



ANNUAL NEWSLETTER 2020

ACTIVITIES 2020 | RESULTS 2020 | GOALS 2021



Above: Sarabi Garcia, co-founder of Tejiendo Alianzas, leads a workshop on business models in San Baltazar Guelavila.

ACTIVITIES 2020

Among the many lessons 2020 taught us, demonstrating compassion and resiliency ranked at the top. What we thought was yet another transient hurricane ended up shaking our society and families to the core. As people, it forced us to reevaluate how we take care of one another, and as a nonprofit, how we deliver value to all our community and international partners in a new context filled with fear and sadness.

Much of our work depends on face-to-face interactions, relationships cultivated through time and patience. Like any other organization, we use common communication technologies to



keep in contact with our partners when traveling is either not possible or unnecessary. But the silence and void that exists between people when you simply cannot visit one another has been challenging, especially when we began losing people dear to all of us. As a result, this annual report is distinct, serving as much to inform others of how we navigated this storm that has marked all of us, as a dedication to those we lost in the process, honoring them through our perseverance and hope.

RESULTS 2020

Activities: Local recycling business working with MIT engineering students

Santiago Suchilquitongo, Oaxaca

- Six days of consultation, co-designing, and co-constructing user-centered technologies
- Two organizations involved: MIT and Tejiendo Alianzas
- Five local residents participated, four female engineering students and one MIT faculty member
- Two designs developed and engineered to support the recycling business
- [Student blog](#) on project



Above: MIT students listening to a local resident of Suchilquitongo to understand the needs and challenges of her recycling business.

Exploring strategies for catalyzing innovation and entrepreneurship in rural communities

Before the pandemic forced us to cancel all of our in-person activities, we were fortunate to partner with [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) (MIT)'s [D-Lab](#) engineers and faculty to explore the entire recycling process of Lidia Castellanos Cruz, a resident of Santiago Suchilquitongo, prioritizing areas that she identified as the most urgent to improve and that

the team felt feasible to accomplish given the days available. With the participation of Enoc Ramirez, a local resident extremely talented in soldering and engineering designs, Lidia and the team increased the carrying capacity of her cart. The second challenge was to simplify the compacting and storage of collected materials, with the hope of reducing the physical strain on the family's knees and backs. The impressive result included a soldered metal table and seesaw crushing mechanism with minimal force required to operate. We'll be observing how well the prototypes function, considering future modifications, as well as new projects identified during the initial project idea mapping.

RESULTS 2020

Activities: Community business incubation workshops

San Baltazar Guelavila, Oaxaca

- First 30 hours of workshop completed (30 more hours in 2021)
- Three organizations: Niños de Magdalena Teitipac, ChildFund Mexico, and Tejiendo Alianzas
- 11 entrepreneurs: 9 women, 2 men
- Topics:
 - Local resource mapping and needs assessment
 - Identifying a client and understanding their needs
 - Value proposition and product design
 - Business Model Development
 - Financial Planning and Projections



Above: Local entrepreneurs create long-term visions for their community, San Baltazar Guelavila, during a series of workshops by Tejiendo Alianzas.

Community Business Incubation

In collaboration with [Niños de Magdalena Teitipac A.C.](#) and with the sponsorship of [ChildFund Mexico](#), we were fortunate to develop and implement 60 hours of workshops for the incubation of small businesses in the San Baltazar Guelavila community. Taking the necessary measures to reduce the risk of contagion, we worked with 11 entrepreneurs whose ideas and existing companies were of various types, some just starting out and others with years since they were established.

RESULTS 2020

Activities: The University Connections Program

- 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).
- 70 participating students
- Activities: Engineering and business consultation, STEM skills workshops for local elementary school students, virtual educational trips to all communities where we work
- Four educational and promotional [videos](#) produced
- 25 kits of products sold, including handmade facemasks, mesquite products, palm craft, and Oaxacan chocolate.
- Benefitting 6 local business and projects, 45 Oaxacan entrepreneurs

Ultimately 3 of them will receive seed funding after working with us on their final pitches and performances. We are very proud of these entrepreneurs! It is obvious that this type of workshop is essential to improve rural economies through local micro-enterprises. There is so much more work to do!



Above: Engineering students from the University of Texas lead a STEM skills workshop for elementary school students in Suchilquitongo.

Cross-cultural partnerships for community impact

As part of our [University Connections program](#), the 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.

At the beginning of the year before the pandemic, we were lucky to run an in-person project in addition to our work with MIT engineering students. We created an itinerary for University of Texas' engineering students participating in the FIG (First-year Interest Groups) program, in which they explored how local projects and micro enterprises in Santiago Suchilquitongo



Above: UT students visited DAVA Artisan Design in San Dionisio Ocotepéc to learn about their business operations and strategies for reducing their carbon footprint.

create employment with available resources while tackling challenges related to ecological sustainability and nutrition. First the [Xuchil Natural Products](#) team presented their mesquite flour production, then representatives of the [Central Valley Amaranth Network](#) walked us through the amaranth collection center, before Lidia Castellanos Cruz described her recycling vision and work benefiting the community. We traveled to San Pablo Huitzo to visit the innovative rock powder processing facility that produces organic mineral rich fertilizer.

With the goal of inspiring youth to study math and science through activities based in applied engineering, the UT students concluded their time in the communities delivering STEM skills workshops to elementary school students, who later assembled solar powered cars and competed in races.

We are very fortunate to be able to continue our collaboration with Dr. Sadoth Sandoval Torres, professor at [CIIDIR Unidad Oaxaca](#), and the institution that he represents. At the beginning of 2020, a new group of CIIDIR students and the Instituto Tecnológico De Oaxaca carried out an investigation on the flow of air, humidity and temperature inside the greenhouse mounted by students of the PUC Team Mexico 2019 program, from The

University of Texas at Austin, to dry mesquite pods from the Xuchil Natural Products group. Based on these data, a series of recommendations were drafted to make the drying process more efficient.

An exercise in pivoting

The pandemic forced us to rethink the [University Connections Program](#), which normally includes on-site student work with community partners. We created value virtually for our local and international partners through two primary strategies:

- The production of reusable and revisable educational video resources that also promote the local businesses, their products, the human stories behind them, and the business challenges that students can tackle via research, consultancy, and/or digital content creation.
- Hosting virtual events that serve various purposes—as educational resources, focusing on how entrepreneurs innovate and run their businesses in distinct cultural contexts; and as promotional materials, offering product kits from these groups for sale to participants in the virtual events.



Video: Arrival to Ixcatlan and interview with Amando Alvarez

Above: A slide from the Virtual MAP event in which we presented prerecorded [interviews](#) with Oaxacan entrepreneurs.

Virtual MAP 2020: MBA students and rural community businesses

As a first experiment in converting an in-person program to a virtual format, Virtual MAP 2020 faced a steep climb to satisfy participants. Similar to the FIG program, MAP-Oaxaca seeks to expose students to a myriad of business challenges and potential solutions, while recruiting students to engage in deeper research in the future. To capture the experience of traveling to a Oaxacan rural community, we produced four videos that described the historical and cultural contexts, as well as the economic conditions in which these businesses were born and operated. Students also purchased kits of products and learned about how each was made. As a result, each business achieved sales and several MAP students later engaged in a research project through the MBA+ program to understand the market potential for a mesquite flour based power bar and a strategy for entry in the US.



Community businesses presented included [Xula Palma Artesanal](#) and [Mezcal Ixcateco](#) (Santa Maria Ixcatlan); [Xuchil Natural Products](#); (Santiago Suchilquitongo); [DAVA Artisan Design](#), and [Mezcal Sinai](#) (San Dionisio Ocotepec).

Above: Students participating in Virtual MAP 2020 purchased kits of products from community businesses partnering with Tejiendo Alianzas.

PUC 2020: Engineering collaborations to create social and economic impacts in rural communities

After the first two years of the University of Texas PUC program resulted in more efficiently dried mesquite pods and at a greater scale, this year's goal was to increase the speed of the pod rinsing before entering the solar dehydrator. The model proposed centered on a bicycle-based spinning mechanism which will not require an external energy source other than that of the user. The student team achieved designing the initial prototype, however the pandemic precluded its continuation in the Spring. Fortunately, the tests conducted



Above: PUC student gathering data on the absorption of water by mesquite pods.

produced useful data that will inform the next year's group.

Towards greater local autonomy and resiliency in community businesses

The pandemic forced our work with three local businesses to shift more attention to adapting to the new paradigm, in which online sales would potentially grow around distinct types of products. We consulted with each group on the importance of marketing, expanding sales channels, and pivoting production to products that appeal to people that will spend more time at home and will be more concerned about their health.

Xuchil Natural Products

In 2020, we collaborated with Xuchil Natural Products through coordinating market and infrastructure research projects, product development, marketing, and sales.

One of our friends and partners in promoting mesquite flour is [Sarah Owens](#), a California-based cookbook author, baker, professional gardener, and culinary instructor. She was awarded a James Beard award for her first book [Sourdough](#) and has published various others. Her article, "Harina de Mezquite: A Forgotten Ancestral Food," in [Sowing Seeds Magazine](#) (Issue 3), featured Xuchil Products and our work with them, highlighting topics such as the importance of regenerative agriculture and revitalizing ancestral superfoods. Sarah also mentions the



RESULTS 2020

Activities: Research, Consultation, Product Development, Promotion

Central Valley and Mixteca Regions, Oaxaca

- Three communities: Santa Maria Ixcatlan, Santiago Suchilquitongo, and San Dionisio Ocotepc
- Five micro-businesses: Xula Palm, Xuchil Products, DAVA Artisan Design, Mezcal Ixcateco, Mezcal Sinai
- Over 40 hours of remote coaching in production management, product development, sales and marketing techniques
- Weekly market and product research, sales promotion, and online marketing
- Nearly 30 new product prototypes
- 1 new donation program that benefitted over 500 Oaxacans
- Three promotional and educational videos produced

work of our friends in [Texas](#) and our collaboration with [Breana's Toast](#) in Guadalajara. Her mesquite bread recipe in the article is delicious! Check out the publication [here](#).

In addition, our team in Oaxaca created a potential customer database in Mexico, answered inquiries through the mesquite flour facebook page, and collaborated with a local chocolate producer to create a mesquite chocolate bar recipe with various applications.

The pandemic also reinforced our virtual coaching activities. We began remotely explaining how mercadolibre works as an e-commerce platform to the sales lead of the group, then began to transfer the ownership of the account to that representative. For her to operate it, she had to open a bank account and register with the Mexico IRS for a tax id number, two very important steps towards formalizing their business. Moreover, we identified virtual resources for the Xuchil team, such as online courses in marketing, sales, and business management (Edx by MIT and Coursera).

Outcomes

The Xuchil team made significant progress in developing and exercising greater autonomy over their business processes. They applied for the CEMEX-TEC startup boot camp which includes seed funds, managing to pass the initial first two stages of the selection process which included online capacity building. Other important indicators of independent decision making were demonstrated when they began directing the sales on the [mercadolibre platform](#), completing online courses in marketing and sales, and creating kits of products to sell via social media sales campaigns. As a microenterprise, they've shown greater



economic resilience, focusing their time on online marketing and promotions to compensate for the initial dip in sales due to the pandemic. 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.



If you are interested in purchasing Xuchil products, please visit their [Xuchil](#) online store and learn more about Xuchil's work on their [facebook](#) and [instagram](#) pages.

At [Tejiendo Alianzas AC](#), we accept donations to support our work with Xuchil and other projects in Santiago Suchilquitongo.

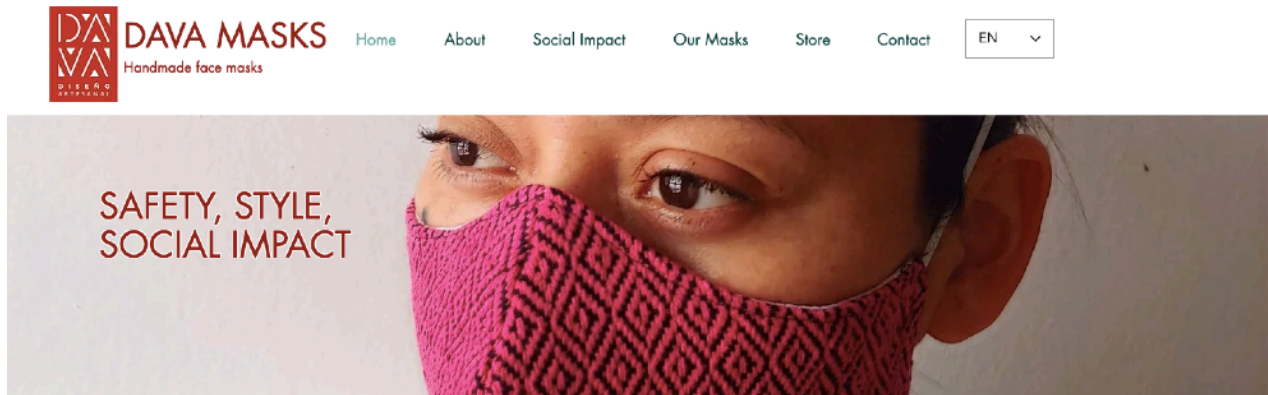
Left: Minerva Cruz of Xuchil Products describes mesquite flour production cycle to a teaching assistant from the University of Texas at Austin.



DAVA Artisan Design

In 2020, we worked extensively with [DAVA Artisan Design](#) in product development and increasing online sales. The family business was forced to close its brick and mortar store in downtown Oaxaca due to the pandemic, which had already transformed how they envision the growth of their company. It became crystal clear that face-to-face retail sales will fuel the opening of stores in additional Mexican cities. With the pandemic, however, we worked with them to shift focus to [e-commerce](#) and a greater online presence in [social media](#).

The old trope that necessity breeds innovation proved resoundly true in 2020. Our team worked tirelessly to develop new products to test. One of DAVA's most valuable assets is the network of artisans it has grown over many years. While shoe and sandal sales dropped dramatically, we saw an easy and obvious way to pivot production to face masks using their impressive array of indigenous textiles. Since Oaxaca fared nearly last on the list of



Most Popular



Above: The [DAVA Masks website](#) was fruit of the partnership between DAVA Arstian Design and Tejiendo Alianzas to strategically pivot shoe and sandal production to new products using existing materials.

Mexican states with access to vaccines, a clear need arose for greater quantities of face masks. Accordingly, we created a face mask donation program called [DAVA Masks](#) hosted on a [new website](#) Tejiendo Alianzas designed and funded. Over the course of 5 months, we were able to donate more than 500 face masks to residents of rural communities, many of whom are artisans or work in local markets. The success of this program led to greater interest among the donors in directly purchasing masks for themselves. We began selling to customers in Mexico, the US, and Canada, as well as businesses such as hotels (in partnership with [Oaxifornia](#)), mezcalerias, restaurants, bakeries, and others in Mexico and the US.

This experience inspired us to work with DAVA on additional products based on materials they employ in footwear manufacturing. Thus *DAVA Home* was born as a new line of products that could decorate and adorn home kitchens, living rooms, and bedrooms. In late 2020, we worked with DAVA to create some of the first prototypes of pillows and cushions, with the idea that a customer visiting their website could eventually choose several distinct items that share the same textile designs.



Above: Laura Garcia, Production Manager at DAVA Artisan Design, working an order of face masks.

Outcomes

DAVA has always inspired us through their creativity and innovation, especially in times of significant challenges. In 2020, they showed tremendous resilience, building their online website and heavily marketing products to compensate for the loss in sales from their store. They also entered into the Mexican federal program, Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro, for subsidies that cover employee salaries, eliminating the need for layoffs. The business also

improved production efficiency through integrating an inventory system in their operations. Clearly, DAVA will serve as a model for other companies in rural communities.

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



Xula Palm Craft

In 2020, our work with Xula focused on sales promotion, marketing, research, and coaching on how to improve online sales.

Right before the pandemic, we coordinated the participation of our friends from XULA for a second time in the [Oaxifornia](#) program, a 3-week initiative that links diverse artisans with design students to explore design through exchange, play and experimentation. With students from the best design school in the United States, the Rhode Island School of Design, the results of this collaboration were truly amazing, such as combinations of palm leaves with black clay, cotton, and other materials. We intend to raise funds to finance future meetings with the Oaxifornia team for perfecting these pieces, leaving them ready for sale and boosting the economy for families in Santa Maria Ixcatlan.

With great pleasure, we were able to organize a visit by the well-known TV program host Carolina Rocha Menocal from Azteca Noticias to meet the artisans of XULA. We hope that with the resulting [video](#), this great example of Oaxacan talent can grow even more, benefiting more and more residents from their community.

With the advent of the pandemic, we researched additional online platforms that could expand Xula's sales channels, such as Esty and Amazon. This, however, brought up an important issue that affects many small businesses in rural communities--the fear of formalizing their companies with the Mexican IRS and managing bank accounts. We will



Above: The Xula team participated in the Oaxifornia design workshops for a second time in January 2020..

continue to work with them and explore ways of reducing their anxieties by evaluating the pros and cons of these steps.

Outcomes

Over the course of 2020, we noted important changes in Xula's development as a business. In particular, they have demonstrated greater autonomy by managing their social media, contacting their customers directly to foment trust in their business. In addition, by maintaining steady sales to regular clients, such as the design store Maori, they have shown increased economic resilience. We have continued to promote their products, and were happy to include them in the 25 kits sent to MBA students at the University of Texas at Austin for the Virtual MAP Program.

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 accept donations to support our work with Xula and other projects in Santa Maria Ixcatlan.



General Plans for 2021

As 2020 concludes, we reflect deeply on what we've learned as a nonprofit and a family of community businesses rattled by disruption and tragedy. How do we plan for 2021?

In part, we consider the resources we have and the value we offer, creating scenarios in which traditional funding continues to dry up and limit our activities while market trends shift, posing new challenges for our partners that require innovation and flexibility to overcome. 2020 has increased the urgency for opening a 501c3 in the US and the need to explore new funding channels. At this point, it remains uncertain whether we will host groups of students in the coming year. Accordingly, we'll continue to develop online resources and services that create value for rural businesses in Oaxaca and our partners abroad.



Above: A local vender in the Tlacolula de Matamoros market who received a donated face mask made by DAVA Artisan Design.



TEJIENDO ALIANZAS A.C.

2021 is going to be incredible! Get involved!

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

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



Above: The DAVA family dog, Gina, was pleased to model the new doggie vest prototypes created with traditional Oaxacan textiles.

We wish you health and happiness in 2021!