



THE FUTURE WE DREAM

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BACKGROUND

We the Q'eqchi' and Mopan Maya People of Toledo have a long history of collectively dreaming and acting to sustain life, land, and community. In the face of oppression and exclusion, we have demonstrated resilience, resourcefulness, creativity, and the capacity to act and persevere. Our very existence as a people, the vitality of our language and culture even after centuries of purposeful efforts to erase us, is a testament to this Mayan character. Perhaps the most poignant demonstration of this Mayan spirit is the struggle that we have engaged in to defend our lands since the early eighties. For decades we raised our voices in and out of court, we organized ourselves, we dreamed, we built partnerships, we persevered, and this resulted in the historical achievement of a court order by the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) in 2015 affirming our rights to land.

It has always been clear in our minds that the struggle for land rights is only part of a larger struggle. This larger struggle is to secure a place to be and to be well *in community*; it is a struggle for life and for *our way of life*. It is no different from the struggle of numerous other peoples in Belize and abroad who fight for a dignified life. Though there are still valleys and mountains we must walk to implement the CCJ court order, we can now focus our efforts on other elements of our fundamental struggle to secure a dignified life. It is in this spirit that we embarked in a process to articulate a collective vision for the future, the results of which we now wish to share.

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"It has always been clear in our minds that the struggle for land rights, is only part of a larger struggle. This larger struggle is to secure a place to be and to be well in community; a struggle for life, and for our way of life."

ARTICULATING THE DREAM

The future that is envisioned for Maya people by others, and sometimes even by ourselves, has often been framed within a way of thinking that presumes moving away from our ways (our lands, our knowledge, values, identity, culture and wisdom) and toward a “modern” society.

This way of thinking sees our ways as backwards and inferior and “modern” society as progressive, complex, and superior. This has often meant that our lands, our way of life, our knowledge, our work, and often our very lives are sacrificed in the pursuit of this vision even as they are exploited for the benefit of others. In engaging in our dreaming process, we therefore recognized that if we are to come with our own dream, we had to embark on a special dream journey, in solitude and peacefulness. We therefore created a space to connect with each other and go through a process that allowed us to re-root ourselves in our land, language, and ancestral memories and wisdom. Out of this process, a collective vision of new routes for our futures was born.



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In dreaming our future, we trusted in the wisdom of our ways that emphasizes engaging in dialogue and generating consensus. The Popol Vuh in its telling of the creation story emphasizes this wisdom. The story tells us that to create human beings, in the very beginning there was silence and in this silence the creators came together to join their words and their thoughts. They decided what nature the created beings would have and how to create them. The Popol Vuh also tells us that the creators made several attempts to create beings, failing to achieve their goal in their first two attempts, but they persevered and succeeded after seeking the wisdom of the elders. Three very important teachings are given to us: (1) the importance of coming together to dialogue and arrive at consensus; (2) the importance of perseverance; and, (3) the importance of the wisdom of our elders who represent collective cultural wisdom. Today, village meetings in our communities, known as the '*Ab'ink*', reflect this wisdom. '*Ab'ink*' means to listen. The village *Ab'ink* is therefore the space for coming together to *ab'ink* (to listen) to each other so that we might join our words and our thoughts. In each *Ab'ink*, the wisdom of our elders is given high value.

THE FUTURE WE DREAM

The process of articulating our collective dream and the vision of our future was anchored in the wisdom of the Ab'ink. We sought to bring the multiple voices of our people together and to join our words and thoughts to build consensus. To ensure the presence of the multiple voices, we brought representatives from a cross-section of our communities, men, women, leaders, elders, and young people who engaged in a dreaming process.



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THE PARTICIPANTS

All the Alcaldes and Chairpersons from our thirty-nine Maya villages along with their deputies were invited to participate. The thirty-nine communities were divided into four geographic zones and the leaders convened during two sessions in each of these zones.

All communities were asked to select 5 representatives - 2 women, 2 young people and 1 elder. These representatives were convened in three sectors: women, young people and men. Sessions were held for women, male and female young people, and men.

THE DREAMING EXERCISE

In order to make space for us to dream and envision our future through our own ways of understanding the world and ourselves, in order to ensure that we remain rooted as we explore new routes, we engaged with the following three questions:

1. Who are we?
2. What are our strengths/assets and pains/threats?
3. What is our vision of the future?

Participants were asked to draw out their responses to questions:

“Who are we?” and “What is our vision of the future?” They were then asked to choose three words to summarize their drawings and explain their drawings orally to other participants. To answer the question: “What are our strengths/assets and pains/threats?” participants engaged in small group discussions and then shared the results of their discussions in a larger plenary.

INTERPRETING THE DREAM

A team consisting of members of the Toledo Alcaldes Association and Maya Leaders Alliance, three young staff members, and the coordinator of the Toledo Alcaldes Association was established to weave the dreams of the participants into a collective vision.

Dr. Filiberto Penados, Chairperson of the Julian Cho Society, was assigned the technical leadership of the team, who along with other team members, developed the methodology to support the process of dreaming a new vision for our people. The facilitation of the sessions was shared by team members, as was the translation. The results of the sessions were analyzed at the end of each day with the team to generate initial impressions. A more detailed analysis was then carried out by a smaller team led by the technical leader, who then presented the results to the larger team for validation.



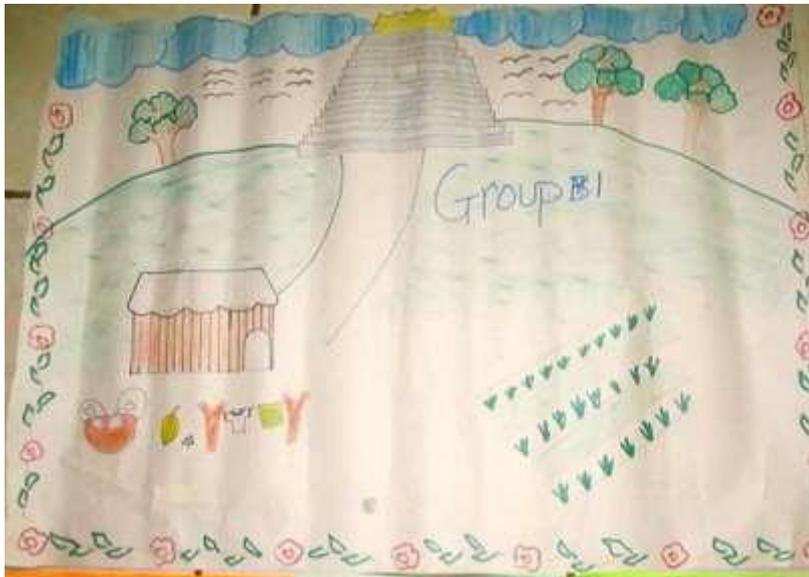
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WHO WE ARE

Often, Indigenous Peoples are represented as poor, broken and passive, or quaint and exotic, or stuck in the past, inconvenient, in the way of development and progress or incapable of living in the “modern” world. The drawings and words that emerged from this dreaming exercise reflect a contrasting picture. The drawings and words communicate that we, as Maya, are a strong people, who know who we are, who are connected to our land and recognize the value of the land and the responsibility of caring for it. We are also knowledgeable and capable, not afraid of hard work, who value peace, unity and community.

REPRESENTATIVE DRAWINGS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people tended to draw landscapes where the sun is shining, the land is green, birds are flying in the sky and clouds are floating. They always depicted green landscapes, forests and crops, traditional houses, Maya temples, food, traditional women's dresses, and traditional implements.



DRAWING 1

In this drawing, the sun shines from behind a Maya temple over a landscape that is bright and green. This is a happy place surrounded by flowers, blue skies, and flying birds in the sky. On this landscape sits a Maya temple, with a path that leads to a traditional Maya house. In front of the house is a bowl of caldo (a typical dish among the Maya in Toledo), a cacao pod and cacao beans, and a clothesline with a traditional blouse and skirt. To the right is a cornfield.



DRAWING 2

In this drawing, we see the sun shining from a corner over a colorful landscape. The main feature of the drawing is a traditional Maya house, which is larger than everything else. The house is surrounded by trees and a grassy area. To the right of the house is a cornfield and immediately to the right of it is a Maya temple. In front of the house are two traditional blouses, a mortar and pestle, and a bearing cacao tree. A little above the cacao tree is a harp, an instrument used to play traditional Q'eqchi' music.

WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE TELL US?

The drawings tell us that Maya people are a people who live and depend on the land. Land as a theme is repeated in much drawings. The land provides food such as corn, chicken, and cacao. Young people drew the temple to explain that Maya people have a long history on the land and to explain that Maya people are intelligent and creative and come from a people known for these characteristics. In a similar way, young people used traditional women's dress to communicate their identity. The mortar, harp, and caldo were used to explain that as a Maya people we have our own ways: our own culture, music, foods, knowledge, and technology.

REPRESENTATIVE DRAWINGS FROM WOMEN

Women tended to draw two types of drawings. One type was a collection of items such as those used in homes for cooking and processing; traditional women's wear (sometimes women wearing traditional dresses) and jewelry; and crafts that women make (see page 11). The second type was landscapes representing life on the land and women's work. The drawing presents a typical scene around a Maya household. It seems to focus on women's work and relationship with the land.



DRAWING 1

On the top left corner sits a traditional Maya house, to the right a large chicken coop with chickens in front of it. Next to the coop is a large garden that includes a cornfield, coconut and banana trees, and a bean field at the bottom. At the bottom left corner, the landscape includes a flowing river with a green bank. In front of the house is a dog, a fireplace and next to it plants, which the women explained are herbs used for cooking. This is a drawing of life on the land depicting the work and activities of women. In the center-left we see a woman with a slaughtered chicken in her hand, a step in making traditional caldo. Below her is a woman in the river doing her laundry. At the center-right of the drawing is a woman working in the bean field. At the top-right corner is a woman harvesting corn. Beside the house is a woman embroidering and inside the house presumably a woman in a hammock.

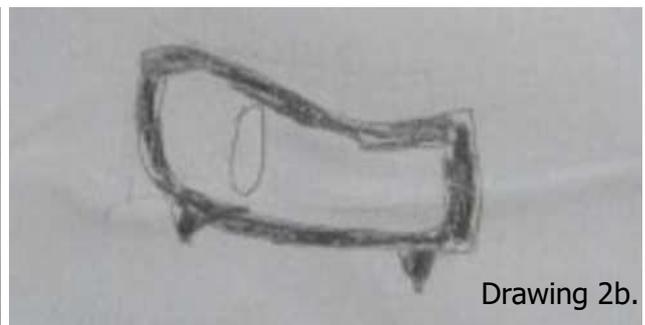
REPRESENTATIVE DRAWINGS FROM WOMEN



Drawing 2a.



Drawing 2c.



Drawing 2b.

DRAWING 2

In drawing 2 of this series we see a woman in traditional dress, a corn mill (D2a); a Ka' (grinding stone) (D2b); and a fireplace with tortillas cooking on a griddle (D2c). This is a typical example of a drawing by women where they depicted implements used in food processing. Clothing and tools were used to talk about identity and illustrate that Maya people have their own food, technologies and ways of doing things. Here they represent that Maya people produce and eat corn and this is what is used to prepare our food.

WHAT DO WOMEN TELL US?

The first drawing introduces the concept of "Ral ch'och'," the Q'eqchi' term that means "people of the land". That is, people who live, work, depend on and take care of the land. The women illustrate their relationship with the land very vividly in the activities they represent.

Women do their laundry, fish and bathe in the river. The river is also a place of recreation and community. The land provides food. Women grow their chickens, herbs, bananas, cacao, corn and beans. Women spoke often about producing their own food and we can see that well illustrated in the drawing.

The second drawing speaks directly to having an identity. This is represented through the traditional dress that women use, and in the way, we as Maya people do things, our technologies, crafts, and food. In this specific instance, it is in our relationship to corn and the processing of corn, that we see as, our

identity. This drawing complements the central element in our identity, the notion of Ral ch'och'.

'Ral ch'och', ' the Q'eqchi' term that means "people of the land". That is, people who live, work, depend on and take care of the land.

If the first drawing speaks to the idea that we are a people of the land, who work, depend on and care for the land, the second speaks to the idea that we are a people with a distinct culture.

Both drawings at the same time show how we as a Maya people are able to incorporate new technologies and new elements into our culture and identity. We now grow bananas and coconuts and use a corn mill to sustain our lives while still being rooted in our culture.

REPRESENTATIVE DRAWINGS FROM MEN

Men often represented who Maya people are in terms of our cultural practices, our knowledge, our farming practices, our communal work and our relationship with the land. Next are two representative drawings.



DRAWING 1

In this drawing, we see a house being built. On the top-left corner there is a family seeing a house being built. On the rafters of the house, there are three men, each on a rafter. To the right side of the house is a person with a long cohune leaf in his hand. This is a typical scene in our Maya villages. To build our traditional houses, men organize their labour through networks of reciprocity. We draw on the help of others and return the labour when they need it. The wood for the framing and fronds of cohune palms used for the roof are collected from our forests. After the roof framing is done, the roof is usually built in half a day through collective work. Typically, while men are building the house, women are collectively preparing caldo to be served at the completion of the task.

REPRESENTATIVE DRAWINGS FROM MEN



DRAWING 2

This drawing presents us with a visual representation of the Maya people's relationship with the land. On the top left corner we can see hills and at the foot of the hills is written the word "rainforest." From these hills flows a river that cuts across the landscape. A little, above the hills, we see green trees and from one of these a monkey drawn in black is swinging. On the landscape in front of the hills to the left, we see a village. To the right of the village we see a woman walking along a path with a container of water on her head. A little below the woman, is a man with a hat and a bag hanging across his shoulder. The caption "hunter" is written below the man and he is along with his dog. Just below the dog is a "we'ch" (armadillo). This tells us the man is hunting for we'ch.

On the right-hand side of the hunter is a cohune tree larger than anything else in the drawing. Cohune trees are important to Maya communities. The fronds are used for building the roof of traditional houses and the heart of the palm can feed a family. The Maya have a special relationship with this palm. We encourage its proliferation and protect it. When clearing to plant our corn we will often leave the cohune trees standing. Before burning, we cut its leaves to prevent it from burning. When we cut leaves for houses, we will climb the tree rather than cut it and will leave enough leaves to allow the tree to continue to live. On the bottom right corner, we can see a cacao plantation, a cornfield, and from the top corner a shining sun.

WHAT DO MEN TELL US?

What do these drawings from the men tell us? The first drawing emphasizes the importance of interdependence and reciprocity to Maya being. One of the most important spaces for Maya people, their homes, rely on the existence of a community of support, on the dignity of being able to give and help others and the humility and gratitude of receiving. What is given and received are not only labour but also knowledge and the commitment that we are in this together; at the same time, the drawing hints at the relationships with the forest. The materials for building the Maya houses come from the forest.

The second drawing, like that of the women, gives meaning to the notion of *Ral ch'och'*. It speaks of our relationship as Maya people to the land. The land provides for us. It provides us with water and food and materials for our existence. The land

is not only our home, it is also the home of other beings that are equally important.

"We Maya people are not afraid to work hard.

Nature teaches us that all beings must perform work and this work is a source of dignity."

We envision, therefore, not only a healthy home for ourselves but for other beings. The drawing also highlights our labour and our knowledge and the way these come together with the land to sustain us. We Maya people are not afraid to work hard. Nature teaches us that all beings must perform work and this work is a source of dignity.

REPRESENTATIVE DRAWINGS OF LEADERS

Leaders often communicated through their drawings the history of the Maya on the land along with key elements of community, relationship to land, language and culture.

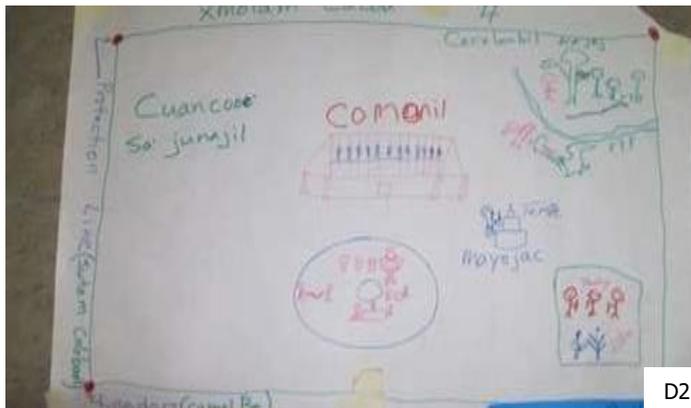


DRAWING 1

This drawing shows two scenes. The scene at the top depicts many of the cultural practices of Maya communities. We can see a traditional house, and to the left of it, a chicken coop and a garden a little below. To the right of the garden there is somebody weaving on a traditional loom and to its right a roasting pit. Below there is a woman in a traditional dress, again indicating identity. To the right of the woman is a cornfield being planted. There are two people planting corn depicting the reciprocal practices involved in this. On the top right corner is a green landscape and on it a cave with a person conducting a ceremony.

The bottom scene features a man farming, a man fishing in the middle of the river and across the river a field ready for planting, and beyond a green hilly landscape. Along the river on one of its sides, there is a row of plants, suggesting that the land was not cleared to the riverside.

REPRESENTATIVE DRAWINGS OF LEADERS



D2

In (D2) we see a rectangular line that binds everything together. Along the line is the word "protection" and "sutam Calebaal" which refers to the village lands. At the center is a house being built. Each red line on the roof is a rafter and on each rafter is seated a person. The group explained that what defines Maya people is their collective work. This, they say is how they build their houses. Below the house, in a circle, there are women working collectively to prepare food to be enjoyed at the completion of building the house. To the right, in a rectangle are three people planting. A little to the left of the rectangular shape is someone performing a ceremony at a temple. Beneath it is the word "Mayejac" which refers to a Maya ceremony. On the upper right corner, we can see a section in green with the word "Cac'alembil na'jej," which means a protected area. The group explains that the forest is where they get their food and medicine and the rivers are where they fish. For their group they explain: The common things that makes us Maya are unity (komonil), land (ch'och'), language (qaatinob'aal), and culture (qaawanko'jik).



D3

The group who called themselves "Molan Xam" meaning 'Fire Group' (D3), explained that it was not enough to talk about "who we are", of how Maya people see themselves but it was also important to talk about how others see Maya people. On the left side of the drawing, the group drew a person dressed in the Belizean flag with a thought-bubble indicating what the person thinks of Maya people. In the bubble is a person with a begging bowl, an emaciated person, an emaciated dog, as well as a person lying on the ground with garbage and flies around him/her. They explain that the government sees us as beggars, poor, and dirty.



D4

This last drawing presents a contrast with (D3) (also drawn by the Molan Xam group). It shows how the group members represent themselves as Maya people. Three words are written above the drawing: intelligent, hardworking, and united. There is also a Maya temple, a farming plot and the thatching of a traditional house roof.

WHAT DO LEADERS TELL US?

What do these drawings from the leaders tell us? The drawings point to what one of the groups identifies as some key elements to Maya being: community (komonil), land (ch'och') and our relationship to land, language (qaatinob'aal), and culture (qaawanko'jik). These are communicated clearly in the first drawing and second drawing. These drawings also highlight the importance of our history on the land as represented by the Maya temples built by our ancestors. That is, we are as the second drawing states, indigenous peoples.

One of the unique points that these drawing communicated is the contrast that exists with the way we see ourselves and the way we are often represented. We are a hardworking, intelligent, and productive people. We work the

land, produce our food, build our houses, heal ourselves, and maintain our communities. We have our own form of leadership and make our own decisions. This contrast with how the

"We are a hardworking, intelligent and productive people. We work the land, produce our food, build our houses, heal ourselves and maintain our communities."

state and others sometimes see us - as lazy, poor, helpless, unproductive and unintelligent – and points to the need to challenge and counter this very destructive image.

SO WHO ARE WE?

It is impossible to capture in words or drawings the totality and complexity of who we (or any people) are. Maya society is not monolithic nor static.

There are many ways of being Maya and what it means changes as we travel through time and confront new realities. What we hold as certain is that we are a people, both diverse and united. As a people, we have journeyed and will continue to journey determining for ourselves who we are as a people.

At this point in our journey, our dreaming exercise has generated eight key elements that we consider critical to who we are:

1. Laa' o Aj Ral ch'och'

The notion of Ral ch'och' is central to who we are, to how we see ourselves, how we see the world, and how we relate to it. Ral ch'och' means we are people of the land, who live on the land, depend on the land, and work and care for the land. It

emphasizes that land is not a simple resource or real estate to be owned. Land is sustenance. Land is life. It emphasizes a reciprocal relationship with the land. The land takes care of us, but we must also take care of the land.

"We are present as indigenous peoples and continue to shape our lands and Belize"

The notion of Ral ch'och' can be thought of as a web of reciprocal and interdependent relationships not only with the land, as it extends to our relationship with each other and other beings with whom we share the land. Ral ch'och' calls for a reciprocal relationship with each other, hence, it is also at the basis of our practices of community.

2. We are indigenous peoples with a long history in Belize

Our mothers and fathers tell us "ayi' xin yo'laa ut ayi tin kamk" (from this land we sprouted and to this land we will return). Often our lands, now

occupied by modern states, are storied as having been found empty; our forests are imagined as being pristine and untouched by humans. Ignoring our long presence on these lands, as well as our work and care of these lands, forests, and waters, we are made invisible. While the temples of our ancestors are celebrated, and exploited, as contemporary Maya, we are often excluded. We often do not feel included as a people who are present and helping to build Belize.

Despite our exclusion from the current imaginations of what Belize is to be, we know that we have been on these lands for many many generations.

The presence of our ancestors is evidenced in the Maya temples, the old agricultural terraces, the sacred remains in caves, and in the nature/composition of the forests and the landscapes. We are present as indigenous peoples and continue to shape our lands and Belize through our on-going relationships and the memories we hold in trust for future generations - passed on to us from our ancestors.

3. We are a people with our own identity, language, and culture

“Our mothers and fathers remind us

that ‘laa’o aj Q’eqchi’ ut aj Mopan. We are a distinct people, with a unique identity and culture. We do not see ourselves as superior to other families but only as a family among the large and diverse human family. We have our own way of understanding and being in the world as all peoples do, with our own set of values, spirituality, knowledge systems, institutions, forms of organizing and governing ourselves; of stewarding our resources and organizing our economies. The Alcalde system, the fajina (collective ways of caring for our commons), collective land ownership, and the Ab’ink are just some elements of being Maya, of our unique cultural identity.

Our identity, language, and culture is not static, it has changed in our interaction with new contexts and will continue to change. However, we remain as a people united by a commitment to each other and to our land, and united by our shared roots and our common struggles.

4. We are knowledgeable, creative, and open to new ideas and technologies

Many times Indigenous Peoples are

considered to be lacking in knowledge, creativity, and the capacity to innovate. Sometimes we and our lands are seen as unproductive because of that perception. Though much of our knowledge system was destroyed in the colonial process and continues to be eroded through ongoing coloniality, we still possess a tremendous wealth of knowledge that guides the way we manage our communities, produce what we need from the land and gather from the forests, prepare our food, construct our houses, weave our clothes, and heal ourselves. We have our own ways of growing our knowledge, sharing it and passing it on to our young people.

Our knowledge system is not static, it continues to change and grow. Our knowledge system has grown, even in the constraining spaces of coloniality and it will continue to change and grow. We are a people open to new ideas and technologies. We did not invent the "keleb'aal" (hand corn mill) or the "ch'iich'" (machete), but these have become elements of our knowledge and technological system and these have been put to our own uses. We have learned new languages in order to communicate with others. We have

learned about different legal systems to defend our rights. We have learned new ways of working the land and understanding our surroundings that have added to our own. "Tat taaqenk, tat okenk" (take interest, seize opportunities, get involved). We are reminded by our elders that this is the way to gain knowledge.

5. We are hardworking, productive, and capable people

As Ral ch'och' we have a long history of working with the land. Our hard work has historically joined the generosity of Mother Nature to make our lands productive. Our children learn the value and dignity of work as they help in our backyard-gardens, in our cornfields and through their contribution to the collective work of the family. Our men, women, and children take pride in the fruits of their hard work. We take pride in the productivity of our cornfields and cacao plantations, the tastiness and richness of a bowl of caldo, and the achievements of the children in school. The value of hard work continues even as Maya people enter different work-fields.

We are a capable people. We manage our own lands, govern our own communities, produce our own food, and we care for and defend our lands. We know we can and continue to aspire to be productive. We are a people who are not afraid to work hard. 'Seeb' seeb'a kat' (do not wait to be told, be proactive, be versatile) our mothers and fathers often tell us.

6. We are komonil and junajil (we are a community and we are united)

"Se komonil ut junajil na chaal tuqtuukilal ut sahil ch'oolejil," our mothers and fathers remind us. Through collectiveness and unity comes peace and happiness. We are a people committed to community, unity, and reciprocity. We understand community not as a given but as something that requires our daily work. It is practices such as Ab'ink, fajina, reciprocal labor, collective ownership, and stewardship of the land that allow us to be community. It is in joining our words and our thoughts in the Ab'ink that we become a community. It is through the collective work that we do to maintain our roads, our schools, and common areas that we become

"We understand that our community is not absent of conflict, nor is it a place where everyone thinks the same. Rather, our sense of community rests on a commitment to healing differences, to resolving disputes, repairing right relations, and generating common understandings."

a community. It is in helping each other to build our houses, plant our corn, take care of our sick or bury our dead that we become a community.

7. We are a resilient, happy, and peaceful people

We are a people who have survived in spite of adverse conditions. We know we are here today because of the struggle and resilience of our great-grandparents. They never gave up; they persisted. We also recognize that our great-grandchildren will only

survive because of what we do today, because of our struggle and resilience.

We are a people that, despite difficult situations, can still smile and find peace. We appreciate the blessings of each day knowing that what we have today is from the hard work and sweat of our grandparents. Our mothers and fathers tell us that before every decision and action we take we must remember “naq moko awe ta chik ab’anan re eb’ laa’ mam ut lix kok’aleb’ laa’ mam.” This means that it is not about one person or the realities of the present, but more so about our children, grandchildren, and their children.

8. We are not poor

The last two poverty assessments of Belize reported that Maya people in Belize are among the poorest in Belize. In 2010, this was reported at 67% compared to 40% at the national level. This is an important statistic, not because we see ourselves as being poor but because it shows the level of exclusion we are subjected to. The exclusion includes a lack of adequate and culturally relevant social services such as health and education, land

insecurity, and the lack of state support to creating livelihood opportunities that we value. However, in spite of the lack of resources provided by the state, we have the capability to feed ourselves and avoid hunger, house ourselves, and support each other through our family and community networks. We have land, language, knowledge, governance institutions, and cultural values, all of which are capabilities that we can draw upon to build our futures.

“Our mothers and fathers always say, “enhe’ maak’a qa tumin ab’anan numtajel qa b’ihomal chi ru li qa ch’och ut sa qa komonil”: yes, we do not have money, but our wealth is endless on our lands and in our collectiveness.”

THE RESULTS OF THE SESSIONS

OUR STRENGTHS & OUR PAINS

Today, as we dream our future, just as our grandparents did in the past, we take account of the present and think about what we must pack for our journey.

There is no doubt that the journey of our people has been a hard one. Tears have been shed, lives have been lost. Too much has been lost. Yet we have persisted. We have been bent but not broken. We are resilient. We are here today, despite the tremendous destructive forces, thanks to the strengths of our people, thanks to our capacity to take account of the present, and thanks to our ability to learn and the ability to plant seeds even in the margins.

We have asked: "What are our pains, what are the illnesses and things that make us unwell that we must attend

to?" We have asked: "What are those strengths that make us resilient and are the foundations upon which we can build?" The answers to these questions reiterate many of the themes that emerged in response to the question "Who are we?"

THE STRENGTHS WE WILL BUILD UPON

Seven key strengths have emerged

Junajil and komonil (Unity and community)

We are a community who cares for each other. The way we work together to build our houses, plant our corn, and maintain our common areas are just some of the ways and spaces in which we commune. Our unity and community, however, cannot be mistaken with a romantic notion of perfect harmony as if there were an absence of difference and conflict. At the heart of our sense of community is the recognition that we depend on each other and a commitment to each other. This is expressed through our practices such as the Ab'ink through which we join our words and our thoughts in the search for consensus. Our commitment to unity and community and our collective institutions allow us to come together, and it is this that makes us strong.

Li qaawanko'jik, li qaa na'leb' (our way- Maya culture, language, and knowledge)

We have our own culture, values, knowledges, and practices. Too often our culture has been pathologized. Too often we have been told - and sometimes come to believe - that it is our culture, our traditions that have kept us behind. That we must abandon these in order to become "civilized", "modern", or "developed". Too often we have been told - and sometimes come to believe - that we must leave all these behind to become someone; that is, that we must accept that we are no-one first in order to become someone. Too often we have been told - and sometimes come to believe - that our values, knowledges, and practices are incapable of responding to the challenges of the present and that only science, the values and practices from outside can be used to build our future, even as our own culture is exploited for knowledge and perspectives to build the future of others. However, as a people we know that our culture is a source of strength while recognizing that we can learn things from other people when the sharing of knowledge happens in a good way.

THE STRENGTHS WE WILL BUILD UPON

Ral ch'och'

Ral ch'och'- Land and our relationships to and with the land. Ral ch'och' means that we are people of the land; people who live on, depend, work, and care for the land. Therefore, for us Maya people, land is important. It is not only the fountain of our physical survival and the source of the material things we need for building a future. Land provides us with a place to be and to become. It is the basis of our survival as a people, at the center of our practice of community, and it is linked to our identity and our spirituality. As Maya people, when we talk about land as strength we do not talk about land as a resource alone. We talk about our reciprocal relationship with the land and this is what is captured in the concept of Ral ch'och'.

Hard work, self-reliance, and resilience

Maya people are not afraid to toil and to struggle. Every day our fathers and mothers work the land, the backyard gardens and the cornfields, and the land provides for us. Everyday many of our children wake up very early to take a bus to go to high school. Every week men and women leave their homes to enter the work force in places far away from home where they sacrifice the warmth of their homes and the safety and security of their communities. Many times, our leaders say, "we are not poor...we may be cash-poor but we are not poor". We are not poor because we work and we provide food for our families, we work hard and we build our homes, we work hard and maintain our common areas. Hard work and struggle are at the center of our self-reliance and resilience.

Leadership

We have our own forms of leadership that are rooted in our values and facilitate our existence and continuity as a community. It is the foundation to the care and stewardship of our lands. Our forms of leadership allow us to come together in our Ab'ink, to listen to each other, to make our own decisions and determine our destiny. Our forms of leadership, however, are not static. They have changed over time in response to new contexts and challenges faced. They will change as we walk but as they change in response to new realities, we will reach into the wisdom of our people. Such wisdom tells us that the role of our leaders is to facilitate healthy relations between people and between people and land. It also teaches us that the leaders are not a replacement for the voice of communities but rather they are the eyes, mouths and ears of our communities. It also teaches us that to lead is to serve, to carry a burden for our community.

THE STRENGTHS WE WILL BUILD UPON

Openness to the world and innovation

We are a people that are open to the world, new ideas and technologies. Whether it is the corn mill, the machete, the cell-phone, or the computer our people have found ways of incorporating these in our daily lives, of making them our own, of innovating upon them and putting them to work within the context of our life projects. Our communities value education precisely for the new ideas and capacities we can learn. However, we are also clear that our own knowledge and practices are a *fundamental source* of strength and a fountain for innovation.

Young people

Our young people are a strength and an opportunity. We understand that we are here today because of the actions of our grandparents. We also understand that our continuity as a people will depend on our actions and the actions of our youth.

PAINS AND THREATS WE MUST CONFRONT

Six key pains/threats emerged from the discussions

External divisive forces

Some of the greatest threats to our communities are the external forces that divide us. We are aware of the diversity present in our communities. We understand ourselves as united in our differences. We recognize that our unity is not something that exists as a natural element but rather something that we work on. Today, however, external forces such as the many churches that exist in our communities can result in greater divisions by creating hard boundaries between families and our community. Moreover, party politics often promote clientelism that punish some and reward others, prey on existing differences and foster new ones to further divide us.

Threats to the integrity and security of our lands

The integrity and security of our lands is central to our existence as a people and our wellbeing. If we lose our freedom to live on and care for our lands, we will lose our sense of community and lose our way as a Maya people. If our lands lose it's health, we become unhealthy. There are many and enormous threats to the integrity and security of our lands, such as climate change, unsustainable development practices, poverty and inequality, poor governance, and structural racism. While the Caribbean Court of Justice ruling in 2015 affirms our rights to our lands, many of the threats to our land remain. The local laws of Belize must change to protect the property rights of the Maya to our land. At the same time, we recognize that the laws only offer a certain level of protection to the security and integrity of our lands and we therefore must continue to be vigilant and true to our calling to care for the land as *Ral ch'och'*.

Exclusion

Our communities still face exclusion from many areas of life including health, education, and infrastructure, sometimes because these services are either not available, are of poor quality, or are not culturally relevant. While there is no doubt that there are improvements, our children sometimes still have to travel far to go to high school, or cannot afford

PAINS AND THREATS WE MUST CONFRONT

secondary or post-secondary education. Similarly, there are many communities that lack access to electricity or the internet. But inclusion does not only mean receiving the services provided to other sectors of society, it is also about receiving culturally relevant services. Schools many times still do not make space for our history and knowledge. The health system does not make space for our wealth of knowledge about wellness and healing.

Threats to the vitality of our culture and values

While we understand culture as constantly changing and our resilience as linked to our capacity to adapt, the rapid erosion of our culture and values - by a social and political context that at best ignores it and worst devalues it - is a threat. This is not to say that we reject new ways of being. Rather, it means that the racism and assimilation that devalues Maya ways of knowing and being must be confronted and transformed. Ways of thinking and practices that assume that our ways are an obstacle to building our future must be overcome, whether this thinking comes from within our Maya communities or from the outside.

Weakening of our leadership

Our traditional forms of leadership have been a strength in our struggle. However, it has been under constant threat and constantly being undermined. Our system of leadership through the Alcalde system – the jolomil k’aleb’aal and polil ka – is the vein that facilitates our existence as an indigenous people. It is where the Ab’ink, fajina, and komonil comes into practice. Ab’ink is where we listen to each other, debate with each other, build consensus, and make decisions. At the same time, we are aware that our practices are not perfect, that the realities we face are changing, therefore we know that we must continue to examine and strengthen our practices. We understand that if we are to exist as Maya Q’eqchi’ and Mopan, our leadership must be strong and respond to the needs of our communities. For our leadership to remain strong, it must be entrusted to the people of each of our villages and no one else.

PAINS AND THREATS WE MUST CONFRONT

Erosion of unity/community

While unity and community are a strength, we also recognize that it is under constant threat. While diversity is part of Maya society, the loss of confidence in our own ways and institutions, the external divisive forces and the rapid change in our communities amplify and create new divisions and present a challenge to coming together and joining our words and our thoughts.

In summary, we have identified land, culture, leadership and unity as being important strengths. At the same time we are not naïve to the fact that this land, unity, and culture is under pressure. While clearly understanding these as strengths, we are acutely aware that they are under threat. Some of these pressures are external dividing forces such as religion, politics, and foreign interests.

However, we also recognize that there are internal factors such as poor leadership, local people who want to sell land, and sectors of Mayan society who do not agree with a communal land vision. In effect, we do not take these assets for granted, rather, we see them as assets that need to be sustained, protected, and built upon going forward.



Photography © JCS

RESULTS: VISION OF THE FUTURE

Our people have never stopped dreaming and acting to bring our dreams to fruition. The fact that we still exist today, despite tremendous forces that threatened to erase us, is the result of the dreams and actions of our great grandparents. The very affirmation of the Caribbean Court of Justice of 2015 of our rights to our lands is the result of a dream. We dared to dream that we could raise our voices, join hands and achieve justice even when it seemed risky or impossible.

It is also the result of work and persistence. We have worked hard and stayed the course. The road has been bumpy. We have walked many valleys, but we made it to the next mountain. On this journey, we made many friends and allies who have made lighter our loads and helped clear our paths. They have kept our spirits high and have worked hard with us.

Today, armed with the confidence of who we are and a critical awareness of the strengths and pains of our communities - along with the confidence that we will meet friends and allies on our path - we dare to continue to dream. We have asked young people, women, men, and leaders to dream of a future for our lands, families, and communities. They have expressed these dreams in the following drawings and words.



OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE



DRAWING 1 (YOUTH)

We see a bright community scene with the sun shining and birds flying. The village has paved roads, a playground, and concrete buildings housing the church, school, police station and health care. We also see the forest and the mountains. The mountains feature prominently on one corner, reminding us of the Tzuultaq'a - the guardians of the valleys and mountains. Represented in the drawing is also our economy. We see the word "resort" close to the hills and a zip line across the river. We also see that a paved road leads to a Maya site. This drawing tells us that our young people dream of improved road infrastructure, something they were concerned about since they travel to school. It also tells us about the desire for improved health, education, and security services. In addition, it tells us of the dream of an economy that takes advantage of the opportunities of tourism and the wealth of resources provided by our lands and our culture.

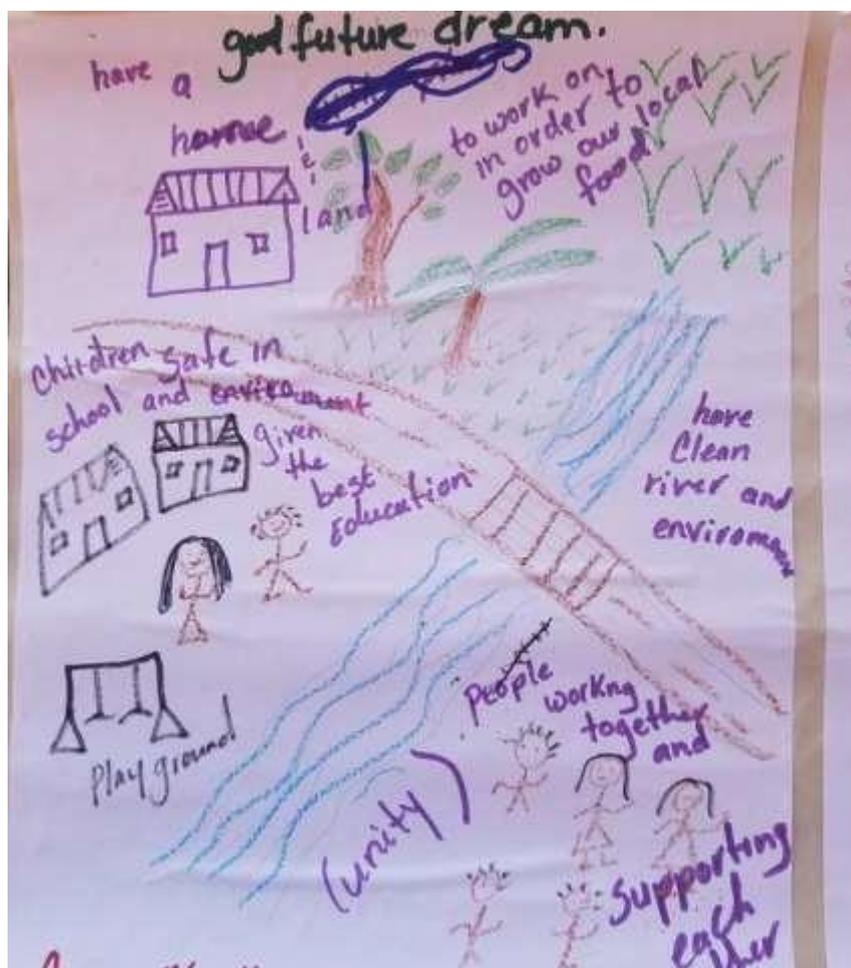
OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE



DRAWING 2 (YOUTH)

In this drawing, we see a colorful village scene with flowers, floating clouds, and flying birds. The village has paved roads and streetlights, playgrounds and recreational areas, including a pool, a two-story building representing a school, and a two-story home. We also see a flowing river and green area with flowers, and a flying bird. This village scene contrasts with what is perhaps a “typical Maya village”, indicating change. Young people imagine improved infrastructure and a clean and happy place for young people.

OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE



DRAWING 3 (WOMEN)

The drawing presents a village scene. In this scene, we see a home surrounded by a farm, which has banana trees, cacao, and corn. We see a school building and children on the school grounds. We see a river flowing and a paved road. This drawing explains very directly the dream of the future of this group of women. The dream is to have a home and land to work in order to grow our local foods. To have children safe in school, being given the best education. To have a clean river and environment. To have, as well, people working together and supporting each other.

OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE



DRAWING 4 (WOMEN)

This drawing presents a village scene depicting a school and Concepciona's (a villager) house on a green landscape. On the right is a river flowing, with trees lining one bank and a forest on the other side. A road runs through the village and on it is a woman dressed in her traditional wear and a man with a harp. The caption reads, "keep our culture." This drawing highlights some key elements, such as the importance of education as represented in the school building. Change like that represented in Concepciona's house, which contrasts with traditional thatch housing in the villages. A clean and healthy environment is represented in a green landscape, a blue river, and forested river banks. The woman and the man on the path and the caption "keep our culture" signaling the importance of sustaining culture while walking this path.

OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE



DRAWING 5 (WOMEN)

This drawing presents a vision of a future Maya village. From the top-left corner and going clockwise, we see a forest with the caption "save the rainforest". Beside it, we see a school with a cobble stone path going through a flower garden leading to the school. To the right of this we see a river with trees lining one of the banks. On the right top corner shines the sun as birds fly through the sky. Featured prominently in the center of the drawing is a paved road crossing the village and running along it, electrical poles and streetlights. Below the road, we see a traditional house, an oversized garbage can that reads "don't litter," and a children's park with children playing sports. The image presented is a bright, happy and green one. Education, a clean environment, spaces for children, and improved infrastructure are highlighted in this drawing.

OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE

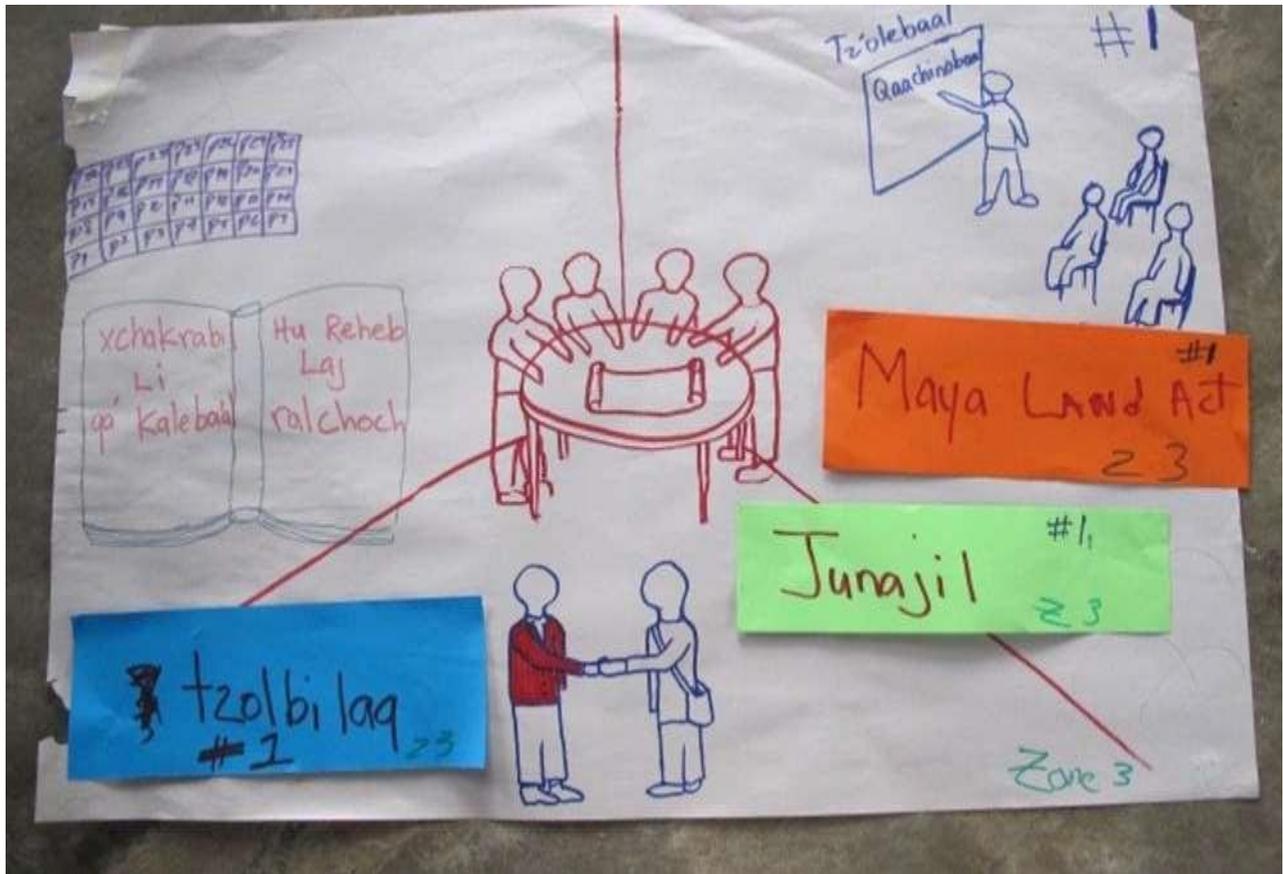


DRAWING 6 (MEN)

Drawing 6(A) presents a green landscape beside a paved road. We see the sun shining from the upper left corner. We see a forest and a man planting trees at the center. On the right-top corner, we see a cornfield and below it a rice field. The drawing illustrates change through the paved road, but reminds us that as change comes along, the Maya people envision sustaining a relationship with the land, reforesting it, and producing their food on it (corn and rice).

Drawing 6(B) depicts a classroom with a chalkboard. The chalkboard shows us what is being taught in the classroom. The title of the lesson is "Maya and Q'eqchi" and the subtitles are "land," "practices," and "dancing steps." The drawing highlights the centrality of education in the Maya vision of the future. Nonetheless, it draws attention to a particular type of education that is envisioned, one that is rooted in Maya knowledge and culture, responding to Maya aspirations for the future.

OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE



DRAWING 7 (LEADERS)

This drawing presents four key elements. At the center is a group of people meeting. The group that drew this explains that this means, "meeting first around the table to plan." The rest of the drawing is divided into three sections. On the left, there is a grid signifying the demarcation and clarification of boundaries so that everyone has a piece of land. This is accompanied by a book representing the law that governs and guarantees property. In the top-right corner is a classroom with a lesson in progress. The chalkboard says "Qatinob'aal" (language), signifying the teaching of the Maya languages. The group explains the importance of having "our own school that teaches the reading and writing of our languages." At the centre-bottom of the drawing are two men shaking hands. On the left is a man in a jacket, a red jacket, which represents the government. On the right is a traditional leader with the traditional koxtal (Maya bag). The group explains they envision "having the government listen to us" and a respectful relationship between Alcaldes and the government.

OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE

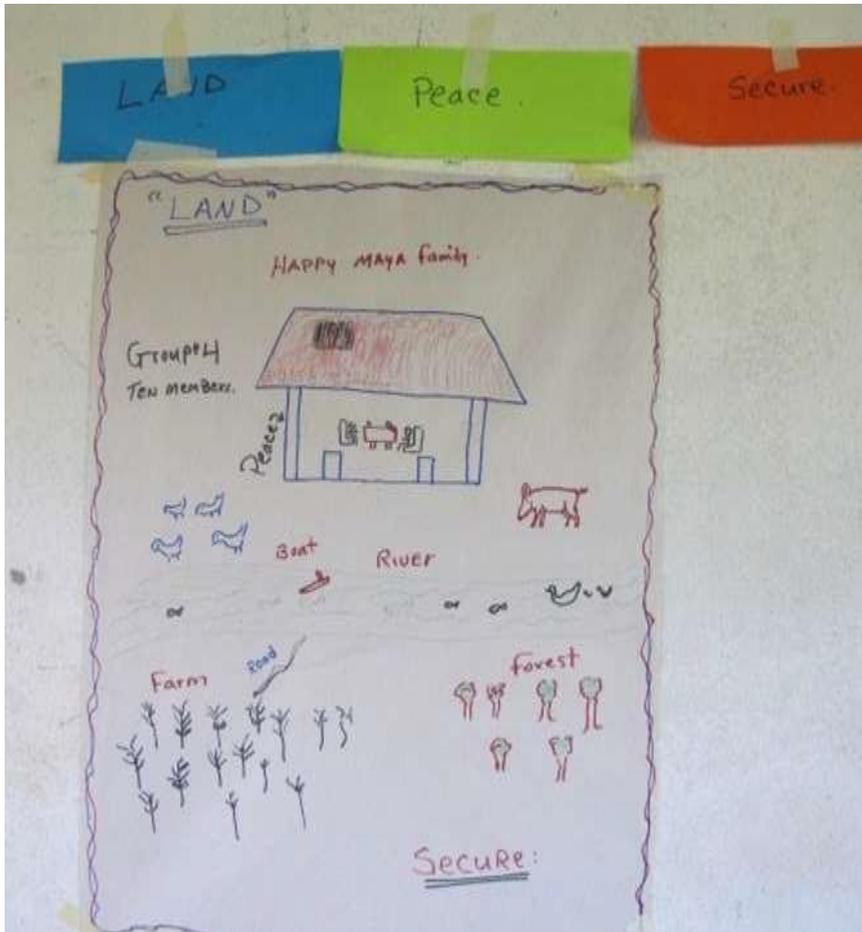


DRAWING 8 (LEADERS)

This drawing presents us with an image of a home located in what it calls the "happy family village". At the center of the home is a large kitchen - the largest room in the house - where a family is having a meal. At the top-left corner of the kitchen is a section for books and on the opposite corner, a section of natural herbs. To the right of the kitchen we see bedrooms and bathroom, which contrasts with typical family homes which do not usually have bedrooms or indoor bathrooms. On the left side of the kitchen is a living room with someone in a hammock- a typical element of Maya houses. There is also a room dedicated to food storage reminding us of the centrality of food, also indicated by the garden to the left of the house. On the top-right, above the house, there is a room with the caption "guest house. Rent - \$25 per night."

The central message of the drawing is that this is what a happy Maya family looks like in the future. It shows a balance between the new and the old. Between change and continuity, as represented by books and herbs. This balance is further illustrated by the presence of bedrooms and an indoor bathroom along with a hammock in the living room, and food storage as a room and not a refrigerator. The food storage along with the garden emphasizes the centrality of food and producing our own food. The importance of economic opportunities that can generate household income are represented by the guesthouse room that allows for participation in the tourism sector.

OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE



DRAWING 9 (LEADERS)

This drawing presents us with a vision of a "happy Maya family." It depicts a home and a front yard. The house seems to be a traditional thatch house but on the roof is a solar panel. Inside the house is a family having a meal. In the front yard, we see chickens and a pig. A river flows through the yard and in it is a boat and fishes and ducks swimming. Across the river is a farm with a cornfield and the forest. The drawing is bordered by 2 lines, one blue and one red, which, as the group explained, represents land security obtained through the Caribbean Court of Justice ruling of 2015. The drawing also expresses an openness to new technologies indicated by the solar panel, but suggests that this should be balanced with customary practices, as the solar panel is part of a thatched roof. The drawing suggests that a happy family is one with land so that they can produce their own food, who experiences peace and security in their homes and their lands (the three words that are captioned in the drawing).

OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE



DRAWING 10 (LEADERS)

This drawing presents the various activities that can contribute to the economy in the future. On the top-left corner, we see an airplane with the caption "Ical's & Sons Company". To the right of it, we see a Maya site with the caption "Cahal Pech". Further to the right, livestock. On the bottom row, starting from the left, we see two persons. One is captioned "local doctor and nurses", along with the words "natural herbs and healer". The second is captioned "lawyers" accompanied by the words "Alcalha & Company". To the right are musicians playing a harp and marimba and a dancing couple. The drawing presents us with a vision in which Maya people can have their own companies or a profession such as a doctor, nurse, or lawyer, but where Maya healers who use natural herbs are also respected. The drawing also presents a vision of a future economy in which Maya cultural heritage is respected, taught, and passed onto future generations through new institutions such as training centers. This balanced vision of moving into the future is emphasized in the words preserve, legacy, and unity.

OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE



DRAWING 11 (LEADERS)

This drawing depicts an airplane with the caption "Mayan So'sol Ch'ich" (Maya Airline). Below it is a woman in her traditional wear and a man playing the marimba. The group explained that this is a Maya-owned airline with a Maya pilot, who is a young Maya man, and on-board music is marimba, not Super-G (a popular artist in Belize). Moreover, they explained that when the young man comes down from the plane he can still dance with his wife to the music of the marimba. The drawing communicates a future in which Maya people are in control of their economy but not "giving up" their culture.

OUR VISION OF THE FUTURE

Out of our coming together, of drawing our dreams, of joining words and thoughts, nine key central themes to our vision of the future have emerged. We the Maya people envision:

A peaceful, safe, and happy place for our families, children, and communities

Maya communities are an island of peacefulness and safety in what at times seems like a sea of violence. Our communities have one of the lowest rates of crime. Chickens roam freely and our corn stays in our plantations unguarded without fear of them being stolen. Our children walk to school and play on the commons without fear. This is of tremendous value to us and we envision a future in which this safety and peacefulness is sustained and expanded to all facets and corners of our communities. We maintain that children, women, men, and visitors in our communities should experience

peace, safety, and contentedness.

Sustained junajil and komonil

We see ourselves as a people committed to unity and community; a people who work together and care for each other. This commitment to unity and community has been critical to our physical and cultural survival. We recognize that this commitment is sometimes threatened by internal differences and conflicts and external threats that prey on and exacerbate them. We envision a future in which this commitment to unity and community is sustained and encouraged, where our undertakings lead to junajil and komonil.

Strong, self-confident, self-reliant, and self-determining people

Our people take great dignity and pride in being self-reliant. Despite statistics that say that we are among the poorest in Belize, our people note that while we may be cash-poor, we are not poor. We have plenty of food and no one is homeless in our communities. Our people have a strong spirit and despite many adverse situations we continue to stand strong.

We envision a future in which we remain upright and proud, where we grow in self-confidence, where our self-reliant capacities continue to strengthen, and where we can determine our future.

Land security and integrity

Maya people have historically defended the security and integrity of our lands, for the land not only provides material sustenance but it is at the foundation of our identity and our sense of community. It is a source of freedom to be and to become.

Since the mid-nineties, we have been engaged in the most recent effort to defend the security and integrity of our lands through the courts. Our legal struggle to obtain protection for our land rights culminated with the Caribbean Court of Justice ruling of 2015, which affirmed our rights. We are currently engaged with the Government of Belize to implement the ruling which we hope will establish the legal framework to protect our affirmed rights. However, the integrity and security of our lands are threatened by factors such as our own internal differences, cultural-change processes, economic

exclusion, climate change, private interests, and even border disputes. We envision a future in which our people can enjoy the legal protection of their lands with a sustained commitment to defend its security and integrity.

Sustained reciprocal relationship with the land

Maya lands are among the most forested and ecologically diverse. This reality is the result of the Maya peoples' relationship with the land, which is sustained by values, practices, and institutions. We recognize that our relationship with the land is under pressure from many factors, including climate change, assimilatory policies and practices, colonial devaluation of our knowledge, values and practices, economic marginality, and, external interests and pressures. As a people, we envision a future in which we are committed to sustaining a reciprocal relationship with and stewardship of the land-captured best by the concept of *Ral ch'och'*.

Sustained culture and identity

Our values, knowledges, practices and institutions, including our land tenure, governance, healing practices, and economic practices have all been a source of strength and are critical to our survival as a people. Parallel to our retention of culture has been our capacity to learn and adapt, to embrace new ideas and new technologies. We do not see our culture as something to be frozen and preserved. The many achievements of our ancestors and contemporary communities are the result of learning and changing. At the same time, we refuse to see our culture as an obstacle to our future. We envision a future in which we continue to be culturally rooted as we imagine and create new paths. We envision a space in which we define who we are and determine the speed and direction of change.

Wellbeing and prosperity

We envision a future in which the response to our greeting “ma sa la cho’ol?” is a resounding “sa lin cho’ol/q’axal usin.” “Ma sa la cho’ol?” asks how are you, how is your

center? How is our heart? “Sa lin cho’ol/ q’axal usin” in turn refers to “my heart is great! I am well centered! My heart is wonderful! I am blessed with goodness, purity, and beauty!” Our communities have suffered from marginalization and exclusion, which has meant that in some measure our communities are less than “sa lin cho’ol/ q’axal usin.” Our communities are affected by poor health, the negative consequences of alcoholism, domestic violence, and poor access to such things as quality healthcare, education, water, electricity, communication services, and road infrastructure. Our commitment is to make our people and communities regain sa lin cho’ol or q’axal usin.

A self-owned and self-controlled, intercultural, and community-oriented economy

Maya people have historically had our own ways of stewarding our assets, organizing and mobilizing our labor, land, knowledges and time for production and sharing of goods and services— in summary, our own economy. We have demonstrated creativity, continuously innovating on our institutions, knowledges, and land.

Respectful relationship with the government/state and other peoples

We the Maya people see ourselves as a big family, part of a bigger family that we call Belize and part of an even bigger family, the human family. We are committed to the wellbeing of our immediate family, no doubt, but our commitment is also to the wellbeing of our extended families. As part of the family of Belize, we see ourselves joining voices in an effort to achieve wellbeing for all Belizeans. We understand the wisdom of the words of our Maya brothers in Mexico when they say they envision a world in which many worlds can coexist. In order to achieve an inclusive world where all families have a place and where all families can contribute to the larger collective wellbeing there must be respectful relationships. We, therefore, envision a respectful relationship with the Belizean state-actors.



Photography © JCS

VISION STATEMENT

After joining our words and our thoughts, like the creators in the Popol Vuh we seek to usher in a Maya future. We envision a future in which we the Maya people are:

"Peaceful, hardworking, self-determining people, rooted in our culture, open to the world and new technologies, living in community, and, collectively stewarding the wellbeing of our people and lands."

GETTING THERE

Programmatic areas

Revitalizing governance and leadership

Central to achieving our dream is the question of sound leadership and governance. This includes the capacity to facilitate our coming together, to listen to each other and join our words and thoughts, the capacity to facilitate community living, the capacity to facilitate the collective care and stewardship of the land, and, the capacity to organize ourselves to leverage our natural and cultural assets in new spaces for the collective wellbeing of the Maya people and lands.

As Maya people, we have our own forms of leadership rooted in our values and wisdom generated over several generations. We have institutions such as the Jolomil kaleb'aal/Polil ka (Alcalde system) that have allowed us to govern ourselves and to struggle and survive as a people. These institutions have evolved over time to respond to new contexts. We realize that going forward we are presented with many new contexts that require the continuous learning and innovation of our institutions. This program, therefore, has as its goal the revitalization and innovation of our leadership and governance institutions such that they are rooted in the best of our culture and that these institutions are tooled for the challenges of the present and the future.

Sustaining and revitalizing our culture

Our people have food, water, and homes. We have songs, music, dances, and stories. In our homes and villages, we speak Q'eqchi' and/or Mopan every day. We have our own way of knowing and being in the world. This program aims to sustain what we have, revitalize what we have lost, and carve a space for continuous creation in the Maya way of life. This includes revitalizing Maya knowledges, medicine, language, art, music, as well as Maya spirituality and values. It involves restoring the value of our culture and strengthening our confidence to create and innovate.

Sustaining and caring for our lands (land integrity and security)

In 2015 the Caribbean Court of Justice settled that the Maya people have

GETTING THERE

property rights to our ancestral lands equal to the property within the meaning of the Constitution of the Belize. While the legal framework privileges the notion of property, Maya people's relationship with the land goes beyond property law. It includes custodianship, caring for the land that cares for us. This program aims to safeguard the land for future generations. This involves safeguarding Maya rights to land as well as protecting the integrity and wellbeing of the land. This requires the implementation of the Caribbean Court of Justice 2015 Order, as well as revitalizing the notion of Ral ch'och, revitalizing core values and practices that sustain the wellbeing of the land, innovating, learning new technologies, creating new practices and institutions, and, participating in global efforts to care for the planet.

Leveraging of Maya cultural assets, capacities and resources

The land of the 39 Maya communities is the last frontier in biodiversity and natural resources exploitation in Belize. It boasts the culture of the living Maya of Belize, majestic rivers and waterfalls. In addition, over 50% of the 39 villages' population is young, with a growing level of formal education. This program aims to leverage this human capacity and the cultural and ecological resources to create Maya economies that have as their aim the collective wellbeing of the land and the people.

Protection of the rights of the Indigenous Mayas

The Maya Leaders estimate the population of the Maya Q'eqchi' and Mopan of the 39 Maya Villages at 21,000 strong. The Mayas of Belize have historically been the most disadvantaged. Hence, they are the first to feel the brunt of global challenges such as climate change. To date, however, at the international level, the collective rights of indigenous peoples globally have been advancing, resulting in world leaders reaching a global consensus on minimum standards that must be upheld to protect the human rights of Indigenous Peoples. This program aims to continue advocating for the rights of the Maya people of the 39 villages through domestic, regional, and global platforms. This includes rights to ancestral lands, to education, health, economic development, and political participation. This program will utilize the court system, the systems of the United Nations, and the Organization of American States to advocate for the rights of the Maya people.

GETTING THERE

Youth and Women

The practice of Ab'ink calls for us to make space for the voices, concerns, needs and aspirations of everyone. Youth and women are two significant populations of our communities for whom we recognize we must make space and be responsive to. This program aims to better understand the needs, concerns, and aspirations of our youth and women, and to create spaces for their meaningful participation in ushering in our Maya future.

Building capacity and education

Enacting the future we dream will require a firm rooting in our culture as well as in new capacities. This program aims to create the space for our communities to root themselves in Maya ways of knowing and being while opening spaces for new knowledges. This includes building the capacities of teachers and creating learning spaces that are culturally responsive and foster innovation and creativity.

Achieving social wellbeing and overcoming exclusion

Our communities suffer from many forms of social ill-being, such as alcohol abuse, domestic violence, poor and inappropriate healthcare, poor nutrition, and many forms of exclusion. This program aims to better understand the challenges our communities' face; to advocate for quality and culturally responsive services, as well as the direct implementation of programs to address these challenges.

Building respectful and productive partnerships with government and allies

The Maya people have not been alone in our struggle, especially during the last 25 years of fighting for our land rights. What we have achieved has been made possible through friends and allies who were willing to walk with us. This program aims to sustain and build new partnerships, to continue to foster positive collaboration.

The Maya people see ourselves as integral members of the Belizean family. We see ourselves as actors and collaborators in the making of Belize as a place of peace and wellbeing for all. We believe that our wellbeing and the wellbeing of all Belizeans can benefit from a respectful relationship with state actors. This program seeks to build such relations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The weaving of the Maya vision of our future has been a collective effort. We wish to acknowledge the threads that were contributed by all the participants, too many to be listed here. However, we want to thank the lead weaving team including Dr. Filiberto Penados (Chairperson, Julian Cho Society) for leading the weaving process, Mr. Pablo Mis (Coordinator of MLA/TAA), Ms. Cristina Coc (Julian Cho Society), and Mr. Santiago Quib (Chair of the Toledo Alcaldes Association) and Mr. Adriano Mas (Deputy Chair of the Toledo Alcaldes Association) under whose tenure this initiative started. In addition, we thank Mr. Juan Cucul, current chair of the Toledo Alcaldes Association, Mr. Alfonso Cal, past chair of the TAA and fountain of wisdom, Mr. Martin Chen (President of Maya Leaders Alliance) and young weavers Ambrose Che, Elvia Bo, Roberto Kus, and Elodio Rash. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the Lush Charitable Giving Program for their financial support.



