



Oxlajuj B'atz', a project of
Asociación Tejedoras Unidas (Komon Ajkem) &
Maya Educational Foundation
Panajachel, Sololá, Guatemala
Tel/Fax: 7762-2557
Website: www.oxlajujbatz.org , Email: thirteenthreads@gmail.com

Quarterly Status Report: April, May, June 2010

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Ramona Kirschenman, Director
July 10, 2010

I am thankful to Oxlajuj B'atz' for sharing a lot different knowledge with us that we have never learned as women. Because of their trainings, I am now able to speak in public, they've (OB) given me so many new experiences and knowledge... all women have the right take charge of their own lives, (and participate in) speaking, working, community organizing...

Quote from Juana Guachiac, a young woman from the Xeabaj II new group in Santa Catarina Ixtahuacan, June 11, 2010:

Workshops/Programs

Bamboo Basketry. In a remote village of San Antonio Suchitepéquez, we conducted a series of bamboo basketry workshops with our new group of 12 women. These beginning workshops in April and May were provided two days a week for four weeks. The women have enjoyed learning this new skill and are really dedicated to the process yet stress the need to continue with another set of workshops in order to produce quality products. OB will provide another month of workshops beginning in mid-July to learn new techniques and designs. Their goal is to produce a new product to sell along with their natural shampoo and soap products.

Ceramics Painting. In May, our volunteer Kirby Einhorn, held a ceramics painting workshop in Xeabaj, Santa Apolonia. This group of 15 weavers, embroiders, and pine needle basket makers also possess the skill of making clay pottery. The clay is a natural resource found in the community and surrounding areas. Their products are very rudimentary; the molds were never painted, and mostly sold within their community. This workshop provided them with some new ideas of sketches and designs to paint onto their molds. The women were thrilled to receive this introductory workshop and by the end, they were pleading for more!

Micro-Credit Loan Program Update. Since its official inception in 2008, our micro-credit loan program has proven to be immensely beneficial to the 82 women who have taken out solidarity loans. Seven groups took out loans to buy sewing machines (as part of our sewing program, see below), followed by two additional loans for new products and designs. Two more groups are soliciting small business loans this year. We have had no major difficulties or set backs and all of the groups have been paying back their loans relatively on time. We are in the process of developing our program to include an educational component where loan recipients must receive a series of workshops in financial management before obtaining the loan. We are also creating loan conditions so that we have clear guidelines in place before expanding the program to our new groups. Many thanks to Soroptimist, [Como Foundation](#), and Alfred Rollman for providing the initial funds for our revolving loan program.

Collaborative Projects

Como Foundation Sewing Program. Our second phase of sewing classes has culminated in May. Our monitoring data shows that the project has achieved its stated goals and objectives and has been successful for the 50 women (four sewing groups) participating in the program. By determining standards of excellence through our new monitoring and evaluation system, we were able to measure the percentage of quality products produced as a result of the class. We projected 50% high quality products; the end result averaged 70%.

We are currently evaluating how to improve our program for new participating groups looking to both take classes and purchase sewing machines since we have had a few more solicitations. We are also analyzing the feasibility of the current groups purchasing industrial machines in order to begin to produce products with thicker weaves in larger quantities.

Building a NEST Loan Program: The four groups, approximately 80 women, participating in the [NEST](#) pay-back-with-products loan program have one more delivery scheduled for the year 2010. Each group weaves one specific design, NEST then makes them into products such as tote bags, journals, and purses. NEST recently sent the groups a new design so that they could

diversify their product line. When the loans are paid back, NEST expects to give the groups more orders.

NEST director, board member, and other friends recently visited three of the four groups in the NEST program, Vasconcelos, Morales, and Chuacruz, to assess the groups' current needs. Each group also displayed products of their own designs to sell. At the end of the visit, we discussed future expectations between NEST and OB and ways to continue collaborating to meet the needs of these Maya women and other potential groups.

Community Visits

Group Administration Part IV: Management of Funds. This quarter we completed our fourth and final workshop of our group administration series entitled "Management of Funds" with our 16 original groups (266 women).

This final workshop has two different agendas tailored to the status of the group, those that already have a group fund and those that do not. We discuss the importance of having a group savings to assure their sustainability and provide opportunities to the women such as; traveling funds to deliver products to clients, expenses for looking for new markets, and participating in workshops and trainings outside of the community. The women brainstorm ways to grow the group fund, for instance, everyone could pay a membership fee to the group, or they could take a percentage off the products made. We also provide a simple accounting sheet for keeping track of income and expenses. Finally, we discuss the actual handling of the money and the need for transparency amongst members of the group.

This workshop has brought tremendous insight to many of the women as they realized how poorly managed this aspect of their administration has been. By the end of the workshop, the women all came up with clear agreements of how to grow and manage the group fund. We will be monitoring the Group Administration workshops every three months to make sure that the women are continuing to put these new skills into practice.

New Group Development: After assessing the information from our yearly evaluations and analyzing our new group's progress, we drafted a new plan for continued trainings and workshops. Our objective is to implement a series of new strategies with the Xeabaj II community to increase motivation amongst the women and formally integrate our five new groups into OB's educational program. We are in the process of creating a strategic plan with timeframes and a monitoring and evaluation plan catered to each group's needs. This long-term plan is projected to officially start in January 2011; in the interim, OB will continue to help the groups work towards self-sufficiency and enhance their productive activities.

Small Business and Product Development Workshops Part I: Ticketing, Logo and Design. In June, we began our first community workshop in a series of four small business and product development themes; Ticketing, Costing, Color tendencies and Market Trends, and Value-Added. The content of the workshops are based on the [Sharing the Dream](#) series of the same themes. OB community facilitators received the training, informational materials, and assistance from Sharing the Dream.

The first theme, Ticketing, is a workshop that provides all the legal information needed for ticketing a product, as well as additional information to include like the history or description of the group, and contact information. In the final stage of the workshop, the group brainstorms designs for their own logo. We then send the logo ideas, group history, and contact info. to [Counterpart](#) who designs a ticket. We are delighted to have the opportunity to

work with Counterpart, an organization funded in part by USAID to support tourism in Guatemala, who has offered to help us with publicity and promotion activities related to bringing tourism to the area, including designing our business cards, and ticketing and labeling for our member groups. The women were appreciative of the information provided in the workshop, and eager to receive a pack of professionally designed tickets as a result!

Group Needs Assessments. In line with our strategic planning, we recently conducted a needs assessment of our 16 long-standing groups of women participating in our programs (our new groups will participate in the needs assessment when they are formally integrated in our program.) At the start of this quarter, we initiated a brainstorming session with OB planning committee's to determine the meaning of each of our objectives, asking ourselves what requirements we expect our groups to fulfill in order to "graduate" from OB. In other words, according to OB's standards, what would it take to be a self-sufficient and empowered group of women? We then drafted the diagnostic from the results and conducted interviews in the communities. Although we are still tabulating the responses, we expect the results to show us what we've achieved with the groups so far, and how much more we need to intervene as well as put us one step closer to being able to complete our five year strategic plan. The plan will include sound entrance and exit strategies for new groups so that we can continue to expand our reach to more women.

OB in Progress

- **Development and Fundraising.** We have completed our proposals for 2010 workshops and trainings for the continuance of our new group development and our small business and product development workshops. Also, we have drafted Letters of Interest to new donors to secure funding for next years programs. In exciting development news, our new 10 minute promotional video is nearly finished! Details soon on how you can view it. Our sincerest gratitude to Liz Miller for volunteering her time to produce it. We'd also like to thank Kirby Einhorn for her volunteer work in May organizing our resource library and providing her ceramic painting skills to the Xeabaj women.
- **OB Cultural Center.** (In the works!) OB is thrilled to announce that we are in the process of creating a Cultural Center in an historical building in the center of Panajachel. Our Cultural Center will serve as a means to expand our level of support to our participating groups of Mayan women. The building is two floors and houses several different spaces including a common area that will have a photo history of the house and a huge backyard that can be available on an as needed basis. We started a collaborative relationship with the owner almost a year ago and his vision for the Center is completely aligned with ours. The building is currently undergoing major renovations but we are scheduled to move our offices into the building in September this year to secure our space. Ideally we would rent three spaces within the building for our resource center, meeting space, and Fair Trade Store. Attached please find our Cultural Center Concept paper for more details. If you would like further information, please contact our Development Director, Andrea Branchaud, ab.oxlajubatz@gmail.com.
- **A Special Thanks to Armando and Susan from MEF:** With great sadness, we'd like to say farewell and offer our deepest gratitude to Armando Alfonso and Susan Fienberg from the Maya Educational Foundation for providing incredible support to OB, and always believing the work we do. There is no doubt that much of OB's success is due to your strong efforts. Best of luck for whatever the future may bring! We will miss you!