



# ANNUAL NEWSLETTER 2019

**ACTIVITIES 2019 | RESULTS 2019 | GOALS 2020**



## ACTIVITIES 2019

For Tejiendo Alianzas, 2019 was a year of larger scale community innovation through workshops, student-community collaborations, and enabling greater local autonomy over businesses. Our role as a community business incubator has expanded beyond direct capacity building with certain groups to consulting and coaching as each micro-enterprise has increasingly applied their skills independently. This was easily our most busy and successful year to date!



## RESULTS 2019

### Activities: Community Innovation Workshops (DCC)

#### Santiago Suchilquitongo, Oaxaca

- 5 full days of activities
- 13 diverse organizations involved
- 25 participants from Santiago Suchilquitongo and neighboring communities
- 5 technologies built during the workshop
- Follow-up financed by IODEMC and MIT, focusing on fine-tuning designs and project incubation for market entry



*Above: A participant in DCC-Suchilquitongo cuts metal materials for her team's soil churning machine developed during the workshop.*

## Community Innovation Workshops

In collaboration with diverse local, national, and international organizations, Tejiendo Alianzas co-hosted and ran a five day workshop in Santiago Suchilquitongo that focused on creating “appropriated technologies” to tackle local problems. Known as “Creative Capacity Development Workshops,” or **DCC**, this MIT D-Lab designed program invited rural community members to apply their creativity and deep local knowledge to develop solutions to challenges they face in their daily lives--ranging from technologies that improve farming yields to home improvements that increase savings. Among our partnering organizations were MIT-DLAB, the Oaxacan Institute of Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness (IODEMC),

FABLAB Oaxaca A.C, Guardarenas México, the MIT Enterprise Forum México, Techamos Una Mano, ADC Suchilquitongo and the DIF Municipal.



*Above: Minerva Cruz, representative of the Suchilquitongo Community Development Association and Xuchil Products, presents the amaranth grain washing machine designed by her team during DCC-Suchilquitongo.*

## Cross-cultural partnerships for community impact

Our **University Connections program** surged in activity this year, forming a crucial arm of TA's activities to benefit local communities and their economies. We led two of our projects in partnership with the University of Texas at Austin—under the PUC Mexico and MAP programs—to support local community businesses through knowledge exchange and collaboratively tackling the challenges that these Oaxacan companies face.

## RESULTS 2019

### Activities: The University Connections Program

#### Three municipalities, Oaxaca

- Partnering with three programs at the University of Texas at Austin: PUC (Cockrell School of Engineering), MBA+ (McCombs School of Business), MAP (McCombs School of Business).
- 25 participating students.
- Activities: infrastructure development, engineering and business consultation, STEM skills workshops for local elementary school students, social impact tourism trips to all communities where we work
- Benefitting 10 local business and projects, 45 Oaxacan entrepreneurs



*Above: Roxana Chavez Aguilar presenting her research results regarding the drying and milling of mesquite beans at CIIDIR.*

The success of these projects have led to even more interest at additional schools in the University of Texas at Austin system, such as the School of Social Work and the Institute of Latin American Studies. Within schools we are expanding as well, such as in the McCombs School of Business and the Cockrell School of Engineering. Our goal remains to continually co-develop programming that both satisfies students'

academic and professional needs while creating a true benefit for the businesses and communities we support. This requires continually tailoring and improving the activities and relationship building between these groups.

Our partnership with the National Polytechnic Institute CIIDIR Oaxaca continues to bear fruits by linking graduate students to our projects through research. In 2019, students from CIIDIR began testing the drying efficiency of the PSD constructed by the Xuchil members and PUC students, analyzing temperature fluctuations, humidity, and air flow. Their research led to a series of recommendations for improving the functioning of the system.



*Above: The closing ceremony to celebrate the completion of the PUC-Xuchil work in 2019 to create a larger mesquite drying system.*

## **PUC 2019: Engineering collaborations to create social and economic impacts in rural communities**

This year, four students studying engineering and one majoring in communications/social work arrived in Suchilquitongo with the goal of working with us to expand the capacity and efficiency of the mesquite bean drying system. After prototyping a version of the Polycarbonate Sun Dryer (PSD) system in Texas, guided by the research conducted by Dr. Sadoth Sandoval Torres and his students at the Polytechnical Institute CIIDIR Oaxaca, and constantly confirming their progress with us, the group arrived to build with our team a larger version of the system. They also designed new solutions for raw material storage using CO<sub>2</sub> gas (often employed by large scale grain suppliers) as well as a heavy materials pulley-based elevator.



*Above: The new Polycarbonate Solar Dryer tested in Texas and built together with the Xuchil team increases drying yields by more than 100%.*

The nature of our work leads to constantly refining cross-cultural partnerships which create positive impacts for rural communities. In addition to running an engineering design challenge workshop to foment STEM skills among elementary school students, the PUC students met with DCC Suchilquitongo project members to learn about their innovative projects and offer ideas for possible design improvements.

Upon completion of the PUC's work in Suchilquitongo, we took them to San Dionisio Ocotepic to learn about our partnering businesses and local culture in rural communities while having the opportunity to buy products directly from these enterprises.

PUC 2019 results at a glance:

- A Polycarbonate Solar Dryer, PSD, increasing drying capacity by over 100%
- A pulley system for transporting raw material to the roof for drying

- A storage system for preserving and protecting raw mesquite beans
- A 3-hour STEM skills workshop for over 20 elementary school students
- Meetings with 5 local DCC-based projects, offering recommendations for design improvements
- Greater local trust in intercultural and international partnerships to benefit underserved communities.



*Above: Workshops for local schools conducted by University of Texas engineering students focusing on STEM skills get local youth excited about math while building our relationship with the community.*

## MAP 2019

Our work with the University of Texas McComb's School of Business has typically been anchored in market related research for determining how the products of our community businesses can and should reach US consumers. While 2019 saw the design of a go-to-market strategy for the Xuchil mesquite based products, our participation in UT's MAP program served as our first experience hosting eleven MBA students in Oaxaca for one week.

We achieved the following goals:

- Providing our local business partners access to relevant expertise tackling business related challenges
- Coordinating contact between potential customers (students, in this case) and community businesses, which leads to better knowledge of effective customer service, marketing, sales, and the interests of specific market segments.
- Providing information to students on the historical and cultural context in which each business operates, as well as coordinating educational hands-on workshops, run by local project members, exploring how specific contexts influence business creation and subsequent decisions.
- Establishing a channel to additional UT MBA programs: presenting our visitors with in-person introductions to businesses can increase student interest to conduct additional research for these groups through UT's MBA+ Program.



*Above: MBA students from UT Austin learn about the production cycle and cultural importance of palm craft by Xula Palm in Santa Maria Ixcatlan.*

Participating community businesses included Xula Palma Artesanal and Mezcal Ixcateco (Santa Maria Ixcatlan); Xuchil Natural Products and the Central Valley Amaranth Collection Center (Santiago Suchilquitongo); Ndavaa Handmade Shoes and Sandals, Lanni Chocolate, and Mezcal Sinai (San Dionisio Ocotepec).

This program reflects part of an evolving strategy by TA to create services that offer high value to community businesses and outside experts, such as students specializing in relevant academic disciplines.



## RESULTS 2019

### Activities: Direct Project Incubation, Consultation, Promotion

#### Central Valley and Mixteca Regions, Oaxaca

- Three communities: Santa Maria Ixcatlan, Santiago Suchilquitongo, and San Dionisio Ocotepéc
- Three micro-businesses: Xula Palm, Xuchil Products, and DAVA Artisan Design
- Over 40 hours of direct capacity building in strategic planning, production management, fundraising and pitching, marketing and social media publication techniques
- Weekly market and product research, sales promotion, and online marketing
- New clients obtained: 4 businesses
- One new bank account created, one Mexican Treasury tax registration complete

### TA's work towards greater local autonomy and growth in community businesses

The three primary microbusinesses we partner with had big years as well, in terms of sales and increasingly managing their operations proactively on their own.

#### *Xuchil Natural Products*

In addition to the infrastructure improvements through the University of Texas PUC Mexico program and business consulting from UT MBA business students,



we collaborated with Xuchil to improve business skills, formalize their business, and develop new products. We led research teams, and were deeply involved in sales promotion and new customer acquisitions.

#### *Organization and skills building*

Our meetings focused on a number of skill sets--strategic planning, production management, fundraising and pitching, marketing and social media publication techniques. As a result, they created their own

fundraising campaign with the crowdfunding platform Donadora, presented pitches to partners and funders on numerous occasions, hired an accountant to manage their tax compliance, and began directing their social media posts. They achieved a remarkable amount of autonomy, which culminated with the opening of their own bank account and registering with the Mexican Treasury to formalize their business.

### Sales Promotion

Our actions to increase sales of Xuchil products included the following:

- Creation of a go-to-market strategy for positioning mesquite flour in the US market, in collaboration with MBA students at the University of Texas McComb's School of Business.
- Coordinating the production of a multimedia marketing video with [TV Azteca](#).
- Working with professional photographers to create promotional material, photos of products and recipes.
- Opening accounts with the online sales platforms, [Mercadolibre](#) and [Kichink](#)
- Meeting with potential clients and facilitating sales with three new high profile business customers in Oaxaca and Mexico City—the bakery Boulenc, the restaurant Destilado, and the restaurant Sartoria.
- As a result, sales improved by more than 100%.

Moreover, the group diversified its offer of products. Once we completed the prototyping, the group added a mesquite based coffee substitute, banana flour, amaranth flour, and local black beans to their product list.



*Above: A fresh cup of mesquite coffee substitute (left) and mesquite syrup (right).*

### Plans for 2020

In late May, Tejiendo Alianzas and Xuchil will lead our third year of partnering with University of Texas engineers to improve the production of mesquite flour. After the first two years resulted in more efficiently dried mesquite beans and at a greater scale, this year's goal will lead to increasing the speed of the pod rinsing before entering the solar dehydrater. The model proposed centers on a bicycle-based spinning mechanism which will not require an external energy source other than that of the user.



If you are interested in purchasing Xuchil products, please visit our [Xuchil](#) online store and learn more about Xuchil's work on their [facebook](#) and [instagram](#) pages. At [Tejiendo Alianzas AC](#), we also accept donations to support our work with Xuchil and other projects in Santiago Suchilquitongo.

*Above: The PUC 2019-20 team will focus on a mesquite rinsing system.*



### **DAVA Artisan Design**

Our work with the DAVA family business is now gaining steam, with a focus on research, designing systems that standardize their production and sales processes, while amplifying their client base.

As an established business and with a history of over thirty years, rather than seeking our incubation services, DAVA sought consultation for accelerating and scaling their production and sales. Accordingly, TA completed a diagnostic for the business, applying the research findings and strategy developed by MBA students from the University of Texas McComb's School of Business in 2018.



This led to refining their sales model (in store and online), taking steps toward standardizing and consolidating their vast product line, and beginning the extensive process of creating a centralized inventory system.

During our meetings we began creating short and mid term strategic plans. With our consultation, they began participating in the SBDC (Small Business Development Center) program, sponsored by IODEMC (Oaxacan Institute for the Entrepreneur and Competitivity) and UTVCO (Technical University of the Oaxaca Central Valley), to better understand their financial model, costs of production, and setting accurate sales prices.

This year also saw the opening of their first store in downtown Oaxaca, a goal of theirs set many years ago. We worked with them to design the interior of the store itself and the promotion strategy. Concurrently, they began researching e-commerce platforms that would eventually integrate into their overall sales strategy. Sales increased by nearly 60% due to the store in downtown Oaxaca, providing the business with savings it had never obtained prior.

DAVA, like the other micro-businesses we support, is dedicated to creating a social impact, in part by investing in their supply chain and sponsoring local social projects. The relationships that the Ndavaa business has with the families of artisans who work with them to produce hand-made fabrics is nothing transactional but rather very humane. These artisans are part of the Ndavaa family. As such, TA worked with DAVA and their artisan partners in the community San Baltazar Guelavila to apply for federal funding that would allow them to diversify their product line. We are happy to report that they achieved the funding and were able to buy a series of new sewing machines!



*Above: Clara Garcia (middle), the co-founder of DAVA, with her two daughters Sarahi Garcia and Laura Garcia in front of the new store in Oaxaca.*



*Above: Sarahi Garcia (middle) with a family of textile artisans in San Baltazar Guelavila after having obtained federal funding for new sewing equipment.*

If you are interested in purchasing DAVA products, please visit their new [online store](#) and learn more about Xuchil's work on their [facebook](#) and [instagram](#) pages. At [Tejiendo Alianzas AC](#), we also accept donations to support our work with Xuchil and other projects in Santiago Suchilquitongo.



### Xula Palm Craft

In 2019, our work with Xula focused on skill development, strategic planning, product promotion, and the diversification of their client base.

#### Skills Development

We coordinated their participation in “Crafting Futures,” an intercultural design program sponsored by the British Council and hosted by [Oaxifornia](#), learning about new palm weaving and dying techniques while sharing their knowledge and building friendships with designers and other artisans. They were excited to learn of their invitation to participate in Oaxifornia 2020.



*Above: Promotional material shared through social networks for the Crafting Futures workshops in which Xula Palm participated..*



### Sales Promotion

Visual media is fundamental to expressing the quality and human story behind Xula products. We were fortunate to coordinate the production and publication of promotional videos created by the local Oaxaca news channel [TV Azteca](#) and the well-known national news journalist, Carolina Rocha. The [Carolina Rocha report](#) has amassed nearly 40,000 views and counting!

After a strategic planning session with the group, we began practicing virtual remote coaching and training meetings, while trying to tackle thorny subjects, such as the fear and frustrations associated with business formalization. This last issue reflects the crossroads that many small rural businesses face as they decide what path to take to increase sales and improve their quality of life. We at Tejiendo Alianzas respect their choices even when they may not coincide with what we recommend for the future of their businesses.

Sales reached 70% of that from the prior year due to smaller scale purchases, while securing two new clients, a design store and a mezcal company, through social media sales channels.

We are currently seeking larger scale clients such as hotels and restaurants to replicate the success of sales in 2018.

If you are interested in purchasing Xula products, please visit the [Xula Palma Artesanal](#) facebook page and request a catalogue. And don't forget to check out the [Xula](#) instagram page as well! At [Tejiendo Alianzas AC](#), we also accept donations to support our work with Xula and other projects in Santa Maria Ixcatlan.



*Above: Exploring the use of virtual meetings with Xula Palm artisans to plan activities.*

## Internship program

In 2019 we hosted our first long-term intern, Ashlen Olmsted, for over six months in Oaxaca. While she very quickly parachuted into an intense period of DCC-Suchilquitongo and PUC workshops and community work, she dedicated the majority of her time to creating a framework for project evaluation. We are very thankful for her commitment to our work, her flexibility in adapting to diverse activities on the ground, and her love of community development in Oaxaca! We wish her the best of luck in all future pursuits and have all the confidence that she will make a huge impact in whatever project she supports or directs.



*Above: Intern Ashlen Olmsted during one of our visits to work with Xula Palm in Santa Maria Ixcatlan.*

If you or someone you know is looking for a real-world experience in applying their knowledge to make a difference in rural Oaxacan communities as an **intern** for Tejiendo Alianzas, please email us at: [info@tejiendoalianzas.org](mailto:info@tejiendoalianzas.org).

## General Plans for 2020

In addition to expanding our University Connections program, co-facilitating D-Lab workshops, and further advancing the Xuchil and Xula community businesses, and the Ndavaa family business, we will very soon finish the last details of formalizing Tejiendo Alianzas. We are already a registered charity that can receive both national and international donations and have finished our branding, and now have officially launched our new home website. Soon we will begin the process for creating a 501(c)(3) in the United States.

You can find us on our [home website](#), [facebook](#) and [instagram](#) pages, and by contacting us at: [info@tejiendoalianzas.org](mailto:info@tejiendoalianzas.org).

**2020 is going to be incredible! Get involved!**





# TEJIENDO ALIANZAS A.C.

## Contributing to Tejiendo Alianzas

If you would like to support our work in the form of a **donation**, we can accept them through two channels:

1. Via our [Paypal account](#) (also accessible through our [home website](#))
2. A direct transfer to our Tejiendo Alianzas bank account in Mexico:

### TEJIENDO ALIANZAS A.C.

Bank: BANCO MERCANTIL DEL NORTE, S.A “BANORTE”

Account number: 1001261809

CLABE: 072610010012618092

Branch: 3503

Swift code: MENOMXMT

**We wish you the best of luck in 2020!**

