



Oxlajuj B'atz', a project of
Asociación Tejedoras Unidas (Komon Ajkem) &
Maya Educational Foundation
Casa Kaqchikel, Calle 14 de febrero,
Panajachel, Guatemala
Tel/Fax: 7762-6245
Website: www.oxlajujbatz.org
Email: thirteenthreads@gmail.com

Oxlajuj B'atz' (Thirteen Threads) Quarterly Status Report April, May, June 2011

Summary

➤ **Special Projects, Initiatives, and Announcements**

- Rug-Hooking Project
- New Website
- Volunteer Program
- Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation

➤ **Community Programs**

- Small Business and Product Development Phase II: Managing a Fair Trade Store (in-store and in-community training)
- Medicinal Plants Project: IMAP Training, Garden Design, Preparation and Implementation
- New Group Development and Research: San Juan Cotzal and Tac Tic Cooperatives



Photo by Darcy Andrews

“Working as an intern with OB gave me an amazing perspective on the challenges faced by indigenous women in Guatemala, and opened my eyes to the emancipatory potential of the dynamic educational projects that OB engages in. The privilege of working alongside these truly incredible women is a life-changing, inspirational experience that I will never forget.”

- Quote from Madeline Kreider Carlson, 2010 Oxlajuj B'atz' Volunteer on a Watson Fellowship.

Special Projects, Initiatives, and Announcements

Rug-Hooking Project.

Excitement is in the air as we prepare Mayan rug-hookers, Yolanda Calgua and Rosa Garcia, and OB Field Supervisor, Lucia Chavez, for their big trip to the US. OB's Executive Director Ramona Kirschenman will be chaperoning these 3 women to the mid-west in September, for an international hooked-rug exhibition at the [Anderson Center](#) in Red Wing, Minneapolis curated by [Mary Anne Wise](#). This event as well as a full itinerary of activities can be found on OB's [NEW website](#).

Since the big announcement back in March, the women students have been fervently hooking to create new rug designs that will be displayed, and sold, at a variety of venues during our trip. In addition, our volunteer Diane Dreyfus (see "Volunteer Program" below), tutors Rosa and Yolanda in Basic English conversation in their homes. The two women also come to our Center in Panajachel to receive advanced business training and to discuss their presence as Maya women in the US.

Meanwhile, our facilitators have held follow-up rug-hooking workshops in two communities (Chirijquiac and Totonicapán) so that more women from the group learn the technique. In the end, only those women with a strong interest and design capability will be successful in selling their products as OB's focus is production of one-of-a-kind designs. Our Monitoring and Evaluation Director (in consultation with Mary Anne Wise), has nearly perfected our monitoring system of the rugs so that only rugs of the highest quality and design will be accepted and for sale.

The 2011 rug-hooking project including the extraordinary opportunity for two women to participate in the Anderson Center event was made possible through a generous grant from the Delta Family Foundation. Mary Anne Wise is in the process of creating a curriculum for 2012 in hopes to return to conduct an instructor's workshop and advanced classes on designs (more details to come.) If you are interested in contributing to the current or future rug-hooking project, please follow instructions on our [donate page](#) of our website and be sure to state that the funds are for the rug-hooking project. Or, [contact us](#) directly for more details. Standby for details soon regarding our 2012 Guatemala rug-hooking tour!

New Website.

Long time in the making, but worth the wait! [OB's new website](#) is complete with pictures, project highlights, testimonials, blogs, news alerts, an interactive community map, and much, much more! OB would like to especially thank two incredible, dedicated people who



Yolanda and her sister Jessica Photo by Diane Dreyfus

made it all happen: Eddie Branchaud for his fantastic design work and long hours spent downloading and linking and; Andrea Branchaud for her endless hours spent writing and revising context, and now maintaining the site! Also, thanks to our staff for their assistance in collecting some of the details, and finally to all of you who have provided us with great advice and feedback. We hope you enjoy the new website and look forward to any additional comments.

Volunteer Program.

OB's efforts to promote our volunteer program have certainly paid off this quarter. We've been blessed to work with an array of talented volunteers who've been able to utilize their experience to assist us and our women members. OB would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the following women for helping OB to succeed in our work:

- Deborah Becker has over 30 years' experience in fundraising, organizational development and community economic development that follows the guidelines of sustainability. Deborah so graciously wrote our Business Plan for the Women's Center and Fair Trade Store, and continues to assist OB in researching potential donors, grant-writing, outreach, and consultation in community development.
- Diane Dreyfus, a Jack (Jill!) of all trades, came to one of Mary Anne Wise's rug workshops in our Women's Center and was "hooked" immediately. Diane, a certified ESL teacher (one of a long list of achievements on her resume!) has been teaching English to our soon to be Mayan women ambassadors travelling to the US. She is also our outreach and press person extraordinaire for Rosa, Yolanda, and Lucia's big adventure.
- Pamela Marble has 30 years' experience as a nurse and nurse instructor. Pamela began work on a Health Resource Guide that will provide our women members with the contact information needed to address health concerns. Pamela plans to return next year to consult OB in developing a curriculum on the female anatomy (a subject high on the needs list with member groups according to our needs assessment in 2010.)
- Nikki Brand and Darcy Andrews are university



Diane with Quijel group, photo by Diane Dreyfus



Darcy and Nikki, photo by Darcy Andrews

students from UC Berkley and Brown University who came to OB by way of one of our collaborating organizations, [NEST](#), who offered them an internship for the months of June and July. Darcy and Nikki have been gathering information from some of our member groups to create production guides for NEST and OB. They've also been tremendous in helping OB with a variety of tasks including public outreach, monitoring and evaluation database work, translations of documents, and much more (not to mention occasionally digging in the dirt to help plant a garden!) (See "Medicinal Plant Project" below.)

- Claudia Fernandez Puemape, a designer who just arrived in June from Madrid, has worked with groups of artisans in Bangladesh. Claudia will be with OB for the next three months working with the women's cooperatives on new products and designs.

Thank you all for your strong efforts and dedication to OB. It's been a pleasure to get to know you. You've truly enriched our lives and lightened our load!

Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation.

It is with great joy I announce that the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation (DADF) has agreed to continue funding OB over the next 5 years. Funds are provided for our Field Supervisor to continue her invaluable work with OB, research and development of new groups, as well as a one-time grant to cover the costs of our new legal Association in Guatemala. OB wishes to offer our deepest gratitude to DADF for their contributions in recent years as well as their on-going support and confidence in our work. It is because of DADF that OB has been able to provide new women's groups, determined to improve their lives, with the chance to become empowered by overcoming poverty, and living a healthy, sustainable life.

Community Programs

Small Business and Product Development Phase II: Managing a Fair Trade Store.

This quarter, we continued Phase II of our Small Business and Product Development project by training the member groups how to manage a Fair Trade store. The content of the training curriculum was created entirely in-house by the OB team and applied through in-store and in-community training.

The Managing a Fair Trade Storetraining begins with an introduction by our Production and Store Manager to the two representatives participating from two member groups. She explains the current benefits of the store and our goal for it to be member owned and operated in the future. The in-store training includes customer service



Managing a Fair Trade Store (in-store training)

skills (with real customers!), sales and inventory registers, store exhibitions, and product displays. Once the representatives have practiced in the store, an OB Community Facilitator replicates the training in the community with the help of the representatives that participated. The women commented that the in-store training was tremendously helpful since they learned by practice, and could share with confidence their experiences with the rest of the group.

The final workshop in Phase II of this series is Catalog, to be held in July, which demonstrates what elements to include in creating a catalog of products and designs. Phase I and II of our Small Business and Product Development Workshops along with start-up funds for the Fair Trade Store are made possible in part by a generous grant from the COMO Foundation.

Medicinal Plants Project- *Maya Traditional Use of Medicinal Plants for Community Health.*

This quarter we completed the garden training, design, preparation and implementation phase of our Medicinal Plants Project.

OB's collaboration with [IMAP](#) (Instituto Mesoamericano de Permacultura – Mesoamerican Permaculture Institute) has prepared our community facilitators for the process of designing and implementing individual community gardens as well as finding solutions to any obstacles that may occur. The Facilitators participated in an intensive 3-day workshop at IMAP headquarters in San Lucas Tolimán in April. The workshop included information on medicinal plant and herb garden design (i.e. choosing location, working with landscape), water management, organic composting and seed-saving (on-site native seed Bank), and focused on utilizing available natural resources to design, plant, and care for the garden. IMAP has also agreed to provide on-going consultation while the preparation and implementation process is underway in the communities. If IMAP abides by their slogan, "The problem is the solution," we feel confident that the gardens will be fruitful.

Community visits in May, June, and July involved creating designs depending on location, preparing the land, delivery of the plants appropriate to each community, and implementation of the gardens in 10 communities. The women have been really creative with their designs; some are using recycled bottles to enclose them. Monitoring of the new gardens will begin



Medicinal plant gardens, photo by Darcy Andrews



Garden design in Nahualá

in August and continue through to the end of the year. Our end of project evaluation will determine the next phase of the project.

Funds for the Medicinal Plant Project were provided in part by a grant from the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. OB is in need of supplementary funds for the additional facilitator training, community workshops, and continued monitoring of the gardens. If you are interested in donating, please go to the [donate page](#) of our website and note that you would like the funds allocated specifically to the Medicinal Plants Project.

New Group Development and Research: San Juan Cotzal and Tac Tic cooperatives. In April and May, OB evaluated (by method of a SWOT analysis) two cooperatives in San Juan Cotzal and Tac Tic who are potential OB collaborators.

We were introduced to the San Juan Cotzal cooperative by DADF who has previously supported them in their efforts. SJC is located just outside Nebaj in the beautiful mountains of the Quiche department. The cooperative is now in the process of developing a visitor's center which could be beneficial to them and OB in developing joint tours to the area.

The Tac Tic cooperative was recommended to us by a friend of Panajachel locals who visited the cooperative, became inspired by their products, and wanted to help them make new connections. Tac Tic is located outside of Cobán in the Alta Vera Paz department.

We found these cooperatives to be more advanced than a typical OB group in terms of their organization. They are both formally structured as legal cooperatives in Guatemala. However, they still struggle to market their products and have not received consistent technical assistance from an organization. There are various advantages to working with these cooperatives especially in regards to our Fair Trade Store. It's been challenging, for instance, for some of the groups to produce consistently. The San Juan Cotzal and Tac Tic cooperatives both produce regularly and are developing products that are not common to the Panajachel area. Their collaboration could potentially provide both OB with new products for the store as well as a market for them in a tourist area. We will be visiting these two groups again next quarter to show the results of the evaluation and discuss potential future collaborations.

Thanks to your contributions and support, Oxlajuj B'atz' is able to carry out our mission to promote women's empowerment through poverty alleviation, good health, and active community participation within Mayan communities in Guatemala.

Ramona Kirschenman, Executive Director