

## Honorable Mention

case 1-429-427  
April 3, 2015

# Maya Mountain Cacao: Optimizing Operations for Buyers and the Indigenous

On a red-eye flight after a slate of meetings in the northeastern United States, Emily Stone finally had a few hours to assess the operating decisions that faced her fast-growing Latin American social enterprise, Maya Mountain Cacao (MMC). With increasing revenues, a yield-increasing training program, and an expanding wait list for the limited supply of MMC's cacao,<sup>i</sup> the prospects for continued growth appeared strong for the year ahead. As the driving force on the ground in Belize for MMC, Stone would have little time to decide and act once her plane touched down in the sunny foothills of the Maya Mountains in Central America. She needed to quickly decide on new initiatives, solicit feedback from Belizean communities, and prepare for the company's next phase of growth.

Stone had narrowed her options to three operational priorities: production improvements for continued expansion, establishing further control in MMC's value chain, and altering the company's share and governance structure. These points were interconnected, though Stone understood that not all problems could be tackled simultaneously. Still, she thought that all options on the table supported MMC's social and environmental mission and, collectively, the resolution of these problems would help accelerate revenue growth.

### Taza Chocolate

During a 2005 trip to Oaxaca, Mexico, Alex Whitmore became inspired by the locals' rustic approach to cacao making. He resolved to build his own chocolate factory after having learned how to replicate the production processes for stone-ground chocolate. Returning home to the Boston area with a blueprint for a hand-carved granite millstone, he founded Taza Chocolate.<sup>1</sup>

Whitmore desired to leverage his product for more than growth within the premium chocolate market. Taza Chocolate needed a social and environmental mission built into the core of its business model. Whitmore continued traveling Latin America in search of an untapped market with strong growth potential and a history of cultivating high-quality inputs for chocolate production. He found that local low-income Latin American

<sup>i</sup> "Cacao" and "cocoa" can be used interchangeably. For the purposes of this case, the term "cacao" is exclusively used given its association with the name of the featured company—Maya Mountain Cacao.



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