Thirteen Threads

“Empowering Women and Inspiring Change”

Semiannual Report

January–June 2015

July, 2015
INTRODUCTION

This document reports on the distinct projects for the empowerment of women within varying areas carried out alongside the different groups served by Oxlajuj B’atz’. Through these projects, the women are able to make decisions within diverse participatory spaces and put the valuable information gained from capacity-building workshops into practice with their families, friends, and communities. This serves as a great advance for the women since they are able to further foster and strengthen their knowledge and have managed to raise the standards of quality with respect to their craft making, thus improving their economic situation.

The projects reported reflect those implemented during the months of January through June 2015, with the initiation of the program “Way Towards Sustainability” made possible through financing from Dining For Women, Daniele Agostino Derossi, and Maya Educational Foundation.

The main projects undertaken are as follows: participatory development meetings, community visits, selection and hiring of facilitators for workshops, training the women for the development of a 2015 educative training curriculum guide and of new weaving techniques in hairpin looming, commemoration of International Women’s Day, the annual leadership meeting – Oxlajuj B’atz’s assembly taking place every year, workshops for the reclaiming and practicing of ancestral knowledge through the use of medicinal plants, commemoration of the International Day of Action for Women’s Health, community visits to new groups in Tzununá and San Juan Cotzal.

The following is a description of each of the projects developed.
PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED

MONTH OF JANUARY

1. Development of the Annual Operatives Plan and Financial Plan

The technical staff at Oxlajuj B’atz’ carried out analyses of the available funds for the year 2015 and of upcoming projects, and based on these developed an annual operatives plan and projections for finances that were then presented to the board of directors.

2. Welcoming and induction of incoming volunteer Sophie

On January 13, Sophie was welcomed into our offices at Oxlajuj B’atz’ and on the third week was formally introduced to our work and our expectations of support in the following projects:

- Managing Facebook publications to promote the women’s work.
- Developing merchandising strategies for the Fair Trade store.
- Community visits to film and photograph the work of the women and their groups, with the end goal of developing a documentary on Oxlajuj B’atz’s work.
- Updating Oxlajuj B’atz’s information on social networks, especially on Google, Vimeo, TripAdvisor.
- Supporting projects developed by the organization through the documenting and photographing of events.

3. Organization of methods for authentication of projects and store

The technical staff at OB organized methods for authentication of activities performed in 2014; within these documents are activities’ reports, attendance sheets, methodology files, and the stores’ administrative systems.

4. Development and presentation of criteria for selecting a consultant for the political education and training of Maya women
This month, an outline of the criteria for recruiting a consultant has been released and the person who meets these criteria has been selected.

**MONTH OF FEBRUARY**

**Supplementary assembly for the transition of directives and general meeting for activities planned for 2015**

The supplementary assembly was held on February 4 to address a shift in directives: due to changes within the organization, the assembly was organized for the transferring and rendering of information to the participating leaders consisting of 15 women representatives from the following groups: Chimaltenango, San Antonio Suchitepéquez, Chuacruz, Morales, Quiejel, Patanatic. The meeting had a duration of one day, and was crucial for informing the women, thus enabling them to make decisions and actively involve themselves with the organization. This event was made possible through financing from Dining For Women.
Recruitment for a consultant for the Development of the Political Education Curriculum Guide For Maya Women

On February 3, Ana María Medrano, a maya kiché who is a national leader and social therapist, was selected upon meeting the requirements outlined in the criteria for consultancy. Upon finalizing a contract, an action plan and methodology process were formulated for establishing the curriculum guide. Thanks to this democratic and participatory process, there is now a completed curriculum guide that is systematic and based on the needs and demands of the women. This project was realized through support from an Oxlajuj B'atz' donor.

Workshop with women's focus group for the development of the curriculum guide

A workshop was held with a focus group of 16 women representing the different artisan groups for the identifying and prioritizing of the subject-matter for the curriculum guide with a starting point of addressing their needs and demands. The methodology of the workshop was participatory, dynamic, lucid, and based on a reflection and analysis of the life histories and trajectories of the women's lives from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to elderly life stages, recounting their sufferings caused by systems of oppression like patriarchy, racism, capitalism and its direct relation to poverty, and the aftermath of armed conflict. The workshop also consisted of recollecting Maya ancestral knowledge, including values, principles of equity, complementarity, balance, and remembrance of struggles and
advances that have been realized in relation to the exercising and enjoying of rights.

This activity served for reflecting, sensitizing, and creating a safe space where the women could share their pain, sorrows, joys, and dreams for life. The workshop, which lasted a day, took place on February 12 with financial support from Dining For Women.
During this project, 18 of the group leaders completed the educative training process that had received support from the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation, Dining For Women, and Juana Mintz from 2013 to 2014. This event was crucial for the women, as for many of them it was the first time receiving an educative diploma for personal, leadership, and business development; it was an important event for graduation, celebration and motivation.
Community Visits
These were conducted this month to film and photograph the artisanal projects of the women within the communities of Morales, Chimaltenango, Quiejel, San Antonio, and Patanatic to promote their activities, products, talents, and life histories. Realizing their dreams of a better quality of life for their children and creating new business and work opportunities for the sale of their products as a reliable means for generating income were the prime reasons for the women's organizing.

A documentary of the impact Oxlajuj B’atz’ has on the women's lives will be produced from the film and photographs.

Los morales  

Chimaltenango

San Antonio Suchitepéquez  

Patanatik
These visits also served to reiterate and revise the commitments and benefits for each of the groups according to their respective membership agreements and to update member information, especially of those belonging to the board of directors.

This project was made possible through support from Sophie, our volunteer from France. The following photos and short video taken of a group of artisans are a sample from OB’s gallery of videos and photographs for the promotion of the women’s work through varying social networks. This was also made possible with funding from Dining for Women through the program “Way Towards Sustainability.”

MONTH OF MARCH

Preparation for International Women’s Day
The representatives of the groups in Panajachel carried out a work meeting on March 2 that included the participation of 5 women from: San Antonio Suchitepéquez, Morales, Chimaltenango, Chuacruz, and Patanatic, respectively. The women discussed and defined the importance of International Women’s Day, elaborated a methodology for the proposed event in the women’s center– the Centro de Mujeres, and within their communities. The meeting lasted one day and was made possible through funding from Dining For Women.

The women contributed their input in prioritizing the following motivational messages: women’s self-esteem, living a life free from violence, the importance of organizing, women’s active participation, human rights, the right to just and
dignified work, fair pay, and love for women’s lives; these were the messages promoted within all groups. The women are currently actively participating in the preparation of activities.

**Commemoration of International Women’s Day in Panajachel**

International Women’s Day was commemorated on May 7 in Panajachel with the participation of: 4 women from Chimaltenango; 4 women from Morales; 4 women from Patanatic, 4 women from Chuacruz, 2 women from San Juan Cotzal; 4 women from San Antonio Suchitepéquez; 1 woman from Quiejel; 3 volunteers; 3 women from the technical staff at Oxlajuj B’atz’ and a musical group of 12 individuals, totalling 40 participants for this event.

The event had two components: a women-only space for the purposes of strengthening their self-esteem and raising awareness on women’s rights; and in the evening, workshops and a weaving exhibition to demand women’s economic rights, just and dignified work, and elaborate on the reasons for opting for fair trade. This event was realized with financing from Dining For Women.
Morning event for the women artisans

Within this space, the women were able to appreciate the joys of being a woman while demonstrating their talents, abilities, and skills in the art of weaving, strengthening their self-esteem in this way. Additionally, the women were able to engage in a discussion of women’s rights in which each expressed how she exercised her rights.

They were thus able to discern for themselves that they were unaware of various rights and recognized that several of their rights in relation to family, community, and country, were negated them; many challenges exist within this scope of exercising and fully enjoying human rights, especially those of indigenous women.

Evening event: exhibition of women weavers’ artistic work

This event served to promote the women’s work and the reasons for opting for fair trade. The women held weaving classes where they exhibited their skills and abilities, and shared this with locals and tourists from various countries.
Thanks to the public attention generated by this event, our fair trade store was able to attract new customers, in addition to promote the women’s development programs, and foster interest from prospective donors and volunteers to contribute to the different programs and projects here at OB.

MONTH OF APRIL

Preparations for the general assembly for OB:

Several meetings were held with the board of directors this month to prepare the subject-matter of the general assembly, draft internal operative guidelines for the board of directors, create membership plans, produce business reports for the store along with materials, narrative, and financial reports for 2014 to communicate back to the members of the general assembly at Oxlajuj B’atz’. The board of directors assumed responsibility for this process in accordance with the statutes established by the organization.

Moreover, the annual operatives plan was revised along with the available funds for each project and event for 2015 and based on these the board of directors took several measures to ensure efficient use of funding. These measures were later discussed and approved by the women representing the member groups partaking in OB’s general assembly.
Annual assembly for Oxlajuj B’atz’ – Leadership Assembly

The annual assembly for Oxlajuj B’atz’ took place April 28 and 29, attaining the participation of 23 Maya women from Chimaltenango, San Juan Cotzal, Quiejel, Chuacruz, Morales, San Antonio Suchitepéquez, and Patanatic. During this assembly, the groups’ representatives were informed of the prior year’s revenues and expenses within the diverse projects and events taking place in their communities and in Panajachel. The women were able to see the amount of funds invested in each of the projects and the total number of projects carried out.

The women also became familiar with the financial plan and the annual operatives plan for 2015, and contributed their input in defining mechanisms for the implementation of expenses, projects and the accomplishing of activities within their communities.

As a result of the training processes driven by the women, this event practiced leadership and the exercising of one’s voice in democratically-made decisions within the organization. Furthermore, for the first time ever, two women representatives from the Cotzal cooperative formally entered into the organizational structure of OB’s general assembly alongside the entry of new women leaders from San Antonio Suchitepéquez and Morales in Sololá – more women than ever within the general assembly. This event was accomplished with financing from Dining For Women and Daniele Agostino Derossi.
Selection and hiring of a facilitator for workshops on the training and education of Maya women

A facilitator with education and experience at the national level advocating for indigenous women’s rights has been selected this month for the workshops on the training and education of Maya women with an added emphasis on the rights of indigenous women. Training workshops will be held for 20 leaders of the 8 intervention groups at OB from the first week on of this month.

MONTH OF MAY

Reproduction of the Community Workshops on Healing

On May 15 and 18, women from the groups in Chimaltenango and Patanatic reproduced the workshop “Healing Wounds Caused By Intrafamilial Violence, Misogyny, and Internal Armed Conflict: Transcendence Through Positive Living” with the objective of sharing with the other women healing strategies to improve their emotional and overall physical health. This experience served a powerful purpose in the empowering of the women since the women who participated in the original workshop were eager to replicate it within their respective groups. Chimaltenango’s group, Ranm Ixoqui’ had 15 participants and Patanatic’s group, Las Rosas, had 10 participants. These activities were made possible through financing from Dining For Women.

![Image of women at a table]
MONTH OF JUNE

Commemoration of the International Day of Action for Women’s Health
This activity was carried out with the members of the groups served by Oxlajuj B’atz’ with the objective of claiming the women’s reproductive and sexual rights in order to prevent maternal deaths.

The women are pleased with this activity as most were unaware of the topic and would like to implement future workshops on women’s reproductive and sexual health to share the information gained with their families, sons and daughters, and communities. With the recognition that women’s health is a right that needs to be addressed, this activity was realized within the groups of San Juan Cotzal, San Antonio, Chimaltenango, Chuacruz, Morales, Quiejel, and Patanatic. A donor from Oxlajuj B’atz’ helped finance the activities, while the hiring of the facilitators for the process was funded through Dining For Women.
OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED:

- Integration of the women representatives from San Juan Cotzal into the general assembly at Oxlajuj B’atz’.

- New customers were able to be reached due to the commemorative activities carried out in the cultural center, doubling the store’s sales.

- The general assembly took place this year where the women became familiar with important aspects of the Association such as: donors, total amount of funds from each donor, projects and activities undertaken, expenses and available funds.

- Currently, the number of women participating in the store’s administration has increased, 3 women from each group know how the fair trade store is managed.
- The standards of quality in the products have been improved of which the women are very happy and as a result there has been an increase in sales in the fair trade store.

- A development model, that includes methods for attaining sustainability, is being applied to the groups and women served by OB as well as to incoming groups.

- The women have managed to gain some influence within familial, group, and community spaces, where prior, they were not allowed to participate. Now they are supporting one another to continue and increase their participation in decision-making spaces at group, community, and municipal levels.

- With the achievement of improving the quality of their products, the women have reached new markets and thus increased sales along with their family's financial earnings for their children's education.

- The most notable progress has been the strengthening of the women's knowledge within various subject-matter, of which is witnessed within decision-making spaces.

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

The following is the financial report attached as an Excel document.