A timid dream transformed into reality

High-tech medicine in the land of the Incas

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Hospital Diospi Suyana, Curahuasi, Peru

The Diospi Suyana Hospital, in the midst of the Andes of Southern Peru, offers modern healthcare to the poorest of the poor. This became possible through a great alliance of private individuals and companies.

Dreaming is allowed

Children's dreams are beautiful. They make us believe that everything is possible and life is full of opportunities. Adolescents hope for an adventurous journey to a rosy future. When my wife and I shared our plan to build a state-of-the-art hospital near Machu Picchu for the descendants of the Incas, many dismissed our goal as an unrealistic fantasy. Where would all these millions of dollars that would be needed to build and equip an institution of that magnitude come from? And if such a clinic ever came into being, then the cost of running the project would quickly convert it into a "white elephant". But things got very serious when we moved with our three children into a small mud home in the village of Curahuasi in the Peruvian Andes. In early 2004 we started campaigning for our vision, first in Germany and later around the globe. Wherever we went, we were met with frowns. Understandably. Talking about great undertakings while having a few beers is one thing, but putting your career and family at risk is quite another.



Figure 1: Waiting room of the Diospi Suyana Hospital. Every seat is taken.

The emergence of a high-tech clinic

As a first step, we and eight daring friends founded the charity association "Diospi Suyana". This expression from the Quechua language of the ancient Incas means "we trust in God". Even sceptics could warm to this name, for where nothing is possible, only faith in a higher power remains.

In January 2004, our campaign saw its humble beginning. My wife and I presented our "Indian Hospital" at schools, universities, clubs and churches. In our presentations, a computer simulation allowed the final product to fly over the screen with a buoyant lightness. Perhaps our own enthusiasm also infected some of our listeners, because we had the first successes. Donations from private individuals rolled in and some companies indicated their willingness to help with equipment and materials.

After the first ground breaking on 24 May 2005, the construction crews were employed on an area of 3.4 hectares, making quite a bit of noise and producing a lot of dust. Month after month, we had to transfer a total of 100,000 USD to the construction company, otherwise the project would inevitably have come to a halt. Interestingly, we had decided to move forward without any debt or credit. On our website, which we updated on a daily basis, thousands of visitors from all

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Figure 2: Dr. Martina and Dr. Klaus-Dieter John, the founders of the mission hospital in Curahuasi, Peru.

over the world soon watched with breathless suspense to see whether our endeavour would fail. The interest of the media grew, and the first journalists travelled from far away to wander through the long corridors of the buildings. Over a period of 2 years the steady progress transformed a timid dream into a reality of cement and stone. We had laid 15 miles of cat-7 cable in the walls, not to mention countless miles of pipes for suction, compressed air and oxygen. The final result was a good enough reason for a big party. On 31 August 2007, we celebrated the official inauguration with 4500 guests in an amphitheatre next to the hospital. The former First Lady of Peru, Pilar Nores, called Diospi Suyana a cathedral of love that would benefit the whole nation. A high-tech hospital with four operating rooms, intensive care unit, bed wing, computed tomography and the finest laboratory equipment was ready for work. All this infrastructure was meant to serve the indigenous population who would never pay the true cost of their treatment. The result was so amazing that nine television teams presented the event to a national audience.



Figure 3: Dr. Martina John with a newborn baby. Two visiting doctors from Europe next to her.

The financing

It was not long before the first patient stepped into the waiting room of the hospital. The Quechua man did not speak a word of Spanish, but he was cordially welcomed by our Peruvian nurses. On the opening day our team consisted of some Peruvians in permanent employment, as well as 30 volunteer employees from abroad. During the first 10 years of its existence, the hospital became a medical institution at the level of a European district hospital. The famous little mustard seed of faith grew into a mighty tree.

How was that possible? Our talks remained the backbone of our PR work. So far we have told the story of Diospi Suyana an astonishing 2470 times in 23 countries. We did not ask for money, but merely illustrated the progress of our work with an ordinary PowerPoint presentation. Two hundred and thirty companies, mainly from Europe, have generously donated equipment worth more than 7 million USD. Most recently, the Wermelskirchen company ProVita Medical sent us infusion stands, luminaires and treatment furniture in the five-digit range.

The support from renowned companies, which shipped mostly brand new products to Peru, was already remarkable but it was the private individuals in particular who became our best friends. Over 1000 birthdays and anniversaries, Christmas bazaars and charity concerts have been organised by sympathizers in support of our work. Around 1000 sponsors set up standing orders for regular donations, which cover the lion's share of our expenses month after month. The following numbers are downright dizzying. More than 100,000 donors have given on at least one occasion, helping to raise over 21 million USD in financial contributions.

More than 160 volunteers, experts in the fields of medicine, education or crafts have moved with their families to Curahuasi. Most of them have served a 3-year term with us. In order to do this they had to build up private sponsorship groups to cover for their own expenses. You can call them idealists and convinced Christians, with great passion in their hearts and a willingness to let their own lifeblood flow. This utter

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Figure 4: The Diospi Suyana Hospital in Curahuasi, Peru. 300,000 patients have been treated so far. Most of them desperately poor.

disregard for the credo "the bottom line is, it's all about me" prompted the daily newspaper *The World* to headline: "Called by God to the mountains of Peru!"
What inspired company directors and scouts alike was a string of fascinating coincidences. A civil engineer sat with his wife in the kitchen of his house. The two were pondering and praying over their plans for their future when just at that moment their phone rang. I invited them to run the construction work of our hospital on a voluntary basis. The engineer Udo Klemenz invested 8 years of his life in advancing the cause of Diospi Suyana – without payment, it goes without saying. For the first time ever, a business group donated a CT scanner for a hospital in South America. The Chief of a telecommunications service provider "accidentally" saw my Diospi Suyana slides. As a result, our hospital received a telephone and Internet connection, the total value of which now amounts to 300,000 USD.



Figure 5: Ophthalmologist Dr. Ursula Buck in the operating room. A steer had pushed its horn into the eye socket of the patient. He recovered fully from this injury. The operating microscope was a donation from the Swiss company Haag Streit.

On a human level, we walk with fear and trembling. There are no guarantees, but there are growing risks and ever longer queues at the entrance to the hospital. We meet an endless number of desperate people who travelled for many hours in buses looking for hope. So many times, we have been shaken by obstacles and hardships. These challenges have driven us inevitably to prayer.
On the 10th anniversary of the hospital, in August 2017, the President of Peru, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, referred to Diospi Suyana before a national television audience as a project with heart and expertise. 300,000 patients from all 25 states of Peru have so far benefited from our medical help. These services were essentially the same

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as you get in European or US-American hospitals with the only difference being that they are subsidised by donations and offered without any hidden profit motives.

The sphere of activity is growing

Over the years we have gradually expanded the hospital. In 2010 we opened a dental and eye clinic. In 2017 we doubled our bed capacity to 100 by building a second storey. Our latest addition is an orthopaedic workshop fully equipped with innovative technology.
Our focus has gone far beyond medicine. We have established 11 youth clubs with a weekly attendance of 400 boys and girls. In 2014 we founded a modern school for 600 pupils. In the not too distant future our own TV and radio channels will reach millions of Peruvians with a high-level programme of culture, enlightenment and faith issues.

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How was that possible?

Diospi Suyana has attracted worldwide attention through 500 media reports. The creation and operation of this facility are exceptional. The BBC in the UK once called it a combination of "medicine, money and miracles". And a television documentary of Deutsche Welle, which was broadcast in four languages around the world, described it as a "hospital of faith". No matter what you may think about this story, Diospi Suyana has passed the test of time. And the evidence gathered suggests that faith, hope, and love, at the end of our days, count more than elbows and profit.

www.diospi-suyana.org

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