

**Consortium on Law and Values in Health, Environment & the Life Sciences
Award Report for the 2016-17 Academic Year**

“Sustainable Livelihoods in Rural Guatemala:
Commercialization Strategy and Impact Assessment of Indigenous Forest Products”
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Project Summary

Rainforest Alliance, and a consortium of Guatemalan partner institutions, sought to maximize the profitability of specific indigenous and Mayan livelihoods while simultaneously mitigating the negative effects of climate change through the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices. Xate palm and ramon seed are endemic to the region, highly marketable, actively curb harmful deforestation through sustainable harvesting, and conserve the region’s robust ecosystem. The nature of my work in the project was multi-faceted and diverse, in large part due to the unexpected medical incident that took place in early June and disrupted the anticipated timeline and deliverables of the project.

While in Guatemala, I worked alongside a team of graduate students to create a baseline of understanding, communicate our role and mission to various communities, and began assembling the various deliverables that would be handed to local Rainforest Alliance staff in Guatemala. These included:

- Business toolkit to assess costs, labor, and market considerations that allow local farmers and concession leaders to better manage their enterprises (related to maya nut and xate palm).
- Marketing materials for Rainforest Alliance and local NGOs in Guatemala, in order to better articulate their ‘story’ to US-based markets. These primarily include the various church communities in the United States who participate in the purchasing of xate palm and other Guatemalan products directly from the concessions in MBR.

However, following the disruption of my research in Guatemala, my involvement on actually finalizing these deliverables was limited. Remotely, I was able to provide writing, editing, and transcribing services while the rest of the team conducted field interviews, meetings, etc.

In July and August, the main focus of my work centered around the ideation and development of a Community Development Fund, based in the US but serving only those communities working with Rainforest Alliance in Guatemala. In essence, I provided best practices, literature reviews, pertinent research memos, and suggested next steps for Rainforest Alliance and other stakeholders (University of Minnesota, Continental Floral and Rainforest Alliance) as they seek to develop the fund’s structure and future fundraising mechanisms.

Results

Guatemala-Based (Team):

- Environmental scan of the Maya Nut and xate palm, local market analysis (facilitators and obstacles).
- Business plan and a suite of actionable forms/concepts for local communities.

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- Marketing materials for Rainforest Alliance, complete with pictures, text, design, etc.

MN-Based (Individual):

- Literature review: Examining similar fund structures around the world, establishing best practices, areas of concern, and potential for growth.
- Fundraising strategy for fund stakeholders (short and long-term)
- Proposed governance structure using a carbon-credit bank account, in lieu of results from the literature review.

Future project plans

While the field research experience with Rainforest Alliance is officially over, I am excited to be continue working with the client (on a voluntary basis). This will allow me to contribute directly to the future development of the community fund. In this role, Dr. Dean Current will continue to serve as my advisor.