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'Understanding volcanoes and society: the key for risk mitigation'



Cultural consequences of post-eruption migration in El Chichón volcano, México.

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El Chichón volcano, the most active volcano in the Chiapanecan Volcanic Arc, southeast Mexico, erupted explosively during March-April 1982. Three major Plinian eruptions caused significant damage on the environment, loss of life and generalized social disruption. Within a radius of 10 km, the villages of Francisco Leon, Guadalupe Victoria, Carmen Guayabal Tonapac and Esquipulas, were completely buried and survivors were often relocated to areas far away from their hometowns. Little has been documented about migration processes during the years after the eruption; however, the consequences of post-eruption migration in the region continues to this day in the form of further relocation, land appropriation and cultural and social syncretism. In this work we show an example of these processes investigated in the Ejido Esquipulas Guayabal, a village that was completely buried by the eruption. The residents of Esquipulas Guayabal were relocated to a municipality called Rayon. However due to the lack of land of their own and the distant new settlement, during the last seven years people have decided to settle back Esquipulas Guayabal and take back the land through a formal legal ownership process. Throughout this process the Zoque community has sought support from the Tzotzil people, generating the creation of a pluralistic community that seeks to be reintegrated in a social and cultural environment dominated by a political structure that has caused their marginalization. Therefore, this phenomenon has triggered the search for new forms of self-organization and external supports that benefit all in an integral community development. The effects of a volcanic event are not just seen in terms of environmental impacts, but also in terms of social and cultural impacts which must be taken into account in order to set up the best public policies regarding volcanic risk and its mitigation.