



ANNUAL NEWSLETTER 2021

ACTIVITIES 2021 | RESULTS 2021 | GOALS 2022



Above: Participants of the “Launching My Startup” workshop in San Baltazar Guelavila.

ACTIVITIES 2021

After our initial emergency response to 2020, which involved a series of short-term experiments and battening down the hatches to lower costs, at Tejiendo Alianzas we adapted our vision and strategy in 2021 to manage the uncertainty presented by an ongoing pandemic and the disruption of our traditional funding streams. Achieving a new version of “normalcy” was not in the cards quite yet, but planning our work according to various scenarios grew ingrained in our operations. How can you think big and focus while in that kind of multiverse?

The short of it: 2021 taught us that remotely creating value for the communities we serve and our partners has tremendous potential to compliment in-person services; developing new prototypes using existing supply chains under a profit-share agreement jump starts innovation, more quickly tests market demand, and offers supplemental income to all



parties; exploring partnerships that foment circular economies among the community businesses in our network opens the door to interesting new products and sources of income; entrepreneurs from rural communities can provide and attain tremendous insights from one another.

RESULTS 2021

Activities: Collaborative Community Innovation

Santiago Suchilquitongo, Oaxaca

- 50 hours of consultation, co-designing, and co-constructing user-centered technologies
- Five organizations involved: Tejiendo Alianzas, Fablab, Xuchil Productos, Oaxin, MIT, and IODEMC
- Seven local residents participated
- Two designs developed and constructed
- Funded with 60,000 MXN donated by Oaxin, MIT, and IODEMC



Above: Sarabi Garcia, Program Director at Tejiendo Alianzas, meets with a resident of Santiago Suchilquitongo to discuss the improvements in the new composting bin prototype.

Exploring strategies for catalyzing innovation and entrepreneurship in rural communities

In 2019, we worked with the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology \(MIT\)](#)'s [D-Lab](#) and a network of Oaxacan organizations to run Creative Capacity

Building (CCB) workshops in Santiago Suchilquitongo, leading to the design and prototyping of several products which sought to resolve local needs. The Oaxacan nonprofit Oaxin, the Oaxaca state agency IODEMC, and MIT provided funding for follow-up on two of these projects—"Los Guerreros," a team that initially prototyped a general irrigation system using bamboo but then adapted the design for supporting mushroom cultivation; and "Las Cascaritas," who constructed a low-cost and small-scale compost barrel system for use in local homes.

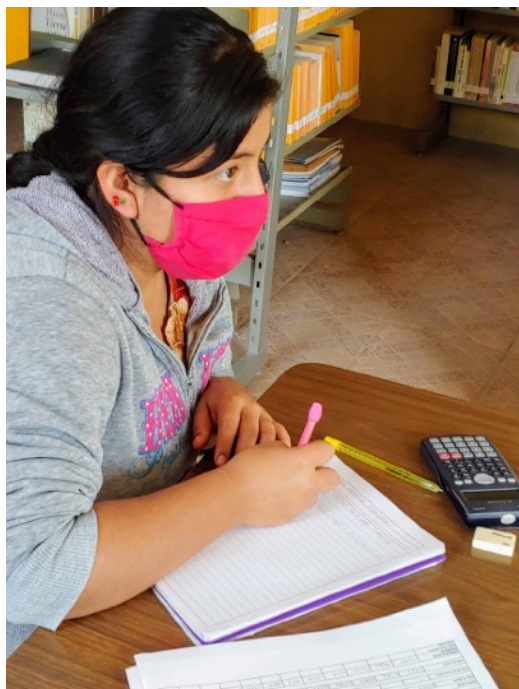
Though advances slowed to a halt in 2020, in 2021 Tejiendo Alianzas was able to return to Suchilquitongo, while respecting all health protocols, and complete the next stage of project development and testing with both groups.

With Los Guerreros, we constructed the mushroom cultivation center and the group achieved its first harvest and sales to local residents by the end of the year. The irrigation currently occurs manually but will be automated through a ceiling based vapor and pump system as sales continue to increase. The joining of forces with Xuchil Products allowed Los Guerreros to obtain a space for the cultivation center and access to existing sales channels under the Xuchil Products brand.

Meetings with Las Cascaritas to assess the original prototype informed a series of improvements to the design, primarily in terms of volume capacity and the churning mechanism, which were completed in collaboration with Fablab Oaxaca. The design will continue its testing phase and then be assessed for commercial potential.

Community Business Incubation and Formalization

Program: Launching My Startup (LMSU)



Above: A participant of the “Launching My Startup” workshop in San Baltazar Guelavila.

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. We began these sessions in the Fall of 2020 and concluded in Spring 2021. While 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.

In the second series of 30 hours, we worked with them to structure their business ideas using a business model canvas, creating a value proposition, before calculating their costs of production and necessary financial models for receiving a favorable profit margin. Then the participants went deep into financial projections, identifying the minimum sales and income to break even and the parameters for enabling growth. The sessions concluded with their preparing and practicing

RESULTS 2021

Activities: Community business incubation and formalization workshops

San Baltazar Guelavila, Oaxaca and Online

- 46 hours of LMSU and FMB workshops completed
- Three organizations involved: Niños de Magdalena Teitipac, ChildFund Mexico, and Tejiendo Alianzas
- 11 entrepreneurs, primarily women
- 60,000 MXN in seed funding awarded
- Topics:
 - Local resource mapping and needs assessment
 - Identifying and understanding a client
 - Value proposition and product design
 - Business Model Development
 - Financial Planning and Projections
 - Presenting and pitching business ideas



Above: Winners of the “Launching My Startup” seed funding competition.

pitched to present to a panel of judges which would decide who among them would receive \$20,000 MXN in seed funding.

We are very proud of all of these entrepreneurs! Due to their efforts and determination, three of them were awarded seed funding: Agronishguid, an organic chicken farm; Identidad, creators of contemporary artisan textile designs; and Pasteleria Darysa, a familia-run pastry shop.

Program: Formalizing My Business (FMB)

In July, CONFIO again funded Tejiendo Alianzas to create a series of workshops, now focusing on the formalization of rural businesses for participants of LMSU to continue their learning. The primary objective was to guide these small business

entrepreneurs in the formalization of their enterprises. Taking into account that the sustainability of these small companies does not follow one path, we engaged the participants in: 1) mapping out a future vision of each entrepreneur; 2) assessing the current situation of each person and their business; 3) learning about case studies, the decisions and plans of other microenterprises; 4) comparing and contrasting the situations of the participants with the case studies to identify appropriate key strategies; 5) identifying the

RESULTS 2021

Activities: The University Connections Program

- Partnering with four programs at the University of Texas at Austin: PUC (Cockrell School of Engineering), MBA+ (McCombs School of Business), MAP (McCombs School of Business, Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS).
- 70 participating students
- Activities: Engineering and business consultation, virtual educational trips to all communities where we work
- Three educational videos produced: [Xuchil Products](#), [DAVA Artisan Design](#), [Casa Martinez](#)
- Three educational videos funded by LLILAS in post-production
- Two promotional videos funded by LLILAS in post-production
- 25 kits of products sold, including handmade facemasks, mesquite products, palm craft, and Oaxacan chocolate.
- Benefitting 6 local business and projects, 45 Oaxacan entrepreneurs

next steps of each participant; and finally 6) finishing the workshop by completing the diagnosis of their company and an action plan that relates to its legal and regulatory formalization. Critical to exploring these topics was the need to justify the existence and success of their businesses. We had them envision their startups as motors to financing their personal and professional goals, thus placing significantly greater pressure on their growth. Another important aspect of these sessions was the inclusion of the community businesses Tejiendo Alianzas supports as case studies to illustrate different paths to business development and formalization. Participants noted the positive impact of these details in the evaluation upon concluding the workshops. It is all too common for traditional startup incubators to employ case studies and models which attendants find unrelatable and whose decisions and learning cannot be applied to their own situations.

University Connections Program: Cross-cultural partnerships for community impact



Above: Minerva Cruz from Xuchil Products participates in the online conference Virtual MAP 2021 with MBA students at UT Austin.

Tejiendo Alianzas' [University Connections program](#) seeks to 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.

Remotely delivering value

In-person activities serving students and community groups remained on hold due to the pandemic which kept us all on high-alert. However, we continued creating virtual programming and resources that benefited our partners across the board.

Virtual MAP 2021: MBA students and rural community businesses

Virtual MAP 2021 built on the success of the program in 2020, connecting 50 MBA students at the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin, with rural entrepreneurs to explore traditional business issues influenced by specific contextual factors, such as cultural norms and local resources.



Above: Claudio Martinez from Casa Martinez participates in the online conference Virtual MAP 2021 with MBA students at UT Austin.

As originally planned, we produced a new series of videos adapting material recorded the prior year and updating them with new segments. In addition, the entrepreneurs themselves participated in a live Q&A following the presentation of the [videos](#). Students also purchased kits of products and learned about how each was made. Consequently, each business benefited from new sales and several MAP students later engaged in a research project through the MBA+ program to address some of the challenges presented during the event. In particular, one group of students identified solutions for DAVA's inventory management and another gathered data on Casa Martinez's target market segment in Texas.

Community businesses presented included [Xuchil Natural Products](#) (Santiago Suchilquitongo), [DAVA Artisan Design](#) (San Dionisio Ocotepec), and [Casa Martinez](#) (San Dionisio Ocotepec).

PUC 2020-21: 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, the last two 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.



Above: PUC 2020-21 funded infrastructure improvements to facilitate the transition to a new mesquite flour factory.

The first student team (2019-20) designed the initial prototype until the pandemic began and wasn't able to complete the testing. During the 2020-21 academic year, the second team chose to refine the prior design and continue prototyping, however the pandemic again prevented their finishing and traveling to Oaxaca to install it with the Xuchil team. Nevertheless, they collaborated with Xuchil Productos and Tejiendo Alianzas to improve the infrastructure of the new factory where operations will take place. With funds raised by the UT students, a ramp was constructed from the ground level to the roof, enabling easy movement of raw materials for processing; a protective cinder block wall was built on the roof to prevent accidents; and a concrete base was installed for the greenhouse drying station.

LLILAS Educational Video Production

With Title VI funds made available by the [Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies \(LLILAS\)](#) and the [LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections](#), Tejiendo Alianzas began production of professional videos which served both educational and commercial ends, thus serving students and rural enterprises. These resources 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. The additional commercial videos also serve a critical need of these local groups—telling their story in a way that highlights the quality of their products and the elaborate process for making them. With great pleasure, we present a sample of one of these videos: [The World of Xula Palm Craft](#).



Above: The production of an educational video, “[The World of Xula Palm Craft](#).”

Global Career Launch (GCL) Program Development

After a number of years collaborating with MBA students from the [McCombs School of Business](#), primarily for conducting research that benefits local groups and to create learning experiences through both in-person and virtual events, we are proud to announce that our partnership with the McCombs School has grown significantly. In collaboration with McCombs School faculty, we submitted and were rewarded funding to develop the [2022 Global Career Launch Program in Oaxaca](#).

During a period of six weeks, undergraduate students will learn about various rural enterprises in Oaxaca, exploring their operations, origins, and challenges, before proposing and testing small-scale solutions. With the supervision and guidance of an all star team of MBA students, UT McCombs professors, and Tejiendo Alianzas, UT undergraduates will first meet with representatives of Xuchil Productos and Oaxifornia to learn about their operations, before heading to San Dionisio Ocotepec to work with DAVA Artisan Design for the duration of their stay. The specific issues they’ll tackle relate to improving operational efficiency, reducing bottlenecks, and streamlining the production cycle for all footwear handmade in their factory.

Towards greater local autonomy and resiliency in community businesses

Though the ongoing pandemic continued to limit in-person services for our three primary community business partners, we were fortunate to receive funding to support rural innovation activities and incubation workshops. Resources that benefitted DAVA, Xuchil, and Xula included research and development of products, consultancy for improving operational efficiency, funding for infrastructure improvements, and production of educational and marketing materials.

RESULTS 2021

Activities: Community Business Support

Central Valley and Mixteca Regions, Oaxaca

- Three communities: Santa Maria Ixcatlan, Santiago Suchilquitongo, and San Dionisio Ocotepéc
- Four micro-businesses: Xula Palm, Xuchil Products, DAVA Artisan Design, Casa Martinez
- Weekly market and product research, sales promotion, and online marketing
- Nearly 20 new product prototypes
- Three educational videos produced (MAP 2021); two extended education videos and two commercial videos in post-production (LLILAS)

Xuchil Natural Products

In 2021, we collaborated with [Xuchil Natural Products](#) through coordinating market and infrastructure research projects, product development, marketing, and sales.



With both the McCombs School of Business and the Cockrell School of Engineering at the University of Texas at Austin, we continued advancing in research, infrastructure development, and the Virtual MAP 2021 video conference with MBA students who learned about Xuchil, bought products from them, and saw videos we produced to explore cultural, historical, and business related issues. With funds from the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) at the University of Texas, we will begin production of professional marketing and educational materials in 2022.

Though the pandemic prevented for a second year the arrival of PUC engineering students to finish the bicycle-powered mesquite pod rinsing system, they did raise funds to begin the remodeling of the new Xuchil work site in preparation for the 2022 harvest and operations. We're excited to announce that the new PUC 2021-22 team has begun coordinating with the Xuchil group to develop a raw material storage system and strategies for streamlining the production cycle!

Outcomes with Donated Funds

- Construction materials for remodeling factory space: \$90,000 MXN
- 1 [educational video](#) for the University of Texas Virtual MAP 2021 event and kit sales: \$16,000 MXN
- Initial design for a raw material storage system and strategies for streamlining production cycle

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.



DAVA Artisan Design

In 2021, our work with [DAVA Artisan Design](#) leaned heavily towards research and development, creating marketing and educational materials to promote their story and work, and coordinating sales of new lines of products we co-developed with the business.

Due to the evolving nature of the pandemic and strategies for mitigating risk of contagion, we continued creating prototypes of face masks with improved designs informed by the latest scientific research. Tejiendo Alianzas funded and continued to develop and manage the DAVA Masks website and donation program, as well as acquire new customers through the Oaxifornia network. In 2022, we will discontinue the DAVA Masks website and transition all products to the DAVA Artisan Design primary online store.

As mentioned above, we were happy to coordinate the research conducted by University of Texas McCombs School of Business students to establish a new inventory system for DAVA. Tejiendo Alianzas also partnered with MIT engineering students attending the "Design for Scale" course to create a biodegradable shoe sole for DAVA's footwear, an important step in realizing their vision towards greater environmental sustainability. Our non-profit seeks to strengthen local and circular economies by finding synergies among the community businesses we support. As such, we were tremendously excited to learn that mesquite byproduct from Xuchil Products could potentially serve as a primary component of a future biodegradable shoe or sandal sole. We coordinated the first round of research and testing with promising



Above: MIT engineering students begin testing binder materials for creating a biodegradable shoe sole made of mesquite for DAVA.

results. The students shared a number of recommendations for incrementally reducing the environmental impact of DAVA's footwear through the use of plant-based and biodegradable materials over time. In the Fall 2022 semester, we hope to begin the second round of tests with MIT students.

Getting DAVA's story out through video production also represented a significant amount of our work with the group. First, we wrote and produced the Virtual MAP 2021 video and then were able to begin two professional videos with LLILAS funding. Like the other community businesses we serve, DAVA will clearly benefit from sharing the history, culture, and vision behind their business.

In December 2021, DAVA turned a leaf by opening a new store in downtown Oaxaca. After the success of their prior store which the pandemic forced them to close, they new the potential of having a brick and mortar retail space for customers to try their products. We were happy to support them in the interior design and organization of the space and hope that 2022 will bring them great success.



Above: MIT engineering students cut the mesquite-based shoe sole in research for DAVA Artisan Design.

Outcomes with Donated Funds

- 1 [educational video](#) for Virtual MAP 2021 and product kit sales: \$8,900 MXN
- 1 educational video, 1 commercial video (both in post-production): \$13,500 MXN
- Sales from DAVA Masks and funding for website management: \$56,500 MXN
- 15 prototypes, primarily face masks
- Research findings informing development of inventory system, biodegradable product development and environmental sustainability strategy
- A sheet of biodegradable mesquite based material for sandal soles
- Interior design of retail space

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 Ocotepc.



Xula Palm Craft

In 2021, our work with [Xula Palm Craft](#) focused on sales promotion, marketing, research, and producing videographic materials that served both educational and commercial purposes.

Over the years of our work with Xula, we have strived to collaborate with the group to refine their products for markets that seek higher-end artisan goods, and then connect them to potential clients, such as Oaxifornia. However, Xula's online presence remains minimal, limiting the reach of any given publication on social media. Our conversations with them made it clear the importance of making their story widely available. We saw the potential for educating the general public and students of relevant disciplines about the history and culture that set the stage for their palm weaving tradition, and at the same time create commercial videos that promote the sale of their products.

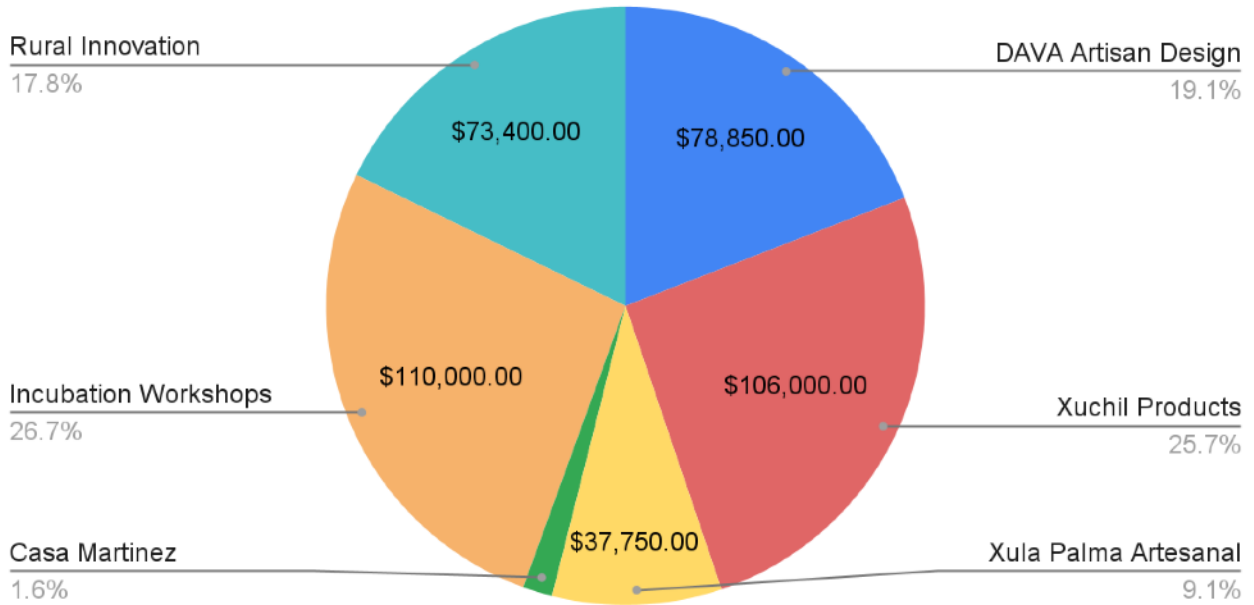
Outcomes with Donated Funds

- [1 educational video](#), 1 commercial video (both in post-production): \$13,500 MXN
- University of Texas MAP kit sales: \$2,250 MXN
- Oaxifornia sales: \$22,000 MXN

Taking into account that funds and services received by Xula totaled less than 50% of that of other community businesses partnering with Tejiendo Alianzas, we intend to adjust our fundraising strategy to support greater research, capacity building, and marketing resources.

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.

Community Business Impact: Funds and Services Received (Total: \$410,000 MXN)



**This chart does not include all hours worked by Tejiendo Alianzas staff in consultation, research, and coordination of activities.*

Announcement:



Above: Dr. Lindsay Jones, founder of the Billy Creek Trust.

We were honored to receive a donation of \$480,000 MXN from the Billy Creek Trust to purchase a vehicle, computer equipment, and for hiring administrative assistance. Though we remain on the waiting list for a new truck (due to the international shortage in microchips), we very happily acquired new computer equipment and are about to start scouting for office help.

The Billy Creek Trust was established by Dr. Lindsay “Syd” Jones, a highly esteemed scholar and professor at Ohio State University and a widely admired human being, who passed away in 2020. His love for Oaxaca was second to none, having written the unpublished trilogy of books titled: *Narrating Monte Alban: Seven True Stories of the Great Zapotec Capital of Southern Mexico*. A complete list of his

publications and academic work can be found on the Ohio State [website](#). His [obituary](#), which he wrote himself, details the very full life he lived. Dr. Jones created the trust to support projects in Oaxaca that reflect his values and people he would have admired. We would have been over the moon to have met him.

2021 Key Takeaways

This past year offered yet another wealth of learning opportunities. Below, we share a number of important ideas that guide our present thinking about Tejiendo Alianzas' work:

- Creating value for our partners remotely while using digital or virtual tools greatly compliments our existing in-person programming but cannot completely substitute it. A hybrid-model employing both holds tremendous potential.
- Story-telling provides various benefits for community businesses and partners in academia. To improve the quality and usefulness of these resources, it makes sense to contract professional video producers and involve students with communications backgrounds in their development.
- A profit-share model and agreement with local businesses, as tested through the DAVA Masks project, might prove a more sustainable vehicle for product development while creating new income streams for these groups.
- We reinforced our belief that rural business incubation models can be effective when more fully informed by the local context, resources, and challenges. Moreover, rural entrepreneurs respond positively to case studies they can clearly relate to. This opens the door for further research and development of similar and complementary materials that can guide future workshops and resources made available via the Tejiendo Alianzas website.
- Even in the second year of a pandemic, we were able to raise and channel significant funds and resources to local community businesses. This was possible via continual needs and opportunities assessment then creatively pivoting operations.



Above: A facemask prototype developed with adjustable earstraps and a nosebridge.

General Plans for 2022

The differences between the conclusion of 2020 and 2021 cannot be overstated. From navigating a dizzy tailspin to slowly lifting our gaze in hope, we can finally plan for the new year. That certainly does not mean we're filing away the last two years in the archive—rather, continually reflecting on them, humbly considering diverse scenarios for collaboratively creating greater sustainable sources of employment for residents of rural indigenous communities. Among our plans for 2022, we include:

- In-person activities with students working alongside community businesses, primarily through the PUC, MAP, and GLC programs;
- Production of digital resources with both educational and commercial ends;
- The beginning of the [Oaxifornia](#)-Tejiendo Alianzas partnership to support their network of artisans;
- Establishing a 501c3 in Texas to expand our programming in Mexico and strengthen our partnerships in the US.



Above: Minerva Cruz, member of Xuchil Products, after successfully picking up the year's harvest.

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: Tejiendo Alianzas and Xula Palm Craft, Santa Maria Ixcatlan.