



10. RÍO NEGRO VILLAGE

Rabinal, Baja Verapaz



Some information about the old times

The elders say that Río Negro families came from the town of Rabinal. They used to sell their products at the market in San Cristóbal and had to come through this area. Because the water from the river is dark during the winter, they called it Río Negro. These were abandoned lands and that is why they came here. The last names of the families that came are Iboy, Chen, Osorio and Pérez. People came from Uscap, Xococ, Las Vegas and Nimacabaj. That is why there are different last names in the community.

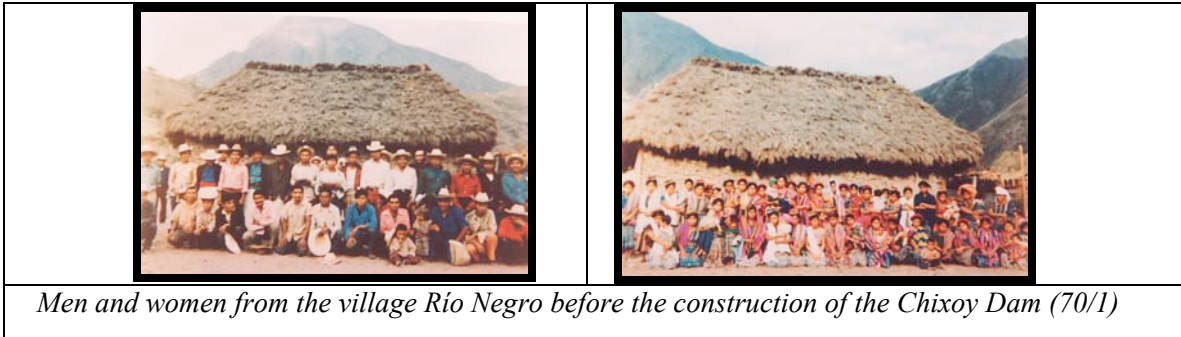
These families made an agreement to work and live in this community. They did not buy the land as individuals but paid for community rights to the land and that is how the property was legalized. The land property documentation is housed at the municipality's office.

The land was divided up according to lands for cultivation. In Río Negro there was a place for the Iboy, Uscap, and Chen families. The Osorio, Sánchez and the people from Ixpatá also had their land. Each family had rights to their own piece of land. Many other families obtained rights by marrying into the Río Negro community -. Right now, the few families that have gone back to Río Negro live on what is left of their lands. The productive lands were flooded.

Life before was different. The grandparents did not use chemical fertilizers; the soils did not need fertilizers. There were many types of fish: machaca, espinoso, quisque, soc, tishaj (a type of mojarra). You could find guayabas on the riverbanks and many types of fruits. There were also iguanas and other animals. The products were sold in Rabinal and San Cristóbal. For example, the jocotes were ten cents. Baskets were sold a lot.



The Santa Cruz fiesta was celebrated. They were Catholics. The dance of the costeños was celebrated on May first. People wore masks and danced to marimba music.



Men and women from the village Río Negro before the construction of the Chixoy Dam (70/1)

Some stories about the construction of the dam and the time of violence

At the beginning of the dam construction they used many machines and materials. Helicopters came, holes were dug and roads built. Many “Caterpillar” machines came in. Topographers measured.

In Pueblo Viejo there were Maya ruins. A guard was placed there. The archaeologists took away masks and pots, excavated tombs and took the bones. They took photographs. The helicopters came to take away the archaeological remains.

To begin work- - in the communities, INDE hired assistants. - They paid laborers Q 42.00 per two weeks.

To convince people to leave their places, they measured the land and told people they would get paid for it. There was a lot of commotion during that time in the community. INDE workers promised good houses, a school, education and grants for the children, also milk, a health center, community center and a mechanical shop for the men. They also promised a truck for transportation. Many agreements were signed, actas and papers. The elder did not believe in it, they thought that it was all a lie, and that the land was going to be stolen.

In olden times people did not know how to read and write. They did not know Spanish well. Up until that moment no outsiders came to the community. The town was far away and the teacher would come for two days and then leave. People did not trust outsiders.

The accusations became intense when one of the INDE workers saw a guerrilla group with a sky mask and told about it. People from the army, guerrilla and INDE came to the community. The Guerrilla Army of the Poor, (EGP) came to the community. They gathered people together to tell them not to believe in lies. The EGP began to paint rocks with big letters. After that the community was accused of being guerrillas.



The construction of the dam changed the life of people at that time. People did not trust outsiders. (74)

The problems with INDE began because a good group of people did not want to leave their lands. They did not believe that such a big project could be built. Also the negotiations with INDE at that time were difficult. We were able to get some money for the construction of provisional houses while Pacux was being built. At the end more funds were received. People had to provide wood and palm leaves to build their ranchos.

Ten houses of 7 x 6 varas were built in a piece of land that already had an owner. Someone burned those houses and that is when INDE began to say that the community was a part of the guerrillas. They said the community did not want anything.

Another problem occurred at INDE's - cafeteria for workers when leftovers were given to kids that went to ask for it, but then the kids began to steal the food. The people in charge of the - cafeteria went to the - Policía Militar Ambulante (PMA). The PMA imprisoned a young guy in Pueblo Viejo. A commission of three soldiers and one PMA came to Río Negro. The families were upset because of all the problems that had occurred and they took the authorities to the oratorio and did not allow them to leave.

Some people from the community and from other communities got drunk on boj and cusha and went to the oratorio with sticks and machetes. They hit the PMA and they [soldiers and PMA] in turn - fired their weapons. Eight people died (4 from Río Negro and 4 from Canchún), and many were hurt.

The community tied the soldiers down, took away their arms and hid them. The PMA tried to run away jumping into the river, but were followed by people and died due to the blows given to him. They put him into a bag, tied it and - threw him in the river. The body of the PMA appeared the next day in a place called Aguacatón, in Pueblo Viejo. That was the first massacre and when the problems for the community began.



A family of Río Negro in the olden times. (72)

Later INDE asked two members of the committee, Don Evaristo and Don Valeriano, to take the book of actas which contained the agreements signed by INDE with the community. Their bodies were found a few days later on the road of Purulha on the way to Cachil and were identified by their teeth. Some people went to present this information to the governor of Salamá.

People think that at that moment INDE already knew what was going to happen to the community. It was all planned. At that point all the agreements with INDE were broken. INDE ended its agreement to give houses to the families, a truck, compensation, free electricity and jobs. INDE did not want to do anything with Río Negro and there were no papers to back up their promises.

Some community people kept the arms they took from the soldiers. The army began to harass the community to give them back. Some of the military commissioners said the army already had the names of the people who were hiding the arms. Some people say that they were obliged to accompany the army to identify who were those people. They were told that if they did not go, they would be killed.

The second massacre was in Xococ. They asked people to gather and identify the guerrilleros. There were 87 people, children and women among them. They died at the Xococ church. They were put in a drum full of water and lime and held by the legs.

A woman was able to escape and told the community that the patrollers from Xococ and militaries were coming. The Río Negro men hid and women and children stayed in the community. Later the patrollers came in and began to burn the houses and rape the women. Some of the military took the cattle and peoples belongings. They took everything. That was the massacre of Pacoxom.



*On the hill of Pakoxom
the third massacre took
place on March 13 of
1982. (18)*

All the people that live in Río Negro lost family members and friends during the violence. Those were hard times of suffering. Some of damages incurred on families during those times are given in the following testimonies:

When people sought refuge in the mountain they lived on the crops they had planted. When people came to harvest the corn or to destroy the field, the families had to hide the corn in the creeks. They would cover the corn with nylon and that is what they ate. They also fished with hooks. The hardest times were when there was no more corn and salt. They ate only fish. Also, the shoes got damaged and were sewn -back together or fixed - with plastic. Then, many people left their hiding places and sought a better life.

They lost their corn field when they abandoned their homes. The houses were not taken care of and the animals, (cows and horses) ate the corn. Another person said that the Río Negro families lost their cattle. The civil patrollers took the cattle.

It is also said that the army took peoples belongings: fishing nets, radios, ropes, packs, tools (hoes, nails...). Later the army came back and burned the houses and the fields.

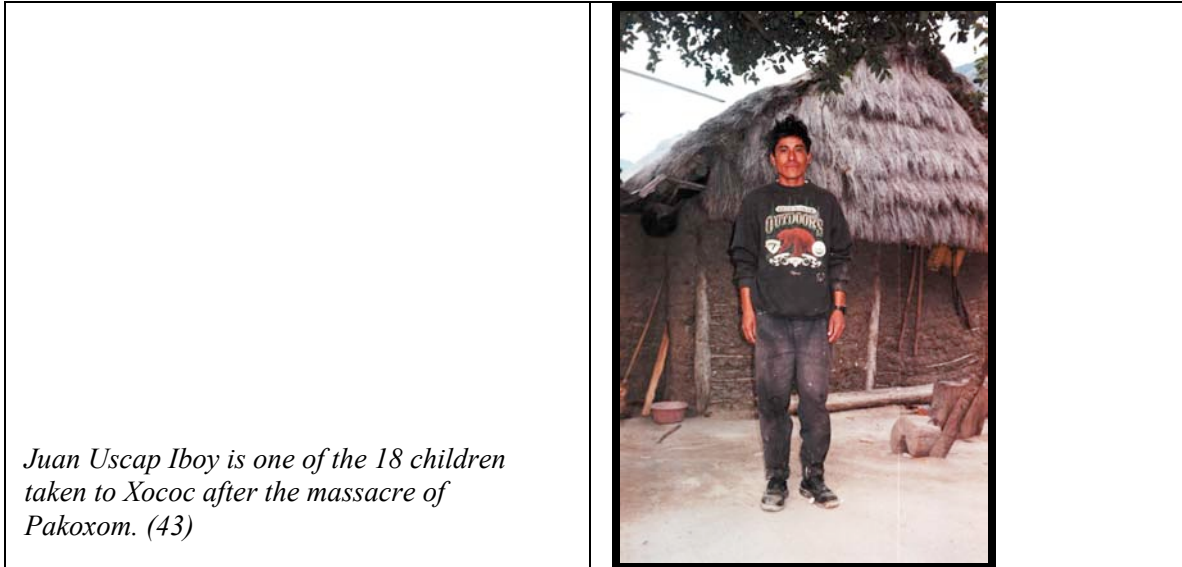
Someone said that he had to leave his job at INDE because of his wife and children's death. Many people were in despair, seeking how to survive and without homes, belongings and their families assassinated. The families had to wonder around a lot. Some hid on the mountain. Others went to Chiquimula, Playa Grande Ixcán, Barillas, and Cahabón or to Mazatenango. Always migrating and looking to escape the violence and to get a job to survive.

Another person tells that his father and mother were massacred when he was 7 years old. He says that the patrollers from Xococ took away 18 children from Río Negro and that in Xococ they were not treated well. They were treated like animals; they were not given education, not even primary school. They would separate the siblings from the same family. Siblings were only able to see each other every month or 15 days. They were "enslaved" two years and a half with the people from Xococ. They changed their names with last names of the families that "adopted" them.



They were finally able to go to Pacux but food was not enough, because there were many children. At 12 they began to work in the fincas on the coast. There they had food.

They said that the owners did not treat them well and that they worked for three months in the coffee fincas. Then they would travel to the southern coast to pick cotton. After that was done they would go harvest sugar cane. Some also went to Petén seeking work. In the fincas they were paid every month and earned some Q 50.00 a month. They were only given beans to eat. When they went back to Pacux they bought their own clothes and food.



Juan Uscap Iboy is one of the 18 children taken to Xococ after the massacre of Pakoxom. (43)

The same person tells that at 17 years old the army obliged them to enlist in the military service. He was taken when he was going to the burial of a friend's mother. He was pushed in an army truck going to Cubulco to take more young people. He presented his exams in "Mariscal Zabala" and finished his course. He went back to Pacux at 20 having completed his military service.

During the time that people ran away, people tell that they almost lost their lives, were threatened and were saved by luck:

- Someone said that he was threatened by the Judicial Police in San Cristóbal.
- Also in San Cristóbal, someone else said they were obliged to go back to Río Negro looking for guerrilla hideouts. They found the hideouts and were obliged to carry the arms, ammunitions, pots and rolls of wires. Further ahead a group of guerrillas took away what they were carrying and killed five people. The life of the other three was spared with the promise that they would join the guerrilla. Before they had been interrogated and mistreated.

They also tell of solidarity acts while they were in hiding. These actions helped to save the life of people. Examples:

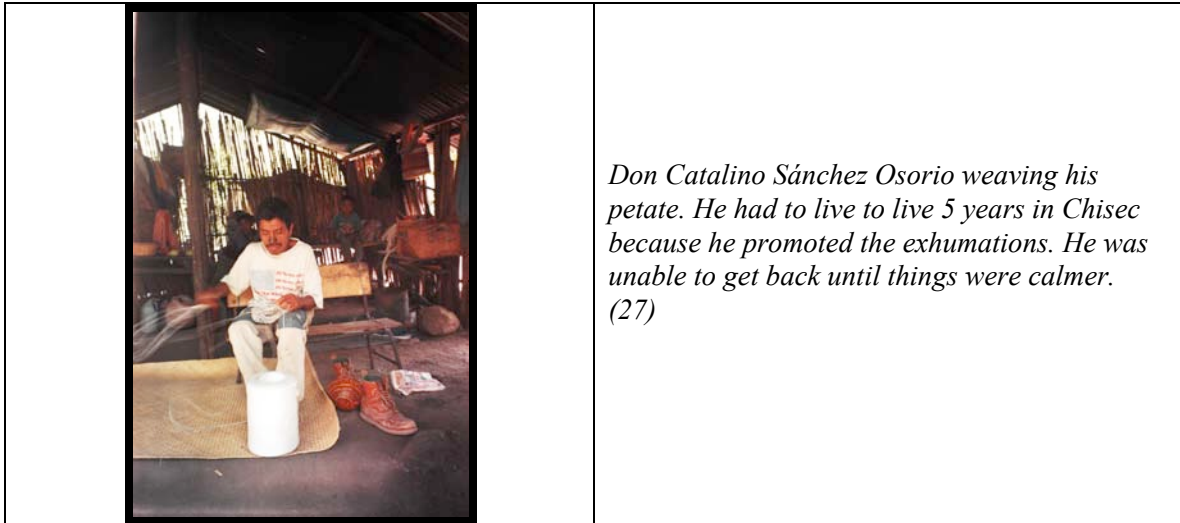
- They exchanged dried fish for corn.



- Some people got the support and solidarity from the bishop and other members of the Catholic Church (refuge, food...)
- A municipality gave documentation to two people to travel and work in other parts of the country without mentioning that they were from Río Negro.

People also tell that during the time they live in Pacux, intimidations and other problems continued:

- Someone tells of how the soldiers raped a woman at the recently abandoned military post at Pacux. When people protested three people were taken to the post (including the woman raped), where they were threatened and tortured.
- People were obliged to patrol and take turns guarding the area. If they did not want to do it they were accused of being guerrillas.
- A person had to leave the community because he was promoting the exhumations. He was told he was going to be kidnapped. He went to live in Chisec for five years, until things got calmer.



People think that all - this suffering and the massacres happened because of the building of the dam. People did not want to leave the community and demanded their rights and they were massacred, and were accused of being guerrillas.

So to not forget, people tell their families all that they lived, all they suffered and the horrible situations that they endured.

The Río Negro community fought to have their story be known nationally and internationally. It was a great success to accomplish the exhumations from the clandestine burials. From that point on acknowledgement [of our history], projects, and support was received.



The return of some of the families to the Río Negro village

There are some 14 families living in Río Negro who came from the village of Pacux, Rabinal. The language of the community is Achí. Some people can also speak Spanish. In Pacux, those families did not feel comfortable because they were not able to plant, and like they say “everything had to be purchased”. In Pacux they could not plant their corn or other products; they could not have animals like chicken or pigs. The houses are very close together and flooded during the rains. Also, the houses were damaged and had deteriorated. In Pacux people said, they had to buy corn, trees did not grow and chicken were caught in accidents. And if the animals escaped, it created fights with the neighbors. Also, they had to buy fruits in town and they are very expensive. The ocote and firewood had to be bought, and they did not have money to buy a stove. Some times they had to seek firewood in lands that were not their own and the owners scolded them and called them thieves. In Río Negro no one scolds them; they can plant and gather firewood as they please.

People from Río Negro. There are some 14 families living in the village. There were no good conditions to live in Pacux.(66)

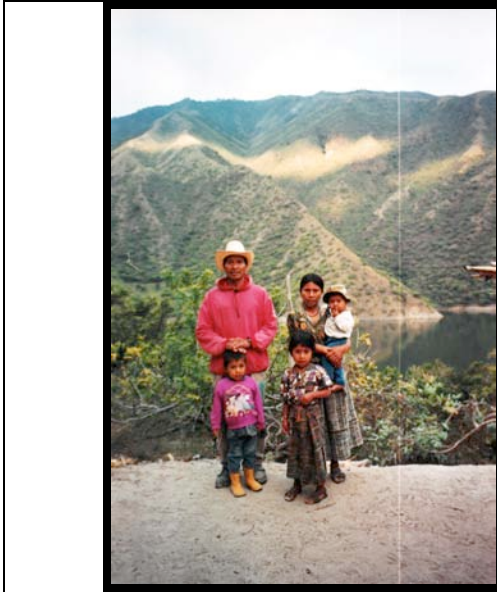


To go back to Río Negro, the families requested permission from the military zone of Salamá. They also went to talk to the community of Los Pajales, in Quiché, so they would not be labeled guerrillas. The people that went back were afraid they were going to be labeled guerrillas, as did the community of Xococ during the times of the massacres.

The shortest route to get to Río Negro from Rabinal is through Xococ. Some people say that at the beginning they had to request permission from that community to - pass through on their way to Río Negro. They had to bow down to be able to - pass through. They also requested permission from the mayor's office.

The first three families went back in 1991. Other families arrived later (1994, 1997, etc.). Close to the river they first made a camp with nylon and later built small thatch roof houses further up. At the beginning they fished and looked for crabs. Other families came later. Some liked it and others did not, and went back. Today there are many families living in the community.

At the beginning when people arrived, they were afraid that what they lived through before would happen again. First they came to the river where Don Chome lived. Later were no longer afraid and went to Río Negro to make their houses. When they arrived the hills were full of bushes. There were many thorns and snakes. They had to clear it up to live there.



The family of D. Julián Sánchez and Dña. Fidelia Taperia was one of the first three families to go back to Río Negro. (46)

Don Abraham Rico from Santa Cruz took over a finca that was abandoned for 10 years. He had good dogs and went hunting. Since there was no one [then living on the finca], he went around saying that he had land in Río Negro. He wanted to build a house and keep the land. He told people not to go back, that the land was barren, that it was not good to plant corn or good to raise animals, and that it was a problem area because the guerrilla had been there. People told him they were the owners, they had been born there and they wanted to go back to fish and collect palm fruit and pon seeds.

In the first few years after they returned, the community was able to obtain 10 sheets of zinc for roofs for each family. The dioceses of Alta Verapaz and INDE workers helped. The Pastoral Social of Cobán gave a boat in support. The exhumations required everyone's collaboration. The people from the community during their time in Pacux strived a lot to be in a better situation:

- They received the support of the Pastoral Social for widows and orphans.
- There was a petate project with a group of women. Another group worked building chicken pens and others a bakery.
- In Pacux they built an oven with the support of INTECAP. A cooperative was created with women but because of lack of ideas and capacity it fell through.
- None of these projects were supported by INDE, but achieved through the work of the community. But, they were not enough for people to live peacefully.

The lack of alternatives in Pacux forced those families seek a better life in the community of Río Negro.

Some community places

The Sogiana cave is close to the community where long time ago a snake of 7 heads was found. They say the snake wanted God to bring about judgment and the flooding of humanity. One day when it began raining, the angels fought with that snake and lightning chopped one of its heads. The snake left with 6 heads went back to the cave. No one has



the nerve to go up to the cave. Some people from the community went in about 10 meters and saw that it was full of animal bones. The bones were of big animals.

Another story told is that there is an enchanted hill in Río Negro. They say that on that hill there is a dish full of money, it is the money of the hill. A bull is guarding the money. People are afraid to go to that place because it is enchanted. One can go in, but unable to get out. They say that there are big animal bones at the center of the hill.

Close to Río Negro there is a place called Chicolom. The story is that an old man was planting corn and someone came to bother him. The old man got mad and took a chicolob' or branch to hit him and stop bothering him. At the end the name Chicolom was given to the place.



The family of Julio Tecú and Candelaria de León. The people that came to Río Negro because they were not doing well in Pacux. (24)

Some damages caused by the dam

There are some “new” families—children of the families directly affected by the dam. These families did not have houses or land in Pacux. That is why they came to Río Negro, because in Pacux they were experiencing hardship and had nothing. Some of these families are the orphans who lost their rights when their parents were massacred.

In the community there is not enough corn. The soils are poor. Before people did not use chemical fertilizers. The grandparents said that when the land gets accustomed to be fertilized, you have to continue fertilizing it. If you don't fertilize it, it does not produce. They used to cultivate on the river banks the land produced a lot. Fruit trees and crops were lost. There were many types of animals and many types of fish. Many fish disappeared when the dam was built. Because the river is dirty and contaminated the flavor of the fish is not the same.

The celebrations that the community held have been lost, such as the Santa Cruz fiesta. The village is sadder now, the fiesta is not practiced. All of that is lost. There are not enough people in the village.



Another problem the dam caused is that you can't cross to the other side of the river. The right to cross was taken away with the flooding. Another problem is that when the level of the river goes down the path gets full of mud and it is difficult to cross. The path becomes dangerous, it is steep and people generally carry heavy loads. It is a problem especially in March. The community of Río Negro hasn't received any help from INDE.



Young people fishing. Many fish types disappeared and ways of crossing the rivers were lost. (55)

Community Resources

Agricultural resources

The biggest problem in the community is poor soils. The best soils were flooded. Nevertheless, people planted plantains, achote, güisquil, camote, yuca, cane, flor de izote and ayote. There are also orange, lemon, jocote, guayaba, mango, guanaba, anona, coffee and aguacate trees. Many of the fruit trees are starting to produce fruit. Some families use rotten leaves to fertilize the soil. Other families use small quantities of chemical fertilizer. And other families do not fertilize at all. The hoe and *calabozo* are some of the tools used to work the fields.

There is a path in Río Negro that leads to Pamuy. There are many Pamuy or Chicos trees on that path. These trees produce all year long. In Pamuy each fruit is sold for Q.0.25. They pay Q. 1.00 in Rabinal for each fruit. It is hard to carry the palm leaf because there are no roads and it is heavy. Palm leaves are sold in Xococ or Buena Vista. It is sold by a handful or by the dozen. Depending on the size they pay Q. 1.00, Q. 1.50, Q 2.00 or Q 2.50. The tops of the palm have to be pruned and new leaves grow in two or three months. A dozen of palm leaves weights five pounds. It is hard to carry it to town. If you want to earn Q 25.00 or Q 30.00 you have to carry more than a quintal. With what is earned the families can buy some products like sugar, coffee, salt, lime and coffee.

Families in the community have dogs, chickens and other fowl. The dogs guard the houses and the family. Some families have cattle. One of the families has a bull and other families who have cows use it reproduce. The families share the grazing field and help each other in taking care of cattle.



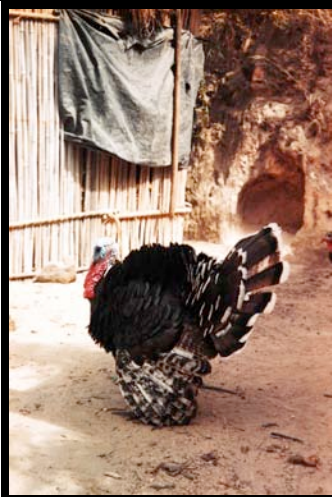
Don Faustino Chen shows his plantain field planted close to a sábila plant. (10)



Palm leaves are sold by the dozen in Xococ or Buena Vista and this helps the families.(9)

A family domesticated a chacha, a predatory bird. The chacha used to eat corn from someone's house and little by little became domesticated. They caught it with a net and built a cage for it. Now the chacha sings at two in the morning with the roosters. It sleeps close to the chickens and goes into the kitchen to look for corn meal. If they buy a chicken the chacha bothers it until it gets to know it, and if the neighbors chickens come in the chacha scares them away. Need to get a male chacha so they can reproduce. The chachas are edible; they don't taste not like chicken.

People also go hunting when they can. When hunting they seek deer tracks and when found, one of the hunters stays on guard there. The deer can come back again. There are also some armados, pizotes, cochemontes and tepescuintles. The families hunt to add up to their sources of food.



Chunto of D. Cupertino Pérez. The families have few animals. (14)





The chacha bird of D. Sebastián Iboy. With patience this predatory bird was domesticated. (36)



Fishing resources

The fish found now are chirica, risonera, carp and güilin. The aguarito can still be found. When they built the reservoir they put in the seed of carp, tilapia and guapote. Fish is preserved by sun drying for two days or two and a half days. Later it is taken out to dry out more so that it preserves well.

People fish with nets, hooks or trasmallo. With trasmallo you can fish more but it is expensive. Only some families have trasmallo. Fishing does not generate much income, only to buy a bit of sugar or salt. For the families it is important to have trasmallos to fish. Also, each type of fish needs its own trasmallo. The pepesquito needs a small, thin and fine trasmallo. The roll costs Q. 330.00. The güilines are about a foot long and require another type of trasmallo (Q 240.00 the roll). The guapotes need a bigger trasmallo of about a100 varas, which costs Q 550.00 per roll (in this case you can get four trasmallos per roll). For a good quantity of fish about 30 trasmallos are needed (to fish about 30 pounds per day, 40 pounds if you count with the influence of the moon). Between January and April is when more people from other places come to this area, they bring more resources to fish on the reservoir. Each fishing group bring between 15 and 30 trasmallos. Because the river dries up upstream, the fish come down and there is good fishing. It is important to take about five to ten pounds of fish to Rabinal. It is sold at six quetzales per pound and you can buy something with that. A man comes to buy fish at Pueblo Viejo on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. On Tuesdays and Thursdays another fish buyer comes. The pound of guapote is Q 2.50. The tilapia and the large guapote are sold for Q 5.00 or Q 6.00 per pound. Carp is sold for Q 4.50.


	
<p><i>The family of D. Sebastián Iboy. Fishing is an important resource for the community.(40)</i></p>	<p><i>D. Rogelio Chen weaving fishing net to fish. (38)</i></p>

Craft resources

The palm leaf is also used to make petates, brooms, and sopladores. The petates are sold in Rabinal for Q 4.00 or Q 5.00. A simple petate take one day and a half to make. When it is double it takes 4 days buy it is sold for more money. Some people know how to make matates or string with the manguey plant. The matates are sold for Q 8.00 in town. A large matate can be sold for Q 25.00 and it takes half a day to make it. This can also be made with threads that come in cones (“Aal” in Achi’) which cost Q 72.00 each cone. With one cone up to four dozens of matates can be made. There are people who make and




sell fishing nets. Women make napkins, huipiles, fajas, and bandas. Melisa González weaves two napkins each week and sells them in Pacux for Q 6.00 each one. For this type of work color threads are needed.

					
<p><i>Dña Candelaria de León weaving petates. They are sold in Rabinal for Q 4.00 or Q 5.00 (23)</i></p>		<p><i>Maguay leafs drying to make string. (25)</i></p>			

Infrastructure and transportation resources

In Río Negro, the families have a potable water system. Water is scarce during the summer even though there are a small number of families. If there were more people it would be a big problem. The spring is 2km away from the community. It would be good to reforest the spring because it doesn't have a tree cover.

INDE never delivered its promise to build the cement houses. The families from Río Negro have to build their own houses, even if they are rustic. The materials they use are: mud, straw, white sand and lime. Palo verde or palo orilla, which people gather from the hilltop, are used for support and tied up with palm leaves.

			<p><i>D. Julio Tecú working on his house of bahareque. (19)</i></p>		
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There is a school for the children made of cement. There is a need for a Health Center at the village.

It is difficult to take or bring products and things to Río Negro because there is no road and no cars can come in. The distance from Pacux to Rabinal is 36 km and it takes a lot of effort to go to town. To go to Rabinal you can go by river up till Pansinic (if there is fuel) and then take a car to Cubulco and Rabinal. It is usual to take Quebrada Canchún, which is a cheaper way, and then you have to walk three hours to Xococ. This is difficult when the river is low and you have to make a big effort to walk in the mud, especially in the summer. In that case people have to take the way out through Xetuján which takes 8 hours walking. And if you are carrying heavy loads it takes the whole day. The other way out is through Pueblo Viejo, although there are no cars. If you are lucky to find a car it costs Q 7.00. It costs Q 80.00 up until Cruce del Cid and Q 100.00 until Tactic when a group rents a truck. It would be good to have a store and a car in Pueblo Viejo because the river doesn't dry up there. It would be easier to transport the fish, palm, ocote, petates and all community products.

When a woman is in labor and when there is someone severely ill, the lack of transportation is a problem. They can be taken to Pueblo Viejo by boat, but there are no cars or telephones there and you can't reach an ambulance. When this has happened INDE workers have helped calling the INDE office in Chinazul and they call the hospital. But the ambulance takes a long time. Things would be different if they could have a car at Pueblo Viejo.

D. Faustino Che's family. Lack of transportation presents a problem when someone is sick. (12)



Institutional Resources

With the help of the municipality the community was able to develop a potable water project. The municipality gave cement to build some tanks, and donated pipes and gave some money for paying laborers. The SIAS and the Ministry of Public Health send doctors monthly, but there is need for a health center.

The Pastoral Social provided a boat. But fuel is very expensive; a gallon of gasoline and oil is Q 22.00. Eight years ago the Pastoral Social provided 35 orange trees for each



family. Many trees died because of the *zompopos*, a few survived and have yield harvests for 3 years. The trees require a lot of care because of the *zompopos*. The Pastoral Social also helped with a cattle project. Many animals died because lack of good fields and technical knowledge.

The community was able to build a school made of cement blocks and to obtain school desks. It took going to MINUGUA, the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, the municipality, state government but they were able to finally get it. The Pastoral Social helped with transporting the desks from Guatemala City. Rights Action helped with the mill, which women use and - this helps their work, they don't have to do the work manually.



*Familia de D. Catalino Sánchez y María Mendoza.
La Pastoral Social apoyó con un proyecto de ganado (30)*

The community has received visits from the international community. Due to the violence issues related to Río Negro are known throughout the world. It has been in the news and many videos have been made. All of this is considered an achievement by the community.

The community hasn't received any financial support to begin a better life or to invest in production projects. Only one family said they had applied for credit from COSANGER. The interest they charge is 26% annually to be paid in a year and a half. If you talk to them they can extend the time, they understand. If there is need, this family travels to the coast to work and earn money to pay for their credit, although they don't - earn much. This family gets Q 1.500,00 which is not enough for a good harvest.

Life in the community

There are no paid jobs in the community. The families plant enough to consume because the soils are not very productive. During the rainy season there is lack of water. Rain is scarce. Planting takes place in July and harvests in November. When the summer is long, there are no good harvests. The families plant corn, beans, make potatoes, work the palm leaves and fish. They are happy because none scolds them when they gather firewood and have ocote to make fire. Some families plant corn with maicillo. They also plant corn



with beans, like it was done before. The black beans are cooked unpeeled and are eaten like that with the peel and scrambled eggs.

Don Faustino Pérez planted guayaba trees; he added pebbles and soils so that they would grow well. In this way the water is contained. *Folidol* and *Volaton* are used against plagues to preserve the corn.

Besides crafts, the women wash cloths, make tortillas and take care of the animals. Many times the women have to work in fincas to earn enough to attend the basic needs of the family. Since there is no work many families in the community have the work picking cotton (in the olden times), coffee and sugar cane. Women and children generally stay home when the men go to the coast. Also everything is very expensive on the coast and they give two food rations for all the family. If the children get sick you have to pay for the doctor's visit and the prescription.



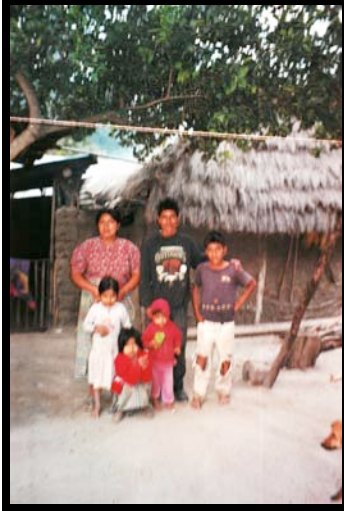
When people migrate to the coast they prefer to work cutting sugar cane. They can earn up until Q. 400.00 per week. Instead with coffee you only get Q. 500.00 or Q. 600.00 per month. It takes a lot more of work because you have to carry the coffee walking and the sugar can be left on the field. You don't have to carry it. At the coffee fincas on the coast they only give you beans and tortillas in the morning, noon and night. On the sugar cane mill they serve varied foods and always souls on Thursdays or Sundays. A person can cut up till 12 tons of sugar cane per day when it is cut in the "camequeada" way. When it is cut in the "maleteada" fashion only 4 or 5 tons per day are cut. You can cut a quintal or quintal and a half per day.

Other people say that they don't go to the coast because the pay is not good and you become ill with dysentery and fevers and there are no bathrooms and the *galeras* are



dirty, no clean water and the tortillas are eaten with flies. And if you become ill the patron does not help. Melisa Gonzalez's mother died due to poison. She was picking cotton when an airplane sprayed poison on the people that worked there. Fifteen days later after she got to Rabinal she died of intoxication.

The community is organized in committees of parents. There is a lot of work because there are only a few families and it takes time away for doing other work like going to the coast to make some money, fishing, agriculture, etc. Many families feel that there are many obligations in the community.



D. Juan Uscap and Dña. Isabela Osorio family. People go to the fincas to find work. (44)



Dña. Margarita Iboy González. The women stay home taking care of the house when the men work at the fincas. (35)

The parent's committee was able to accomplish the construction of the cement block school. All the families had to help out carrying sand and other tasks. Classes begin at seven thirty in the morning and end up at twelve and a half. In the afternoon the children go fishing to help out. Some families are working hard for their children's education, so when they grow they can become teachers or become professionals. If the children do not want to study they have to learn to work. This is how the families from Río Negro think.



D. Cupertino Pérez and Dña Ventura's family. There is a need to work hard.(16)



A group of children from Río Negro. The families work hard so their children can become educated.(39)

In Río Negro people plant and use a lot of medicinal plants because there is no money to buy medicines. People use these plants:

- Aloe vera is good for dandruff and kidney illnesses.
- Ruda is used for the eyes.
- Verbena mixed with honey, orange peel and eucalyptus is used for colds and coughs.
- Quinoa is trituated and used to bath people sick with colds.

The elders recommend to young people to learn the different tasks and to learn from old people and to not take on bad ways of life.



D. Sergio Chen with his brothers. The elder recommend that the young study and work hard. (47)



The ruda plant of Dña Ventura. People use medicinal plants; there is no money to buy medicines at the pharmacy. (17)



The Río Negro families want better living conditions. They:

- Require support to improve production, make hammocks and cattle projects.
- Need better houses, the ones they have made of bahareque are not adequate.
- Require basic needs: lack of jobs, health center, a road to the community.
- Need economic resources to operate the community boat. Gas is very expensive.

Have a teacher in the community, but there is no budget to pay the teacher.

Credits

This report informs on the results of a field trip to the Río Negro community during the 6 and 7 of December, 2003. This study was conducted with the support of some investigators from the affected communities: Victoriano Díaz Pérez (Colonia El Naranjo) and Alejandro Chen (Resettlement of Pacux). Additional contributors are D. Angel Chen Pérez and D. Jesús Chen Chen, members of the Board of Directors of the Association 13 of March, Río Negro Maya Achí, ASCRA.



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