



*Oxlajuj B'atz'*, a project of  
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## Quarterly Status Report October, November, December 2010

### Summary

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- New Group Integration – (Totonicapan, Chimaltenango, San Antonio)



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*“Women today in Guatemala have the right to be independent, to leave the house, work and learn; before this wasn't possible, our women were totally closed off from life outside of our homes. Through the Oxlajuj B'atz' program, I have learned the skills needed to be a leader, how to organize the group and how to improve and publicize our products.”*

- Quote from Alicia Guarcax Panjój, of WAQXAQI` K`AN (the 8th Weaving Day) group from the Chuacruz community in the Sololá Department.

## Workshops, New Initiatives, and Special Events

**Rug-Hooking Workshop.** Once again we were honored to have artist [Mary Anne Wise](#) teach a third rug-hooking workshop with her returning Maya women students. This two-day workshop in October was an introduction to a new phase of advanced skills development in rug-hooking. This workshop focused on using the women's traditional huipil designs and incorporating them in a rug design. Some incredibly creative and beautiful rugs resulted from the techniques learned in this workshop.



Thanks to a generous grant from the Delta Family Foundation, OB will host its fourth workshop series, two days per week over three weeks in March 2011. These in-depth workshops will be a continuation of the new skills learned in October. An exciting aspect of this grant is that it allows two Maya women participants to travel to the U.S. and exhibit their work alongside Mary Anne at the [Anderson Center](#) in Minneapolis, MN in September 2011. The lucky ones chosen for this incredible experience will be revealed at the culmination of the March workshops.

**Grand Opening of our Maya Women's Center and Fair Trade Store.** On Saturday December 18, we celebrated the grand opening of our Maya Women's Center and Fair Trade Store at our new location in the *Casa Kaqchikel*, on Calle 14 de febrero, just off the main street, Calle Santander, in Panajachel's tourist district.

The day's activities began with a Maya ceremony, attended by some of our women members and OB staff. It was "Día de los Abuelos" (Day of the Grandparents) in the Mayan calendar--a fitting day for starting this new initiative as we paid respects to our elder ancestors in front of a sacred fire, gave offerings of flowers and a variety of seeds and incense, asking that our new Center and Store yield great success for OB and the women members.

It was the perfect way to start the day. Soon visitors from away as well as from the community trickled in, browsed through the store, and headed upstairs to help themselves to Guatemalan "tipico" snacks and drinks as marimba music played in the background. Once the rooms were jammed packed to their capacity, we started a presentation of our educational projects that included an introduction to the nearly 60 representatives from our participating groups of women who attended. When the presentation ended, there were weaving, rug-hooking, natural dye and chocolate-making demonstrations. There were fabulous raffle prizes and most of all, a beautiful selection of artisan products from our 20 participating women's groups featured in the new fair trade store.

While the day's activities played out better than we expected, as with any new business, the new Fair Trade Store is not without its challenges. We have a lot of work to do with the women's groups on product development in order to keep the products fresh and unique. Also, since the goal is that the women's groups become more self-sufficient, we continue to work with them on taking responsibility for product quality, costing, fully preparing the product for delivery, finishing, labeling and so forth. Not to mention, we certainly have our work cut out



for us in terms of promotion and publicity in bringing more visitors to the store, through tours, signage, and advertising. Nevertheless, with the immense enthusiasm from our goal-driven staff and the motivation from the women's groups, we are confident that this undertaking will be a great success for all involved.

Our capital campaign continues as we still need to secure funds for the Center and Store. Our goal is \$79,079 and we've received \$38,342 so far. If you'd like to donate to our capital campaign you can do so by following the [instructions on the donation page of our website](#).

**New OB Staff – Production and Store Manager.** We would like to welcome Reyna Linda Pretzantzin to the OB team. Reyna oversees our new Fair Trade Store and assures that the participating women's groups are delivering high quality products. She comes to OB very well recommended bringing experience in production and design work with groups of women as well as working in a large and popular consignment store in Antigua. She received her Associate Degree in administration at Fox Valley Technical College in Wisconsin U.S. She is now continuing her studies in Antigua, Guatemala in order to complete her degree and receive a license in Business Administration. She speaks English, Kaqchikel, and Spanish. Reyna is not only a great asset to OB, but as soon as she arrived, she and the staff felt so comfortable, it was as if she had been with us all along. Welcome Reyna!

**Development of Our New Local Board of Directors and Legal Status.** Since its inception, OB has been a shared project of the Asociación Tejedoras Unidas (Komon Ajkem) in Guatemala with our sister organizations [Mayan Hands](#) and [Sharing with Dream](#). We have been happy and comfortable there for over 6 years now, but as each entity grows and has different needs, it has become clear that our legal contract no longer allows for us to remain under the same Association. While our connections and support to each other will not change, we will all be forming new Associations to fit our needs legally in Guatemala.

This couldn't have come at a better time since we are currently developing a new local board for OB that will sign onto our new Association. We have begun the development of this new board with Ling Tan, a small business owner from the Panajachel community who has helped us encourage other members. We now have 8 interested candidates, all women of very diverse backgrounds and cultures (Maya, ladino, and women from 3 different countries outside Guatemala) who will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to OB. The first meeting will be held at the end of January. We hope to finalize and legalize the new local Board of Directors in the first quarter of this year.

We are also in the process of developing an Advisory Board in the U.S. to initiate marketing and fundraising contacts internationally.

## Community Programs

**Small Business and Product Development Workshops Part III & IV: Color Tendencies & Market Trends, and Value-Added.** This quarter, we finished Phase I of our Small Business and Product Development workshops on Color Tendencies & Market Trends, and Value-Added. The content



of these workshops are based on a series of themes developed by our sister organization, Sharing the Dream. The series also included Costing and Labeling (see OB Third Quarter report). OB community facilitators received the training, informational materials, and assistance from Sharing the Dream over a year prior to the implementation of our program.

The third theme, Color Tendencies & Market Trends, is a workshop that teaches the women what color combinations to consider when creating a new product for a particular market; who or what is the product being designed for? The fourth theme in Phase I, Value-Added, demonstrates what an artisan can add to a product to enhance the look, quality, and increase the price.

These workshops were eye openers for newly formed groups that haven't had much experience with color trends. In a culture where intense, bright smatterings of colors are the norm; soft, pale and beige colors are often difficult to get accustomed to or even understand why they are considered attractive by other cultures; or why a button made from a coconut shell instead of plastic increases the price of a product. In any case, the women are fascinated by the information in these workshops. They see how useful they are to expanding their knowledge and options as an artisan; not to mention means of an income.

Phase II of this series will be conducted in 2011. These four new workshops created entirely by our staff will be taught both in-store and in-community. 1) Costing II, the women will learn retail/wholesale pricing, spec sheets, competition in the market, sales policies with new clients and review Fair Trade principles; 2) How to Promote your Group, helps the women learn how to promote their group to visitors on tours; 3) How to Manage a Store, includes customer service skills, product displays, sales registers and inventories; and 4) Catalogs, shows the groups how to create a catalog of their products. The purpose of these workshops are to prepare the women to be more self-sufficient as well as provide them with new opportunities for income through sales in the Fair Trade Store and community tours.

Phase I and II of our Small Business and Product Development Workshops along with start-up of the Fair Trade Store are made possible by a generous grant from the [COMO Foundation](#).

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

In October, we initiated our new medicinal plants project made possible by a grant from the [United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#). The goal of this project is to empower, educate, and train 200+ Mayan women in traditional medicinal plant propagation and use. The objectives are to restore faith in traditional medicine vs. modern medicine, preserve traditional Maya knowledge of medicinal plants and remedies, improve community health among indigenous Maya groups by making family health care more affordable, and to offer the potential for income-generation for interested women's groups.



Phase I of the project is currently in process and will continue for duration of one year from October 2010 to September 2011. It includes 6 community visits/trainings to each of the 11 participating groups, as well as two specialized trainings to be held in specific locations, and monitoring and evaluation.

Community trainings and workshops are being held by Consejo May K'iche' Winaq Oxlajuj Ajmaq (roughly translated as the Council of Elder Authorities on the 13th Day), an indigenous council of spiritual guides and traditional medicinal plant experts. During each community visit, various topics related to the growing and use of traditional medicinal plants is covered, combined by awareness of cultural identity and traditions. Depending on the theme, different members of the indigenous council facilitate the trainings, and he/she is assisted by one of OB's three Community Facilitators so that trainings are held in the women's native languages. Workshops incorporate the following methodologies:

- Ancestral knowledge and Principles of Maya medicine (life, health, sickness, curing power and Maya therapeutics)
- Causes of sickness (environmental, food, energy and Cosmo vision, social e.g. pollution, politics, war, chronic hostilities, poverty)
- Resources (medicinal plant use--providing knowledge of at least 60 different plants, use of *tuj* (Maya sauna), use of bio-energy (sacred fire), preventive treatments)
- Explanation and expansion on medicinal terms in the Mayan language:
  - *ajkunanel* (general Maya therapies)
  - *aj iyom* (Maya obstetrics)
  - *aj wiqol b'aq* (Maya traumatology)
  - *aj Q'ij* (Energy therapy)
- Awareness and strengthening of ancestral knowledge

At the end of the project, a medicinal plants manual of the information obtained will be developed by OB in consultation with the council and one copy will be provided to each group.

Medicinal plants workshops have always won the popularity contest with the women in terms of projects we've offered. These workshops are interactive as the information is knowledge shared as well as learned. It's a time when the women can really show their roots and participate in something that honors their cultural values and is at the same time useful to daily living.



**Xeabaj II: The Road to Recovery.** Thanks to the on-going support from the [Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation](#), OB continues to develop and grow with our newest groups. In Xeabaj II, a remote community of Santa Catarina Ixtahuacan, we completed our asset-mapping exercise with the volunteer help of [Madeline Kreider Carlson](#) ("Maddy"). She was coached by Deborah Becker, an asset-mapping expert who has graciously volunteered her time to consult Maddy

throughout the process. We were so pleased with the results in Xeabaj II that we are proposing to conduct asset-mapping exercises in our other 19 participating communities in 2011 and 2012.

Asset-Mapping involves a series of focused questions where an inventory of the individual and group capacities and abilities begins to present itself. In addition to human resources, it also looks at the community's social, organizational and natural resources. When the assets are revealed, they are connected to the needs and challenges faced by the group to create opportunities. For example, the group may find that each woman is performing the same activity individually, when they could be cooperating to save time and resources, allowing them to spend their saved time and money in other economic endeavors. Or, a natural resource may be abundantly available, but its benefit to the women's economic development may not have been obvious. Using project examples from other communities and the eyes of the trained facilitators to notice the undeveloped opportunities, each community we work in can uncover a wealth of projects that will increase their economic potential and overall quality of life. An additional benefit in asset mapping is the element of building relationships between all the people of a community and their resources in a way that strengthens their web of support and sustainability. The results of the exercise reveal a "map" of connections that are born from the process.

Once we gathered all the necessary information in Xeabaj II, we used colourful drawings, to portray the results to the women. They were very surprised to see how their discussions and answers to questions were depicted visually. From the results, we devised a five year plan for moving forward in Xeabaj II in a truly sustainable way. The challenge now is getting all the women on board since the plan cannot work unless the participants initiate the process. Xeabaj II has been our toughest group in terms of the women's level of motivation. In January, we are meeting with the women and their family members to review the results again and clarify our role in the community. We hope to confirm in that meeting whether we are able to move forward or not with the plan.

In December, we brought the women of Xeabaj II to visit our Maya Women's Center and Fair Trade Store to show them an existing opportunity to develop products and sell them. The same day they travelled to one of our most experienced groups in Chuacruz so that the women could see first hand how a group really can be successful. It was a day of emotions and frustrations for the women. Although they were inspired by the day's events, talking a mile a minute the 2 hour micro-bus ride back to the community, we later found that they were a little frustrated by seeing the level of quality necessary to be able sell a product. They don't believe they have the potential to make that high of a quality product or really be successful at anything. It showed us that there is still so much work to be done here. But we can't force it. OB recognizes that if the women are not invested in the



process, it cannot work. We just hope at our next meeting the women will see that a brighter future is within reach.

**New Group Integration.** In addition to Xeabaj II, we continue to work with our newest groups; formally integrating them as members of OB's. These groups are receiving an evaluation in January, the results of which will help finish creating their long-term plans.

In Totonicapan, the women have had a hard time dedicating themselves to a productive activity. They have so many skills to offer but don't invest the time in developing new products. It's a common catch 22. Groups lose motivation because they don't have an income but in order to some day have an income, they must invest the time and resources; hence, why our work is so challenging.

In Toto, the women do embroidery; they weave, and one of our facilitators taught them how to make fruit preserves from fruit in season. Last quarter we provided them with the color tendencies and market trends workshop, over two separate workshops, to try to get creativity flowing. They have an understanding of quality but need work on colors and new designs. In 2011, we will continue to prepare them to promote and sell products as well as look for volunteer design students to help them work on new designs.

"Corazon de Mujer", the group from Chimaltenango, has had several complications with group organization and legal concerns. This long standing group has their own Association. However, most of the women participating were not involved in the process of setting up the legal Association so they don't understand how it works or what obligations they have. Last quarter the women were pleased that finally all the documentation, including expense sheets, was passed on to them. OB has been helping them sort through the information and reorganize the group. As previously mentioned, this group has been together a long time and has had support from various organizations. But they haven't been able to truly work together; just on a makeshift basis when there is an order for products or outside support. In 2011, we will help them sort through the expense sheets and offer them our second phase workshops on small business promotion and product development.

The Chimaltenango group is fortunate enough to have a space that was donated to them. Some day they'd like to formalize it and include an office and exhibition room for products. Future plans include helping them figure out how to realize that goal.

The women from the village of San Antonio Suchitepequez continue to have great success. We've been working mostly with the group on product development, promotion, and costing. They currently have three different products available in our store, bamboo baskets, natural shampoo, and our biggest seller, chocolate! We still need to work with them on group organization and team-building. Now that they have steady income from the sales, they need to organize work tasks amongst the women so the work load is evenly distributed. Having started in San Antonio from nothing, this is a great accomplish for the women as well as OB--a great model for us as we form new groups in the future.

Xeabaj II, Totonicapan, Chimaltenango, and San Antonio are also currently participating in our medicinal plants project and loving every minute of it!

Thank you for your continued support of OB and Maya women in Guatemala!

*Ramona Kirschenman*, Executive Director

