

GLOBAL BUSINESS BRIGADES: CALVIN COLLEGE

Community Bakery Project

Isla Tigre, Comarca Kuna Yala

Spring 2009
Winter 2010



MAY 2009 BRIGADE

Project Snapshot

General Information

Project Title: **Isla Tigre Community Bakery**
College: **Calvin College**
Student Group: **20**
May Brigade: **11**
Initiatives: **Economic sustainability, cultural exchange**
Capital Investment: **\$1,500**

Brigade Location

Country: **Comarca Kuna Yala, Panama**
Community: **Isla Tigre ("Tiger Island")**

Leadership

Club President: **Ashley Luse**
External VP: **Brendan Snyder**
Internal VP: **Trevor Deters**
Faculty Advisor: **Professor Roland Hoksbergen**
Regional Advisor: **Alex Dang**
Brigade Leader: **Adriana Piñeiro**
In-country Partner: **The Kuna Congress**



(The flag of Kuna Yala)

Description

Isla Tigre (Tiger Island) is located within Comarca Kuna Yala, an indigenous reserve composed of 432 islands on the northeast of Panama. Inhabitants of Isla Tigre number 900 and are mostly children and elderly citizens. A staple food for Kuna families is bread, most of which is produced in a community-owned, volunteer-operated bakery. GBB Calvin has partnered with the Kuna Congress to help improve the operations of this bakery.

Most of the Bakery's proceeds are re-circulated back into the Island's economy to help promote and support the Community Dance Committee, which is headquartered on Isla Tigre. Music and dance make up a major part of Kuna culture. Several of the neighboring islands have lost these traditions and their traditional culture has suffered as a result. The members of Isla Tigre find it their duty not only to continue the tradition on their island, but also to promote and teach the cultural activity throughout Comarca Kuna Yala.



Objective

The objective of the Isla Tigre bakery project is to develop a profitable and sustainable bakery, upon which so many families depend. The end result will be to provide a steady food source to the community as well as a stable stream of funding for the music and dance program.

Next Steps

Calvin College will be returning to Isla Tigre in January, 2010 to follow-up and analyze the progress made by the Kuna Bakery since the June Brigade. Our team will then look for ways to further improve on operations as well as opportunities to increase production and profits. We will also be looking to improve sanitary practices and the environmental effects of the bakery.

Expected Project Completion Date: January 2010

Community Overview



Country Background

Founded in 1938, the Comarca (political division meaning indigenous reserve) consists of a strip of land stretching 232 miles (373 km) along the Caribbean coast of Panama, bordering Colombia and the province of Darién. San Blas, also known as “Kuna Yala,” is an archipelago of 432 islands, which run along the northern coast of Panama. Roughly 36 of the islands are inhabited

by Kuna communities, and an additional 13 communities are located on the mainland, totaling 49 communities with an aggregate population of nearly 37,000.

Partner Organization

El Congreso General de la Cultura Kuna is the indigenous Kuna Congress which governs all inhabited islands of San Blas. Each community’s congress meets on a daily basis to deal with issues relating to religious and secular affairs. In addition, general congressional meetings are held several times a year to unite the 49 communities.



Community Situation

Calvin College has partnered with the community of Isla Tigre. This island has a well developed organizational structure and is reputable for remaining closely adhering to its cultural heritage. There are roughly 900 inhabitants—the majority being children and the elderly. There is a large gap in age distribution as many adolescents move to mainland Panama to receive a better education. The island has an elementary school and a health clinic which provide the community with essential educational and health needs. Still, there is a shortage of internal food sources, including staples like bread.



Isla Tigre may have one of the richest cultures in all of Kuna Yala, while many other islands have left their traditional cultural practices behind in exchange for assimilation with contemporary Panamanian culture. Isla Tigre has maintained various traditions such as music, dance, celebrations, traditional clothing, and quite possibly the most important, the indigenous Kuna language called Dule. It is quite impressive that this island community has maintained an effective organizational structure with final decisions being made by the Kuna Congress. The community meets on a nightly basis to discuss new issues and to let all contribute to the decision making process.



Preparation

Recruitment

The GBB Calvin Executive team held campus-wide recruiting efforts, though focus was kept on Business/Accounting/Economics, Spanish, and International Development Studies majors. Our recruitment methods consisted of posters and pamphlets, a campus-wide informational meeting, personal conversations with the student life coordinators and department chairs, as well as the creation of a new website, www.calvinbusinessbrigades.wordpress.com. At the time, we were unsure of what the June project would be, so our recruitment focused on our past experience in Panama and an overview of the two project proposals offered by GBB. As a result of our recruitment efforts, GBB Calvin received much attention from students, faculty/staff, and donors, alike. All of this “GBB buzz” resulted in a gift of \$1100 from Calvin’s Student Life Office which went toward our Capital Investment Fund and a \$3000 renewable organization budget for years to follow. Another honor which our chapter is proud to tell of is our peer-elected title of 2009 Rookie Students Organization of the Year.

Club Operations

Club Meetings

The GBB Calvin executive team held weekly chapter meetings throughout the semester. Our meetings addressed such topics as economic development, GBB project proposals, and research and logistics preparation for the June Brigade. We broke into small groups at most meetings, and some meetings involved group conference calls with in-country coordinators.

Organizational Structure

The GBB Calvin executive team consists of a President, External Vice-President, and Internal Vice-President. The President oversees operational matters including correspondence with GBB National and communication with donors, faculty sponsors and corporate sponsors. The External Vice-President handles *external* matters including website management and travel arrangements. The Internal Vice-President oversees *internal* matters including internal communication and focus group-oversight. All three leaders manage strategic planning for the campus chapter and are credited with the success our group had with fundraising.

Research Methods

We divided our team into three focus groups depending on areas of study and student interests:

- The *Cultural Team* focused on secondary research on the Kuna and gave a presentation to the larger group. The cultural team focused on preparing the brigade team to interact with and respect the unique culture belonging to the indigenous community we would be living amongst. This team also led conversation on case scenarios to allow the group to begin building cultural sensitivity.
- The *Business Team* brainstormed questions to send to in-country coordinators to help the group further understand the needs and desires of the bakery. The business team studied basic business planning and assessment strategies. This team also developed an accounting workshop and preparing accounting workbooks ahead of the brigade trip. Additionally, the business team set up a site-visit to a local Grand Rapids bakery so that we could familiarize ourselves with the general operations and structure of a traditional bakery.
- The *Fundraising Team* worked to establish a positive reputation on campus. This led to the club being able to build community support and led to some major funding opportunities. Specifically, our club won a corporate sponsorship of \$2200 for the June trip and a \$4500 renewable grant from an anonymous donor. Under the oversight of Ryan Deters (Fundraising Coordinator), the team also developed an individual fundraising letter template that was utilized by students as well as a detailed grant proposal that was submitted to gain approval by the President’s Cabinet.



Project Process

Implementation

Action Plan

This action plan consisted of three deliverables: day one assessment, business workshops, and a capital investment.

May 25: Welcome to Isla Tigre

Our group arrived at Isla Tigre, Kuna Yala via boat. We were greeted by a welcome song as we docked and began to unload our baggage. A traditionally-dressed group of Kuna children lined the path and welcomed us with dance. We were ushered into the meeting place of the Kuna Congress and met with the community leaders, who told us that they were glad to have us on their island. We then were taken on a tour of the 900-person island: the Congress Hall (Casa de Congreso), the Chicha House (Ina Nega), the school (Sila Iguadigipe), the medical clinic, and then the bakery (La Panaderia) that would serve as the focal point of our week-long project. We unpacked our luggage at the seaside cabins (las cabañas) and ate our first meal at the hotel restaurant.



After our meal, we returned to the bakery to meet the members of its leadership and learn about the baking processes utilized. We then conducted a SWOT analysis for the remainder of the afternoon:

STRENGTHS

- Bakery already operational and profitable
- High demand for bread (nearly unlimited)
- 102 volunteers for free labor
- Strong community support
- Well-composed organizational structure
- Knowledgeable bakers
- Strong leader with business knowledge and pre-established supplier relationships
- Understand concept of credit, making it easier to implement loan
- Project was proposed by the community itself
- Previous understanding of accounting

OPPORTUNITIES

- Market potential/opportunity to grow (option to increase production/efficiency without risking profit-loss)
- Increased production of certain more profitable products (pan dulce/sweet bread)
- Buying in bulk implies lower ingredient cost
- Long-term supplier relationship would lead to lower input costs and more consistent and timely deliveries
- Preordering supplies would guarantee delivery of desired inventory

WEAKNESSES

- Oven is old and unreliable
- Bakery had not been operational for two months
- Storage space not sufficient
- Missing kitchen tools (lack of kneading space, rising racks, storage shelves, flour sifters, etc.)
- Poor bookkeeping and accounting practices
- Inconsistent profit margin among products (instead of raising price to maintain a profit, they “skimped” on ingredients and made more product with a given amount of ingredients)

THREATS

- Competition from private bakeries
- Climate—inventory going stale
- Unsanitary practices
- Isolated island-market
- Inconsistent and unreliable suppliers
- Cap on growth due to island population

Community Workshops



May 26: Accounting Workshop

Before leaving for Panama, the Calvin team put together a thick accounting workbook to present during our accounting workshop. This book included an example of a week's worth of accounting records followed by several hundred blank worksheets. The workshop began by going through imaginary accounting transactions, specifically tailored to the reality of the bakery. Although many of the community members were familiar with basic accounting principles, they found the concepts to be challenging. It took a long time to get through the example problem, but the ideas were grasped by the workshop attendees in the end.



May 27: Inventory Workshop

The inventory workshop began with a skit led by Calvin students. The first scene showed the incorrect method of inventory upkeep—the bakery running out of supplies and being forced to stop production. This mirrored what often happened when the Kuna Bakery was operational. In the second scene, students showed an improved method of inventory management. This entailed buying sufficient supplies to meet the demand and repurchasing supplies once inventory was low, implying that production did not have to stop. Discussion then followed, connecting the skits to the reality of the bakery. GBB Calvin encouraged the Bakery to maintain a steady inventory for the purpose of providing a reliable source of bread for the community and steady flow of income for the Dance Committee.

May 28: Capital Investment Plan

Our Capital Investment Fund (\$1500.00) was spent on: a new oven for the bakery, kitchen necessities and cooking utensils, as well as bulk of supplies to stock up inventory that would last for one month. After much discussion with the bakery, our brigade team established the following month-long budget plan:



Purchase	Price	Quantities	Totals
Wood	17.00		17.00
Stove	275.00	1	275.00
100 lb. Flour bags	51.00	6	306.00
100 lb. Sugar	41.00	1	41.00
Large Block Butter	22.00	1	22.00
Half Carton Eggs	38.00	1	38.00
5 Gallons of Oil	35.00	2	70.00
Half a Carton of Yeast	23.00	1	23.00
Bag of 25 lbs. Salt	3.50	1	3.50
Baking Powder	7.00	5	35.00
Total			830.50

Project Sustainability

Implementation

The primary goal of the GBB Calvin group was to invest in a sustainable project. In order to be sustainable, we needed to ascertain that the bakery would thrive once we left. GBB Calvin put together the following goals to ensure sustainability:

1. Determine a local leader who could manage daily operations.

The local leader was easy to find. From the very first meeting, it was clear that an Isla Tigre community member, Sr. Martínez, had a unique passion for the community bakery as well as baking expertise. Sr. Martínez manages his own private bakery out of his own kitchen and has built a large network of suppliers. Throughout the week, he demonstrated his knowledge as he worked with Calvin to determine the quantities of supplies necessary to maintain daily operations.



2. Improve inventory management.

Our team identified that the bakery's greatest struggle was its lack of inventory management. They would purchase ingredients when a supply ship came to the dock and then would produce bread until inputs were depleted. Operations would then shut down until new supplies were purchased. This process led to an inconsistent bread supply for the community and inconsistent funding for the Dance Committee.

GBB Calvin wanted to help solve this problem by working with the people to determine a production schedule. This process started with members of GBB Calvin interviewing Sr. Martínez and other bakers on the quantities of ingredients necessary for different types of bread. We soon realized that the bakery could produce normal bread, sweet bread, and fried bread. Each type had a different profit margin. We then hosted brainstorming sessions with Sr. Martínez and the rest of the bakery staff to determine the schedule. After finalizing the production schedule and communicating with suppliers, we were able to determine the financing needed to purchase and maintain a monthly inventory.

3. Finance the project with community empowerment in mind.

GBB Calvin wanted to finance the first month's inventory in a way that was empowering to the community. In order to avoid creating dependency, we decided to provide the bakery with an interest-free loan. This approach works in this situation as the idea of a loan was not new to the bakers, who are accustomed to buying on credit. The forward payment to the supplier was arranged before GBB Calvin left Isla Tigre, and the bakery agreed to repay the loan when Calvin returned in January, 2010. We promised to re-invest the loan into the bakery upon our return.

The remainder of the capital investment fund was used to purchase new bakery supplies. A brand new oven was purchased to facilitate consistent production. To allow for keeping bulk inventory, we purchased air-tight containers for the small ingredients and large air-tight bins for flour. Oven mitts,



spatulas, egg beaters, flour sifters, aprons and other necessities were purchased for daily production. For improved sanitation, brooms, sponges, and rags were purchased. The supplies were all delivered to the island by boat about one month later. The community was once again motivated and empowered when the new supplies arrived.

Challenges

- **Language translation:** On this brigade, we dealt with three different languages. While Spanish is taught in schools, the Kuna speak an indigenous language called Dule. It was difficult to have Spanish as a second language for both groups. There was only one person on the island who spoke both Dule and English.
- There were quite a number of children that came to the project site. The **noise** became a distraction away from meetings for both adults and students.
- **Miscommunication of information:** The bakers seemed to not have a good handle on revenues and expenses. Numbers seemed to change from person to person from day to day.
- Our group spoke with a few suppliers on the dock about pricing of goods, but we realized after time that we were being given the "**Gringo price**," which temporarily skewed our calculations.
- **Lack of materials** for lumber, tools, and supplies for the hands-on table-building project.

Community Impact

The purpose of any GBB microenterprise project is to bring empowerment and hope to the community involved. More specifically, the goal of GBB Calvin was to touch the lives of those visited, while supporting a sustainable business. During the Calvin Brigade, the community was energized and highly involved in the daily workshops. There were over 20 people in attendance each day, and each day we would see individuals taking part in the conversation, not afraid to challenge their peers or the Calvin presenters. Often a community member would stand up and translate the Spanish into Dule so that everyone would remain on the same page. We were pleased to see so much involvement and were impressed with the business knowledge as well as accounting training that the Kuna demonstrated.



After our introduction to the Bakery on Day 1, our team decided to take on an additional hands-on project. Some well-equipped students led the construction of a new table that better fit the needs of the bakery. The Kuna were very involved in this project. They searched for wood, provided the input illustrating the design needs of the table, and several of the young men helped with the manual labor.

During the Calvin Brigade, the Kuna Bakery members became inspired to fix the oven that had been out of operation for two months. Overall, after the stove was repaired and the loans for the ingredients were given the bakery was able to once again continue operation. Implementation of a new long term business plan, emphasizing a consistent production schedule will help provide a daily bread supply for the community. This will also provide a consistent income for the music and dance committee. These funds will help promote the vibrant culture needed on this island and in the surrounding Comarca Kuna Yala.



Two-Sided Relationship

The Calvin students were able to take away just as much from the Kuna Bakery Project. From the moment we stepped on the island, the Kuna were excited to share their rich culture with us, particularly through music and dance. Our very first images of the island involve dancing, and we were continually asked by the community to share in their celebration of the Dance. On our final night on Isla Tigre, the Kuna hosted a special ceremony for the Calvin students involving dances by children and adults. After the dance, Calvin students were ushered to the center of the gathering place, and each one was presented with special gifts. The warmth and hospitality that GBB Calvin had felt the entire week reached its pinnacle that final evening.



Even more valuable than the cultural lessons learned were the relationships that developed between the students and the community members. A special bond was formed between the students and the children. We spent hours playing games with the children. Every day after school let out, we would be greeted by dozens of smiling energetic faces. Being able to help provide a constant source of food for these children made the project even more meaningful. Also, seeing the excitement on the children's faces as they proudly presented their dances to us made us truly appreciate the importance of the dance fund.



Relationships were also forged between the students and the older generation of the community. The Kuna congress members were the first to welcome us to Isla Tigre. We grew this relationship by eagerly partaking in cultural lessons and by attending a nightly congress meeting. The congress members gave each student a Kuna name and they enjoyed watching us use these new names for the week. A special relationship also developed between our group and the Island's Pastor. He was the only person on the island who could speak all three relevant languages: Spanish, Dule, and English. The Pastor took on the role of our care-taker and teacher. He was always ready to explain the Kuna culture, and his hospitality made us feel welcome and valued.

Next Steps

Next Calvin Brigade: January, 2010

Calvin College will be returning to Isla Tigre in January, 2010 to follow-up and analyze the progress made by the Kuna Bakery since the June Brigade. Specifically, we will follow up on our May accounting workshop by evaluating the Bakery's accounting practices and auditing their records which will ideally be kept throughout the next few months. GBB Calvin will also evaluate the loan structure and whether it facilitated successful inventory management and a sustainable production schedule. Our team will then look for ways to further improve on operations as well as opportunities to increase production and profits. We will also be looking to improve sanitary practices and the environmental effects of the bakery.