

WEAVING SOLIDARITY POCO A POCO with Jolom Mayaetik Mayan Women's Weaving Cooperative, Chiapas, Mexico-Making a Difference through Fair Trade, Human Rights Advocacy, And Alternative Development at Hartwick College.

COOPERATIVE HISTORY

Jolom Mayaetik was founded in 1996 by indigenous Mayan women weavers as an independent, autonomous, and women-run organization. Their mothers were involved in earlier government-run cooperatives since 1984. During the last 11 years, they have succeeded in expanding their membership and increasing their geographic range. They have also chosen an external marketing strategy and have successfully maneuvered international marketing through formal business relations with stores and organizations and through informal solidarity marketing. Their doubling of both production and sales during the last three years has been the product of the commitment of the cooperative, its leadership and training partner, K'in al Antzetik, and its international solidarity network including the French design team, EL Camino, and U.S. researchers and solidarity marketers at colleges, universities and fair trade retailers. These successes have come through voluntary hard work and commitment to the art and ideals of the cooperative and to the principle of transnational solidarity.

The Cooperative has 350 Mayan women members, half of whom are young and single. Almost 13,000 people live in co-op communities. The Jolom Mayaetik community groups are located in 14 communities in 7 municipalities of the Highland Region of the state of Chiapas, Mexico. The population of these municipalities is largely indigenous Tzotzil and Tzeltal-speaking Maya and totals 207,925.

MAYAN WOMENS LEADERSHIP

One distinct locus of Mayan women's struggle for rights, autonomy, and economic and political democracy is within new cooperatives led by indigenous women. In Jolom Mayaetik, indigenous women and their allies are creating solidarity economics and political mobilizations for gender equity, and developing young leaders to represent their collective organizing efforts in local and global arenas. This cooperative space allows elected leaders to assert their leadership in the context of the women's collective vision.

Mayan women and their families experience tremendous economic hardship and extreme marginalization as indicated by extremely high rates of malnutrition (54%), illiteracy, high infant mortality, and the highest maternal

mortality, poverty, and tuberculosis rates in Mexico. While Mayan women have always woven, their increased production is in direct relation to men's decreased earning capacity, the loss of land for crop production, falling wages, falling crop prices, cost of living increases, male migration and immigration, and rising poverty. Jolom Mayaetik has succeeded in doubling its production and sales over the last three years and has expanded its marketing in the U.S. dramatically. It has also succeeded in developing a very popular new line of textiles-El Camino- in conjunction with European designers. To deal with the continued steady decline in male earnings and increased cost of living in Mexico, the cooperative has increased its external marketing.

In the context of increasing poverty, economic destabilization, increasing violence against women, and land expulsions in Chiapas, Mexico, the grassroots organizations of Jolom Mayaetik, a Mayan Women's Weaving Cooperative, and K'in al Antzetik, a multiethnic non-governmental organization, have been working for over a decade to create justice for indigenous people through the empowerment of young women. The development of an autonomous women's cooperative with young, Mayan leaders, and the creation of a Center for Women's Training & Development are remarkable. By supporting Jolom's alternative development, we work with them to alleviate poverty, develop young leaders, promote sustainable business practices, and preserve the unique, Mayan cultural heritage of weaving.

THE HARTWICK CONNECTION

Professor Katherine O'Donnell, Hartwick College Sociology Department, has worked with the cooperative Jolom Mayaetik since 1998. In Chiapas, she works directly with Jolom members on international textile marketing and lecture tours and on fundraising through grants for local indigenous health projects and clinics. Hartwick students have been directly involved with delegations, fundraising, mural painting, and building projects. In the U.S., Professor O'Donnell arranges speaking selling tours across the U.S at churches, colleges, universities, labor organizations, weaving clubs, academic conferences, and the International Folk Art Market in Santa Fe. She is an international advisor for the US Solidarity Network with Jolom Mayaetik and the director of the Weaving Solidarity Network housed in the Hartwick College Center for Interdependence. Professor O'Donnell conducts Fair Trade, Human Rights, and Economic Solidarity delegations to Chiapas through the Hartwick College Center for Interdependence. The next one will be in January, 2009.

INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.
The U.S. and international solidarity network works on generating income as well as awareness about human rights, indigenous women's leadership and cooperative practice, and our collective role in challenging inequity. The Jolom story in global context informs the marketing of their textiles. Our economic solidarity literally translates into markets for fine textiles and, therefore, into income for the cooperative's members and their families as well as opportunities for public education and squarely locates our lives in the context of the shared impact of global economic apartheid and the security, human rights, and sustainability challenges we all face

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SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS, CHIAPAS

VISITA NUESTRO BLOG:

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