

HORIZONS OF FRIENDSHIP Horizons NEWSLETTER

Fall 2020

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO END POVERTY IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO

Investing in Resilience & Recovery



Children in Chiapas, Mexico showcase fruits and vegetables they have grown with their families in home gardens.

The global pandemic has deepened inequalities, crushed economies and exposed vulnerabilities in health systems around the world and in the capacity of governments and communities to respond to extreme shocks. It raises the question: how do we build more resilient communities?

Resilience is the capacity to anticipate shocks or stresses, to absorb or accommodate them while maintaining basic functions, and to recover quickly. However, building resilience is too often a buzzword when it comes to interventions in international humanitarian aid and development.

This poses serious risks for all in Central America and Mexico, particularly the most vulnerable. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the GDP for the region is expected to fall 9% by the end of the year, as tourism continues to drop. Meanwhile, poverty and extreme poverty are expected to increase by 6.7%.

An area of particular concern is the Dry Corridor of Central America, which extends from south Mexico to Panama, where the number of people affected by severe food insecurity could double to three million by the end of the year.

Compounding this situation is a

worrying rise in gender-based violence, sometimes referred to as a second pandemic. In April alone, 367 women were assassinated in Mexico while 100 died of COVID-19. In El Salvador, there was a 70% jump in violence against women; Honduras saw 83 femicides.

The reality is that these crises and trends

will continue in the region unless development work takes a whole-of-society approach that includes the communities affected.

Our partners are a lifeline to the most vulnerable in their communities.

At its very foundation, Horizons' work is focused on resilience and the belief that we must build the capacity of grassroots organizations to identify and lead solutions for their own communities. In turn, these grassroots organizations will be ready to anticipate, respond and recover in crises like the pandemic.

In Mexico, for instance, Horizons' partner, DESMI (the Economic and Social Development of Indigenous Mexicans) has worked to build community gardens and provide hundreds

of families with food security in Chiapas, one of the poorest regions in the country. As supply chains slowed and prices of staple foods rose due to the pandemic, these families were not only able to feed themselves but also provide a nutritious alternative to other community members facing hardships.

In Honduras, as cases of gender-based violence rose and governmental authorities were occupied with the COVID-19 response, Horizons' partner Visitación Padilla (Women's Movement for Peace) created a phone line to support survivors and victims of violence while delivering humanitarian aid to women and youth in need.

In remote communities of Nicaragua, our partner AMICA (the Association of Indigenous Women of the Atlantic) set up a plan to help communities recover lost crops, procure hygiene items for over 300 families, and work with traditional authorities to support survivors of sexual and domestic violence.

These are but a few examples of why investing in the resilience of communities through local partnerships makes a difference. The pandemic highlighted something we've long known – that our partners who serve at the frontlines of crises are a lifeline to the most vulnerable in their communities and the key to building a sustainable recovery.

We ask that you join us in investing in their resilience, in their recovery and in the future well-being of those most vulnerable.



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PLUS! 2019-2020 Annual Report



Public health educator and midwife Valerie Cuc makes a home visit.

Year 4 of the Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) program in Totonicapán, Guatemala was busy and successful despite the challenges presented by COVID-19 (see sidebar).

Our initial choice to focus on and support the network of traditional Indigenous midwives, or comadronas, was always strategic, both in recognizing their vital role in maternal and newborn health and in terms of long-term sustainability. During Year 4, we continued to work with the 34 train the trainer midwives, including delivering a bonus training program on Indigenous Health and Rights. They, in turn, replicated their learnings with another 868 midwives.

Through our partnership with the Totonicapán Health Authority, we trained 2,264 health care professionals on MNCH

best practices, including safe and secure vaccinations, and on using and applying the updated Guatemalan Comprehensive Medical Guidelines.

The public health team continued its ambitious work, reaching more than 7,000 women and their families through over 5,000 home visits. And 30,000 women participated in workshops and discussions on pre- and post-natal care, nutrition and the importance of vaccination.

We also partnered with 13 community and commercial radio stations to share 35,190 radio spots on key MNCH themes: caring for pregnant women, warning signs during and after pregnancy, family planning, vaccination, caring for newborns, exclusive breast-feeding, and forms of gender-based violence and how to file a complaint and get help.

Adapting to COVID-19

COVID-19 is deeply impacting Guatemala. Public health restrictions began on March 16, forcing us to adapt the MNCH program accordingly.

With in-person activities cancelled, our partner PIES de Occidente has focused on final equipment purchases and donations for the Totonicapán Health Authority, hospital, and the network of 900 traditional Indigenous midwives.

It has also worked with the government to ensure these midwives can continue to deliver in-person health-care to pregnant women, moms and babies without fear of fines or punishment during times of quarantine and curfews.

Our public health outreach team has been providing patient care via phone and working closely with Community Health Commissions to translate COVID-19 health advice into K'iche. A public awareness campaign was also launched to provide advice on COVID-19 prevention, lifesaving maternal and newborn care advice and gender-based violence prevention.



Sharing Knowledge with Canadians

“As an Indigenous Maya woman, I am committed to strengthening the bonds of sisterhood between women

in my country,” said Virginia Ramos, a young Maya K'iche' community leader, as she spoke to a group of concerned Canadians. She told them that Horizons' Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) project has filled her with hope. “I am confident that in the future we will be able to build communities based on solidarity, without prejudices or sexism.”

Virginia was part of a large group of Guatemalans to visit Canada through the

MNCH project's knowledge exchanges. These exchanges are key to increasing understanding and awareness about improving the health of women and children in Totonicapán. She was joined by another young Maya K'iche' community leader, traditional Indigenous midwives and staff from the Totonicapán Health Directorate and our local partner PIES de Occidente.

The group met with health practitioners, youth, the general public and Indigenous health workers throughout Ontario to talk about their crucial work in ensuring Maya K'iche' people receive culturally pertinent health care – whether they are mothers, newborns or adolescents.

These knowledge exchanges are also promoting dialogue among Indigenous Peoples living in Canada and Guatemala. A group of Anishinaabe, Cree, Inuit, Mohawk and Oji-Cree women recently joined Horizons' staff for a special Canada to Guatemala exchange with our Maya K'iche' partners in Totonicapán.

The Indigenous women from Canada brought unparalleled knowledge in maternal and child health, youth sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the prevention of violence against women.

Both exchanges, and the MNCH project, are contributing to Virginia's dream of solidarity with no bounds.



Program materials for this year's Migrant Worker Outreach Program feature the faces of former migrant workers Reyna and Andres.

With COVID-19 outbreaks affecting migrant farmworkers in southwestern Ontario and parts of British Columbia, Horizons of Friendship remains committed to supporting the workers who come to Northumberland County.

By November 2020, around 150 migrant workers from Jamaica, Guatemala, and Mexico will have arrived in Northumberland to work on local farms. Thanks to Horizons' Migrant Worker Outreach Program, these workers will have access to health, legal and social services. In addition, the program provides translation and transportation

services for migrant workers in hospitals, government buildings and businesses.

This year, Horizons is also providing migrant workers with Lifeline Care Packages to allow them to live comfortably during their mandatory 14-day quarantine upon arrival. The package contains food and toiletry items as well as information in Spanish or English on health, legal and community guidelines related to COVID-19 and supports in our community.

Although there have been no reported cases of COVID-19 among Northumberland's migrant workers to

date, "we've heard directly from them that they're worried about the future. They've heard about the illness at farms in southwestern Ontario, and they're frightened something like that could happen to them," says Daniel Quesada, Horizons' community outreach officer.

"Right now, our priority is to provide migrant workers with information on how to protect themselves from COVID-19 and supply them with tools like masks, hand sanitizer and cleaning products to continue the fight." With these tools, Horizons is directly contributing to the fight against COVID-19 in Northumberland.

But that is only one piece of the puzzle, according to Horizons' Executive Director Patricia Rebollo. "Governments across Canada need to ensure migrant workers are protected and safe in their homes and workplaces. Overcrowded bunkhouses should be a thing of the past," she asserts. Some farms in southwestern Ontario house up to 12 migrant workers in close quarters, in a single room. "As a country, we should honour migrant workers and the work they do by treating them with dignity and providing them with safe living and working conditions in Canada."

As the situation with COVID-19 continues to develop, Horizons will focus on keeping migrant workers in Northumberland County safe and advocating on their behalf.



Meet Armando

My name is Armando Gomez. I'm a 42 year old migrant worker from Guasave, Sinaloa, Mexico. I have a family, two daughters and a wife back home. I come to Canada every year

to work, to support my growing family and pay for my daughters' education. The work we do is hard, and I know our conditions and status here are precarious. But we are grateful to have our friends at Horizons supporting us along the way.

A big thanks to the entire Horizons' family and supporters for looking out for us during this uncertain time!

Lifeline Care Packages

Horizons' Lifeline Care Packages help migrants get through their 14-day quarantine. They're filled with staple food items like rice, beans, cooking oil, peanut butter, granola bars, canned tuna and veggies, toiletries such as toothbrushes, toothpaste and deodorant, hand sanitizer and home cleaning products.

Bedding/pillows are also added to the packages, after a request from migrant workers. Two reusable masks, which must be worn in commercial establishments in Northumberland County, complete the package.



Summer student Milla Ewart prepares care packages.

