It was a big year for hundreds of rural, indigenous Mexican artisans working with ATA. Last August ATA’s new project, Manos Vivas (MV), began working with 1000 artisans to help them build viable businesses. The artisans, many of whom speak Mayan rather than Spanish, live in small villages in the Yucatán and Chiapas.

In July in Las Vegas and this August in New York, crafts from these small villages grabbed the attention of international buyers who visited these trade shows, the largest ones held in the United States. ATA’s strategy of collaboration between designers and artisans has made Manos Vivas a champion for artisan success, bringing over 200 products designed and crafted by 132 female artisans—and one man—in Chiapas and 49 women from the Yucatán to the Las Vegas Market and NY NOW.

The products MV brought to the shows were items that Mexican designer Paola Martínez and American designer Mimi Robinson developed with the rural artisans. Robinson visited Chiapas and the Yucatán in March and April to help curate, design and merchandise the MV Collection for the trade shows. The home décor and fashion design products were woven, macramé, cross-stitched, hand and machine embroidered. They included pillow covers, placemats, hammocks, handwoven ‘huipiles,’ (traditional squared...
Oregon,” says Guillermo Jester, MV’s sales and marketing rep for MV. An additional 100 buyers expressed interest in collaborating with artisans to develop designs using traditional techniques in new colors, sizes and materials for each buyer’s stores.

“The artisans are motivated,” says Jester. “They didn’t expect to receive much attention or money but since they were so successful, they are motivated to continue to produce crafts using their traditional skills and materials.”

It’s just the beginning for these artisans, says Jester. He plans to increase the circle of success and motivation in upcoming trade shows. “There will be more artisans participating as we continue to give training,” he says. “Only groups that were ready to sell that met international quality standards could participate this time, but more artisans will join the next shows.”

Since last October, MV has provided training to groups of artisans not only on product design but also human development. Overall, 997 women and eight men participated in the training events, learning business skills and gaining self-confidence. The two-year goal is to reach 1500 artisans.

A financial success-story

Six groups of artisans — one from the Yucatán and five from Chiapas — sold $7500 of goods to buyers representing stores from California to Michigan. “The best sellers were the pompoms and macrame bracelets from Chiapas, bought by small to medium-size stores from in California, Michigan, Iowa and Oregon,” says Guillermo Jester, MV’s sales and marketing rep for MV. An additional 100 buyers expressed interest in collaborating with artisans to develop designs using traditional techniques in new colors, sizes and materials for each buyer’s stores.

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W. K. Kellogg Foundation funds the “Sitalá Alliance”

A self-sustaining future is the goal of this new program funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF).

“The Alliance, also known as ‘CRECER JUNTOS – SITALÁ,’ (which translated means “Grow Together”), is a new idea,” says the ATA’s Monika Steinberger. “It is based on collaboration among local organizations implementing a wide range of activities that strengthen communities: health, nutrition, maternal and neonatal care, local leadership, agricultural improvements, access to safe water, community savings groups, and income generation.”

Six organizations and 30 communities are part of this new project in Sitalá, a small community in central Chiapas. According to Steinberger, Aid to Artisans Mexico has been deeply imbedded in the region. “We are part of the local culture,” says Steinberger. “Over the past 6 years, we have established close working relationships with community leaders and have earned the people’s trust. Our work takes us deep into the communities, through person-to-person coaching and follow-up by ‘promotoras’ drawn from the Mayan people.” The program is led by ATA’s country director in Mexico, María Eugenia Pineda Meléndez. She supervises the Alliance and coordinates their efforts to achieve the common mission and goals. Members of The Alliance include the following groups:

ALIANZA PEDIATRICA GLOBAL - works to prevent maternal and infant death, strengthens local health capacities, and trains youth leaders for the prevention of early pregnancy and gender violence.

CONIDER - Carries out community planning, training local leaders; focusing on children and adolescents.

DICADEM - Promotes nutrition and health, supports income generation, improves food systems and access to water.

CANTARO AZUL FOUNDATION - Ensures access to safe water and creates cooperation between community water networks.

LEÓN XIII FOUNDATION - Promotes savings, community health care, and community development in human growth and interaction.

CREATIVE LEARNING – ATA - Supports income generation, social enterprise, women’s leadership, peace building, human rights, and education.

Steinberger is confident that ATA will be able to achieve the goals set for the Alliance, laying the foundation for sustainable community development “Our country director, María Eugenia Pineda Meléndez, is respected by Alliance members and local beneficiaries alike. Members accept her leadership and are eager to advance joint goals under her supervision and guidance,” says Steinberger. “The alliance of local organizations is very important to maximizing joint local impact, as we all are focused on different things,” says Meléndez.
Saving Women: Manos Vivas joins TrickleUp to teach women about finance

“While only 5% of people in the Americas live in extreme poverty, indigenous people, Afro-descendants, women, and people with disabilities continue to be disproportionately represented among those below the extreme poverty line (defined as living on under $1.90/day) and are often not well-served by government social protection programs or other organizations.” So reads the website of non-profit TrickleUp (TU) an NGO that specializes in financial programs to improve rural communities.

In July TU and MV launched “Empowerment of Women and Youth through Financial Graduation and Inclusion.” “We both want excluded segments of the population to be part of the regular economy in Mexico,” says MV’s Meléndez. “Our objective is to empower women and youth 18 to 34 years old through access to financial inclusion and social protection mechanisms.”

As part of this project, MV and TU work with 825 indigenous women artisans and entrepreneurs in 11 municipalities in Chiapas, teaching them how to save their earnings from their sales. This will give them the ability to grow resources which they can use to invest in other productive initiatives. The “savings program” trains women to manage their own businesses. It strengthens their self-esteem and encourages female leadership. The project also serves women who have disabilities or who have family members with disabilities, giving workshops on how to integrate disabled people into the community. “It is a program that has a comprehensive approach that contributes to improving the living conditions of women, people with disabilities and families, with its own methodology for the empowerment of women,” says Elena Gómez, ATA /TU Project Coordinator for the program.

“One of the great satisfactions of this project is that it has motivated organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and the Government of the State of Chiapas through the Secretariat of Gender Equality to be interested in collaborating the TU/ATA mission of creating savings initiatives for women,” says Meléndez.

Helping food artisans in the Yucatán

Improving food products made by indigenous women from the Yucatan Peninsula is a new focus for ATA. ATA recently established a team working with the community of Chacsinkin, in the central part of the state. “Our goal is to improve living conditions for food producers and processors by generating added value to products and selling them in the national and international market.” In this first stage, ATA Promotoras are focusing on the production of beverages (from tamarind, local Jamaica and other fruits) for the Mexican markets including coffee from artisans from Sitalá.

“Using traditional recipes, we improve the food production chain, add value and rescue traditional knowledge,” says Meléndez. “We are working with Mexican companies to establish relationships with the indigenous producers of Yucatán.” Goals for the program include expanding into the international market, diversifying raw materials sources and encouraging a market for of raw materials in southeast Mexico, especially in Yucatán and Chiapas.

Written by Cari Shane
Photography by Daniel Hernandez
Catherine Macha of the Tanzanian NGO, Kahe Home, has dreamed of attending the Market Readiness Program (MRP) for over three years. Macha couldn’t afford the program fee and searched for sponsors at home, without success. Undeterred when she couldn’t find them, she started saving up.

After 3 years of saving, Macha made it to New York in August 2019, for the intensive 4.5 days MRP training. Her goals were to learn the requirements for the US market, including costing and pricing, color trends and quality control. “It was just great. I was able to sell the 5 sample baskets I brought, I am happy. The training and interaction with the buyers and our mentors were all constructive.” ATA is looking for sponsors to help other Catherines achieve their dream through an MRP scholarship fund. If you or someone you know would be interested in sponsoring an artisan business owner with a scholarship for this life-changing training, please contact LaurenB@creativelearning.org.

Made possible by a dedicated team of ATA staff, mentors and volunteers, the MRP drew 13 artisan business owners, NGO directors, and exporters from 8 countries this year. The participants bonded with the MRP team, diving enthusiastically into the work of adapting their businesses or products for growth and success in the US market.
Deola Kamson owns and manages Delabique Garments Limited, a women’s clothing and accessories label, that tailors their products to the bodies and desires of their customers. Originally from Lagos, Kamson received a degree in BSC Zoology from the University of Ibadan.

Maria Yolanda Hernandez Gomez received a degree in the English Language from the Autonomous University of Chiapas in 2012 and started as Artisanal Field Promoter for ATA’s Mexico program “Manos Vivas”. She is the co-founder of an artisanal cooperative in Zinacantan called “Mujeres Sembrando La Vida.”

Maureen Obaweya is the CEO of Morin.O which designs and manufactures leather goods in Nigeria. The products are inspired by ethnic designs for the sassy, fashionable and innovative individual. Obaweya received a degree in pharmacology from Ahmadu Bello University Zaria in Nigeria and then went into the arts setting up her first gallery.

Nautenle Fonseca Pereira Goldstein Batista graduated in Applied Foreign Languages at the University of Sorbonne-Paris in 2006, then founding Mama Lua, a clothing and accessories brand for ladies and kids based in Rwanda. She works with local women’s crafts cooperatives to produce fashionable items mixing African and Western styles.

Each participant created and presented a 6-month action plan, detailing their strategy, based on their goals and the feedback they received during business roundtable sessions and one-on-one mentoring.

ATA’s annual reception showcased products by the MRP participants and offered a chance for artisan exhibitors, MRP alumni, and ATA’s trade network to connect. Creative Learning CEO Carola Mandelbaum thanked all of the MRP mentors and volunteers for their generous contributions and presented a special gift to ATA consultant Carol MacNulty for her contributions to the MRP and the TEAM initiative at Las Vegas Market over many years.

Written by Lauren Barkume
Photography by Lauren Barkume

Meet the 2019 MRP Alumni:

Catherine Macha, works with farmers on handcrafts in the off season. She is the Vice Chairman of Kahe Home, an organization that provides a home for intellectually disabled children and trains farmers to be financially independent by producing food, baskets and mats to be sold locally. Macha graduated from Sokoine University of Agriculture in 2011 with a degree in Rural Development.

Maria Yolanda Hernandez Gomez received a degree in the English Language from the Autonomous University of Chiapas in 2012 and started as Artisanal Field Promoter for ATA’s Mexico program “Manos Vivas”. She is the co-founder of an artisanal cooperative in Zinacantan called “Mujeres Sembrando La Vida.”

Maureen Obaweya, Morin.O

Maureen Obaweya is the CEO of Morin.O which designs and manufactures leather goods in Nigeria. The products are inspired by ethnic designs for the sassy, fashionable and innovative individual. Obaweya received a degree in pharmacology from Ahmadu Bello University Zaria in Nigeria and then went into the arts setting up her first gallery.
Tania Beatriz Gomez Vazquez is an Artisanal Field Promoter for “Manos Vivas” in the ATA Mexico office in San Cristobal, leading workshops with indigenous artisans from the highlands of Chiapas. Vazquez received a degree in social work from the University of San Cristobal in 2016.

Based in Lagos, Ora Ataguba is the CEO of Weave & Co Gallery, a shop featuring authentic and innovative Nigerian arts & crafts, including leisure furniture, baskets, metal sculpture, decorative items, fashion accessories, clothing, and paintings. She also organizes skill acquisition programs for women, widows, and poor people.

Violet Abdulkadir is founder and CEO of Afrikoncept Collection with the mission of preserving her heritage through unique handmade fashions. Abdulkadir has a Masters’ degree in Business Administration from Lagos Business School. Afrikoncept enhances the incomes of women and youth that produce tie dye prints for the label.

Yildiz Yagci is the founder and president of Anatolian Artisans, a nonprofit organization working to provide sustainable income for low income Turkish artisans since 1999. Originally from Istanbul, Yagci is committed to raising awareness about arts and culture of Turkey by organizing exhibitions, festivals, fairs, conferences and seminars.

Nigina Ikromova is the Executive Director of the Union of Craftsmen of Tajikistan, an organization of associations engaged in decorative craft, traditional folk art and other handcrafts. The Union has over 200 members across Tajikistan, offering training programs in product development and marketing.

Reyna Jimenez Lopez is a “Promotora” for the ATA Mexico program “Manos Vivas”. Reyna is responsible for training and supervision of artisans in Chiapas as they fulfill orders received at national and international tradeshows. She also holds workshops dedicated to advancing skills and human development for artisans.

Alicia Helfrich is a Senior Program Specialist with the Economic Growth Division at Creative Associates in Washington D.C. Recently, she laid the foundation for an M&E system in Guatemala. She wants to focus on assisting artisans earning livelihoods from craft production, and sustainable progress for families and communities.

Fabio Arciniegas Lopez is the Marketing Representative of Sombreros & Artesanias del Mundo (Hats & Crafts) based in Pasto, Colombia. The business works with 19 artisan women in making fine hats, bags, and tabletop items from natural Toquilla fiber. Their products are sold in Panama and they are looking to expand into US markets.

Fabio Arciniegas Lopez, Sombreros & Artesanias del Mundo (Hats & Crafts)

Nigina Ikromova, Union of Craftsmen of Tajikistan

Yildiz Yagci, Anatolian Artisans

Violet Abdulkadir, Afrikoncept Collection

Reyna Jimenez Lopez, ATA Mexico

Ora Ataguba, Weave & Co Gallery

Alicia Helfrich, Creative Associates

Fabio Arciniegas Lopez, Sombreros & Artesanias del Mundo (Hats & Crafts)
This July 2019, Aid to Artisans held its fourth "Training Entrepreneurs in Artisan Markets" (TEAM) session in partnership with the Las Vegas Market! Serving companies looking to enter the US retail market, TEAM combines one-on-one counselling and training and a booth at the fastest growing trade show in the US. We also provide industry experts to coach TEAM participants during the show.

During the Las Vegas Market TEAM featured ten businesses selling handmade products from Ethiopia, Peru, Mexico, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tibet (China), Nepal, India, Lesotho and Ghana. Our largest show yet, the TEAM booth drew hundreds of buyers. The show was full of high energy as our expert consultants and exhibitors worked together to make the show a success. Special thanks to our amazing industry experts Carol MacNulty (BDH Global), Mimi Robinson (Mimi Robinson Design), and Laurie Kanes (12 Small Things).

You can read more about our TEAM program on our website and apply for a spot in the January 2020 show. Applications open in early October 2019.

The TEAM Exhibitors:

**Aid to Artisans Mexico (Mexico)** - As part of Aid to Artisans’ worldwide activities, ATA Mexico empowers artisans in Chiapas, Sitalá and the Yucatan Peninsula by providing technical assistance to improve the quality of their products and diversify fair access to markets. The Home Décor and Fashion Accessory products combine the rich traditional techniques of Mexico with contemporary designs.

**Azure Jewelry (Mexico)** - Using 100% recycled silver, the brother and sister duo of Azure Jewelry takes inspiration from their personal and national values, nature and travels to provide contemporary and modern statement pieces from Mexico.

**CIEP Lesotho** - Handmade in Lesotho (Lesotho) - As part of an Aid to Artisans project, CIEP Lesotho works with artisans to bring handmade products of Lesotho to the U.S. Retail Market. Export agent Mantai Mpesi of Handmade in Lesotho represents products featuring fashion accessories made in wool and mohair, jewelry items made from shoeshoe fabric, horn and bone, and recycled metal, and a wide range of baskets made of natural fibers.
50 artisan knitters in Peru. It is dedicated to bringing handmade infant apparel and toys made of high-quality natural materials to the international market. Cutting out the middleman, Hampaj ensures that purchases directly support the artisans of Peru.

**Dancing Yak Handicrafts** (Tibet). Dancing Yak Handicrafts is a successful training center for Tibetan women who produce impeccable products featuring natural yak wool and the beautiful Tibetan brocade textiles. DYH combines the culture of Tibetan handicraft with original and modern styles, bringing high-quality tote bags and other colorful fashion accessories.

**Hampaj** (Peru). Hampaj is a brand of PeruLand All Natural, who works with over 50 artisan knitters in Peru. It is dedicated to bringing handmade infant apparel and toys made of high-quality natural materials to the international market. Cutting out the middleman, Hampaj ensures that purchases directly support the artisans of Peru.

**Considered by Real** (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). This organization recognizes the human and economic potential of artisans in the Pacific region, bringing handmade home décor and fashion accessories from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to US markets.

**Royal Knit** (Peru). An expert in producing sustainable Alpaca yarn and Pima organic cotton, Royal Knit brings products of the highest quality with unique sophisticated designs to the US market. Products feature home décor, women’s and children’s clothing and fashion accessories.

**Sammy Hand Made in Ethiopia** (Ethiopia). The Sammy brand links the artisans of one of Africa’s most ancient civilizations with American and European fashion know-how. The result is unique contemporary handmade treasures that have already gathered fans from New York to Tokyo.

**Savanna Baskets** (Ghana). Savanna Baskets is a social enterprise that works with rural women co-operatives in Northern Ghana. Woven from kinkanke grass, these time-honored Bolga baskets are both richly traditional and perfectly modern.

**The Red Sari** (Nepal & India). The Red Sari is a socially responsible fashion design company with a mission to create sustainable jobs for women in Nepal. The Red Sari brings unique handmade products with contemporary designs, produced using the ancient handicraft techniques of Nepal to global markets.

Written by Rachel Landale
Photography by Lauren Barkume
We will be exhibiting again this January at TEAM, Training Entrepreneurs in Artisan Markets at Las Vegas Market. Applications open in October 2019 for the January 2020 program. TEAM is a full-support trade show experience for exhibitors--training that gives artisan businesses real opportunity to learn about selling and exhibiting and then participating in a US trade show. As part of the TEAM experience, ATA provides pre-show webinars and feedback on everything from pricing to merchandising. Only 10 spaces will be available, so apply early.

What are our alumni saying?
"The climate of working with a team of experts who have been this industry is invaluable... Such networking and expertise they offer is worth every penny." - Mohapi Lphallo

Want to know more or be the first to know when applications open? Contact us at LaurenB@creativelearning.org.

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Spring 2021 TEAM @ Las Vegas Market

What's Next!

ATA One-on-One

Aid to Artisans’ new training initiative, ATA One-on-One provides personalized coaching to entrepreneurs, designers, and artisan businesses who seek more support for their preparation in successful entry into the US handmade market. Coaching is available by distance all year long.

It provides artisan business owners an opportunity to speak with industry experts on a wide range of specific questions related to your business and market access. Coaching sessions are one hour long and can be held via video call, WhatsApp, phone or in person.

Take advantage of ATA’s team of experts with decades of experience in the artisan and handmade sectors and get the one on one advice you want.

To sign up and schedule your free One-on-One call, complete the ATA_One-on-One application.

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Aid to Artisans
Artisans around the world need your support!
Please make a donation by clicking here.

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