

B'isis Kab'a
(now the Chisec Community Conservation Project)
6th Quarterly Report
April – June, 2003

ISU Office of Sponsored Programs
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RE: USAID Grant 520-G-00-02-00030-00

Activities in the 6th Quarter:

Following the original request for an extension through June 30, 2003, ISU proposed the following activities:

1. Consolidate the work already done on the Candelaria, Bombil Pek, and Jul Iq caves in order to increase the amount of cave protection, resolve existing land conflicts with the hotel and with a nearby property owner, and facilitate smooth inter-institutional relationships with the government.
2. Advance on the management plans and legalization of two communities on the Passion River that protect and/or manage archaeological sites.
3. Add at least six more communities to the planning effort for the Jaguar sanctuary while following up on the legalization of the first four.
4. Consolidate the relationship between SANK and the project, and between SANK and Counterpart.
5. Consolidate a working relationship with FONTIERRAS/INAB under their own pilot project funding

During the past three months, the ISU project has continued to open new ground coordinating with the local NGO, SANK, with constant community mapping work, execution of socio-economic studies in all communities involved, accompaniment and logistical support of FONTIERRAS during their first weeks in Chisec, and growing of the Biological Corridor (Jaguar sanctuary), working now with a total of fifteen communities, fourteen of which do not have definitive legal land title. This period has been highlighted by the entry into Chisec of the FONTIERRAS office and their staff of eight people. The presence of FONTIERRAS has injected a vibrant, new life and energy into the entire ISU-SANK project. What had become a doubt by many communities as to whether or not FONTIERRAS was actually working in coordination with us, was quickly transformed during the month of June into an understanding that a partnership does exist between our project and FONTIERRAS to fast-track land-titling at reduced prices dependent on community conservation commitments. This rapid socialization was achieved by the constant presence of FONTIERRAS technical staff with ISU-SANK staff in community visits and meetings. In these visits to the communities and meetings held with all of the communities in the Chisec urban area, FONTIERRAS has spoken and begun to perform exactly as it was envisioned they would last October when ISU originally outlined the project. Their enthusiasm and communication with the communities now translates into a general excitement in the communities as well, where a sense of privilege has been created among these fourteen villages because they have consciously or inadvertently protected their surrounding forests over the years. As a result of our work, unexpected but very positive developments have arisen during this period as well, that not only point to a potential healthy future for the corridor, but indeed, suggest the creation of much better organized, balanced village socio-political structures than what has traditionally existed in these low-land Q'eqchi communities. Beyond the Biological Corridor, ISU and SANK continued to coordinate with the various actors involved in the Candelaria Cave process, playing the role of facilitator to ensure that the timeline set for the signing of the Community Co-Management plan was kept to be finished by September. Finally, ISU assisted Counterpart International (CPI) with their entry to work in the Chisec area in mid-May, helping them not only with transportation, general office support and introduction to the communities, but also providing them with a potential framework for their relationship with SANK and the communities where they will be working.

Activity 1: Consolidation of work with Candelaria, Bombil Pek, and Jul Iq caves

During the period April – June 2003, ISU continued to coordinate with the principle actors responsible for the creation of the Candelaria Caves National Park Management plan. Despite a number of negative reports and articles in the Guatemalan press, all of this work has continued and the Ministry (MICUDE) appears willing to deliver on its commitment to invest the rights and responsibilities of management of the caves with the local Q'eqchi communities. The legal conflict between MICUDE and the eco-lodge located inside the protected area has yet to be resolved, not to mention the conflict between the lodge and the Q'eqchi community, Mucbilha. MICUDE filed a penal case against the French owner and his Guatemalan partner in the court of Coban in September of 2002, but during the month of April this year requested the transfer of the case to Antigua to be heard before a judge who deals exclusively with cases concerning national patrimony. Due to its increasing attention at a national level and what Vanderbilt archaeologist, Arthur Demarest, characterized as credible rumors of death threats against some of us involved in the process, the first informational roundtable was organized in May to dispel rumors and clarify intentions of USAID, Vanderbilt University, Idaho State University, Counterpart International, the US Peace Corps, FIPA and the Ministry of Culture. At this ISU-financed event in a hotel in Coban, Demarest was the moderator and Nora Lopez spoke on behalf of the Ministry. Those in attendance included the Frenchman, his Guatemalan partner, twenty-four community representatives, USAID representatives (Anne Dix, Claudia Pastor), CPI representatives (David Garcia, Mario del Cid), FIPA representative (Raul Maas), SANK representatives (Ernesto Tzi, Carmela Xol Quiix), Peace Corps volunteers working with the affected communities, MICUDE representatives (Yvonne Putzeys, Daisy Pop), and the Vanderbilt University cave exploration team responsible for the study of the Candelaria cave system. In this public forum, before the communities and before the lodge owners, the Ministry was very clear that their intention was to involve the communities with the eventual management of the protected area. That said, Nora Lopez invited the parties to use this first meeting as a springboard for more talks where a negotiated solution could be worked between the lodge, the communities, and the Ministry. The lodge owners expressed their dissatisfaction with the information and complained about the pending case that MICUDE had brought against them in the court system. Nora Lopez refused to discuss the case at this meeting, which disillusioned them more. In the weeks following the meeting that was not opened to the press, a concerted effort was made in various newspapers and on Guatemalan radio to discredit MICUDE and USAID's work with the communities. MICUDE and Demarest's offer to continue a calm dialogue between parties was rejected by the lodge owners, as they again left the country for France in early June with word that they will not return until November. It was made very clear in the Coban meeting that the Candelaria management plan is expected to be finished and signed by the communities in September. The lodge owners seem to be confiding on the ability of their powerful attorney to delay the legal process against them and upon the Guatemalan elections to put into office a new, friendlier administration who they know and have worked with in the past and will not involve the communities with the management of the protected area.

A press conference with USAID, ISU, CPI, FIPA, Vanderbilt and the Ministry is currently being planned for the month of July, in hopes of giving the press a more complete understanding of this ongoing, progressive and important process. The next few months will prove critical to the final outcome of ISU's work in the area. Community co-management of the Candelaria national park will be a significant achievement in including indigenous communities in the management and development of their natural resources, as outlined by the 1996 Peace Accords; not to mention a precedent-setting model for many countries throughout the Americas. USAID's support of this process is crucial, as is the follow-up with the communities of which institutions like Counterpart International will be in charge. Despite the many failings of this current government, USAID should not and cannot wane in its support of this process during the next five months, due to the simple fact that with a change in government, it may all be a moot point in January of 2004.

With respect to the caves of Jul Iq and Bombil Pek and the community Porvenir II, where they are located, ISU assisted with project staff in the first phase of the legal measurement, conducted by the Fontierras-paid survey team that arrived in Chisec at the end of May. The measurement must be turned into Fontierras within three months of the signing of the contract. This will complete the first step in the land-legalization process, once it is officially registered with the National Land Registry. Its completion will then allow ISU

to begin the negotiations with Fontierras and the community on the ultimate size of their protected area surrounding the caves and the final price offered to the community for the land.

Activity 2: Advance on the management plans and legalization of 2 communities on the Passion River

The progress with respect to this activity remains as was reported during the last reporting period, which is copied here.

No action has yet been initiated for this activity, due principally to the fact that our GPS Tech Team has been occupied from January through the present date, sometimes working six days a week, mapping communities in the Jaguar Sanctuary. In addition, the Cancuen archaeological project's field season did not start this year until late March. Brent Woodfill, from the University of Vanderbilt, is our principal liaison with these communities and he has yet to start work in the Cancuen area, due to his current investigation of the Candelaria Caves.

The Cancuen project is currently closing camp for the season, not to open again until 2004. As such, should time not allow ISU to work with these communities now in the fall, this activity could potentially be assumed by SANK during 2004 on a small in-country grant that would allow them to continue to work this community-based, participatory process completely at the local level. ISU will consider this and confer with USAID-Guatemala to determine its feasibility.

Activity 3: Add at least six more communities to the planning effort for the Jaguar sanctuary while following up on the legalization of the first four.

From January to the present date, the following communities have been added to the initial four that were mapped in 2002, having concluded the participatory mapping of each community, including all individual parcels, houses and current land-use:

1. Sechinapemech
2. Las Ruinas
3. El Triunfo
4. Faisan II
5. Rinconcito del Norte
6. San Luis Chiquito
7. Cooperativa Lomas del Norte
8. Chaquiquiche
9. Nueva Sinai

During the first weeks of July, the communities of Palestina and Las Papayas will be added to this list, bringing the total number of communities now in the Jaguar sanctuary or Biological Corridor to fifteen that includes Bolonco, Cerro Alto, Nueva Babilonia, and Agua Subterranea, which were mapped in 2002. This means that ISU has nearly doubled the number of communities mapped as originally projected in *Activity 3*, allowing the Corridor to take on a much more coherent shape that respects the greatest amount of current forest cover and the respective communities where said forest is located. To date, ISU has also completed participatory socio-economic studies in thirteen of the fifteen communities, with the remaining two to be completed during this month as well.

Finally, during this past reporting period, one of the more important activities that ISU and SANK have carried out has been the socialization of the community maps and the results from the socio-economic studies in each community. These community-wide workshops, where all women, men, and mature children are invited to participate, are presented to the communities as festive events, just as important as the inauguration of a large infrastructure project, such as their road or water system. The exception here, though, is that the celebration is not for the completion of a concrete, visualized work, but is one celebrating their work in having created the maps, collected the information for their socio-economic studies and in general, having empowered themselves for the first time in their history with a baseline of information as to how they stack up in natural resource use and conservation, agricultural production, education, employment generation, and poverty. Nonetheless, this concept does not seem to be lost on the

communities, as frequently a number of turkeys will be killed beforehand and the traditional, celebratory Q'eqchi meal of Kaq'Iq will be prepared. Indeed, in the community of San Luis Chiquito the entire community participated in the evening meal, with all women, men and children receiving their bowl to eat after the workshop was finished. Q'eqchi people not from this village found this to be extremely rare that an entire village would be so organized and extravagant for an event so seemingly informational.

The workshops are conducted entirely in Q'eqchi, being led by SANK facilitators Ernesto Tzi and, recently, Carmela Xol Quiix, who is able to draw the village's women into the discussion by showing them how and where they participate in the local economy, in addition to explaining the linkages between education, number of children per woman, and poverty. Figures drawn from the socio-economic studies such as annual production of corn and black beans for the entire village, fascinate the men and greatly surprise them when they realize the small yield and economic gain from their cultivation. Likewise, every village is shocked at the total economic value that they are extracting from their forests yearly - a figure that is always two times greater than corn and bean production, if not five times greater or more. Normally, total economic value from the forest accounts for between 30 and 60% of a village's total economic output, with the only exceptions to its financial weight being the production and sale of cardamom, and the non-agricultural wages paid out to village members over the course of a year. Community demo graphics in all communities are frightening, with average number of children per married woman being 6.7, and 56% of the village population are 15 years of age or younger. All of these numbers are discussed with the villages, with Ernesto and Carmela showing such correlations as high indices of education with high income from non-agricultural labor and its inverse. Impromptu conversations are spawned in Q'eqchi out of the workshop, such as how a community can get more information on family planning or how can they send their children to middle school when the closest one is three hours away. Ernesto and Carmela are able to respond to these questions and lead them to other potential areas of support, as Q'eqchi people help other Q'eqchi people in their language, and a well-trained SANK makes ISU's presence more and more obsolete.

Adding to the festive atmosphere, ISU has made it an integral part of the workshop experience, no matter how far from the nearest road or down the river the community may be, to include an audio-visual component to the event. Considering that some communities like Faisan II (60 families) or San Luis Chiquito (30 families) which have no electricity, no access roads and are at least a four hour journey from Chisec in truck, on foot and in boat, the arrival of movie projection and sound equipment in their village is cause enough for celebration. Taking advantage of an ongoing Q'eqchi-language video project that SANK is running, ISU has helped produce three digital, educational videos in Q'eqchi that are the feature attractions in these workshops. Themes of the videos include: ISU project video on how and why we are creating the Biological Corridor (with aerial shots of the corridor and the National Park Laguna Lachuha, including appearances of various communities and their members), a video on proper burning techniques for traditional Mayan *milpa* planting, and a video on no-burn *milpa* and sustainable, organic Mayan Q'eqchi farming (done with a local man from Chisec on his small farm). The movies are kept short (15 to 25 minutes), are interspersed with music, effects, and jokes, allowing for the audience to remain attentive throughout. SANK has produced other Q'eqchi videos, including one about the Guatemalan civil war, as well as one on howler monkeys, which ISU has also shown in the communities.

During this reporting period, ISU-SANK conducted eleven of these workshops in each respective community. Once the final four workshops are now completed, we will host an inter-community seminar in Chisec for two to three days with nominated community leaders from each village. It is in this seminar that the final structure and management plan will be given to the Community-based Biological Corridor, according to what all community leaders will agree. It will be up to these leaders to return to their communities and socialize the results of the meeting with their villages. Finally, ISU-SANK will do new community visits to complete the participatory mapping process, going out to the areas to be demarcated as *Community Protected Areas* to 1.) Map them with GPS equipment and 2.) Physically locate the polygon of the area and monument it in a way that is recognizable to all community members (this can be done economically with a local, ornamental pink colored plant that is sacred in the Q'eqchi culture and grows well under shade). By November, ISU-SANK will have turned in to each community a final, laminated copy of their community map with defined protected area as well as a laminated and illustrated copy of their management plan – both to display in a public place in the village. In the mean time, Fontierras work with all of these communities (with the exception of Cooperativa Lomas del Norte) will go on and will

need the accompaniment and pressure of ISU-SANK to fulfill on their commitment to fast track the reduction in price and titling process for these communities. It is important to note, though, that the majority of these communities will not be titled by the end of 2003, giving another very important reason to consider giving SANK an in-country grant to continue to give this process follow-up and maintain communication with the communities.

As discussed in the introduction, there have been some unexpected developments that have spun off and out of this work in the Biological Corridor. Not only has there been a great buy-in and acceptance from the communities for the project, but from the first weeks that we have begun working with some of them, they appropriated the project for themselves. Such is the case in the community Nueva Babilonia. Far from securing their legal title and despite the fact that ISU-SANK have yet to realize our inter-community seminar in Chisec, Nueva Babilonia has already decided at a community level where their protected area is located and what the rules of use inside that area are (in this case – zero resource extraction, i.e. no hunting, no felling of trees, and no removing of ornamental plants). Using their current organizational political village framework, they have set up a system where anyone desiring to remove a tree must request permission from the village committee. Anyone who removes a tree without obtaining permission is fined by the committee five hundred Quetzales (\$64). Refusal to pay the fine results in referral to the police or expulsion from the community. Community members in Babilonia are already discussing the feasibility of a local nursery to grow trees and sell to those who are given permission to remove a tree, as they would also like to make it mandatory that a certain number of saplings are planted for every tree removed. Going beyond just words, Babilonia has already fined and collected from one community member, as well as captured three men from a neighboring village who were on Babilonia community grounds removing ornamental plants. Such tasks have given the Babilonia committee its first-ever recognized need to exist indefinitely, versus committees that are created in villages for the short-term goals of completing an infrastructure project. Or in other words, on their own, they have found the need to create an efficient, sustainable form of local government based primarily upon natural resource conservation. Should Babilonia be the example of all fifteen of these communities, the creation of the Corridor poses to create a radically new Q'eqchi natural resource stewardship paradigm.

From the beginning of this project, ISU has made it clear that giving these communities access to appropriate incentives helps to secure the communities interest and create in the local mind a concept that resource conservation has its rewards. To this end, the biggest incentive for the communities is the fast tracked and reduced price legalization of their communal lands. Another very important incentive for many of them, though, is the maintenance of their rural roads. In late April, ISU accompanied the mayor, secretary and treasurer of the Municipality of Chisec to the offices of CIPREDA in Guatemala City to sign the contract for the maintenance of 38 kilometers of these roads that benefit a great number of the communities in the corridor. Since the signing of the contract, though, there have been significant delays with USAID – Guatemala and CIPREDA to complete the paperwork necessary to begin bidding on the project. Considering that the Muni of Chisec is responsible for 50% of the value of the road maintenance, it is imperative that the work begins soon so that the mayor will be forced to execute his portion of the work quickly and maintain a good image with the electorate in time for November voting this year.

Beyond our coordination with CIPREDA, ISU-SANK have begun a very productive and mutually beneficial relationship with Fundacion Solar, who in May installed one solar panel system in the schools or meeting houses of eight of the Biological Corridor's most removed and inaccessible communities. Bringing them electricity for the first time in their villages' histories, these eight communities were extremely grateful and impressed by the fact that people would be interested in them specifically if they were committed to protecting their forest. ISU-SANK continues to coordinate with Fundacion Solar currently, in hopes of installing refrigeration systems, phone systems, and potentially community-wide solar systems in the communities with greatest need and least likelihood of eventual introduction of electricity from the national electric company.

Activity 4: Consolidate the relationship between SANK and the project, and between SANK and Counterpart.

During the current reporting period, SANK continued to take ownership of the project as ISU has encouraged of them since January. As was mentioned in the last reporting period, the project with the exception of Idaho State's in-country coordinator and occasional university intern, is entirely locally run with members of the Chisec organization, SANK. All GPS and GIS work are done by Q'eqchi and one ladino who live in Chisec, three of whom are on SANK's board of directors. During the next two reporting periods, with Jason Pielemeier now acting as ISU's in-country coordinator, we hope that SANK will fully operate the day to day aspects of the project and be comfortable with what it is to manage and run a project of this nature. By December, we expect there to be no hesitation or doubt in SANK's ability to be able to continue giving this project the follow-up that it will need once ISU finishes.

Once Counterpart International (CPI) officially entered the Chisec area in May to begin work, ISU played a supportive role in lending transportation and office space to the new USAID project that was still without funds. Beyond this logistical support, ISU also advised and consulted both CPI and SANK on their potential work together during the 18 month project, as well as to the shape that ISU had envisioned the CPI work. CPI did not always agree with ISU's advice, in particular when dealing with how CPI will address the communities of the Biological Corridor. What is more, CPI never seemed to grasp the importance of involving SANK or using SANK to enter into the communities where they will be working. When Dr. Anthony Stocks initiated work in this area nearly a year and a half ago, he began with SANK vice-president, Ernesto Tzi, who introduced him to the Candelaria cave communities and gave him a framework with which to work with the communities. This slow but important beginning has to be attributed to much of any success we currently purport to have. Using a different methodology, though, CPI seems very zealous to hit the ground running, but they do not yet know the ground nor where they need to be running. Their desired formal relationship with SANK has been seen to be one more of lip-service, than of any conviction that a local organization needs to be involved with the execution of the project. ISU has expressed this observation verbally and in writing to local CPI hires as well as CPI administration in Washington, DC.

Activity 5: Consolidate a working relationship with FONTIERRAS/INAB under their own pilot project funding

The Fontierras office finally opened in Chisec in May, with a staff of eight people. Again, USAID – Guatemala and CIPREDA are exceedingly slow to move paperwork, as nearly two months after they are on the ground, the office is still devoid of any tool that they need to fulfill the large task that they have been assigned. Currently they are borrowing furniture and one computer from the Playa Grande, Ixcán, Quiché Fontierras' office. They do not possess one GPS, much less any of the surveying equipment necessary for their work to be legal. For the majority of their time here thus far, they have had no access to any vehicle and have therefore been beholden to ISU for all mobilization to these distant communities. These complaints aside, the staff seems well suited for the job and they all speak to the creation of the Corridor and the role that Fontierras plays very well. Their presence in the communities during these last weeks has brought new excitement to the project and the partnership that was described from the onset to the communities is now seen as a reality. The engineer in charge of the Chisec office, Romeo Euler, speaks Q'eqchi extremely well and understands the work well. He will be a great asset in assuring that Fontierras fulfill their side of the bargain.

Additional Activities:

1. Mapping of Sepalau: Much like ISU's ongoing work with the Bombil Pek and Jul Iq caves in the community of Porvenir II, during this period, we have begun the mapping and socio-economic studies of the community Sepalau Cataltzul, home to the local tourist attraction of the three lagoons of Sepalau. While Sepalau does have a legal title to the land, our mapping will provide the community and Counterpart International with a baseline of forest cover and a digitalized map of where they may potentially declare protected community areas to secure the protection of their lakes. ISU will assist Sepalau and CPI with a final management plan for the lakes as well.

2. Training: ISU trained a total of 22 Q'eqchi members from ten different communities as socioeconomic researchers. In addition, two more Q'eqchi community members were trained in use of GPS, compass, and navigation.
3. Digitalization of Topographic Maps: ISU paid Mario Rodriguez for four completely digitalized IGN 1:50,000 topographic maps that give a three-dimensional, geo-referenced image of the Biological Corridor, in addition to outlying areas that may prove interesting for SANK to map in the future, considering similar significant stands of forest.

Conclusions

At the end of the reporting period, we can measure the progress in terms of the deliverables we proposed for the extension of the "Chisec Community Conservation Project" to be finished by June 30, 2003.

Below, the deliverables are copied from the proposal and commented on in bold.

Deliverables of the Project Extension

1. 12 community technicians trained in GPS and navigation. **(12 trained)**
2. 6 new communities within the network of the Jaguar Sanctuary with communal reserves. Liaison consolidated with Lachuá National Park. **(9 new communities mapped, 2 more underway. Relationship established with IUCN project in Lachuá National Park)**
3. SANK equipped and trained to conduct future resource management planning activities under contract. **(2 SANK technicians trained in the use of ArcView and plotter, as well as fixed tech team of 6 GPS field workers, more than capable of taking on future work under contract)**
4. Tourism committees legalized and operating in Candelaria Caves, Bombil Pek under agreements with the Ministry of Culture and Sports. **(Pending 13 point Work Plan to be completed in August for the communities of Candelaria Caves. Bombil Pek awaits registry of their legal measurement and ensuing negotiation with FONTIERRAS regarding price and size of community protected area)**
5. 1:10,000 maps of all participating communities showing their boundaries, parcels, and land uses including protected areas. **(13 completed maps to date of communities in Jaguar Sanctuary)**
6. 3 small projects funded and completed to facilitate community tourism activities. **(Pending coordination with AGIL and Counterpart and their survey of prioritized needs, ISU is able to support these projects.)**
7. Resolution of dispute between hotel and Candelaria communities and between Muchbilhá and a private property owner across the highway. **(Despite various attempts to foster a dialogue of negotiation between the Ministry, the communities and the hotel, including support from Vanderbilt archaeologist Arthur Demarest, the hotel owners have little to no disposition to negotiate or change the status quo. Resolution of conflict can be made by the Ministry of Culture and national government by following the timeline agreed upon for the signing of a community co-management plan and proceeding with the pending legal case against the hotel owners.)**
8. Smooth transition into activities funded under Counterpart agreement with USAID **(ISU has and will continue to offer solicited and unsolicited counsel to CPI as they initiate work in the area.)**