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Project **Water for our Roots**  
*Davis Projects for Peace*

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**Project Summary**

Project **Water for our Roots** will end dependence of the Toba-Wichí aboriginal community on charities, by developing rainwater-harvesting systems to create a sustainable, and continuous water source to the Toba. By learning to use their own land and consuming the fruits of their own labor, the Toba will no longer need to expect donations as a means of survival. Although a very helpful means of survival for the Toba communities, donations form a dependency relationship that is harmful to the development of their community, and are short-term solutions to conflicts that go back to the end of the 19th century.

**Context & Background**

The province of Chaco, Argentina is home to several of the poorest communities of aboriginal tribes in the country. Once owners of their own land, the Toba tribe was slowly displaced by European immigrants from Germany and Slavic nations. In a cruel example of neo-colonialism, the Toba were first used as sources of cheap labor, later stripped of their land, jobs, and resources. To this day, the relationship between the Toba and the “gringos” -as they call the current wealthy landowners- is tense. The Toba believe they have been discriminated against and marginalized, to the point that many tribes of the area have for years depended on the donations from several humanitarian causes; schools, and the promised, but unrealized federal aid. Having been displaced of their original land, the Toba tribes of Castelli are now far from sources of potable water and live in mud and wooden huts, some without walls.

The climate in Chaco is semitropical, with various rivers flowing through the province. Recently, severe droughts have destroyed the land, particularly in small towns like Juan José Castelli where there is no running water. Ironically, when it does rain, the land tends to flood, transforming the dry soil to mud. Currently, there is no water collection/supply present in the region, and the plans for a supply system estimate completion by 2030¹.

**Project Description**

Having experts in agronomy and topography helping us, the goal is to create an economical, but efficient system of rainwater harvesting to provide potable drinking water, and irrigation for the land. Toba elders have experience in farming. In collaboration with them we can teach the tribe’s youth to farm, and simultaneously develop senses of pride and dignity that will germinate from them working their own land.

The main goal of the project is to provide an alternative and permanent solution to the troubles of the Toba-Wichí that can later be used as a functioning example for other people of the region to follow. By not only providing water on demand, but showing the people how, entire communities could begin to redevelop into towns, preventing the ethnic holocaust that is silently occurring in Argentina.

**Goals:**

1. To educate and empower the Toba-Wichí tribe by permitting them to manage and control irrigation of their land thereby making it a useful and valuable resource.  
2. Empower the young with a sense of pride in their community, to restore their dignity as **original people of Argentina** (official term).  
3. Via successful example, create a bigger movement for the development of the **original peoples**, to promote further funding and expansion of the project.  
4. Attempt to reconcile the current landowners with the Toba tribes.

Personal Information

Since pre-kinder to high school graduation, I attended Lincoln International School, an American-International school with an active community of students who engage in various humanitarian causes, including the Global Action Network (GAN); Habitat for Humanity; and their very own Chaco Project started 20 years ago. This project has become an annual tradition for high schoolers that collect donations and head north to the town of Juan José Castelli, Chaco to build and maintain schools, donate food and clothes, and participate in the cultural customs of the Toba people.

I completed the I.B.O Diploma with over 180 hours of community service. I also redesigned the agenda for the Chaco Project, besides giving yearly donations of food, clothes and cleaning supplies. My senior year in High School I became an active community leader as the Vice-President of the Student Council, where I rewrote the Student’s Constitution (Student Bill of Rights), implemented graphic design to improve the communication of school events, and worked every day towards the improvement of the students’ life on campus. Currently I am completing my second year in SCAD as an Industrial Design major.

Pre-Implementation

The aforementioned Chaco Project will be used as a stepping-stone for Water for our Roots. Silvina Lopez Fernandez, my Spanish Literature teacher and current leader of the Chaco Project, has expanded and improved this 20 year-old project to its current size and importance. She has ample insight into the community, having established relationships with community elders, kids, and teachers, as well as donors from the school and Buenos Aires. Water for our Roots will concentrate on the same community of Toba aborigines, and part from the existing connection with Ms. Lopez Fernandez to help this new project succeed.

Implementation

During the summer holidays (June-September) I will be in Buenos Aires, where I will personally communicate to different potential backers of our project, such as Green Peace who has a strong presence in the affected area.

Working with the elders: The community elders are responsible for the protection of the culture of the tribe, and their well being. As the more experienced members of the community, working together with them will bring a solution that not only fits our project but also is appreciated and accepted by the Toba-Wichí. Elders are respected members of the tribe, and will be working with us to teach their children how to farm and utilize the land.

Working with the youth: This is the aspect of the project that will require continuity through the years. By educating the youth; the leaders of tomorrow, we can ensure that there will be someone with a passion to maintain the land that will now be fruitful and their own. The youth are key to reconciling with younger children of landowners in neighboring cities, where hopefully the Toba can look for respect and recognition, and future trade partners. Mainly they will receive instruction from their elders and myself on a small workshop that will help them kick-start the farming project.

Constructing a System: By contacting and utilizing the knowledge of experts in the field, a system of water collection and simple irrigation will be developed and constructed, in order to provide the Toba with water for personal hygiene, irrigation for the cultivation of the land, and potentially potable water. This system collects rainwater, and stores it in a reservoir for further use during drought seasons, or for an on-demand service.

Looking Towards the Future

Thankfully, the Lincoln School makes annual service visits to Chaco, during which this project not only can be worked on, but improved and enlarged, made more efficient, and hopefully mass-produced, as to provide this idea to communities in need all over the country, and perhaps one day all over the world. Donations are in reality a cruel way to inadvertently make aboriginal communities dependent on us. Slowly, but surely they are being exterminated by forms of neo-colonization, and state-sponsored genocide; as if they were not Argentine. A future where these original people of my country are respected and recognized is possible. A future where these tribes recuperate their dignity is not impossible, and not far away, if people counterbalance the inaction of their governments.

A better future is one where seeing volunteers bringing donations is no longer the day the Toba most cherish. If we can go back as friends and equals, instead of “outsiders,” we will have reached our goal. When the entire aboriginal communities of Argentina no longer depend on false promises from their governor, and the president of the nation, they will be equal citizens who enjoy the rights they so deserve as Argentines, the same rights I am proud to defend and honor.