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## Quarterly Status Report January, February, March 2011

### Summary

➤ **Workshops, New Initiatives, and Special Events**

- Annual Plan 2011
- International Women's Day Celebration Exhibition and Leadership Assembly
- Rug-Hooking Project (with a surprise announcement!)
- Launch of our Day Tours to Women's Cooperatives
- Development of Our New Local Board of Directors

➤ **Community Programs**

- Small Business and Product Development Phase II: Costing Part II and Group Promotion
- Medicinal Plants Project Part III and IV, IMAP Workshop and Collaboration



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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. (Best Group 2010 winner!)

## Workshops, New Initiatives, and Special Events

**Annual Plan 2011.** The New Year brought an exciting new phase for OB and the women's groups we work with. The OB team returned refreshed after the usual busy end of year activities and especially with the grand opening of our new Women's Center and Fair Trade Store. Back at work, the team spent the first few days together finishing our 2011 annual plan - a task that got delayed in the busy shuffle. Our annual plan each year is created through a participatory process with the entire staff. That way everyone is on the same page, from administration to facilitation, we reach agreements on our goals for the coming year, and know what tasks are at hand. The annual plan can be viewed online in Spanish at: [Oxlajuj B'atz' POA 2011](#).

**International Women's Day Celebration, Exhibition and Leadership Assembly.** On March 6 and 7, we celebrated International Women's Day with an exhibition and demonstration of artisanal products in our Women's Center, and our annual Leadership Assembly. An International Women's Day Celebration combining these two events is becoming an annual tradition for OB. It gives the women's groups the chance to meet the people who are buying their products and supporting OB, as well as provide an opportunity for an exchange of ideas and experiences with women from other groups, learn of their both their achievements and challenges.

The day's events began with artisanal product demonstrations and sales including weaving, rug-hooking, natural dyeing, chocolate processing and a special presentation by a community elder who spun natural cotton, (a technique rarely seen today!) Guatemalan music played in the background while a slide show of the women's groups participating in OB's projects over the years rotated on the wall. Our partner organization, [Maya Traditions Foundation](#), collaborated in the sale of their Fair Trade products and a beautiful selection of artisan products from OB's 20 participating women's groups was made available for sale in our new Fair Trade Store in Panajachel.



That evening, 40 women, two representatives from each of our 20 participating groups, gathered for a dinner and discussion held by Ana Socorro, an indigenous Social Worker and Women's Rights Activist from Sololá who spoke on the subject of women's political participation in Guatemala. Rumor has it the women stayed up until the wee hours of the morning pressing Ana for information about their rights as a woman citizen. Even with the exhaustion from a long day of events and having travelled from afar, the enthusiasm and active participation from the women was impressive.

The next day, the women awoke bright and early for our annual leadership assembly. The theme this year was "Democracy and Women's Participation," purposely chosen for the election year. The assembly began with a history of women's participation in Guatemala,

continued with a discussion on how one can practice democracy in every aspect of their lives, and culminated in training on conscious voting. Community follow-ups on these themes and the previous night's dialog will be held in July, just in time the 2011 presidential election.

At the end of the assembly, we announced the Best Group winner for 2010, WAQXAQI' K'AN (the 8th Weaving Day) from the Chuacruz community in the Sololá Department. A group is selected each year by the OB team based on a number of merits including; level of active participation, product development, group organization and strengthening, and overall level of self-sufficiency. We presented the Chuacruz group with a diploma of recognition. The prize is a group field trip of their choosing that values at about \$500. The women are still debating where to go. We suggested a museum that exhibits traditional Mayan clothing, or relaxing in natural hot springs, but a trip to a popular amusement park seems to be winning the vote.

The Exhibition and Leadership Assembly as well as start-up funds for the Maya Women's Center are made possible through a generous grant from Dining for Women.

**Rug-Hooking Project.** *"I am so grateful for OB and for the opportunity they gave me to be in this class. I am so grateful for everything I've learned here, for the way Mariana y Jody (Mary Anne Wise and Jody Slocum) open their hearts and give to us everything. They hold nothing back. I can see that, my compañeras, we all feel that. Before these classes, I believed I was nothing. I was a low person. I believed that because I do not read, I can't write, I don't speak much Spanish... I've never been to school. If you are that way, people see you as a low person. In the first rug class, I did not dare to hope because I wasn't sure I could do it (the new rug hooking technique). But now I am selling my rugs and I have a different opinion of myself. I see the world different now and I am happy because I never thought that would be possible. I am NOT a low person."* - Quote from Carmen (featured in picture with Mary Anne Wise), a rug-hooking student from the Chiriquiac group when asked what rug-hooking means to her.



Our latest round of rug-hooking workshops was unlike any other. Devoted teacher, artist, and business woman extraordinaire [Mary Anne Wise](#) and her long-time friend and business partner Jody Slocum returned to Guatemala to teach a 4th rug-hooking workshop over a three week period in March. 12 experienced women returned to increase their rug design skills. We also invited two new women from the Tonicapán community who have been struggling to find a new product for their group. These 14 dedicated students produced some fantastic new designs incorporating elements from typical Guatemalan textiles, this time on a much larger scale (2x5 feet, for instance).

The highlight of the project was the announcement (and especially the reaction!) of the two lucky women who were chosen for a trip to the US. The women will be representatives for the Guatemalan students work at an international hooked rug exhibition, curated by Mary Anne, at the [Anderson Center](#) in Minneapolis, MN September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011. The decision was based on several criteria but when it came down to it, we chose the real leaders, those who



strive over and over again for their groups' subsistence, who are role models for both women in their groups as well as their communities. The vote was unanimous, Rosa Garcia Garcia from the Patanatik community, and Yolanda Calgua Morales from the Quiejel community. Their emotional response to the news was caught on video and will be made available for viewing soon on our new website.

And the surprises did not stop there! To show their appreciation, in the final week of workshops the women prepared a cultural presentation of folk dances from each of the communities. Mary Anne, Jody, and OB were the guests of honor. It was a touching ending to an incredible three weeks.

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.



**Launch of our Community Day Tours to Women's Cooperatives.** *"The women were friendly, informed and inspiring. The outing was one of our best days in Pana."* - Quote from a visitor on one of our community day tours.

This quarter OB launched community day tours to women's cooperatives. The tours are a great way for visitors to learn first hand the work of OB and experience the lives and rich history of the women's groups. The tour begins with a power point presentation in OB's Women's Center, then off to visit one of OB's participating communities where the women present; a history of their group, product exhibitions and demonstrations, and are available for questions and answers from the visitors. The tour includes typical Guatemalan lunch and follow-up discussion at the Center. If the community is further away, lunch will be provided at a restaurant on route. We also make additional stops at special attractions in the area of the community.

Our week-long package tours start this year as well in July and November. Interested parties should [contact us](#) for a schedule and more details. If you know someone coming to Guatemala, be sure to tell them all about it!

**Development of Our New Local Board of Directors.** It's been a long time coming but OB now officially has a new local Board of Directors. Creation of the new by-laws is still in process but, we have a dynamic group of nine women from diverse cultures and backgrounds with an array of different experiences that will constitute the founding board for our new Association in Guatemala. Once we create our internal rules, we will get started on the work of OB's vision to include women from the participating groups on the general assembly.

Development of our U.S. Advisory Board is currently in process and should be organized by next quarter.



## Community Programs

### Small Business and Product Development Phase II:

**Costing Part II and Group Promotion.** This quarter, we began Phase II of our Small Business and Product Development community workshops. There are 4 themes in total. The first two themes this quarter are second level Costing workshops and How to Promote Your Group. The content of this second phase was created entirely in-house by the OB team and will be taught in-store and in-community. The themes reinforce and enhance the content of Phase I (see previous quarterly report.)

Costing Part II is a workshop that teaches the women, the difference between retail and wholesale, the content of a spec sheet, market competition, sales policies with new clients, and Fair Trade principles related to pricing. The workshop is intended to show what conditions may alter the price of a product. For instance, in the Costing Part I workshop, the women are provided with the basic steps to arriving at a fair price for their work. Part II shows them what circumstances could change or adjust that price, i.e. wholesale, competition in the market, fair trade conditions (quality, etc.).

How to Promote Your Group is a workshop that gives the women tips on how to present their group in order to provide a much richer experience to visitors. For instance, we ask them



to tell the history of their group, the community, and the meaning behind their “traje” (indigenous clothing.) The women role-play a tour visiting the community by splitting into two groups, the tourists and the women. (Their portrayal of tourists always gets a big laugh!) By the end of the workshop, OB helps them create an agenda in anticipation of future visits. The workshop is intended to prepare the women for our community day tours and upcoming package tours, for public exhibitions, and for interacting with customers in the Fair Trade Store.

Phase II of this series will continue through June of 2011 with workshops on; How to Manage a Fair Trade Store which includes in-store customer service skills, product displays, sales registers and inventories and; Catalogs, which helps the groups design a catalog of their products.

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.***

This quarter we completed the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> in-community trainings of our 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.

These two community trainings were accompanied by an internationally known Mayan healer who not only provided the women with training on medicinal plant use but also offered health consultations to those in need. The project has been coordinated with the 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.

The next phase of the medicinal plants project provides the participants with the opportunity to plant individual garden plots. To prepare for this phase, OB community facilitators and one representative from each of the 11 groups participated in a two-day workshop at Instituto Mesoamericano de Permacultura (IMAP) just outside San Lucas Toliman. 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 how to utilize available natural resources to design, plant, and care for your garden. The women were really engaged in the workshop as it proves how you create and maintain a garden a little or no cost. OB community facilitators will return to IMAP for intensive training. Follow up visits and planting of the community gardens will take place next quarter with on-going consulting from IMAP.



Our deepest gratitude to our individual donors and foundations for your continued support of OB and Maya women in Guatemala!

*Ramona Kirschenman, Executive Director*