, sheep and cattle. They face migration, a lack of resources, overgrazing and other desertification-related problems on a daily basis, all of which outlines an unsustainable future. In order to improve their quality of life, INTA has been implementing different projects which include animal breeding through to the reappraisal of their culture.



One of the chapters of Agenda 21 sets forth the need to ensure the full participation of the indigenous populations in appropriately arranging existing natural environments so as to preserve biological diversity, protect basins, production sustainability and agricultural development. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need to have the knowledge, experience and participation of indigenous women and communities in order to combat desertification.

On the other hand, Objective 4 of the National Biodiversity Strategy imposes the need to “reappraise the cultural diversity of the indigenous people and other local communities and the contribution of their productive systems and natural resource management practices to biological diversity conservation and sustainable use”.

### Women's footprints

As pointed out in Digital Newsletter No.4, indigenous women are the leading players in the fight against desertification, particularly in informal economy sectors. They remain at home while men try and get a job in towns and cities. In the above issue of the newsletter emphasis was placed on the story of Rosario Andrade de Quispe- leader of the WARMI SAYAJUNQO Women’s Association- who was granted an award by the Environment and Sustainable Development Secretariat within the framework of the NAP given her commitment to combat desertification and improve the quality of life in the Argentine *Puna* area. She, like many others, remains in charge of the family, livestock and tries to find a way to earn her living and live a decent life. Micro-loans, businesses, projects... a range of fluctuating possibilities for these women and families to remain on the land where they were born.

## Environmental discrimination

Desertification and its next-of-kin (deforestation, for instance) wreak havoc on the land. So much so that General Recommendation No. 001/07 on Environmental Discrimination due to Deforestation was issued and then presented in the form of a document in May 2007 by María José Lubertino, President of INADI; Wichí Chieftain Octorina Zamora; Hernán Giardini, Greenpeace; and Miguel Enrique Pellerano and Gustavo Morato, the Environment and Sustainable Development Secretariat. All of them made presentations on environmental discrimination and how it has greater effects on certain sectors of the population.

“Environmental discrimination happens because of the implementation of economic development policies which have an impact on the people and even a greater impact when such persons live in remote areas. It is a vicious circle: poverty, discrimination, practices that are harmful for the environment”. **María José Lubertino, President of the National Institute to Combat Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism**

Chieftain Octorina Zamora talked about environmental devastation and how it affects her community: “It is said that indigenous people own the land but that is just wishful thinking. Since there is more and more deforestation taking place, the food is farther away from us. We see truck loads of carob tree driving by and the bean from that tree is our people’s main foodstuff. They are destroying the key to our survival”. This meeting gave rise to a series of proposals to put a brake on the suffering of the affected people. Such proposals state that local and provincial governments should consider environmental discrimination due to deforestation a priority issue.



*Ava guaraní. Chané. Charrúa. Chorote. Chulupí. Comechingón. Diaguita. Diaguita calchaquí. Guaraní. Koya. Mapuche. Mbyá guaraní. Mocoví. Ona. Pilagá. Rankulche. Tapiete. Tehuelche. Toba. Tupí guaraní. Warpe* (written with a *w* and not with an *h*, as recognized and demanded by the community), *Wichí*. As marvelous and different as they are, these indigenous communities have a point in common: the love for their land. A love that is transmitted from generation to generation, passed on through their traditions and culture and supported by several projects which provide for dignity, work and wellbeing.

### Segundo decenio de los pueblos indígenas del mundo

Comenzó el primer día del año 2005 y fue adoptado por la Asamblea General el 22 de diciembre de 2004 a través de la resolución 59/174.

El Decenio tiene cinco objetivos:

- El fomento de la no discriminación y de la inclusión de los pueblos indígenas en la elaboración, aplicación y evaluación de los procesos internacionales, regionales y nacionales relativos a la legislación, las políticas, los recursos, los programas y los proyectos.

- El fomento de la participación plena y efectiva de los pueblos indígenas en las decisiones que afectan directa o indirectamente a sus estilos de vida, tierras tradicionales y territorios, a su integridad cultural como pueblos indígenas que poseen derechos colectivos o a cualquier otro aspecto de sus vidas, teniendo en cuenta el principio del consentimiento libre, previo e informado.

- La redefinición de las políticas de desarrollo para que incluyan una visión de equidad y sean culturalmente adecuadas, con inclusión del respeto de la diversidad cultural y lingüística de los pueblos indígenas.

- La adopción de políticas, programas, proyectos y presupuestos que tengan objetivos específicos para el desarrollo de los pueblos indígenas, con inclusión de parámetros concretos, e insistiendo en particular en las mujeres, los niños y los jóvenes indígenas.

- La creación de mecanismos de supervisión estrictos y la mejora de la rendición de cuentas a nivel internacional y regional y particularmente a nivel nacional, en lo tocante a la aplicación de los marcos jurídicos, normativos y operacionales para la protección de los pueblos indígenas y el mejoramiento de sus vidas.

## Sources

\* Failde de Calvo, Viviana (INTA EEA Salta); Ramilo, Diego (INTA AER Seclantás), “*El desarrollo participativo como herramienta de lucha contra la desertificación*”, Salta, Argentina

\* National Institute to Combat Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI, by its Spanish acronym)

## Installation and reading of MARAS (Environmental Monitoring System for Arid and Semi-Arid Regions)



**W**ithin the framework of the GEF Patagonia Project (UNDP GEF 07/G35) and the LADA Project, campaigns were launched for the installation and reading of MARAS (Environmental Monitoring System for Arid and Semi-Arid Regions). The objective of the above-mentioned UNDP project is to install 600 MARAS in the Patagonian provinces.

On 17-21 November 2008, a first MARAS installation and reading campaign was carried out in Ing. Jacobacci, Rio Negro province, where the team coordinated by Donaldo Bran (an agricultural engineer), installed 5 MARAS within the Hill and Plateau Landscape Unit, Basalt Plateau Landscapes located in Anecón Chico, Chaiful and the Jacobacci Plateau.



Before the installation of the MARAS, the team talked to the different landowners of the farms on which these evaluation systems were placed so as to explain their meaning and the purpose of their installation. For further information, visit [www.ambiente.gov.ar/?idarticulo=6283](http://www.ambiente.gov.ar/?idarticulo=6283)

## The Warpe People

In the last three and a half decades and in response to a very strong call from Mother Earth, family members of the PUYUTA community on KUYUM territory have been looking for their relatives to propose a reorganization of their Peoples. All writings and documents said that the Warpe People had disappeared 250 years ago which is a fallacy since the last official census identified around 16,000 Warpes.

Fulfilling this mission has been a hard but beautiful task. With a backpack we traveled the Warpe Territory even beyond the borders of our country: San Juan, Mendoza, San Luis, a part of La Rioja and we then crossed the Andes to find descendants of the "cornered" Warpes who were taken to Chile to work in mines.



Sacred Ceremony Tree

Despite all the obstacles, vacuums and denials we faced, we have resisted and defended our name: PUYUTOK (Morning Star, currently Rivadavia). And from this place, the Warpe House at No. 103 Libertad street (a guidance, coordination and implementation center) and based on the identity which lies deep in the heart of history, we started the hard job of identifying and bringing together the families so as to reorganize our Peoples. We visited them one by one. Many times we faced denial because nobody wanted to be a Warpe although their names gave them away (Guaquinchay, Talquenca, Aballay, etc.). We came across denial, fear, embarrassment.

While carrying out our job, we decided to prepare a Cultural Education Project called "Educating for Life" and our slogan was: *For our voice to sing in the throats of those for long silenced*. With this idea in mind we went to schools to convey our philosophy and culture and to recreate the identification of pedagogy with the elements of Nature. We worked on the relationship of mankind with the land. We found people who had a Warpe relative, friend or acquaintance. We promoted the education project on radio programmes which lasted up to two hours and were broadcast for five years on the *Universidad Nacional de San Juan* radio, among other provincial broadcasting stations.

Our educational task had broad repercussions and, in 1993, the Provincial Minister of Education convened us to train teachers. Thus, for the first time, a ministerial resolution was issued to recognize our skills as teachers. We must very humbly but proudly say that we have been able to extend the Warpe culture throughout the territory and have been able to identify full families. Several communities are already being organized at the four KUYUM addresses and in all three provinces.



Juana Agüero

She lives in San Miguel, Tres Cruces, General Lavalle district, Mendoza province.

Juana is 34 years old and has three children who go to a boarding school located 26 km from her place, which means they spend 10 days at school and 5 at home.

Juana and her family are a part of the Warpe ethnic group. They have no drinking water or electricity. The above -plus the lack of resources and the existing drought- has forced many inhabitants of the area to migrate to San Luis and San Juan provinces.

Juana set up a cooperative to improve the quality of life of her family and community. She is aware that community work is necessary to face the big distances and the dryness of the soil. The cooperative got the municipality to provide the inhabitants with a drinking water tanker truck every 15 days because the San Juan river water is polluted.

The cooperative is currently seeking new members who are willing to join the initiative. Juana also makes crafts in sheep wool, using techniques she inherited from her grandmother. She colours the wool with natural dyes made from ground, roasted fruit and then sells her products in Mendoza City.

Our struggle led to the enactment of legislation, the most important of which is the inclusion of Art. 75, section 17 into the National Constitution. At the National Constituent Assembly of 1994, there was a single Warpe delegate, Mrs. Yligue Quiroga Chapanay. At this assembly, 350 members of the native peoples were present and lobbied among the constituents for three months to ensure the approval of this Article. Yligue participated with a strength and depth which are difficult to depict in words and that made many scientists, journalists, politicians and brother peoples become aware of the existence of the *Warpes*. From beyond, Yligue continues to nurture and enlighten all those who pursue her mission.



Our essential achievements have been to defend our territory, obtain the legal recognition of our People and retrieve our cultural identity. Our ceremonies helped to defend our territory and sacred sites. We were also able to obtain the enactment of a decree which transferred 15 hectares of the Angualasto archaeological field for its protection from desecration and looting.

The sacred lands of Waco are a symbol of our struggle. Why Waco? Because it is an old indigenous spiritual sanctuary as shown by the symbols on the rocks and ceremonies that still exist there. Our ancestors used it as a “healing” site, because it was the spring of thermal waters which had healing properties and first-class therapeutic mud. It is considered a place for meditation and connection with the universe. This “virgin” land has medicinal plants and herbs which are not really appreciated at present but were used by our grandmothers in the art of healing. That is why Waco is a symbol of our fight to recover our territories. We have thus prepared and proposed to the provincial Government “A Warpe Peoples Development Plan” for the restitution of thousand of virgin hectares that belong to the native people.

IT IS A NEED OF THE UNIVERSE,

A NEED OF THE MOTHER EARTH,

A NEED FOR COSMIC BALANCE.

Different life projects have arisen from our work. At present, for instance, we are submitting a project of the *Cieneguita* community, Wanakache territory called “Back to life”. This project aims at having joint work carried out by the Warpe Community and society as a whole.

The proposal would allow solving social and cultural problems since our work vindicates human beings. Therefore, our idea is to continue with our activities, mainly micro-businesses which will foster labour-based income with all the variables involved in the society-nature relationship, from an integrated holistic standpoint.



For decades the native community and its territory have undergone drastic changes which have brought about progressive trauma and deterioration: deforestation, pollution, misuse of natural resources. Desertification due to an indiscriminate felling of native trees such as the carob tree and the *chañar* has worsened and so far no preventive measures have been taken in this regard. All these factors have a negative impact. Although our community is not living in extreme poverty or conditions of misery, we realize that our resources are very scarce and that the situation has worsened considerably in the last few years.

The community has 500 inhabitants and a vast territory, enough to produce its own income, tap the environment and foster new job opportunities. That is why we nowadays re-assess our history, our life, our reality as well as our future. The project's general objectives are the following:

- 1- **Reforest the area** with native species.
- 2- Use the benefits provided by vegetation for **beekeeping**.
- 3- Use solar energy in **solar furnaces**.

Our Life Project includes the participation of the young generations of children and youths. And our community work is focused on spiritual aspects, the sacred circle which governs our life and activities.

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