



The Xalalá Dam: A Comprehensive Timeline

Since the early 1970s, the construction of the Xalalá Dam has been a recurring priority for the Guatemalan government. Slated for construction in the Ixcán region of north-central Guatemala, the proposed project threatens to destroy not only the livelihoods of dozens of indigenous Q'eqchi' communities, but also the very roots of their culture. Given the renewed government interest in the project and in anticipation of NISGUA's fall 2014 speaking tour featuring community organizer and human rights defender Víctor Caal Tzuy, NISGUA brings you an in-depth timeline chronicling the history of the Xalalá Dam project.

According to the **Q'eqchi' worldview**, nature serves as the axis of balance between humanity and its sustenance, as well as the base of relationships within families and communities. The Q'eqchi' communities of the Ixcán uniquely defend their connections to the land they inhabit, the animals and crops they raise, and the rivers that provide the water that sustains all life.

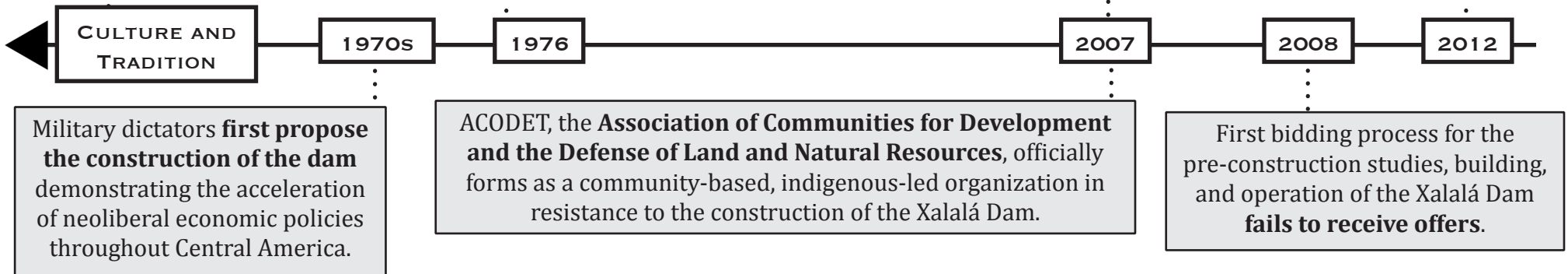
Construction begins on the **Chixoy Dam**, located downriver from the proposed Xalalá site.



Children in the Ixcán show their support for the 2007 community referendum.

A **community consultation** in the Ixcán categorically rejects the Xalalá Dam, as does a 2010 vote in the neighboring municipality of Uspantán. Since 2005, indigenous communities in Guatemala have employed referendums as a tool to demand self-determination within a political system that systematically isolates and excludes them. The right to consultation is protected under international laws and conventions, including ILO 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Ex-military general Otto Pérez Molina assumes the presidency and **declares the Xalalá Dam to be of national interest.**



The government publicly broadcasts the **deployment of military forces to the community of Xalalá** under the pretense of combating drug trafficking. Communities successfully refute the claim and halt the advancement of the troops. Lobbying false accusations against individuals, their activities and communities is a common government strategy to criminalize leaders and discredit social movements. Several community leaders have faced spurious charges related to their opposition to the dam.



Bidding process to conduct geological studies close without offers. Companies have cited local opposition and lack of social license as key factors in a prior decision not to bid. The Guatemalan Electrification Institute (INDE) has attempted to undertake the studies on its own but has been consistently denied access by the communities.



The communities of Xalalá have categorically rejected the hydroelectric project.

Guatemala signs an “emergency contract” with Brazilian company Intertechne Consultores S.A. to conduct pre-construction studies, circumventing the government’s public transparency mechanism for tender processes.

INDE meets for the first time with communities, but does not inform them of the existing contract with Intertechne. According to ACODET, this is not the first time INDE has intentionally deceived communities. The incident follows a pattern of using misinformation and unlawful strategies to gain support for the dam.

A Guatemalan court rules in favor of affected communities, recognizing the validity of indigenous authorities and agreeing that INDE violated community rights by failing to consult with them. However, the court refuses to rescind the contract, passing the decision for its revocation back to the executive branch. The communities appeal the ruling, sending the case to the Constitutional Court.

A congressional ethics investigation finds that **INDE violated Guatemalan laws** in contracting Intertechne. It denounces numerous anomalies in the process, including the failure to consult with affected communities and calls for the annulment of the contract. ACODET issues a press release stating that INDE’s “lies and biased actions” serve to “confuse public opinion and the communities”.

The US-based Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) employs strategic, creative and coordinated grassroots activism and advocacy to pursue justice for war crimes, to change harmful US policies and to promote sustainable communities in Guatemala.

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