



## **11. ROSARIO ITALIA COMMUNITY**

### **Santa Cruz, Alta Verapaz**

#### ***History of the Community***

The ninety families who live in Rosario Italia have their origin in the villages of Puente Viejo and El Zapote in the Santa Cruz municipality in the department of Alta Verapaz.

The eviction and expulsion of the 28 original families started in 1979. Represented by Dr. Gaitan and other construction engineers, INDE arrived in community. The company started to measure the land and cut down trees. The community was informed that due to INDE's orders, they had to abandon the area.

The Guatemalan government, the National Institute of Electrification (INDE), and the financing agency the World Bank, were the responsible institutions for the plan and process for the community's resettlement.

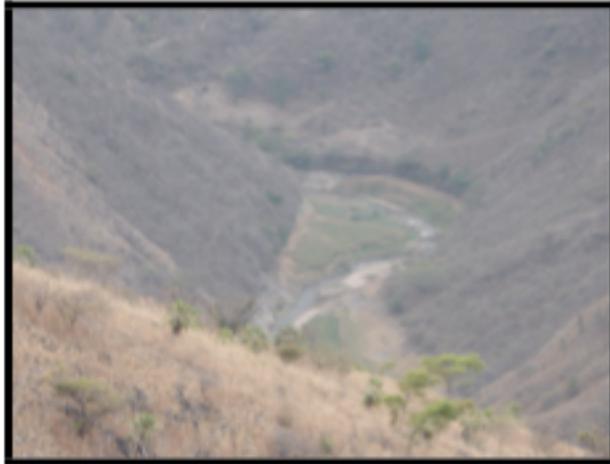
INDE employed different promises so that the community would abandon the land. Although they do not remember all them, some of them were: the provision of three farms for planting crops, a farm for cattle, houses made out of concrete bricks, free electricity and potable water for all families, a motor boat for fishing, a transport vehicle, and marketing of products. INDE did not leave the community any written document. The population accepted the resettlement terms. The community believes that they were taken advantage of because they did not know how to read or write.

They also used threats against the community. INDE engineer Victor Palma, who has died, served as village head and threatened to kill and kidnap people. With a gun, he threatened Mr. Santiago Fernandez who at that time was a member of the community committee. Later he calmed down.

The first emergency eviction was in 1979. The community moved upriver in the hills so that they dam would not reach them. INDE offered the community a definitive resettlement in the Santa Elena farm, near the Rio Negro village. The community did not accept because the land was dry and would be a source of suffering. Furthermore, this land would be very far from the town.

INDE hired the 28 affected families to build provisional houses of *bahareque* in their new location. They paid Q50 (fifty quetzals) for fifteen days of work. Once the "huts" were built, the community was informed that they would be moved in truck to the Rosario Italia village with all their personal objects and animals. This was in 1987.

Once in Rosario Italia, the community was not in agreement with the quantity of land received. INDE informed them that more land would be bought, including one farm for use as a lumber site, and that the housing was provisional.



*Puenete Viejo. After the first eviction, the community had to move to places higher up river.*



*65 families live in the Rosario Italia community.*

### ***Housing***

The large majority of the INDE offerings were not granted:

- In Rosario Italia, INDE built 28 *bahareque* houses. Each house was a 8 x 5 meter one room box. Since it was made with mud and sticks, the walls are deteriorating and rotting. Some of these houses no longer exist. The columns were made of bad quality soft pinewood.
- The houses are very small. The population was never satisfied. They live poorly and crowded in these houses. INDE never built cement block houses.
- Each one of the families was given 6 cuerda plots. With the families' growth, these plots are small.
- Some families have been able to build cement block houses with their own effort. Other families have been able to make arrangements and improve the INDE-built houses. Other families have not been able to improve their houses for lack of economic resources, or because they are elders and widows who are unable to build new houses.



*Mr. Fidel Tahuico has to add support beams to the INDE-built house so it does not fall down.*



*Some families, like that of Maria Teresa Ortiz, do not have the economic resources to repair the houses given by INDE.*



### **Water**

- The community purchased a water source for Q350 (three hundred and fifty quetzals). They could not plant trees in the area since they only have the right to the water source. The community oversees and administers the system of potable water service and maintenance.
- INDE helped to install water faucets for the homes and building the water tank. Some faucets are damaged. The very small tank does not meet the community's needs.
- The community has water problems. Sometimes water does not arrive in the higher parts of the community. A complete study to determine why some families have problems with this service is needed. This study would determine if there are pipes that have leaks, if the water source is sufficient for the entire community, etc.
- Many families do not live calmly and are in disagreement with this problem.
- When there is no water, some families have to take this vital liquid from a contaminated stream.



*An INDE community faucet.*



*A water tank with two community faucets. The families that use the faucet on the right have water problems.*



*This is the stream from which some families have to take their water. Since the stream passes through other communities, it is contaminated.*

### **Land**

Before the flooding of the reservoir, the community had 3 *caballerias* of fertile land. Today this land is flooded over by the dam. When this land was flooded, so were the plants and trees that the community had planted. This was land that could be harvested year-round.

Each one of the 28 affected families received 2 *manzanas* of land. In total INDE gave them 1 *caballeria* and 3 *manzanas* of land.

Each one of the 28 families divided a part for the housing (0.5 *manzana*), and the other part for crops (1.5 *manzanas*) that totaled the two *manzanas*.

The land received was not enough to build housing, plant, take care of animals, or get wood.

The new families (sons and daughters of the affected families) do not have alternatives for their development and life due to the lack of land.



Although the land is fertile, it is the small amount of land for harvesting which is the problem. In Rosario Italia, the harvesting of potatoes, tomatoes, squash, cabbage, beans, corn, and peppers is possible. While all these products could be harvested, our lack of knowledge on how to produce them is a problem. Furthermore, we need economic resources to start this work.

- To harvest, we need training on how to get a good product, fertilizer for production, etc. There are 2 harvests a year.
- INDE had promised three farms to the community. It never complied with this, nor with the promise to give a farm for cattle and another one for lumber.

### ***Electricity***

The community did not pay for electricity for the first few years. They started to pay when DEORSA took control of the energy distribution.

- Electricity is very expensive. The bills have gone up a lot. It is normal for families to pay Q60 (sixty quetzals) monthly.
- Furthermore when one has to go pay the electricity in town, one is also paying for transport, food, and the lost working day.
- Furthermore, the DEORSA employees who read the electricity meters are not offering a good service. The bills come with overcharges.
- INDE has not fulfilled its promise of providing free electricity to all families.
- The price of electricity prevents families from using these funds for food or farming.



*The street to get to the village is in bad condition. It is very uphill.*



*The Health Clinic built by INDE is not functional and does not cover the community's needs.*

### ***Other Promises***

The community has an INDE-built Health Clinic, but it is not functional. There are no doctors, nurses, medicines, or first aid kit. The health promoters and midwives are the health workers in the community. The Health Clinic does not cover the community's needs.

The school that INDE built is now too small. There are not sufficient classrooms for the girls and boys.

There is neither a good or bad road to the community. This is a serious problem when getting products out of the community for selling is necessary, or when bringing materials into the community is



needed. Some families live closer to the area by which vehicles pass, while others live 20 to 30 minutes away. It is an uphill walk on bad roads.

The community's internal streets are in bad condition. When it rains, they become very muddy and slippery.

A vehicle for transportation and selling was never received. The farm for lumber or the compensation for damage caused was also never received.

The community does not have a community hall. The Catholic church or school is used for community meetings.

Thanks to the community's efforts, they have managed to improve their infrastructure on their own: churches, granaries to house production, latrines for the school, some cement block housing, sinks, and stoves. Not all of the families have been able to improve the conditions of their infrastructure.

### ***The Effects of Eviction***

Before the dam's construction, the population was well adapted to their life in Chicruz and neighboring villages. Although there was not much infrastructure, the population could survive with the environment's resources.

There were abundant and fertile lands, sufficient construction materials, and ample spaces to care for animals in Puente Viejo, Los Chicos and El Zapote. There were cows, horses, and pigs. The people had fruit trees and an overabundance of trees for lumber. The population planted and used medicinal plants, corn, beans, yucca, and tomato. Trade allowed them to cover the population's most urgent needs.

Lands were productive without the need for fertilizer. The river provided the community with fish to eat or sell. There was freedom to fish or bathe in the river. The water was abundant and there were numerous wells.

Life was not simple or easy, and limitations existed. There was a need to work hard and constantly. But life was pleasant for a population which acted according to its historic and cultural experience. During hundreds of years of existence in the area, the people worked the land.

Currently, resources necessary for life are lacking: water, land, materials, soil quality, and animals. There is a need to invest in fertilizer and pesticides. More money is invested than before and the production is less. The production was more diverse in the past.

Furthermore, as the land provided is small, sometimes problems between neighbors occur because animals invade someone else's crops. Sometimes the families live very close together and there are fights. The community's traditions and customs in the new resettlement are being lost. One's own culture is being lost.



Improvement, like access to services and infrastructure, in some cases has been achieved: electricity, formal education, school, and access to some daily materials (radios).

### ***Achievements of the Community***

During these years in Rosario Italia, the community has had to overcome the difficulties associated with the process of eviction and resettlement. It has survived in very hard conditions and thanks to the families' work, organization, and capacity for struggle some achievements have allowed the population to improve their quality of life. Some of these are the following:

#### *Community resources:*

Despite the lack of land and money to invest and produce, the community is able to harvest corn, beans, squash, potato, cilantro, radish, coffee, and bananas. Much of the harvest is for self-consumption, but sometimes part is sold to buy clothing or cover some family needs.

In some places, planting is possible in the winter due to the humidity, although all of the land needs fertilizer for production. Some families have built barriers for the protection of soil and crops. The corn is stored in rustic granaries. Lime and *balaton* are used to preserve the corn. The farmers use the seed from previous harvests or buy seed from neighbors for planting.

Some families have hens, dogs, pigs, ducks, pigeons, turkeys, and cats. It is difficult to have animals since there is no space to keep them. Only one family has two cows.

Although they are rare in the community, there are some trees: pine, cypress, oaks, liquidambar, and *taxisco*. There are also fruit trees that produce oranges, *jocotes*, peaches, avocados, *coyop*, medlar, coffee and others.

Some families earn money by exploiting a sand pit. Mr. Eucadio Izaguirre found the sand pit. Today trucks pay Q20 (twenty quetzals) for each meter of sand. A truckload is Q100 (one hundred quetzals). It usually takes five people a full day to gather and load the sand into a truck. Rock is also sold, but this has very little profit. Not all the families have plots in the sand pit, which is a problem. Some families needed to sell their land.



*Due to lack of space, only one family has cattle.*



*Valeria Tahuico. Women help the family economy.*



*The discovery of a sand pit has been a great help.*



Some women earn money by making artisan goods like *huipiles* and woven palm mats. Others have stores or weave. But the necessary supplies for weaving are expensive. A package of string is Q60 (sixty quetzals), and the work is not very profitable.

The farmers most use the following materials: the machete, the hoe and the axe to cut wood. Although they always need more materials. Shovels, pick axes, and wheelbarrows are used in the sand pit. The families have bought the needed goods with great effort: shoes, furniture, and dishes.

Sometimes families loan their work tools. Although if they are lost, there is an argument.

The community's organization and struggles have allowed for some (although an insufficient amount) basic infrastructure. There is a school, a water system, an electricity system, a Catholic church, and a soccer field. Some families have managed to have good housing, stoves, and *pilas* to store water and wash. Others have electric goods (refrigerators, televisions, radios, and stereos).

*Community life:*

In our community, there are people that work, and have the will to do so, for the community's needs. The health promoters educate on personal hygiene and the use of medicines. They use plants like ruda, orange or mango leaves, verbena, and cinnamon to cure sicknesses like fever, malaria, and diarrhea.

There are two committees in the community. One is for the community's development and the other is the School Board. For example, the latter was successful in getting a fence put around the school and building a soccer field. Families make great efforts to send their sons and daughters to school.

The community goes to Church each Saturday, and also on Sunday and Wednesday. The word of God, the Eucharist, the rosary prayer, and social events are conducted. If there is a little money, one goes to the store to buy something to share with the family. The men and boys play soccer. Women like to watch soap operas. The community gathers when there is a first communion or a marriage which are always successful and happy events. Before and after planting, the community gives thanks to God.

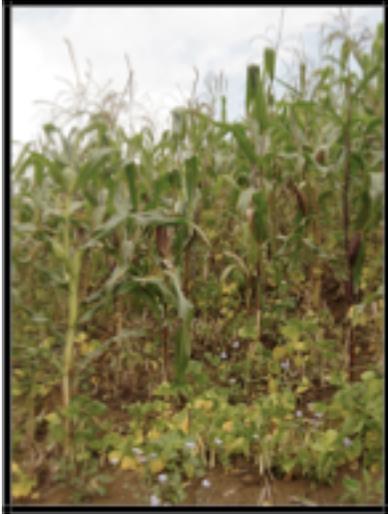
Within the community, there is much knowledge and experience about agricultural issues. People know how to plant corn, beans, and potatoes. They know how to remove sand from pits. Some women make *huipiles* and woven mats.

The male and female elders know the community history. They know how it was in the past and how it is now. Mr. Fidel Tahuico and Mr. Tomas Hauico know how the old people in the past danced the dance of the deer. When they finished planting, they returned home to eat *pinol* and drink alcohol and *boj*. At night, they played marimba and danced.



The families attempt to feed themselves as well as possible. They consume coffee, bread, *tortillas*, beans, and peppers. Families try to raise their sons and daughters with these foods.

Mrs. Julia Ortiz and her daughters Francisca and Virgilia always prepare food when there is a wedding, a birthday, a party, or an activity. They do this well.



*There is a great deal of knowledge and experience in the community. Mrs. Irene Izaguirre plants corn and beans.*



*Thanks to the committee's work, there have been some achievements like the soccer field.*

### ***The Problems and Needs of the Community***

It is true that the community, with much work and effort, has managed some achievements. But the families generally are not satisfied or in agreement with the settlement's conditions. Life is too hard.

The large majority of INDE's promises never were fulfilled. The community has many problems and needs. Some of these needs can be covered with the families' effort and work. But the large majority of them can only be solved with the support of State authorities, INDE, the World Bank, and the participation of other organizations and institutions.

#### ***The most felt problems and needs:***

- **Land:** INDE did not provide the families with sufficient land. A sufficient amount of production is not possible with the land provided. The community needs to have land to harvest, raise cattle, and produce lumber. Land needs to be purchased. Land should be given to those that do not have any.
- **Water:** The water is not sufficient since there is not a large tank. Furthermore, the tank is old and can fall down. Some families do not have access to potable water. There is a need for a new water sources and a larger tank. Some of the neighboring communities break the pipes.



## Investigación Social de Comunidades Afectadas por la Represa Chixoy

- The road: No road reaches the community. Vehicles cannot enter the community, not even in emergencies. There is no community development.
- The basic life resources: Wood supply is a very serious problem. INDE gave very little wooded area and with time, it has been used up. As there is no wood, some people cut trees from neighboring farms and the owners get mad and shoot at them with firearms. Some families split their land between their children and then they do not have wood. It is necessary that INDE fulfill their offer of providing land for lumber.
- Education: There is no middle school in the community. The school only goes up to the sixth grade. There is no adult training or education. There is a need for teachers, doctors, and college graduates from the community.
- Electricity: The community needs to solve the electricity problem. The service is expensive and of poor quality. And if one cannot pay, the electricity is cut and one cannot pay any more. The community wants INDE to fulfill its promise.



*Genaro Sucup cutting wood. Finding wood is a serious problem for some families.*



*The health promoters do not have medicines or equipment with which to work.*

- Housing: The INDE-built houses have been falling down and there is no money to build good houses. Work in the community is scarce.
- Health: There isn't medicine in the community since it is too expensive. It would be good if the Health Clinics gave medicine. A first aid kit in the community is necessary to attend to sick people. The principle sicknesses are pneumonia, fever, malaria, diarrhea, intestinal worms, and gastritis. Furthermore, the health promoters do not have materials to attend to emergencies or work materials. They do not receive salaries for their work.
- Economic alternatives for life: There is a great need for the families to progress. There is no work or employment. Further study is not possible in the area. There are no resources for production and marketing. There is no money. In the community, there are no seeds, fertilizers, or pesticides for planting.
- School: More and more, the numbers of boys and girls of the community continue to grow. The school now is small and insufficient for the community's needs. There is a need for more teachers and educational books.
- Women do not have employment opportunities, education, or money to start some type of work. There is a need to support women's collective projects, like a chicken farm or a vegetable garden.
- In summary, INDE's promises need to be fulfilled. There is a need for a better life.



*With the community's growth, the school is now too small.*



*Agapita Ac. Women do not have employment opportunities, education, or money to start some type of work.*

**Resource Needs:**

There is a need to diversify and make technical production:

- Harvest potato, tomato, beans, corn, radish, cilantro, carrots, celery, etc.
- Have a farm with hens, pigs, or other animals.
- Reforest with trees of different types, for example fruit trees (oranges, peaches) and wood trees (pines, cypress, *casuarinas*, eucalyptus).
- Produce with seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, and fumigation sprays.
- Produce medicinal plants.
- Produce harvests that receive a good price.
- Work in artisan goods, construction, and other labors.
- Obtain financing for production.
- Invest money to produce more money.

The needed things in life are expensive. Medicine and food should have lower prices. For a good diet, corn, beans, sardines, beef, oil, milk, oatmeal, fortified cereal, etc. are necessary.

Due to lack of economic resources, some families cannot obtain all the needed materials and tools. There is a need for clothing, shoes, furniture, dishes, and work tools (shovels, pick axes, hoes, machetes, and files), construction materials (cement blocks, cement, iron, sheet metal, and sand), and goods for the home (pots, plates, cups, and tables).

Stoves are needed for cooking. The entire community needs good latrines.

Institutions that work in the community are needed, particularly to support the solving of the community's needs as well as give recommendations and advice.

The ALA project supported the community with a hen farm. During six months, the project advisors came once a week. When they stopped coming to the community, the hens slowly died off. The project finally ended.



*The community needs stoves for cooking.*



*There is a need to improve the community's latrines.*

*Problems in community life:*

Wages are not sufficient. When there is work, one can make between Q25 (twenty-five quetzals) and Q30 (thirty quetzals) a day. There is not money to invest in production. There is not enough money to cover food, clothing, education, and health needs. The people who do not work in the sand pit are forced to migrate to the plantations to make a bit of money.

The problem with the sand pit is that the hill is being destroyed and depleted. There is also a problem that after working a lot, the truck does not arrive. The sand mixes with dirt and then is lost. There are no sales in the winter. The sand collapses and blocks the road and the trucks cannot enter.

The community needs training to learn different skills and trades, as well as on organization to learn about the different committee offices or to learn how to solicit help. People do not know much of their history. We do not want our culture to be lost. There is a need for a tape recorder to be able to record and not lose the knowledge about our culture.

Better organization in the community is needed:

- Elect people who are willing to work.
- Have good communication between community members.
- Improve the information that committees give to the community.
- Have the committees take their work seriously and be responsible.
- Have the community support the committees by attending meetings.
- Receive economic support for the committee members' travel.
- Receive workshops to improve community organization.

Some people in the community have liquor as a vice and spend a great deal of money on liquor. They will have to give up this vice.

Examples must be given to the boys and girls of today and teach them to study.

***The Community's Proposals***

“We, the inhabitants of Rosario Italia, want a community with cement block houses on flat land with paved streets and avenues. We want electricity, potable water, drains, a



soccer field, and a park. We want a school, a community hall, a health clinic, and a forest where the community can gather wood, and have trees surround the community. And that the name of community be ITALY.”

The community’s principle proposal is to work and struggle for the fulfillment of INDE’s promises, as well as find ways that the State, INDE, and the World Bank comply with their responsibility to resettle the community and establish a better life.

The community wants to work alongside the other communities affected by the Chixoy dam for its rights. The community is willing to take the necessary measures to ensure the fulfillment of these promises.

The community knows that it cannot solve all these huge needs by itself. It needs the support of the State, institutions, INDE, and the World Bank.

The community wants the problems to be resolved with the participation of State institutions involved in each case:

- The Education Ministry in the school and education problems.
- The Health Ministry to improve health services and medicine provision.
- The Social Investment Fund (FIS), the National Fund for Peace (FONAPAZ), the Santa Cruz municipality, and other State institutions to support infrastructure, production, commercialization, reforestation, and implement training programs, etc.

The community would like the support from Rights Action to continue and not end. The community would like support with the community book and that Rights Action broaden its work according to the community needs. It would like other NGO support. The community would like new institutions to support them. Rosario Italia does not receive institutional support.

### ***Credits***

This report is the result of the research conducted between October 2003 and March 2004 in the Rosario Italia Community in the Santa Cruz municipality, Alta Verapaz.

Community researchers Bernadino Sis and Baltasar Toj Caal participated in preparing this report. Santiago Fernandez narrated the community’s history. Rolando Cuja and Iñaki Aguirre, on behalf of Rights Action, also participated. Furthermore, the old and new board of the directors of the Community Development Council, as well as other community members, collaborated and participated in this research.

This report is a complete summary of the community book written by the group of researchers. Although this book still is in the process of being completed, the information gathered here was available. The information was gathered via interviews with individuals and the Committee’s Board of Directors, some community assemblies, and working groups, as well as through visits, conversations, and photographs.



*Baltasar Toj Caal and Bernardino Sis were the community researchers that the community elected to conduct this work.*



*The community's old and new board of directors collaborated with the research.*

This report summarizes the process of eviction and resettlement of the community due to the construction of the Chixoy dam. It identifies the negative effects of this resettlement and holds the Guatemalan government, INDE, and the finance agency the World Bank, responsible for assuring that this population achieves a better life.