

Project number	39911022
Title	Towards a Society of Equals

Countries:

Bolivia

Summary

During the period from approximately 1943 until 2007, the Swedish Pentecostal movement committed itself to evangelizing and promoting development through various Swedish congregations founded among communities of the Weenhayek indigenous group. This people inhabit a band of territory along the banks of the Pilcomayo River, in the municipality of Villamontes, 1 in the southeastern Bolivian region of the Gran Chaco. The Swedish Pentecostal mission's early work focused on evangelizing (Christianizing) the Weenhayek people, which they did through preaching, teaching / discipleship programs, and establishing congregations led by pastors who generally were chosen by the members of the local community.

However, the work of the Swedish Free Mission in Bolivia (the mission's official name) took an important turn in the mid-1970s, when the Mission shifted focus from being strictly religious to being more holistic. It was at this time that Sida, through PMU InterLife, began funding small interventions focused on social and community development. Health, education, and humanitarian aid projects were carried out in Weenhayek territory: medical dispensaries were established and health workers trained, literacy centers and schools with bilingual education were set up, and small-scale emergency aid programs providing food and clothing were put into action. In addition, the mission helped to re-build homes, supported political and social advocacy efforts such as the effort to recover ancestral lands, and promoted organizational processes by helping to found local organizations to defend the rights of the Weenhayek people.

Direct Swedish aid officially concluded in 2007, leaving behind nearly 70 years of direct work with the local indigenous population. The assets of the Swedish Free Mission in Bolivia (MSLB 2) were transferred to FIWEN (the Weenhayek Indigenous Foundation), an organization created jointly by the Swedish missionaries and local MSLB personnel with the express purpose of continuing the development efforts initiated by the Mission. Currently FIWEN is carrying out education efforts among members of the Weenhayek communities.

In 2011 the Swedish Pentecostal Mission, through PMU InterLife, decided to carry out a wide-ranging evaluation of the work carried out by Swedish missionaries among the Weenhayek people. In November 2011, a team of consultants consisting of Miriam Winroth and Alexis Mondragon were contracted to perform the evaluation. The evaluation's objectives were to analyze and evaluate the missionary efforts, as well as to create a methodology (model and toolbox) for interventions with indigenous peoples.

Given the historical scope, the breadth of efforts to be covered, and the complexity of the topic to be analyzed and evaluated, the evaluation team decided to divide up the work; Alexis Mondragon would carry out field visits in Bolivia with the local personnel now in charge of the mission (FIWEN), members of target groups, authorities, local civil society organizations, and others. Interviews with local, regional, and national stakeholders were complemented by a workshop that was carried out during two afternoons with FIWEN personnel (employees and board members) and a short workshop with the 47 head representatives, referred to as "captains," of the 47 communities of the Weenhayek people.

The evaluation's conclusions can be summarized as follows:

- The interventions carried out by the Swedish Free Mission in Bolivia in Villamontes have been very relevant in all their essential aspects, and have fulfilled many of their development objectives and goals. Focusing the interventions on a relatively

small geographic area with a population of approximately 4,000 people facilitated both the Mission's evangelization and development efforts.

- Today it's more widely recognized that indigenous peoples have not only human rights but also special rights related to their ethnic identity. The Mission's contributions in the fields of education, health, and social and political advocacy were important and impactful; the mission's work among the Weenhayek people was not only pioneering, but also set an example and created a model for others to follow.
- The Mission's intervention occurred over a lengthy period of time, during which its impact was highly visible within the local society. Despite its material, social, cultural, and ideological limitations, the intervention succeeded in making the needs of the Weenhayek people visible to the surrounding local population, facilitated the Weenhayeks' integration into mainstream Bolivian society, and initiated a process of promoting and defending their human and ethnic rights.
- Given the deficiencies and limitations in regards to "intercultural sensitivity" that characterized the Swedish Free Mission in Bolivia during a large part of its work among the Weenhayek people, we recommend that future interventions supported by PMU InterLife and carried out among indigenous communities should be preceded by training in areas such as interculturality, intercultural dialog, religion and spirituality, religion and development, etc.
- Since the missions' interventions have produced a visible impact on the Weenhayek people's quality and standard of living, and since the phenomenon of inequality principally affects the most vulnerable peoples or sectors of the population (women, children, indigenous groups), we recommend that PMU InterLife should design interventions focused on these groups, after analyzing the national and local context of each country where interventions are to be carried out. This analysis should take into account demographic, economic, political, and cultural data, as well as other types of information.

Recommendations

- The Weenhayek should overcome their dependency on other groups, including the Swedish Free Mission. The challenge is to identify strategies for diversifying their productive activities and thereby increase their income and quality of life.
- Create strategies for conserving the local and regional environment. The Weenhayek people should oblige the State to resolve the problem of pollution, since it's the primary culprit (due to natural gas extraction and mining).
- Improve the Weenhayek's capacity to negotiate, through training them to organize and work in coordination with other stakeholders to promote their development. Implement the development plan created in 2011 as well as a system of rendering of accounts to monitor income and expenses.
- Create a framework for professional employment opportunities for young people. Invest in professional development and develop other sources of work beyond the traditional occupations of fishing and crafts. Improve the quality of bilingual education; request fund from the Ministry of Education for increasing the number of classroom hours per week in order to meet international standards (at least one hour a day for at least four school years); improve the quality of the textbooks; create a curriculum web that integrates topics related to Weenhayek culture and identity.
- Develop an environment in which the Weenhayek language is used in writing: work with local authorities to establish Weenhayek as the official language for legal and administrative processes, as called for in the Bolivian Constitution.
- Promote intercultural dialog among the Weenhayek and work for reconciliation and rebuilding unity among the Weenhayek in order to ensure their culture's survival. Carry out a process of reconciliation among the parties involved in the conflict. Establish a forum for dialog facilitated by a third party who is trusted by both groups in order to find points of common interest that can outweigh existing differences.
- Foster a program to develop leadership and organizing abilities, and focusing on

transparency, responsibility, and rendering of accounts (being good stewards).
Work to make women's rights and gender equity more visible and to sensitize the population to these issues' importance.