



14. ALDEA EL ZAPOTE

Santa Cruz, Alta Verapaz

Introduction

There are 15 families living in the community. Most of the families came from Puente Viejo, where they use to plant. When the resettlement occurred the patrón sent people to El Zapote.

The people that benefited from the resettlement in Rosario Italia or San Antonio Panec were the ones that were under the mark 8-20. Those that were above that mark line received no assistance at all. Aldea El Zapote is comprised of those families who lived above the mark, and those who were under the 8-29 but refused to leave.

Another version is that some of the families that were left without land in Rosario Italia or San Antonio Panec because they were not taken into account or their names were not included in the list. Those families are dissatisfied.



View of River Carchelá. The Government of Guatemala, INDE and the World Bank were responsible for the flooding. Those institutions should have made sure that the affected community would be compensated for the damages caused. (35)

People remember that many years ago, since there was no money, they use to barter at the Los Encuentros market. People would take corn and would exchange it for beans or the other way around. Or they would take things and would exchange them for other. But that was many years ago. There are people who have been in this community for more than 60 years. And many were born here.

The name of the community comes from the big zapote trees located at the center close to where the village was started.

Various individuals in the community have provided information for this study, but the entire community has not met and made a commitment to join the demand for reparations.



View of the community of El Zapote



These are the zapote trees that give name to the community.

Damages caused by the dam

Since the construction of the dam, the community of El Zapote has ceased to have community celebrations. Before, there were happy events, or communal activities. All of that has been lost. Before people from Cancun and Río Negro would come to sing at the chapel. No one comes now.



The children from the village have to cross through dangerous paths when they go to school.



The best lands were left under the water of River Carchelá. Now it is difficult to get fruits. We have to buy it.

The infrastructure of the community was left under water. For example, the Catholic chapel that we had was destroyed by the militaries. The houses were left under water:

- The best lands, the most productive were left under water. Now it is very hard to cultivate.
- The community was left with a great number of fruit trees under water: *chicos*, mangoes, *jocotes*, oranges, bananas ... Also under water are many crops: maguey, coffee, sugar cane... Before we had fruits in the community. Now we have to buy it.
- When the level of the water at the reservoir goes up the children that go to school have to go through very dangerous paths. They could slide and fall into the water.



- A common disease we have is malaria. There are a lot of mosquitoes in the community, perhaps because of the reservoir.
- INDE has not make any improvements or left any benefits for the community.

Community Resources

Water

Most of the families fetch water from a water source located 300-400 meters away from the community. We had a problem because some families would get the water from the water source with a hose. But the same people would cut the hoses. El Zapote is not a united community. There is need for a potable water project that the community could manage.

The water source is contaminated with the garbage that people throw. Some times it cases illnesses.



Water source of El Zapote. From this creek the community fetches water.



Family of Modesto Morales. There is lots of confusion in the community about land ownership. The community is not united.

Land

Most of the land belongs to one man, Don José María Hernández. A few families have titles because they bought a piece of land.

Some people say that a family has title of a land that was mostly flooded.

Other people say that the land was bought by Don Modesto Morales. There is lots of confusion about land ownership. Some families complain that they were not allowed to plant crops.

Resources for Food Production

- In the community there are different trees types: pines, *jocotes*, mangoes, *zapotes*.
- We always use chemical fertilizers to work the land. The soils are not of good quality. It needs water and fertilizers.
- The corn is kept in *tapanco* so it won't go bad. We add folidol to protect it from weevil.
- Some families have chickens, ducks, or pigs. We sell the animals when there are needs. Some times the chicken die in accidents.



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- There are many wild animals like deer, wild pigs, *tepesquintle*, raccoon, and skunks. There is always less because every week people come to hunt.
- A very important resource in the community is palm leaf. It needs to be dried up and can be then used for making petates and brooms. It provides an income for families.
- We find firewood in the community for household use. We don't have to buy firewood, but it is difficult to fetch it. You have to climb up the hills.



Doña Santa Sabana Toj making a petate. In the community palm leaves are very important.



D. Ruperto Sanchez Morán with his family, Alicia, Marcela and María Elena Sánchez. You have to work hard to survive.



Family of Micaela Estena Ajchicú. The houses are made of bahareque. They are built by community people.



Doña Laura Rodríguez with her daughter Adelaida Sánchez. The homes do not have electricity.

Infrastructure

The houses are made of bahareque. They were built by community people. It takes 15 days to build a house. The roofs are made of straw and clay for better support. A bahareque house last between 8 and 10 years. After that you have to build one again.

The community has a Catholic chapel and a health clinic. There is also a school for children.



The Bus ticket to Santa Cruz costs Q. 6.00 one way. Only Thursdays and Sundays there is transportation to town. When there is no money people take 4 hours waling till they get to Santa Cruz. The community wants to request a boat to be able to Pueblo Viejo and for transportation to be better.

The community has no electricity.

Institutional Support

Don Oto is the engineer sent to the community by Pastoral Social. The parish helps out with a vegetable garden. They planted radishes, carrots, cilantro, corn and beans. We hope to sell of those products in Tactic or in Santa Cruz.



Marta Rodríguez and Ramón Sis family received support by the Pastoral Social and the vegetable garden project.



Jacinta Toj Rodríguez is the midwife of the community. In the photos Jacinta with Teófilo Milian Toj and their grandchildren.

Health

There are two health promoters in the community. When they can they give people medicines for fevers, colds, cough, and gastritis. These promoters are supported by the Ministry of Health.

There is also a midwife that has brought 30 to 40 children. She has been working as midwife for 12 years. Her grandmother and mother passed that knowledge to her. She is teaching her daughter in law how everything is done.

A doctor comes once a month to the community health clinic. He always gives the medicine that many families need, but some times he leaves the prescription. The problem occurs on the days when people fall ill and the doctor does not come. It is very hard to get to Santa Cruz to buy the remedies.

Some plants are used in the community to cure illnesses. For example, we use *ruda* when children have *Mal de ojo*. The *monte cuchito* cures diarrhea and head aches. The *albejut* is good for diarrhea and vomit. It is also give to women when the child is not born.



María del Carmen Morales with her children Carlos Romeo and Fernando Toj. The doctor comes once a month to the community.



The families use medicinal plants to cure some diseases.

Education

In El Zapote, the children can go to school up to 5th grade. One teacher comes to school from Santa Cruz. There are 35 children. There is need for more teachers.

The teacher is not very responsible because he only teaches Mondays to Wednesdays. Then he leaves for his house. The class schedule is from 7:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m.

At school the children get cookies and atol.

Production and Income Generation

The serious problem is that there are not jobs in the community. Many people from the community have to go to town or to the coast to get jobs. That is the only way to get a little bit of money to survive.

The men work in agricultural jobs mainly. What is cultivated the most is corn and beans. Some families fish. The problem is fishing requires a lot of investment to obtain materials.

Women make petates and brooms and weave *huipiles*, napkins and bags. These products are sold in San Gabriel or in Rabinal. The brooms are sold for Q. 2.00 and the petates for Q. 10.00. The *huipiles* are sold for Q. 200.00 each one, but it doesn't work out because you need to buy the threads.



Irma Yolanda, Pedrina and Irma Morales Sabán. Some women weave huipiles, bags and napkins. It



Some families live off fishing. Not all have nets because they are very expensive.



provides great help.



Organization

At El Zapote there are several committees: school, Pastoral Social, parish and auxiliary major committees. The problem is that the community is not united. There are lots of disagreements among the families.

Domingo Toj Saban is the president of the community. In the photo with his wife Silva Morales and their children. It is difficult to work in the community because it is not very united.

Daily Life

The months of June, July and August are the months of famine in the community. There is no way of getting food.

Father Heman Sierra comes from the parish of San Cristóbal to conduct mass. The father comes when the community makes a request. Every Sunday we celebrate the word of God.

In the community we make boj. Many people drink lot of guaro (alcohol). This doesn't help to keep the family united, there are always problems.



Matias Rodríguez with his wife Hermenegilda Toj and their children. Alcohol consumption is an important problem in the community.



D. Máximo Sánchez is 83 years old. He is one of the people who know the most about life in the community. In the photo with his daughter Cevin Morales and grandchildren.



CREDITS

This report contains the result of a field trip to the community of el Zapote on December 8, 2003.

The activities conducted were the following:

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

This study was possible thanks to the work and support of some of the community researchers of the affected communities: Bernardino Sis (Rosario Italia), Victoriano Díaz Pérez (Colonia El Naranjo) and Alejandro Chen (Asentamiento Pacux). D. Santiago Fernández also helps this investigation.



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