B'isis Kab'a
(now the Chisec Community Conservation Project)
8th and Final Quarterly Report
October - November, 2003

ISU Office of Sponsored Programs
Jason Pielemeier, Guatemalan National Director
Idaho State University
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RE: USAID Grant 520-G-00-02-00030-00
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Activities in the 8th Quarter:

Following the request for a "no cost" extension through November 30, 2003, ISU proposed the following activities:

1. Support SANK as an **independent** resource management and conservation NGO. In this activity, the project activities, after a period of preparation, will be turned over to SANK as a subcontract. ISU will maintain a function that might be described as coordinator/liason/networking/planning assistance for the remainder of the project. ISU will also continue to be the overall administrator of USAID funds. This activity significantly advances the original goal of developing a locally-based resource management and conservation NGO in the Chisec area.
2. Cement the relationship between SANK and FONTIERRAS with coordination, mutual planning that takes into account past activities, strategic planning and possible logistic support and occasional extension (through volunteers) support.
3. SANK/ISU will give the communities of the *Jaguar Sanctuary* more follow-up with their mapping process and the negotiation of lower prices for the land, in light of these communities' commitment to protect their natural resources.
4. Cement the relationship between SANK, as an independent NGO making its own decisions, and Counterpart International (CPI) as a supporting NGO, through supplying bridge funding to SANK and continued support for strategic planning.
5. Provide a continued presence with the communities of Candelaria and facilitate their efforts to secure the Co-Administration Concession from the Ministry of Culture and Sports - MICUDE (tentatively scheduled for late August of 2003). This activity is necessary to bring closure to this aspect of the original ISU workplan.

The final two months of the ISU *Community Conservation Project* have been spent executing the last of the community conservation workshops and designing the final community management plans. These management plans were turned over to the twenty participating communities at the 'Final Intercommunity Conservation Assembly' on November 14th. As the project comes to a close, it is apparent that the relationships and trust built between the ISU/SANK team and the local communities is one of its most significant and inspiring successes. Institutionally, SANK has matured throughout the project's trajectory and is now poised to continue building upon these local relationships with follow-up infrastructure, organizational and development projects. This follow-up will no doubt be critical to the long-term implementation of the significant conservation commitments made by the participating communities.

Another highly significant achievement of the project has been the advancement of land titling activities in the region in coordination with *Fontierras*. The new Chisec office of *Fontierras* is continuing to work well and exceed community expectations. However, the lack of attention and priority given to this office by *Fontierras* central and the inability of CIPREDA to provide the critical equipment that was originally contemplated for the office have proven to be significant obstacles. The lack of equipment, vehicles, funds and attention given to the *Fontierras* Chisec office has already caused the local director to resign and led to morale problems that will likely lead to further attrition if conditions do not improve soon. This disappointing state of affairs is paralleled by the *Fontierras* Office of Regularization's unwillingness to present the project's petition for reduced land prices to the Governing Council, despite the fact that this

critical step is clearly laid out as one of *Fontierras'* responsibilities in the USAID-*Fontierras* "Project for Legalization along the Franja del Norte."

Finally, although the project has worked hard to coordinate, execute and meet the continuing demands of the Institute of Anthropology and History (IDAEH) and Ministry of Culture and Sports (MICUDE) in regards to the management plan for the Candelaria River Heritage Site, that plan has still not been approved. The reasons for this failure are diverse and lay mostly within the bureaucratic labyrinth of the Ministry but also with the coalition of forces that include ISU, FIPA and USAID for failing to communicate with and exercise enough pressure on both IDAEH and MINCUDE.

In summary, the project has exceeded expectations by expanding its innovative land use mapping and conservation work to 20 rural Maya-Q'eqchi' communities in Chisec. The willingness of local communities to conserve their natural resources and develop local management plans is a clear sign that community-oriented conservation initiatives have tremendous potential in even the poorest and most rural Q'eqchi' communities. This revitalized conservationism combined with the priority placed on land titling activities by these same communities indicate a deeper and more significant trend – that the mindset of the Q'eqchi' communities along the Franja Transversal del Norte is transforming from that of 'migratory settlers' to 'long-term land holders.' The significance of this development cannot be underestimated and should be further studied in order to understand its implications for future conservation, planning and development activities in the region.

Activity 1: Support SANK as an independent resource management and conservation NGO.

In July of 2003, ISU signed a subcontract with SANK giving that organization responsibility for administrative, communications and budgetary tasks as well as an independent budget. Thanks in large part to this coordination, SANK has obtained expert-level training in the use of Global Information Systems (GIS), expanded its presence in twenty rural communities, developed a professional administrative staff, received professional accounting services and training and expanded its contacts with a wide variety of national and international institutions. A reflection of this growth are the various follow-up projects that SANK has become involved in: expansion of its existing *21st Century Leaders* scholarship program into the *Jaguar* Sanctuary / Biological Corridor communities; continued introduction of solar powered energy systems in ten communities together with Fundación Solar; implementation of analog forestry in five communities with CPI; formulation of the *Diversification of Export Crops* project with CPI and ForesTrade in coordination with AGEXPRONT; continued hydro-geological investigations as well as a pilot artesian well project together with the University of San Carlos – Coban, Department of Geology; and finally, a study of land tenure patterns in the region together with Veterinarians without Borders. These initiatives, as well as a continued land titling accompaniment project proposed to and currently under consideration by *Fontierras*, will help to insure necessary follow-up and implementation assistance for the conservation promises made by participating communities.

Activity 2: Cement the relationship between SANK and FONTIERRAS

Activity 3: SANK/ISU will give the communities of the *Jaguar Sanctuary* more follow-up with their mapping process and the negotiation of lower prices for the land, in light of these communities' commitment to protect their natural resources.

In only six months, the new *Fontierras* team in Chisec (where perhaps 80% of communities lack legal titles) has managed to attend to all twenty communities in the *Jaguar Sactuary* / Biological Corridor (amongst countless others), identify five overlapping land conflicts in the corridor and, most importantly, resolve four of these complicated situations. On October 29th, the project team was invited to celebrate the turning over of provisional titles to the first of these communities, Agua Subterranea. SANK and *Fontierras* have worked out border disputes between the communities of Palestina and Las Papayas, Nueva Babilonia and Cerro Alto, and Nueva Babilonia and Cerro Azul, as well as a deeper payment dispute between Rinconcito del Norte and Sechinapemech - conflicts which many actors had previously deemed too difficult to resolve. SANK is now coordinating with a new USAID-funded Mercy Corps land conflict project to further attend to these and other problems in the region. Additionally, ISU has helped to facilitate several informal dinners and workshops with the local *Fontierras* staff in order to continue to bring these two important local agents closer together. The work of the *Fontierras* team in Chisec, with SANK's help, can only be described as exemplary (if not miraculous!) and should be examined in order to extract best practices and lessons learned that may increase productivity and efficiency of land titling activities taking place in other parts of the country.

Unfortunately, two significant set backs have hindered the office's ability to execute its fieldwork and left SANK's future role in the land titling process uncertain. ***Since March of this year*** (more than six months ago), ISU has been seeking to coordinate between USAID, CIPREDA and *Fontierras* to execute the purchase and delivery of the "List of equipment required for project implementation" (AID project 520-0326, Implementation Letter No. 108). Due to changes in said Implementation Letter necessitated by new price quotes and equipment specifications, only two of the more than 20 items on this list have reached the *Fontierras* Chisec office (two Dell computers). In the meantime *Fontierras* Chisec continues to borrow equipment, furniture and vehicles from ISU and SANK in order to execute their work. As the team moves from organizing paper work to executing measurements and fieldwork, they are becoming increasingly restricted by their lack of Global Positioning Systems (GPS, both geodesic and sub-metric), total station, plotter, proper office printer and licensed software. I continue to ***strongly recommend*** that USAID coordinate with and encourage CIPREDA to follow through with the execution of this "Equipment List" as soon as possible in order not to continue restraining the capability of the *Fontierras* Chisec team.

Separately, in August of this year, SANK provided the Sub-Director for Regularization of *Fontierras* – Walter Hernandez – with proposals for 1) special price considerations for communities

involved in the project and 2) funding for SANK to continue accompanying twenty communities in the region and the *Fontierras* Chisec office. Despite being indicated as a clear step in the execution of the USAID - Fontierras Land Titling along the *Franja del Norte* Project, the special land prices (which were to be tied to restricted land use - conservation - commitments made by participating communities) have not even been presented before the Board of Directors by the Sub-Director, despite his verbal commitments to do so. A recent letter from the Sub-Director indicates that such approval is not likely due to contemporary internal and external political factors. A final effort to meet with the Sub-Director proved useless although an agreement was reached with a lower level employee to re-present a slightly modified proposal to him as soon as possible. Given that this is a ***principal component*** of the USAID-Fontierras-ISU project and an important incentive for land use commitments, I would again ***strongly encourage*** USAID to push for the consideration of this vital aspect of the project. This same letter indicated that funding for SANK's continued participation in the land titling process in the region was also unlikely, although the priority of this decision is of lesser importance.

Meanwhile, SANK and ISU have continued providing mapping and other assistance to participating communities. In October, the project team finished the last of its 20 community visits where we conducted multi-sector workshops (separately with youth, women and men) in order to socialize the conservation norms and commitments agreed upon by a council of representatives of all 20 communities in August. During these visits, the project's GPS technicians mapped out the reserves designated by consensus in each community. These intense work-shop/mapping activities were capped in each case by the presentation of educational videos produced by SANK in Q'eqchi' on themes ranging from appropriate slash and burn techniques, to women's rights and the importance of conservation. These visits also included a workshop on the appropriate use of karst resources, presented by a USAC Geology student who is working with SANK. These visits proved highly successful and the level of enthusiasm and trust demonstrated by the communities is truly remarkable. The resulting management plans were turned over to the communities as well as local authorities and representatives at a final inter-community workshop on November 14th.

Activity 4: Cement the relationship between SANK, as an independent NGO making its own decisions, and Counterpart as a supporting NGO

Despite early difficulties, Counterpart International's Chisec project team has managed to settle into their new roles and more importantly, begun to strengthen their relationship with SANK. The relationship between these two organizations has grown as they have both taken on responsibilities previously shouldered by ISU. This has been especially true in regards to the continued accompaniment of the Candelaria communities in their on-going negotiations with the Ministry of Culture and Sports. As Counterpart has taken a more active role in these communities (through both eco-tourism and analog forestry training), they have also become more involved in the complex tourism and land management discussions that ISU has been spearheading since the inception of the management planning process. Counterpart's expansion into several new communities (Rinconcito del Norte, Sinai) in the *Jaguar Sactuary* / Biological Corridor region has also helped strengthen SANK's presence in the area and increased coordination and cooperation between the two groups. However, CPI and SANK should take measures to insure that this expansion will not to compromise the quality of attention given to existing communities.

The close cooperation between Counterpart and SANK on the design and implementation of the *Diversification of Export Crops Project* insures that they will continue to work together to address this important follow-up conservation-related initiative. However, difficulties have arisen in the interpretation and execution of this new project, especially in regards to the commercialization of cardamom in the region. It is my personal opinion that SANK, Counterpart and ForesTrade limit their role in the commercialization of cardamom to technical assistance until secure markets that can be reached directly through ForesTrade can be established. Meanwhile, the introduction of and organic certification of ramon nut and vanilla should continue to be pursued. The hiring of SANK Vice President, Ernesto Tzi, by ForesTrade as the region's Export Marketing Agent was a wise decision and will help not only ensure SANK's ability to continue working in the area but also strengthen the group's relationship with both ForesTrade and Counterpart. In October, SANK and Counterpart have each received used Ford F-350 vehicles from the Cooperative Housing Foundation's Ixcan project and these vehicles will prove useful in the execution of the expanding activities of both organizations in the region. Finally, with CPI's assistance,

SANK has recently hired an administrator who will help to coordinate SANK's projects as well as CPI and SANK's joint work in the region.

These advances are important and have significantly improved the working relationship between SANK and Counterpart. However, Counterpart has yet to provide the type of formal organizational development assistance that was discussed between Dr. Stocks of ISU and Raymond Chavez, Counterpart Vice-President for Environment and Ecotourism earlier this year. To date the majority of this assistance has focused on fundraising-related activities. While this assistance has helped SANK achieve funding for follow-up activities, it is probably now more important to shift the focus of Counterpart's organizational development assistance to capacity-building activities such as long-term planning, internal organization and accounting.

Activity 5: Provide a continued presence with the communities of Candelaria and facilitate their efforts to secure the Co-Administration Concession from the Ministry of Culture

In coordination with the communities located in and around the *Caves of the Candelaria River Heritage Site*, the Project has conducted extensive socio-economic and land-use studies culminating, in late 2002, in a preliminary management plan for the site. Since then, the Project has coordinated with the Institute of Anthropology and History (IDAEH), FIPA, Vanderbilt University, Counterpart International (CPI) and the U.S. Department of Interior to implement four different expert studies (biodiversity, sub-surface and surface archeology, tourism potential) in the area. The project also took the lead role in socializing these studies and incorporating them and the comments obtained into a final management plan for the site. The successful coordination and cooperation achieved in this case between government agencies, indigenous communities and USAID-funded initiatives serves as a model for future protected area management in cultural as well as natural heritage sites such as Bombil Pek, Cancuen, Piedras Negras and El Mirador.

With the last of the IDAEH requested studies (Tourism Management Recommendations - Jim Goodbar, Department of Interior; Biological Survey - Reginaldo Reyes, FIPA) now finished and two information dissemination / public debate sessions wrapped up, the Management Plan was turned in to IDAEH for final review at the end of October. Although the plan has undergone numerous revisions in order to take into account ever more detailed requests from IDAEH, it was rejected once again by the Sub-Director of Patrimony for being too vague. These continued critiques by IDAEH have proven frustrating and even hypocritical in light of their inability to lead the management plan writing process or even give significant guidance to those writing it. On the other hand, the failure of FIPA, ISU, CPI and USAID to maintain consistent high-level communication with IDAEH and MICUDE must also be recognized as part of the reason for the failure to date. On November 23rd two revised documents were turned over to IDAEH: a broad *Plan Maestro* or Macro Plan for the area as well as a more specific Plan for Public Use. According to an agreement made at a November 17th meeting between all actors involved, IDAEH will now present the Macro Plan for a limited consensus approval from the Council on Protected Areas (CONAP) in which IDAEH participates. Meanwhile, the revised Plan for Public Use will be presented to the Minister who has already indicated her willingness to sign it. With the pending change in government, the window of opportunity for the plan's approval and the signing of the accompanying rapidly closing, it is extremely important that this document be pushed through during what remains of the current administration. ISU a long with SANK, Counterpart and FIPA have continued to lobby lower level IDAEH officials toward this end. However, ***it is very important that USAID leverage its higher level contacts within the Ministry***, especially with the Minister herself, to make sure that this plan and the accompanying accords on community rights to tourism management are signed as soon as possible.

Additional Activities:

1. On November 22nd of this year, Dr. Stocks presented on the relationship between land tenure and conservation in Guatemala at the *2003 Conference of the American Anthropological Association* in Chicago, where Ernesto, Jason and former Guatemala Director Kelly Kirschner were also presenting a paper on SANK's innovative digital video education project.

2. In late October, SANK sent two representatives to AGIL/USAID's first GIS training workshop. The participation of the project's principal GIS specialist, Pedro Giron, was limited due to the introductory nature of the course. However, the successful completion of this first step by local GIS technician Rogelio Ico is inspiring and we all hope that he will be able to continue participating in this series of workshops and eventually become the first Q'eqchi' certified in GIS.
3. ISU and SANK remain involved in two local land disputes. The first, regarding the community of Porvenir II (Bomb'il Pek) is quite complicated and involves a whole host of private, community and public actors. The second, related to a border conflict between the cooperative of Lomas del Norte and the community and private estate of Seactela is also very complicated and has already resulted in violence and may continue to do so if not resolved soon. Because these conflicts involve private lands that are out of *Fontierras* jurisdiction, SANK is now coordinating continued attention with Mercy Corps.

Conclusions

At the end of the project, 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 November 30, 2003. Below, the deliverables are copied from the proposal and commented on in bold.

Deliverables of the Project Extension

1. SANK will be capable of independent planning and action in the area of resource management and conservation planning. The relationship with Counterpart and SANK will be running smoothly and SANK will be capable of holding its own in its relations with other international NGOs in the area of Chisec conservation. A final project quarterly report will assess their strengths and weaknesses to do so. **(SANK's capability has grown enormously over the last three months and has been solidified by the formal ISU sub-contract. The relationship with Counterpart has matured and continues to grow. SANK's continued negotiations with Fontierras, Fundacion Solar and the University of San Carlos amongst others is a welcome demonstration of their ability to network and coordinate with other actors in the region. These connections and the remarkable level of trust built between SANK and the local communities in which it has worked, are the organization's principal strengths. The relative youth of both the organization and its principal members, as well as inexperience in matters of accounting and planning figure as their main weak points. For this reason it is recommended that CPI and others continue to provide organizational assistance to SANK in the short term. The hiring of SANK's first full-time administrator is an important step toward establishing its long-term operability.)**
2. The 12 communities involved in the Jaguar Sanctuary aspect of the project will have completed their conservation planning and will be receiving attention from FONTIERRAS/SANK that will allow them to perceive tangible benefits from their own conservation activities, such that the activities have a chance of being sustainable. Maps, self-studies and management plans will have been produced for all 12 communities**. (All 20 communities participating in the project are receiving adequate attention from Fontierras and as a result are advancing in their pursuits for title. Mapping activities and socio-economic studies in these 20 communities are finished and management plans were prepared for and presented to each in late November.)**
3. The Candelaria Caves communities will have a co-administration concession with MICUDE and their management plan will receive official acceptance. The deliverables are their accepted management plan and the co-administration agreement. **(The management plan has been re-worked several times and is in its – hopefully – final stages of consideration by IDAEH. The plan's ultimate acceptance will rely to a large degree on the amount of pressure placed on the Ministry by USAID, ISU and their allies.)**
4. The community of the Sepalau Lagoons will have gone through the mapping, self-study, and conservation planning exercises and will have produced a simple management plan for the community that includes the management of the lagoon protected area. **(All mapping and socio-economic study activities have been concluded in Sepalau. The results of these studies as well as management options were presented and discussed with the community at a meeting on November 16th.)**