



THE "YACHUYAJ WO" GARDEN PROJECT

REPORT MARCH 2016



I have taken much too long to give you information on what was happening, please forgive me. The reason has been that I was waiting for another answer to prayer and wanted to give you the complete picture of how things have developed in the last 4 months. As you will see in what I explain below the events have yet not got to an end but we are moving in that direction. Let me explain:

In our last report I mentioned that we had 3 needs that needed prayer. These were:

- a) *Government accepts our plan for scaling up the "Yachuyaj Wo" initiative so that all wichi families in the province can have a chance at producing their own food with appropriate social (wichi teachers) and technical (drip hoses and good seed) strategy.*

- b) *Government changes the new regulations that stops crafts with palo santo wood to leave the country by courier. This is urgent as Siwok Crafts UK has to comply with orders and the best selling months are coming on.*
- c) *That our 3 projects that are waiting to be approved for funding get done. We are walking by faith!*

Although these prayer needs are not all yet answered (need c) has been answered 75%) we are moving in the right direction.

This is the way the story goes:

3 days before the new president (Macri) was about to take charge of his post I receive a call from the future Minister of Agriculture who had heard of what we were doing with the wichi due to the TV exposure:



[Alejandro Deane - Premio Abanderados 2015](#)

Alejandro fundó SIWOK para trabajar con los pueblos originarios del Chaco Salteño. Mediante perforaciones hechas por ellos mismos, los pueblos wichi logran p...

youtube.com

and was calling to offer me the job of Secretary of Family Agriculture for the whole country. A job that implied moving to Buenos Aires and taking care of around 2400 employees, 1500 of whom were put there for political activism by the last administration. I asked for counsel from good friends and brothers in the Lord and decided to say no to the offer.

Bishop Nick had mentioned some months ago that what the "Southern Cone" Dioceses Bishops have told their flock that believers have to have "disponibilidad e incidencia". They have to be willing to participate in public life and make a difference to society. This was on my mind so it was a difficult decision but I still have hope that we will be called to participate in public service.



If this is so then prayer needs a) and b) should be answered. We are very thankful for the donation of a new truck. It has meant that I was able to accept projects very far away and that the fruits of these convinced officials of our positive work. Here the door of the truck used as a "mobile leaflet" to help teach good practices for producing maize.

Our work

Access to water still has been high in our priorities. We have had 3 projects financed:

- 1) Drilling 5 wells with added agriculture. Still fighting to finish the last 2 wells.
- 2) Building 5 rain catchment equipment. (Roofs with tanks to store water). Done.
- 3) Develop at least 45 gardens in 3 months, repeating what we did last year when we got to over 90 gardens in 6 months. This we finished in December.





We have proved that not only can the gardens provide better food for the wichi but also they provide readily cash for the gardeners. Here Mrs is taking some lettuce to sell to a customer that has come to her.

I would like to mention that a year ago local provincial government officials saw our work and invited us to participate in what they called the “Water Table”. This invitation makes us sit in a table with a mixed group different institutions (water works, light, human rights, national agriculture inst, health, NGOs, etc).

To make a long story short we all travelled together to the health “hot spots” in the province and a list of jobs was done for the different participants. Ours was to make a trial sowing of maize in Los Baldes community.



Results of our experiment were excellent and the people wanted to sow in this manner (drip irrigation, good seed, etc)but (as usual) authorities did not drill a new well (their responsibility) for the community. We had done our job with a well that had salty water, good for animals, but that



would ruin the earth if used constantly. Nevertheless the experience will be used in future.



We continue to work with Carlos Campos, Pastor

of Mision Chaqueña, as one of our extension workers. He is a respected man and adds to the confidence people have in us. Right Nono's family with harvest.

He's our other extension worker).

We were asked by Cris Wallis* (Christian Ed. of the Anglican Church) if we could help provide water for a group of wichi in a far away spot in Formosa province neighbouring Paraguay. We said yes. They were at the time drinking water from the river 1km away.



Church/School of Pastor Gulacios community.

As we were doing 5 pumps in the Misión Chaqueña area with trained wichi drillers we thought it possible to put a hand pump in this community. We were wrong... After three visits from the driller we had to accept we could not do the well because the sand is so fine it seeps into the filter and blocks the pump. We'll now use the roof of the church as a rain water catchment area as a solution.



Above: Drinking muddy water from the river and materials for hand pump we took.

For Spanish speakers here is what the driller says about the well and the Pastor about the need for a cistern to trap the rainwater: <https://www.facebook.com/siwok.fundacion/videos/vb.100011392456542/165258390530575/?type=3&theater>

Here we see the church used as school and on this roof we'll put the draing pipes to fill the cistern: <https://www.facebook.com/siwok.fundacion/videos/vb.100011392456542/165571737165907/?type=3&theater>

*See Cris Wallis's letter below explaining the situation of this community.



Harvesting rainwater: We had presented a project to harvest water in communities where the ground water is salty. Here left the taping of the video to promote the project which was voted on internet. This was aproved and 5 modules that collect aprox 22.5K liters a year have been finished.

Below are some testimonies of the families that received them.

<https://www.facebook.com/siwok.fundacion/videos/vb.100011392456542/133963083660106/?type=3&theater>

<https://www.facebook.com/siwok.fundacion/videos/vb.100011392456542/134099453646469/?type=3&theater>



Top at right has 2 modules put together and a 16K cement cistern the government did but never completed the roof! Now they can have good water!

Drilling for water: We have done 3 wells in the past 4 months but still have to finish 2 more. We knew it was a difficult area but the need was so great so we risked it and now are fighting to get through the clay at 28 mt. Below this we will have sweet water. You can see the frustration on the beneficiaries faces: <https://www.facebook.com/siwok.fundacion/videos/vb.100011392456542/137169883339426/?type=3&theater> See also the 2nd crop of maize about to harvest.



These recently done three pumps are now producing and we hope they will use the water for our winter crop of tomatoes.

It's interesting to note that one well costs us about U\$D1200 to do and the same well done

by the government is budgeted at over U\$15000!!!

Summary

1. We are proving on a small scale that solutions can be found for the wichi "dilema". Water can be found and if this is so they can produce their own food.
2. The question is if the authorities can understand this and copy our system of working through extension workers and using efficient ways of water use (drip irrigation).

Prayer needs:

- a) That I can be invited to the decision making table on a national scale. That way we can have influence decisions on access to water, family agriculture and freeing the craft market from red tape.
- b) Ivon, my wife is expecting and baby should be born in mid April. Pray that all goes well.

HERE BELOW CRIS WALLIS'S EXPLANATION OF GULACIO'S COMMUNITY.

Tartagal,

07/02/15

I have just returned from a few days spent in Lote 8 and Santa Teresa, in the Ramon Lista District of Formosa Province, one of the remotest parts of the Argentine Chaco. I had gone there to start up "Abundant Life" courses with Wichí men and women of all ages, members of the Anglican Church in the area.

I had already decided that on my return journey to Ing. Juárez I would pass by the Wichí village of San Martín, on the land that had formerly been held in trust by the Anglican Church, but had been handed back in 2001. Some 10 years ago the people had been forced to move off the land due to severe flooding of the R. Pilcomayo, and had resettled temporarily on lands belonging to other Wichí communities. However, the leader of the church there, Gulacio Segovia, had always hoped to be able to return and

when a conflict last year developed with a criollo (non-Indian) cattle-herder, who started fencing off part of the Indian land (belonging to San Martín) for his own use, the decision was made. Without seeking help from anyone, Gulacio and his people took down their houses and the church building and last September moved back onto their own land. As he was to explain to me, it was to defend their land from intruders and to protect the forest.

As we left Lote 8 on Thursday afternoon, the sky to the south was turning distinctly black and we could only presume, after days of simmering heat and with the wind now coming from the south, that we would be heading into a mighty storm. An hour and a half later we arrived at the abandoned village site of Gulacio. A few families had remained, partly for reasons of the education of their children and partly for not wanting to give up the comforts of electricity and nearby stores. Although the sky above looked increasingly menacing, a youth offered to guide us to Gulacio's new village, an offer I couldn't resist.

The journey took us about 30 minutes, taking us through land I had walked over a few years back, land that each year is subject to flooding. As we went I remembered the swampy bits where we had seen alligators basking in the sun, a dried-up winding river-bed, swathes of "Palo Bobo", a small tree that grows in close formation beside rivers forming a dense and almost impenetrable thicket. As we approached Gulacio's village, the forest closed in on us and between the trees I began to see some small Wichí huts, walls made of the same "Palo Bobo" trees that we had seen on the way. We stopped the pick-up in a small clearing and I recognized roughly where we were, close to the house (or hut) of Jeconías, who I had visited on my previous trip in 2011. His was the only family that had remained on the land after the flooding (see the photo of Jeconías and map of the area).

We followed the young man along a narrow path that led us down into the dry river-bed and up the other side into a semi-darkness, darkness of the forest cover filled with huge Algarrobo and Guayacán trees, darkness of the pending storm. The massive branches shook agitatedly as the wind blew strong and in the midst of the trees appeared the wooden pillars of the church, imposingly high and already with the roof of corrugated tin sheeting in place.

Between the church building and the banks of the dry river there was a small clearing and there I saw Gulacio sitting back-to-front and quite still on a wooden seat, his arms folded on the backrest. He seemed absorbed in the magic of the moment and wasn't aware of our arrival since we approached him from behind. It was a powerful moment: his meditative and marvelling serenity, while above him the wind shook the aged branches and the daylight turned to shadows.

We talked for about 40 minutes; mostly it was him telling me about his decision to return to these lands, giving his opinion on the general situation of the Indian communities in the area, of their leaders and other pastors, many of whom had not supported his return. He also spoke of another Wichí leader, Abelino Tejada - originally of the same community as Gulacio - who had suffered imprisonment for having tried to defend this land from an encroaching criollo. Where Gulacio and his people had been living is relatively close to a small administrative centre with secondary schools and a vocational college, a police station, hospital and shops. "Now", he said, "the children are again learning skills that are useful, like fishing and collecting honey. Here it is clear that we are Wichí!" And he accompanied his statement with a generous smile.

It is not that Gulacio and his people don't appreciate western education, in fact he asked our help to ensure that the government recognize their need for a school. But when schooling goes along with the promotion of a whole new way of life, more geared to urban life - with all its commodities, comforts and vices - and the loss of skills and values of the Wichí people, Gulacio is unhappy. As he explained to me, the decision to return to their lands, forsaking all the material advantages that the people had where they had been living, was based on the unique value and meaning that their own land, the land of their ancestors, held for them and on the commitment to protect the forest. In this respect, schooling alone wasn't going to help them.

Clearly Gulacio and his people (25 families) are being wholly coherent with the option they have taken, putting into practice what others often only talk about and inevitably there is a price to pay. I was deeply impressed by the clarity and strength of Gulacio: proudly Wichí, proudly Christian and proudly Anglican. And I believe that the Anglican Church and Asociana (the social branch of the church) should offer what support we can. For my part, I accepted his invitation to run the "Abundant Life" course in his village.

I can see two practical needs that we could support:

- 1) The lands that were previously titled to the Church were legally transferred to the community in 2001. The flooding of the R. Pilcomayo has destroyed most of the points that marked the boundaries of this plot of land (about 2500 hectares). With the assistance of Ana Alavez we have been able to reconstruct on paper (using GPS and satellite images) the approximate outline of these boundaries. It is urgent that some kind of demarcation of the community lands is carried out, even if it then needs adjusting once government officials begin to take interest.

Asociana should help in this and I am prepared to accompany members of the team.

- 2) At present the water that the community is using for all purposes is drawn from a “canal” of the R. Pilcomayo, about 1 km. from the village. According to Gulacio, a neighbouring criollo has sunk a well and found abundant water at 18 meters down. I wonder if one of Alec Deane’s teams of well-drillers couldn’t help in this.

I believe we have more than legitimate reasons for committing ourselves to support Gulacio’s community, among which are the following:

- 1) our historical link with the community through the church and through the lands “donated” by the church;
- 2) the special trust that Gulacio has placed in the Anglican Church and Asociana;
- 3) we have a clear position regarding defence of Indian lands and protection of the forest, one which few Indian communities are in a position to put into practice; the people of San Martín are putting it into practice and so merit our support;
- 4) this community and Gulacio could be a significant inspiration for other Wichí;
- 5) Gulacio is profoundly committed to both his Wichí and Christian identities - for him there is no conflict between the two and this I consider extremely important.

Chris Wallis.



Jeconías and his family
(November 2011), close to
actual site of

Gulacio’s village