



sparkventures

FOUNDERS REPORT

Spring 2020

CRITICAL SUPPORT IN A CRITICAL TIME

A note from Kristin Schrepferman, Spark Ventures' Executive Director

Coretta Scott King once said, "The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members." I've never known a more compassionate and greater group of people than all of you in the Spark family. You donate your time and talent. You are kind and generous. You travel around the world with us to connect with the people whose lives are changed thanks to your generosity. It's these people who are at the core of Spark's mission... and who are in need of our help today more than ever.

The challenges our friends at Hope, Las Tias, and Entreamigos are facing today are immense. Their vulnerable communities were already struggling with poverty, hunger and limited access to quality healthcare. The global pandemic has created an even greater hardship for them.

Inside this report we are proud to share some of the significant work happening at each of our partner locations to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. While none of us are sure what our world will look like on the other side of this - we're sure of one thing, Spark is committed to stand alongside our partners and provide them with critical support so they can continue to serve their communities.



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Spark Ventures hands off the El Tuma farm - into capable, familiar hands

Confronting COVID-19

Our partners' leaders are making incredible efforts to serve and protect their communities

Our First Virtual Event

We were overwhelmed by the outpouring of support at our first "Virtual Wine & Dine" event

AND MORE...



UPDATE: NICARAGUA FARM INITIATIVE

Back in 2014, Spark Ventures laid the foundation to begin a new agribusiness in the beautiful mountains of Matagalpa, Nicaragua - the El Tuma Farm. Made possible by many generous Spark supporters, the vision included operating a 100 acre farm that would produce cacao, plantains, and honey as well creating jobs for permanent employees and seasonal workers. Over the years, the farm has grown into 170 acres and has employed numerous local workers. Today, the farm has 38,000 cacao trees, 1000 plantain trees, passion fruit, a small crop of beans, and recently harvested over 400 liters of honey.

One of the most important steps taken in developing the farm was hiring Jerome Rodriguez (*pictured above*) to be the farm administrator. Jerome's background in producing cacao along with his passion for the environment and community development have been a great fit. Today, Jerome manages the farm's operations, including overseeing 7 permanent workers and up to as many as 25 seasonal workers. Since stepping into his role in 2016, he has become a strong leader, stayed focused on the vision, and remained dedicated to the farm through all of its successes and challenges.

Spark has been a shareholder of the farm since its inception in 2014. Former Spark team members Lucy Jodlowska and Christian Rath, along with former Board members Nick Schoewe, Tasha Seitz and Bill Romans, invested a significant amount of time and effort in the farm's development. We are incredibly grateful for their work. While the initial plan was to involve Spark's Nicaragua partner Las Tias in this project, they have chosen to remain focused on their work with families and youth in Leon. Over the last several years, Spark has gradually ceded its responsibility and ownership to other investors as we've focused our support in Nicaragua on Las Tias. Recently, Spark's Board of Directors made the decision to donate Spark's remaining shares back to the El Tuma Farm's team of investors. This transition included making Jerome an official shareholder of the business he's dedicated his life to.

We are proud to have been a part of the farm's history. Thank you very much to all of you who helped bring this venture to life. We wish much growth and success to everyone involved in the future of the El Tuma Farm.

MORE DEDICATED LOCAL LEADERS...

Similar to Jerome at El Tuma, the farm in Zambia is cared for by local farmers and community workers. With seven acres of land cleared, the farm is producing lots of cabbage and other vegetables. A pilot crop of tomatoes harvested in February was a big success - the team harvested 5 crates of tomatoes, most of which were used to feed the students. Some were sold to generate revenue for the school.



CONFRONTING COVID-19 HEAD-ON

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended life as we know it across the globe. This is true for Spark Ventures supporters in the United States, and this is profoundly true in the communities we serve in Zambia, Nicaragua and Mexico. While the situation is continually evolving, a baseline truth is that these communities were already struggling with poverty, hunger and limited access to quality healthcare, making them exceptionally vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic - both from a health and economic perspective.



Today, with Spark's support, our partners' leaders are making incredible efforts to continue to serve and protect their communities while their schools and centers are closed. In the span of a just a few weeks, they have:

- **Implemented COVID-19 education & awareness campaigns in their communities** - This has included handing out over 4000 bars of soap and hand sanitizer, over 1400 face masks, and almost 2000 fliers with instructions on how to stay safe & healthy.
- **Continued to provide critical food assistance** - The meal programs at our partner organizations often provide the only or best meal of the day for students. To ensure that students don't go hungry while their facilities are closed, our resilient partners have handed out over 6000 packages of food and meals-to-go.
- **Made investments in their own resiliency** - Our partners have stocked up on non-perishable food to ensure additional food security in the case of supply-chain interruptions.
- **Modified their educational support** - Our partners are providing distanced homework support and school supplies to keep their eager learners on track.
- **Ensured that everyone has been taken care of** - Our partners are continuing to pay their staff, despite the disruption in their activities. They have also made home visits to some of the most vulnerable beneficiaries to ensure that they have the resources they need.

These leaders have rallied their communities to support each other. Their mobilization in the face of the pandemic is critical now and will lay the groundwork for resilience and recovery in the future. Thanks to the generosity of the Spark Ventures community, we have been able to authorize critical emergency funding across our three partner programs, to ensure that they can continue to meet the imminent needs of their communities.



To contribute to our emergency fund, helping our partners meet their communities' most urgent needs in this critical time, visit: sparkventures.org/COVID



EVEN VIRTUALLY, OUR COMMUNITY ALWAYS SHOWS UP

We weren't sure what to expect when we transitioned our annual Wine & Dine event to be our first major virtual "gathering." We knew that the Spark Ventures community can always be counted on to rally around our partner's needs - but would a virtual event allow us to convey our partners' impact and continue to cultivate our community of supporters?

We were overwhelmed - our Virtual Wine & Dine was an event we will never forget and an absolute success. With over 200 members of the Spark Ventures community logged on from all across the US, we raised over \$150,000 to support our partners' ongoing programming, along with their COVID-19 response work.

The virtual format even had some silver linings - together, we were transported to Nicaragua, Mexico & Zambia and were able to hear directly from each of our partners first-hand. It was the first event where we have been able to have leadership from all three of our partners speak to our community. Giving them a chance to tell their own stories was powerful.

To those who supported the event, thank you for your generosity and for helping us lift communities out of poverty and empower future leaders. Want to check out the inspiring video we shared at the event? You can find that at: sparkventures.org/ourspark



PO Box 641004, Chicago, IL 60664 | 773.293.6710
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