

Zapotec Community Builds New Water Pipeline

In the Sierra Juarez of Oaxaca, over seven hours by bus into the mountains north of the city of Oaxaca, there are many Zapotec Indian communities. There, in April, Solomon Lopez, director of the municipal council of San Miguel Cajonos, spoke with SAIIC about community work.

We have started a project to get good drinking water. We've had piped water, but because of the drought it arrives irregularly at the village. For example, there was no water in the morning today, but in the afternoon it returned.

This month the entire town is working, even the women and the old people. We are united together, the entire community. The only way we will get it done is to do it ourselves. We bought the pipe, which costs about 2 million pesos, practically without any help from the government, which doesn't provide much of this kind of service. It's the people of the community who have had to deal with all the details, including the labor. We know we need water, so we're doing what we have to do to get it.

The water that we're bringing to the community comes from five kilometers away. So far we've completed two kilometers of the project, which leaves three to go. This is our largest community project, and it means we'll have more water in the future.

Everyone has to work two days a week, except the old people and the women, who work one day a week. Some of the old people find a relative to do their day, and some do it themselves. There are about 70 people active in the project, not including the elders, who are about 30 more. Plus there are some other people who live elsewhere who help sometimes.

Now we are digging the trenches, and then we put in the plastic pipe and cover the trenches

back up. We asked for technical advise from the government, and some engineers came to plot the route, but they didn't follow through, so we went to another office to find some other people to help. Now they come for two or three days every couple of weeks to advise us about how we should dig the trenches.

We started the job on February 16. In May the rains will come and we won't be able to work for a while. But we'll start again as soon as we can so that we'll have water as soon as possible. If we don't get it finished now, we'll work in stages, working every dry season. We really want to get the project finished.

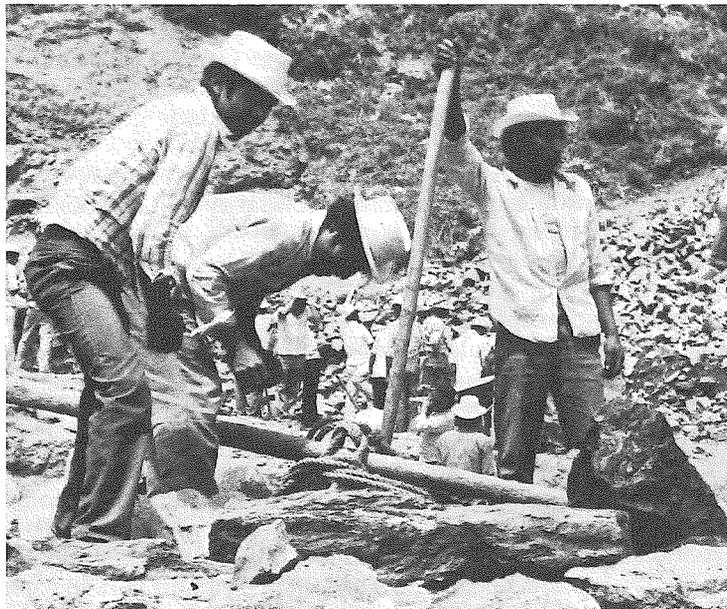


Photo: Assembly of Zapotec and Chinantec Peoples of the Oaxaca Sierra