

## INDIGENOUS RESPONSES TO DEFORESTATION: LAND USE AND TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS IN PARAGUAY

The Gran Chaco, the second largest biome of South America, underwent deep and fast environmental changes a few decades ago. In the Paraguayan Chaco, covering sixty percent of the country, changes are mainly related to the country's development model: The government has promoted rapid economic growth through large-scale soybean cultivation and livestock farming over the past years. This has led to unsustainable forms of production and environmental destruction. Indigenous peoples are considered to be amongst those most affected by this development, due to their special relationship with and reliance on their lands, territories and natural resources (Tauli-Corpuz 2015).

### The long struggle for indigenous territorial rights

Indigenous organisations and some NGOs have been trying to secure more land for present and future generations for a long time. In addition, indigenous peoples are now facing challenges with regard to their territorial rights to use and manage the lands already secured during the past decades. This doctoral research focuses on how one particular indigenous group in the Paraguayan Chaco, the Angaité of La Patria, is responding to these challenges.

### Inside the experiences of the Angaité of La Patria

This research explores how the Angaité of La Patria responded to changes in access to and the use and management of natural resources in- and outside their land property during the past 20 years (1995-2015). It has been analyzed how their livelihood strategies and territorial use changed during this period and how this process of change in human-environmental relations is reflected in the contradictions, tensions and internal political conflicts that mark everyday life in La Patria. In addition, it was analyzed how external actors have empowered the Angaité to strengthen their livelihood strategies and manage their territory in accordance with their own priorities in order to preserve and develop their particular way of life. This analysis is based on the concept of cosmography, which refers to the changing ideas and practices that contribute to constructing a particular place or territory, and therefore to a particular understanding of the world. The research covers two types of cosmographical practices: ritual and livelihood-related practices (like *choqueo* and *shamanism*).

### Indigenous adaptation strategies

National and international legislation granted the Angaité the right to access, use and management of natural resources within their territory. Results show that despite this legislation, the Paraguayan state promoted land-use practices such as deforestation to create large-scale cattle ranches that were incompatible with certain Angaité livelihood practices. The Angaité responded to these changes mainly by adapting their livelihood strategies



and territorial use, abandoning some traditional practices such as hunting, gathering and fishing and adopting or intensifying others such as leasing land and commercializing timber production. This research concludes that this adaptation, combined with the new state and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) patronage networks, impacted the Angaité leadership and forms of sharing. In doing so, it also undermined the capacities of the Angaité to manage their livelihood strategies and their territory in accordance with their own priorities and way of life.

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