

The New School/CARE/Liderezas

Mayas



Project Assessment Report

M. Ximena Gutierrez
PIA
December 10, 2007

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II. Executive Summary

The New School and CARE have partnered to develop a project in Guatemala that seeks to assist a group of Mayan women—the Liderezas Mayas—in developing a sustainable business for their weaving products. The New School aims to create a sustainable business model that can be replicated in other countries, as well as involve their students in the learning process as researchers and trainers.

This semester a New School team traveled to Guatemala and conducted a Project Assessment Study that assessed the products, production process, organizational skills and commitment of the Liderezas Mayas, brainstormed on a business plan using a “designed-by” model instead of a “made-by” approach for the project, and examined how to use the skills of an academic institution to assist the Liderezas Mayas in this project. The business plan will operate as a designed-by model, where the Mayan women design and produce the weaving products.

Following the trip to Guatemala, the New School team decided to continue with the project by conducting a class in spring 2008 that will teach the New School students to become consultants for the Liderezas Mayas. After the spring course, the students will travel to Guatemala for the summer and train the Liderezas Mayas on the skills needed for the designed-by project. The New School believes that the Liderezas Mayas and their products have potential; however, the women need training in quality control, product design and basic business skills to produce a marketable product.

The first section of the study describes the trip findings for the project. This section investigates concepts of the “designed-by” model, the Liderezas Mayas’ organization, products, and production, and the group expectations. The last section focuses on recommendations that will enhance the Liderezas Mayas’ technical and business skills through training workshops. The Liderezas Mayas will need to be trained in product design, quality control and basic business skills. They will also need to create innovative products, implement quality standards for their raw material and finished products, and concentrate on the domestic market in Guatemala. These recommendations attempt to strengthen the concept of the designed-by model, and the Liderezas Mayas’ organization and products.

III. Introduction

The New School and CARE have partnered to develop a project in Guatemala that seeks to assist a group of Mayan women—the Liderezas Mayas—in developing a sustainable business for their weaving products. The New School aims to create a sustainable business model that can be replicated in other areas, as well as involve their students in the learning process as researchers and trainers.

This semester a New School team—Fabiola Berdiel, Project Manager of GPIA; Jay Dehejia, Faculty of the Design and Management at Parsons; Alice Demirjian, Director of Fashion Marketing at Parsons; Ximena Gutierrez, Student of GPIA; Mark Johnson, Professor of GPIA; and Cynthia Lawson, Director of the Integrated Design Curriculum at Parsons—and CARE representatives spent one week in Guatemala to conduct a Project Assessment Study. The study attempted to:

- (1) assess the products, current production process, organizational skills and commitment of the Liderezas Mayas;
- (2) brainstorm on a business plan using a designed-by model instead of a made-by approach for the project, and;
- (3) examine how to use the skills of an academic institution to assist the Liderezas Mayas in this project.

IV. Go/No Go Final Decision

Following the exploratory trip to Guatemala, the New School team has decided to proceed with the project. Although the group discovered that the Liderezas Mayas were only in the initial stages of building their business, The New School and CARE concluded that with adequate training in quality control, product design, organizational and business skills, the Liderezas Mayas could have a successful enterprise. Even though it will be a long time before

the Mayan women are ready to design and manufacture a product that is marketable, the trainings will equip the Liderezas Mayas with the skills necessary for sustainability.

The New School team's decision to continue with the project is based on the belief that the Liderezas Mayas and their products have potential. By combining The New School's expertise in socio-economic development, product design, and business management, this academic institution can teach the Mayan women how to develop a sustainable business with training workshops. Secondly, this project has the potential to provide a development model that can be replicated within Guatemala and in other countries. Lastly, this project offers an exchange learning opportunity for The New School student as they work hands-on with this indigenous community as consultants and researchers for the project.

V. Project Description:

Through a collaborative approach between The New School and the Liderezas Mayas, The New School will educate the Mayan women on business management and product design through training workshops. Starting next semester, a group of New School student from the Graduate Program in International Affairs and Parson The New School for Design will take an inter-disciplinary course that will train the students to be consultant for the project. The class will provide the students with the knowledge, skills and attitude need to train the Liderezas Mayas. In the summer of 2008, these students will then travel to Guatemala and train the Liderezas Mayas on the necessary skills for a sustainable business. The students will conduct training workshops on product design, basic business skills, and quality control.

A. Objectives: We have identified the following objectives as necessary to achieve the project goal:

1. To develop a designed-by business model where the women become self-sufficient by designing and producing marketable products.
2. To create a model that can be replicated and scaled up within Guatemala and in other countries.
3. To create a business that is sustainable for the women and the communities that we are engaging.

4. To improve the Liderezas Mayas' business, organizational, and design skills through training workshops.
5. To address not only economic exclusion but also the social exclusion of the marginalized women we work with.
6. To enhance the academic experiences of the students involved by providing hands-on learning opportunities.

B. Expected Project Outcomes:

1. Increase the income and standard of living for the women working with the Liderezas Mayas.
2. Developing an alternative method of production which engages other women in their community and the surrounding areas with project.
3. Increase the Liderezas Mayas knowledge in business and product design.
4. Strengthen the organizational skills of the Liderezas Mayas.
5. Raise the quality standards of the products produced by the Liderezas Mayas.
6. Provide The New School students with practical experiences and exchanged knowledge.

VI. Findings

A. Designed-by Model:

The business plan will operate as a designed-by model instead of the commonly used made-by approach. The made-by approach usually includes a designer who employs artisans to produce their product. This is generally not a sustainable approach for the weaver because the artisans become dependent on the designer for work. As the producer of the product, the artisans only receive a small percentage of the cost of the product. The designed-by model allows the artisans to design and manufacture the goods. Products are then sold to a retailer with market insights in order to secure a direct dialogue with the customers. This opportunity permits the weavers to be creative and develop products for their customers, not the designer. With the designed-by model, the artisans hopefully receive a higher income. This model should be more sustainable than the made-by approach for the artisans.

In order to develop a designed-by model, the Liderezas Mayas will need to be trained in product design and create an innovative collection line for their product. Currently, the Liderezas Mayas do not have a formal design process. Most of the women design and produce their product simultaneously. They do not use a prototype for their product; therefore, there is no consistency with the products that they produce. Although the concepts of the designed-by model were explained to the Liderezas Mayas during a meeting, they seemed to have a difficult time comprehending the concept of design. The women clearly stated that they value the process of weaving. So, the group has decided to have the women design and produce the products.

The project will be a three-way knowledge exchange between CARE, The New School and the Liderezas Mayas. The New School will train the Liderezas Mayas in product design and assist them in developing a collection line. From this collection line, the Liderezas Mayas will produce quality products. The products will then be sold to a retailer with market insights. CARE stated that a certain percent of profit will be given to similar CARE projects to help other women artisan groups like the Liderezas Mayas.

B. Organization:

The Liderezas Mayas are currently in the initial stages of their organization. The group does not have a clear structure or transparency. The artisan group does have a president and vice president, but with no clear responsibilities. The Liderezas Mayas are currently 31 women. The cooperative is not legally organized. The organization wants to become legally organized in some capacity with the prospect that it will help open doors for them in San Lucas and Guatemala City.

The organization lacks some of the basic skills needed to manage a business. The Liderezas Mayas do not have a bank account or a transparent method of demonstrating how they operate their finances. Right now, the business is a secondary source of income for the women working with the Liderezas Mayas. The women do not know how to price their products, how to purchase better quality raw materials at lower prices, and how to quantify the overhead. The women said that they are interested in being trained in basic business skills that include managing and accounting.

The future goal of the organization is to open a store in San Lucas and become legally organized in Guatemala. The women currently sell door-to-door in their village and it can take months to sell a product. San Lucas Toliman does not have local market for their products. This village is not a tourist destination like other communities around Lake Atlan. The surrounding communities have a better developed market for these types of products. The Liderezas Mayas hope a new store will help attract tourists into San Lucas Toliman and create a market for their goods. Currently, the organization does not have access to the international market and the Liderezas Mayas are interested in learning what would appeal to this market.

C. Products:

The organization produces products of low quantity and quality. The low quantity is due to the traditional techniques used by the Liderezas Mayas and the few hours that they put into weaving in a week. These women utilize waist looming to produce their weaving products. Mayans have been practicing this method of weaving since the pre-Columbian period. This technique is considered a family tradition and has been passed down from generation to generation. This technique can take up to two weeks to finish a product. The business will need to produce at a faster pace in order to sell in a higher quantity. The next section—Issues of Mass Production—considers the alternative methods of production in order to create the quantity needed for a strong business.

The lack of quality standards for the raw material and finished products has affected the overall quality of the products produced by the Liderezas. San Lucas Toliman has limited available raw material in their community. Therefore, the Liderezas Mayas purchase threads with poorly made fibers and dyes. The organization will need to be linked to better raw material from areas outside of San Lucas Toliman. The project hopes to create products that will be environmentally friendly and incorporate natural dyes and threads to the products made by the Liderezas Mayas.

The organization does not have quality standards in construction for the products being sold. Therefore, the products do not have good construction in sizing, seaming, or lining. Many women in the organization do not know how to sew and pay a tailor to finish the garments. The organization will need in-studio training on quality control. The workshops will educate the indigenous women on sizing and quality standards for their products, which should be

implemented for all products being sold. As the organization grows, they should maintain the quality standards in order to brand their products.

D. Issues of Mass Production:

Currently, the Liderezas Mayas use waist loom (back-strap loom) to produce their products. This pre-Columbian weaving technique is very time consuming. Liderezas Mayas described that weaving can take two weeks to finish one product. In order to create an effective business the CARE/New School team believes the Liderezas Mayas will need to produce their products at a quicker pace. Mass production would allow the Liderezas Mayas to concentrate on their designs; however, there were two reasons the team decided not to engage with maquilas. The first reason is that the Liderezas Mayas take pride and attribute critical importance to the weaving process of creating a product. Plus, the Liderezas Mayas strongly believe that the best products to sell will be handmade and they do not want to compromise their weaving techniques for mass production.

After meeting with the human rights group, CALDH, The New School team discovered that the human rights and labor conditions of the maquiladoras in Guatemala are abysmal. The workers make less than minimum wage and work long hours in unsanitary conditions. There are various health concerns associated with women who work in maquiladoras. Based on Liderezas Mayas' strong feelings about producing their own products, and the New School/Care team's uneasiness with engaging maquilas for mass production, the group decided it is best to avoid maquilas and to produce fair-made products.

In order to create the quantity needed to sell more products, the group has considered possible alternative methods to mass production. One method was to collaborate with women from other communities around Lake Atlan to assist in producing the products. This way, the process will benefit not only San Lucas Toliman but the surrounding communities. This seemed to be the preferred method for the Liderezas Mayas. Another option to produce more products without compromising their weaving techniques is for the Liderezas Mayas to spend more time working on the product. It was unclear how many hours the Liderezas Mayas spend on a daily basis producing their products. This method will require the Liderezas Mayas to dedicate more time on manufacturing the products. The third alternative was upgrading loom technology to

more efficient looms or other weaving equipment. There have been many developments in weaving techniques that the group can consider.

E. Expectations:

This project is trying to connect the interests of all the parties involved—The New School, Liderezas Mayas, and CARE. Each party has different expectations for the project. This section of the study will try to outline the various expectations of each group and how the objectives have directly considered each party's interests.

The future goal of the Liderezas Mayas is to become legally organized in Guatemala and open a store in San Lucas where they can sell their products to the community and local tourist. The Liderezas Mayas have pride and value the art of their weaving techniques. This group would like to share their story with their consumer through the handmade products. The Liderezas Mayas have demonstrated an interest in learning on how to run a successful business, as well as understand the markets outside of San Lucas. Their overall objective is to increase their standards of living.

As mentioned earlier, The New School is interested in creating a sustainable business model that can be replicated in other areas. This academic institution believes this project will allow them to share their expertise in socio-economic development, product design, and business management with artisan's women through training workshops to help create a sustainable business. The New School hopes this project will provide their students with a hands-on learning opportunity as researchers and trainers. This University is interested in creating a two-way knowledge exchange between the Liderezas Mayas and the New School with hopes that their training workshops will assist the indigenous women to create a sustainable business that will increase their income and standard of living.

While one of CARE's objectives for the project is to assist the Liderezas Mayas to become self-sustainable, this non-governmental organization (NGO) also aspires to connect American women with the Liderezas Mayas and their struggle through these weaving products. CARE hopes to market the Mayan products to American women. Therefore, they believe the product should be marketed to American married mothers who are 35 and older with a household income of \$60,000 or more. After the trip, CARE discovered that the indigenous women currently do not have the skills that are necessary to sell to a global market. However, CARE

hopes that the training workshops will provide the Liderezas Mayas with the adroitness needed to sell their items internationally.

VII. Recommendations

In order to be competitive, the recommendations focus on enhancing the Liderezas Mayas' technical and business skills. The recommendations concentrate on the skills the artisan group needs and wants to learn from the training workshops. Other suggestions for this project is to create innovative products, implement quality standards for their raw material and finished products, and concentrate on the domestic market in Guatemala. These recommendations attempt to strengthen the Liderezas Mayas' organization, improve the quality of products and the skills needed for the designed-by model to function properly.

A. Designed-by Model:

For the designed-by model to function properly, the Liderezas Mayas will need to be trained in product design and development in order to create innovative products. To comprehend the concept and the process of design, the artisans will need to be trained in product design. The training workshop will include classes on product construction and patterns. The Liderezas Mayas will create innovative products that appeal to a broader market. Although, more market research is needed, we believe that the collection line should focus on home decorations, such as placemats, napkins, tablecloths.

B. Market: The Liderezas Mayas should concentrate on the domestic market in Guatemala before entering the global market. This will help build up their image with their quality standards and allow time for the women to practice their new skills.

C. Organization:

The organization needs to strengthen their cooperative and become legally organized in some capacity. In order to strengthening the Liderezas Mayas' organization, they will need training in basic business and management skills. These skills will help the cooperative manage an effective business. The second recommendation is to become legally organized. This may open

doors for the cooperative. Guatemala has many organizations that can support their business by providing raw materials, assisting with transportation and exporting their goods. However, these organizations will require the group to be legally organized in some capacity.

D. Products:

There are three recommendations for the project on products. First, the group will need quality standards for their raw material. San Lucas Toliman does sell quality raw material; therefore, the project should help link the Liderezas Mayas to quality raw material outside of San Lucas. In order to have sustainable business, the Liderezas Mayas need to improve the quality of their products. The Liderezas Mayas will benefit from training in quality control and implementing quality standards for their finished products. The quality control should incorporate the product construction in sizing, seaming, and overall appearance. As the organization grows, they should maintain the quality standards. This process will help market their products in future by creating a brand name. Establishing a brand name will help promote the crafts and assure customers of the quality of the product. The market research may suggest that the brand name connect the buyer with the Liderezas Mayas and their struggles.

VIII. Appendix I: Timeline

Appendix I: Timeline					
Activities	by Semester				
	Fall 2007	Spring 2008	Summer 2008	Fall 2008	Spring 2009
Market research conducted with focus groups					
Project Assesment Report will be completed by Ximena Gutierrez					
New project proposal and budget written.					
Development of courses to meet Mayan women's needs and desires					
Final Feasibility Study Go/No Go with market research presented					
Inter-disciplinary courses that will train New School students to be trainers					
New School students will train the Liderezas Mayas in San Lucas					
"Street Fair" with the new products during the summer.					
The Mayan women with the help of the New School students design a collection line					
The Mayan women with the help of the New School students will produce a collection line					

