

## Overview

“Choq'qe Ha” means “our water” in Q'eqchi', one of the 22 Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala and the one language spoken in the region targeted by the project. The project aims to educate and inform the people of Chiyuc, Alta Verapaz, on how to properly use and manage their potable water sources, as well as to provide 200 water filters to households and aid mothers, in facilitating this vital resource to their families.

## Background

Chiyuc is a village that is under the jurisdiction of San Cristobal Verapaz, one of the seventeen municipalities that make the department of Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. Alta Verapaz is the department with the highest index of poverty, along with the highest rates of death during birth, and the highest percentage of chronic malnutrition in children of the entire country.

The lack of education and the extreme conditions of poverty deteriorate the hygienic and salubrious conditions of the whole region, leaving the population under 5 years of age extremely vulnerable to gastrointestinal diseases and parasitic infections.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC, Guatemala is the Latin-American country with the highest population growth rate in the last 10 years. Under the data presented by ECLAC<sup>1</sup>, and also studies done by the FAO<sup>2</sup>, Guatemala is projected to have 16.2 million inhabitants by 2015, which means a population density of 149 inhabitants per kilometer square. In Guatemala, 54.8% of the population is under the poverty line. The actual conditions and the ever-rising levels of population put a humongous pressure on the scarce potable water sources available. This situation brings the need of an initiative such as the one proposed.

## Short Term Objectives

- Educate and train 200 mothers and households with topics related to potable water management, as well as proper water treatment for its consumption.
- Raise awareness in the community youth for the management and good use of their water sources.
- To involve regional authorities in order to create similar projects, and to back up the progress done by this project
- The donation of 200 water filters that will:
  - Provide clean drinkable water to 200 families in the community
  - The access of clean water to infants below 5 years, which are the most vulnerable population to gastrointestinal diseases.

## Long term goals

In the long term this initiative is to cultivate a participative network amongst the leaders of the community, the heads of family, children, and municipal authorities in order to protect the water resources of the region.

Spread the knowledge about the importance of clean water sources and its conservation within the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Guatemala 2010-2011*  
<http://www.cepal.org/publicaciones/xml/1/43991/EEE-Guatemala.pdf>, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Farm and Agriculture Organization, *La FAO en Guatemala*, <http://coin.fao.org/cms/world/guatemala/PaginalInicial.html>, 2013

## Description

The project will happen between July and August; it will be led by volunteers from The University of Oklahoma, volunteering students from the national university, Universidad San Carlos de Guatemala, and local authorities willing to participate in the seminars. Among the people and institutions that will be participating in the seminars is Erick Barrondo, silver medalist of London 2012 Olympics (since he is originally from Chiyuc), the Counsel of Regional Development (COREDUR), the San Cristobal Municipality, and Universidad San Carlos.

The first phase of the project will consist of week and a half of training, and organization. It is expected that the content of the talks will be developed and prepared for the seminars, as the training of the volunteers. This will be done between the volunteers, the authorities of the municipality and me.

The second phase of the project will be integrated by the seminars and the donation of the filters to the families of the community. It will have duration of two weeks, where each seminar will last from 8AM to 11AM from Monday to Thursday; it is expected to have 25 people per seminar, chosen by the municipality and COREDUR, in accordance to previous research done about families in economic risk. The seminars will be imparted by the volunteers participating. The sessions will take place in an exposition hall lent by the municipality of San Cristobal at no cost.

The conferences will focus on 4 key aspects of water management and treatment: 1) Consequences of bad treatment and management, 2) The importance of good management and use of water, 3) how to improve water management and treatment, and 4) Instructions on how to properly use the filters to be donated.

The filters that are going to be donated to the community are designed and manufactured at EcoFiltro, a Guatemalan company and foundation. The filters to be used are EcoFiltro model Blanco Completo, a relatively inexpensive, ceramic based filter. It is designed to eradicate 99.8% of the contaminants in water, and has a unitary cost of \$40. It is expected that when the purchase of the filters is done, personnel from the foundation will come and train us (the volunteers), and also help in the capacitation part of the seminars.

After the seminars are over, a report with all the advances will be done and several other state institutions will be informed about the project in order to keep track and provide backup of the same.

My family lives in Coban, Alta Verapaz, 25 kilometers from the hearth of the project, they have agreed to provide lodging, food, and transportation for the people willing to participate. For this reason most of the budget given to the project will be assigned to purchase the filters. I believe that the fact that I grew up very close to this community, and have seen the problems that they have, allows me to act in an efficient and organized way throughout the project. Besides the proximity to all the institutions, the ability to speak Spanish fluently will enable me to carry the project successfully.

Choq'qe Ha is a project that directly infuses peace and wellness in the community of Chiyuc because it provides access to uncontaminated water. This translates in bringing out of the risk zone several children who are vulnerable to intestinal diseases. As a secondary effect the project will raise the awareness of the people of the community, and also break the educational breach between woman and men in the Qeqchi region.

### Contacts:

EcoFiltro Guatemala: Web: [ecofiltro.com](http://ecofiltro.com), [info@ecofiltro.com](mailto:info@ecofiltro.com), phone (+502) 7955-8555

COREDUR: Angela Choc de Sierra, [presidenciacoredur2@gmail.com](mailto:presidenciacoredur2@gmail.com), phone (+502) 5922-9068

Univeridad San Carlos: Ing. Milton Rivera, [ingmiltonrivera@gmail.com](mailto:ingmiltonrivera@gmail.com), phone (+502) 5482-4893

San Cristobal Municipality: Arq. Guillermo Klug, [guillok007@gmail.com](mailto:guillok007@gmail.com), phone (+502) 5337-9898

Erick Barrondo, (+502) 4488-3141; Bernardo Barrondo, (+502) 32124396