



6. Chicruz Village Cubulco, Baja Verapaz

Introduction

The life of Chicruz comes from long time ago. Some of the families have more than 90 or 100 years living in this place. The Ruiz came from Santa Rita. They were not allowed to work there and they came here. They were not able to buy land in Santa Rita for lack of money, and they had to migrate. The Cox and the Morenos are some of the families that came at that time. The Xitumul come from San Gabriel Chicaj. They came long ago.

To cross the river people used balsas held with *tecomates*, a man would push the balsa swimming. That was the way people crossed the river.

In the village of Chicruz there are now some 65 families. Most come from colonia El Naranjo. They went back to their place of origin because they found many difficulties to work, plant, care for animals and fetch firewood.



In Chicruz there are now some 65 families. Most of them come from colonia El Naranjo. They did not find good conditions there and came back. (72)



Damages caused by the dam. The history of INDE

When the teams of INDE first came to the community they told people that they were going to be benefited with a railroad that was going to come through. People would ask why were they there, but were not told the truth.

On the 15th of July 1976 we got a telegram from General Guillermo Echeverría Vielman. The telegram informed of the arrival to the community of the general and say that people were going to be displaced from the banks of the river. They were told that they should stop constructions of houses. That was a surprise for the community.

In that first meeting, the general informed of the displacement and promised that INDE was going to feed the families for 3 years while they resettle in the new place. And that transportation was going to be giving to the site of the resettlement. People were quite uncomfortable with the news. People were not in agreement with the displacement but decided to accept the resettlement and work to that it would happen in the best conditions possible.

Meanwhile, Dr. Gaitán's census and socioeconomic study was done. They were asked up to 330 questions to each family. The research revealed that there were many diseases in the communities (diarrheas). INDE brought a doctor for the community.

After this, INDE created the Human Resettlement Office. Through that office the community took care of business.

Also INDE brought some education promoters that came to work with the women. They were to teach them how to make bags, and vegetable gardens. Men got looms but they did not work. At that time there was food for the families. The problem is that when the agency teaching goes away and discontinues supplying food, people go back to what they were doing before.



Rios Chicruz. The fertile lands of the community were flooded. (16)



The community was organized and kept documentation. On the 20 or 21 of June of 1984 a squad of 42 soldiers of the S-5, a special brigade that worked with the Committee of National Reconstruction, entered the community. Someone tried to take D. Pablo Xitumul's life away, but he was saved through the reports that the community gave of him. They had to give the community *Acta* book and the accounting books. Other papers (such as announcements) were hidden and buried.

INDE tried to take the community to Chilascó, close to Santa Elena and Santa Bárbara. People went to see the place but did not like it because it was cold. INDE only wanted to purchase 3 caballerías. There was another finca of 15 caballerías with 20 springs, but because it cost Q. 200,000.00 they did not buy it.

Later they tried to take the community to finca Primavera (the people from Río Negro had been there first and did not like it). The colonia was already framed-up. But people did not want to move there because it was in a rocky area, worse than Chicruz.

INDE wanted to oblige us to take the lands of Primavera, because they said they could not find another place. People did not accept, wrote a letter of protest, and they themselves sought the lands that were finally given to the community. People did not want to leave Cubulco, and definitely not to finca Primavera.

The lands given to people in exchange were not well measured. Some measured 2 or 3 or 5 manzanas. Later on it was difficult to change the distribution of the lands because people did not want to change the boundaries.

Through the effort and actions of the community we were able to get a boat, because there was no path to access the town. INDE did not want to give the boat but we finally were able to get it. They gave two boats and a barge with motors.

INDE got a metal barge with the name of Cahuinal for the use of people. But they did not give it to us. It is now in Pueblo Viejo.



*What is left from a motor for a boat given by INDE.
After so long the motors have broken and the community has been left without anything. (39)*



Business took place at the Office of Human Resettlement of INDE. There the community spoke about how they wanted the resettlement, what public services it would have to have. There we got notice of the value assessment of our crops. People are not happy with the assessment made by INDE. They feel deceived. People think the crops were not given their real value.

INDE gave jobs to some community people to measure, and open up roads. But many people did not get a job. It also gave support for a weaving workshop for the women in Colonia El Naranjo. But it did not work. They could not sell the weavings.

Resettlement houses type 1 and 2 were given to the people from the community. The people who got houses type 1 got them because they did not have more than 50 m³ in Chicruz. Houses type 2 were bigger and were given to people who had more than 50 m³ before the flooding. Before the dam in Chicruz there were 32 families with big adobe houses.

When the massacres of Rio Negro took place, the people from Chicruz saw how the cattle from the people of Rio Negro passed through the valley. Not only the massacres took place, but they also would steal the cattle and other belonging from the people of Rio Negro.

When the water from the reservoir goes down in the summer, you cannot go from one side of the river to the other. There is a lot of mud impeding crossing. The people who get stuck in the mud are mostly the ones carrying heavy loads. They built a hanging bridge but it doesn't work because somebody damaged it. The bridge was built where the wind blows harder.

Only the bridge from Patzulup, which is far away from the community allows crossing. That is the only bridge left working. There is need to build a formal (not hanging) bridge at the place called "*repunta del ranchón*."



Juan Gonzalez' adobe house. Before the dam there were 32 large houses built with that material. (05)



*Peña Sabino Bridge used by the Patzulup village. It is the only bridge left working. (43)
During the winter people cross the river using a boat.*



In winter, the people generally travel by boat to cross the river.

The most productive lands were flooded. The land left on the side of the hills is very unproductive. It needs lots of water and fertilizers.

Before there were oranges, limes, mangoes, and *jocote*. There were good flooded areas for planting. Now all is flooded. Before we would cultivate flat areas, now we can only plant in slopes. Before the tree crops would take on. Now it is hard to make the trees grow.

The Maya ruins of the Pueblo Viejo Cahuinal were left some 15 meters under water. Some families that lived there were displaced to 10 meters above the water level. There were many pieces of obsidian, ceramic, and pots; and a jaguar, and a skull with a golden tooth were found. All the reliques are found at the National Museum of Archaeology. The people from the surrounding areas would go to that site to celebrate, conduct ceremonies and dance. We lost all that.

There were different types of houses in Chicruz. The community had learned how to make ceramic roofs and work with adobe, so many of the houses were made with those materials with earthen floors. Other homes were smaller ranchos with straw roofs.

People agreed with the construction materials given for the resettlement houses. All have cement floors and are made of cement blocks. The problem is that they are small for all the needs of the families, who live in a very tight space.

The problem at Patzulup is that when the reservoir's level goes down in the summer, people cannot cross the river. The community has a boat but they cannot use it.



In Pueblo Viejo Cahuinal many activities were celebrated by the surrounding communities. Now all is under water. The Maya ruins are underwater. (039)



Before there were many types of fruits. Now it is hard to get the trees to grow. The best lands were flooded. (27)



Community resources

WATER

The community has its own water source at about 10 km. This spring is covered with forests to keep it humid. But not all the families have access to potable water. There is need for potable water for all the houses. Right now some families have to use polluted waters from the reservoir to survive.

LAND

The village of Chicruz can be found in the Cahuinal finca. This finca has 77 caballerías and historically Sunuc, Guaynep, Chicruz, Pueblo Viejo Cahuinal, San Juan las Vegas and La Laguna have belonged to it.

The villages of Chitomash and Chirramos belong to the finca Chimiagua, which has 240 caballerías. This finca was bought from the king of Spain by the indigenous community of Cubulco before the independence of Guatemala.

The soils are poor. They don't produce much. To get a harvest it is necessary to work hard practicing soil conservation, with fertilizers and disinfectants. Need rain too. When there is no rain there is no harvest.



*Guaynep school, a village in the Cahuinal finca.
It was also flooded. (019)*



*Rodrigo Pérez family's vegetable garden. The
soils are poor and don't produce much. (060)*

RESOURCES FOR FOOD PRODUCTION

The mode of subsistence of the community is fishing, agriculture and animal husbandry. The women work mostly in their homes, and to some degree in the making of petates and huipiles.

There are few fish in the river. There is need to have more fish to survive. A problem is that the neighbors from within the community steal the nets used for fishing. That is a serious problem.



On the hills there are palm trees. It is hard to get it but it helps for the making of petates, brooms and hats by the women. You can also dry it and sell it in bunches in town. The problem with petate making is that it gives you back and lung problems.

In the community there are a few lemon, mangoes, *jocote*, *guayaba*, cypress and guapinol trees. It has been with a big effort that people have planted and taken care of those trees. The firewood has to be fetch from the tops of the hills. It is hard to get the firewood.



Lucilo Gonzáles shows us his fishing net. We need more fish in the river to survive.



Many women from Chicruz work making petates. The problem is that it gives you back and lung pains. (015)

There were many wild animals before, such as deer and pigs. Even though you can still find some, they are scarce. During the 80s after the military was gone there was lots of hunting because of the arms left to the patrulleros. Now there are a few wild animals.

There are also rattlesnakes which people use to treat sickness in their birds (poultry).

The turkeys are sold at Q.75.00 in Cubulco.

Women can finish up one petate every two days. Those are sold in Cubulco for Q. 8.00 and Q. 10.00. The problem is that transportation to town is Q. 12.00 and, you have to pay for food.

We fish with *trasmayo*, hoods and fishnets but only during certain times. A *trasmayo* costs Q. 200.00, Q. 300.00 or Q. 400.00 depending on its size. Sometimes we request the seller to come here, so we can save on the cost of transportation. The fishnets can also be purchased or made with a nylon string. Between March and April you cannot fish. There is too much mud and heat.



Revenia Reyes Gonzalez family. A woman can finish up a petate in two days. They are sold in Cubulco (047)



The family of D. Valenín de la Cruz use rattle snakes as remedy for the animals. (73)

INFRASTRUCTURE

There is need for a road from Cubulco to the community. To go to town you have to pay Q. 12.00. Half is the cost of going and coming back on a boat to the *ranchón*. The other half is the cost to get to Cubulco.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

FONAPAZ and the municipality have helped with roof sheets for the houses. Some families lacked resources and did not get roof sheets.

With the support of UNEPROCH the community worked making gravel dikes to protect soils from eroding. We have been able to avoid erosion and soil depletion. UNEPAR and Caritas helped out with the water system for the community. Caritas also gave us some support with the latrines, but most don't use it because there is no ventilation. This is a problem because there are many flies that stand on food and cause diseases, such as diarrheas. Also when it rains the feces go into the river.

The only good bridge is the one that benefits people of Patzulup. It was built by FIS about 4 years ago. It is called Bridge Peña Sabina.



Doña Nicolasa Moreno's house. FONAPAZ and the municipality gave the roof sheets. (050)



Before we used to cultivate in flat and fertile lands. We can now only plant on slopes. Conservation of soils project supported by UNEPROCH. (031)

Community Life

HEALTH

The community does not have a health center, this is a problem when you need to take an ill person to the hospital. You cannot cross the river when the water is low.

When there is an ill person they charge up to Q. 200.00 to take them by boat and car to the Cubulco hospital.

There is need for nutrition programs, especially for children. This place is very poor.

The community midwife does not have materials to do their work. The midwife is certified by the health center and receives monthly training.

Ruda is used as a remedy for children when they get *mal de ojo* or fevers. It also helps people with heart problems.

EDUCATION

INDE built a school in Chicruz. The old community school was flooded. The children from San Juan Patzulup, Pueblo Viejo and Chicruz used to go there. But we later thought that it was better to have a school in each location because some children had fallen into the water. It was dangerous for all the children to go to school so far away. To make the old school people carried the construction material from San Juan Las Vegas walking.



*Remains of the health centers built by INDE.
Today the community does not have health
services (015)*



Chicruz school (63)

PRODUCTION AND INCOME GENERATION

The population of Chicruz lives on agriculture and fishing. We cultivate corn, *maicillo*, beans and vegetables like *loroco*, chile and radishes.

Fishing is hard work and requires funds. The reservoir has different types of fish: *pejo*, *machaca*, *quixque*, and *mojarra*. But some of these species no longer exist. Now what there is more is *tilapia*, carp and *guapote*. *Tilapia* is sold at Q. 5.00 per pound. Carp at Q. 4.00 and *guapote* at Q. 3.00 per pound. We fish with *trasmayo* and we use cages to keep the fish in the river so it is fresh.

To survive many people go to the cost to cut sugar cane or coffee. Some people go there for a month or two. Others go for 6 months. There are a lot of needs. For cutting a ton of sugar cane you get Q. 9.50. Cutting or cleaning coffee is Q.20.00 a day.

In the community some families have made organic compost (with lime, green and dried leafs, manure, corn husk, black soils). This helps in the production of food and to improve the quality of the soil.

ORGANIZATION

The first formal organization of the community was created after the 1976 earthquake. The Development Committee was created. We helped to organize the committees in Chitomax, Chirramos and other places. It took some work to do it but we had some experience.



In the community many families have created areas for organic composting to improve soil productivity. Juan Coz compost site. (064)



D. Francisco Hernando Ruiz shows us his cage to keep fish fresh. (035)

EVERYDAY LIFE

Women are the first one to wake up in the morning. They wake up between 3:00 and 5:00 in the morning to begin their domestic work. Men wake up at 6:00 A.M. to go to work.

Young women and men always help out in the house. The women with the making of petate and the men with agricultural tasks or fishing.



Women are the first ones to wake up in the morning to do house work. (030)



The auxiliary mayor of the community with his family. In Chicruz there are several committees. (023)



Credits

This report contains the results of a field trip to the community of Chicruz on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of December, 2003.

The study aims to present the damages caused by the construction of the Chixoy dam, as well as to identify the type of work we do in Chicruz and the most important needs in the village.

The following were the activities conducted:

- Meeting with the community
- Personal interviews
- Reconnaissance. Photos.

This study was done with the work and support of some of the researches of the affected communities: Salvador Santiago (San Juan Las Vegas), Victoriano Díaz Pérez (colonia El Naranjo) and Alejandro Chen (Pacux resettlement).

Members of the board of the Association New Union Maya Achí from Cubulco D. Alejandro Ruiz and D. Juan Morente Vasquez contributed to this investigation.



This study has been made thanks to the work of some investigators of the affected communities and to the support of the Asociación Nueva Union Maya Achi and Rights Action. In the photo: Alejandro Ruiz, Rolando Cuja, Salvador Santiago, Victoriano Diaz Pérez, Alejandro Chen y Juan Morente Vásquez (41)