

# La Escuelita Niño Heroe Francisco Marquez



Early 2020 ECOM Foundation with its strategic partners committed to remodel/revamp the primary school in the remote community of Union Mexicana, Chiapas, Mexico.

The initial scope of the project was:

1. Construct a multiple use building,
2. Recondition two class rooms,
3. Restore the WC's to working conditions,
4. Ensure safe electric and hydraulic infrastructure.

The project was almost immediately delayed due to the pandemic. As a remote community Union Mexicana was relatively safe from wrath of COVID19 and we wanted to keep it that way. The ECOM foundation and the local Mexican team put the project on hold until we could guarantee the safety of the community and came up with a plan to actively engage the community.

We reorganized not only inserting our project manager in the community, but also by substituting external contracts for local labor. The project faced many logistical challenges and the scope of the 70K project seemed to be a stretch. Because of the road conditions, it was impossible for the construction material suppliers to reach the site. Nevertheless, with the help of the community and our farming operations infrastructure we started hauling in small batches the materials to the school.

With this community gesture, attitude and involvement, we realized that there was no obstacle that we could not overcome together, everybody participated including not only the leadership and labor of our ECOM teams in the area, but most importantly the community including the women and children.





We realized we had stumbled into a unique opportunity and thus gathered the community to implement our “Stretch the Budget” initiative. Together with the community we came up with a stretch goal of saving enough money, through their donation of time and work, not only to complete the project on budget, but save enough money to build a computer lab & library.

The community did their job and inspired ECOM team in Mexico and strategic partners to also pitch in and by leveraging on our relations we were able to significantly stretch the budget. Besides the original scope of the project, we managed to:

1. Built a computer classroom/library
2. Obtained videoconference and communications equipment from CISCO
3. Lap-top computers from our sister company Granjas Carroll
4. Networking equipment and printers from AMSA
5. Our farming operations (Don Jorge & Cacao Clonal Garden) teams not only provided leadership, advice and coordination
6. Built furniture and desks for the classrooms
7. ECOM operations also donated work hours including bamboo construction know-how
8. We obtained support from local flower producers (Finca Argovia) to improve the garden and landscaping
9. Provided Internet Satellite Infrastructure and WiFi network
10. Our colleagues organized a book collection (around 5,000 books) to organize a library for the school
11. Lucila Aguilar Architectos donated all design modifications and coordinated with ECOM team execution (Carla Duque and Ricardo Pizaña).

For practical terms the project was a success and not only the ECOM team and companies, hand in hand with the community was able to stretch the 75K budget to circa 150K, but also have a successful model to replicate. As far as operating budget going forward, we are currently thinking of helping the school transition to be fully independent and not relying on our continued support.

Further we will be working with the state educational authorities to improve the quality of the assigned teachers. We have offered the teacher housing in our farm operations as typical commute for the teacher are from 4 to 6 hours per day.

