

## By protecting its indigenous childhood, Paraguay seeks to ensure native populations' development

Paraguay is among the South American countries that bases part of its identity on indigenous roots and still have a large number of native populations. The Paraguayan government, through its Ministry of Childhood and Adolescence (Minna, in Spanish), oversees the protection of indigenous childhood in vulnerable conditions and seeks their social and communitarian promotion.



In spite of historical marginalization, native tribes from Paraguay maintain their values, customs and beliefs. Current legislation acknowledges native tribes fundamental rights to assure their development. However, institutions still face important challenges to fulfill this fundamental rights.

With innovative politics and actions, the current government provides the conditions for native tribes' heirs -children and adolescents- to improve their life's conditions.

The Direction for Right's Promotion and Protection of the Minna is one of the departments that contributes with eradicate indigenous child labor. Public policies in this area include direct attention, education and constant contact with children and adolescents, as well as their families, communities and indigenous organizations.

"We have two main lines of accompaniment and assistance: one is Immediate Protection and the other is Community Strengthening and Promotion. Both have a common aim, which is to protect the children and adolescents of the indigenous people," explained Eduardo Sosa, general director of Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Minna, in conversation with the **IP Agency**.

The first line of action is "Immediate Protection", which consists of approaching, attracting and referring them to their families or communities of origin. This process is developed through three intervention tools: Street Strategy, Operational and Immediate Protection Spaces.

Permanent monitoring on the streets as a first step is key to reduce child labour exploitation; since these realities have been identified, the Ministry acts immediately and refers cases to the care services it offers as an institution, or links them to those of other institutions.

"The street strategy proposes a year-round approach on the public streets, as well as referral to care and protection spaces in the Abrazo and Painac Program centers and shelters for children and adolescents from native peoples," Sosa explained, clarifying that this initiative is being implemented in Asunción and the Central and Alto Paraná departments.

Throughout 2019 and the beginning of 2020, the Immediate Protection Operation carried out a total of 14 assistance operations to rescue children, adolescents and families of indigenous people in situations of vulnerability and exploitation, in conjunction with the Municipal Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (Codeni), the Paraguayan Institute for Indigenous Affairs (INDI), the National Anti-Drug Secretariat (Senad), the Ministry of Public Defence and the Public Prosecutor's Office, in different locations in Asunción and the Central Department.

"Based on a diagnosis of the different critical situations that arose at the Asunción bus terminal, a device was installed to capture and divert drugs," said the director of the institution, who also pointed out that this strategy corresponds to the second tool called Immediate Protection Spaces.

This emergency device has effectively presence 24 hours a day, seven days a week, since it seeks to eradicate the exploitation that unfortunately characterize the area. What does it mean to assist them? They are taken to temporary centres where they receive food and medical care, and are included in community reintegration programmes and protection spaces.



### **Innovative and comprehensive actions**

The KuarahyRese Transitory Protection Center is one of the immediate and transitory protection devices, "where the processes of family reincorporation are carried out, and in some cases referred to the Detoxification Unit of the Ministry of Health to later refer them to their family or community of origin," said Sosa.

Depending on the case, the children and adolescents are referred to the "Punta Porã Rehabilitation Center" located in the Juan Manuel Frutos District or the Yhovy'i Shelter Community of the Repatriation District, both in the department of Caaguazú. In this center, those who have their families disintegrated are admitted.

A trained team works directly with the affected people and their families, respecting their cultural context in order to promote their recovery, community reintegration and vindication in a suitable environment, taking into account the customs and cultural practices of the Mbya Guaraní people.

"The centre is open 24 hours a day, providing food services such as breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack and dinner, as well as infrastructure for hygiene. It is a staff of six indigenous educators hired by the Minna," he said, adding that they also provide basic food baskets for all the indigenous families that are part of it.

To date, since it began operating in 2019, 51 children and adolescents, ranging in age from nine to 17, have received care through the center's services. One of the center's most important achievements has been the rehabilitation and reintegration of 18 children and adolescents into their communities.



It should be noted that this centre is a model rehabilitation strategy at both the national and regional levels.

### The next step: strengthening communities



The second line of action is Community Strengthening and Promotion, which aims to improve living conditions in the indigenous communities identified as the most expelling or those that most use children and adolescents as a mechanism for generating income on the street.

"There are three intervention strategies, such as direct support to food security with donations or the delivery of food for community pots," said Director Eduardo Sosa.

The actions also include the installation of the Abrazo Program in the community and the articulation with other institutional actors, both from public and private sectors, to satisfy unsatisfied basic needs such as water, electricity, habitability, income generation and for which the Oñondivepa Operational Plan was launched.

In the same context, the Guaviramí Community Centre, located in the Trinidad district of the department of Itapúa, was set up as an alternative place for the care of children and adolescents by educators while their parents work.

"Our objective is to progressively reduce child labour and assist all children and adolescents in the face of any violation of rights. Every day at the Centre, they receive food, schooling, hygiene habits, recreational activities in accordance with their age and emotional support," he said.

The assistance also extends to the families through a community promoter who carries out exhaustive follow-up on the living conditions of the beneficiary child or adolescent in order to guarantee that they have basic conditions such as medical care, identity, education, among others. The Centre helps some 80 families and provides care for over 200 minors, corresponding to 45 indigenous families.

Another of the interventions developed in the second area is the Oñondivepa Operational Plan, which in 2019 assisted a total of 858 indigenous children and adolescents, of whom 473 cases correspond to violations such as child labour, sexual abuse, lack of care and street situations. The remaining 385 children and adolescents are living in poverty and have no access to health care, identity, decent housing, schooling and work.

History demonstrates this and the present ratifies it: looking after the indigenous communities, and mainly the well-being of their new generations, is no longer just a necessary and urgent task, but a permanent commitment, a human task and a permanent challenge for the institutions of the State.