

HORIZONS OF FRIENDSHIP Horizons NEWSLETTER

Fall 2023

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO END POVERTY IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO

Food Security Key to a Better Future



Local community gardens, like this one in Teopisca, Mexico, provide a sustainable source of food and food security for small scale farming families.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has not fully dissolved and emerging variants continue to be a concern, the world has already begun to shift its thinking towards a post pandemic recovery.

But recovery will be much more difficult in the regions Horizons supports. Mesoamerica was hard hit by the pandemic. High rates of economic inequality for many in the region meant that pandemic guidelines were often difficult to abide by, as folks earning low incomes still needed to leave their homes for work. Densely populated communities experienced increased levels of transmission, and hospitals and health care systems across the regions lacked the resources fully needed to combat the virus.

The pandemic stressed already-sparse food supplies and further limited food production capabilities, and delayed plans for urgent repairs to aging infrastructure, making access to water and housing more precarious. These conditions continue; many people in vulnerable communities still have limited access to basic services like clean

water and food, health care, housing and security, while still battling poverty, human rights abuses, and violence.

Horizons and our partners are working harder than ever to determine community needs, understand the root causes of

gaps and various forms of poverty, and develop grassroots, sustainable solutions.

Horizons and our international partners believe that warding off future disasters will depend on re-focusing food systems to become more local and sustainable, to have a better relationship with the environment, and to prioritize self-sufficient communities. The communities that already have some of these attributes in place tell Horizons that they felt the pandemic less intensely (see sidebar).

In 2023, Horizons has launched projects that address key post pandemic issues including food security and sovereignty, access to appropriate health care, violence reduction, and environmental protection and climate resiliency in Central America and Mexico. These projects also prioritize

the creation of local opportunities for youth, which is vital to ensuring the projects' long-term success.

In the following pages, we are excited to share with you what post pandemic recovery looks like from the point of view of our partners and communities: their challenges and successes.



José Santos Guevara

Pandemic puts sustainable agriculture to the test

In El Salvador, families and communities use environmentally friendly and sustainable methods of agriculture, reports José Santos Guevara, executive director of our partner ACUDESBAL. “The pandemic put these methods to a test and I’m happy to report that our approach helped mitigate some of the negative impact in our communities.”

By using these methods and diversifying crops, the communities increased their food security during the pandemic. “We were even able to support other families with our surplus,” says José.

“We see the pandemic as one of many potential crises that we will face in the future. Therefore, our vision of adaptability and resiliency will continue to have us prepared for them.”



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PANDEMIC RECOVERY

Improving Nutrition for Youth in Panama



Children and youth in Ngäbe-Buglé Indigenous communities are learning about nutrition and traditional food preparation techniques.

Establishing strong food security is especially important for Indigenous communities like the Ngäbe-Buglé in Panama. These communities experience some of the highest levels of poverty and childhood malnutrition in the country and live in isolated, mountainous communities within the cloud forest. As deliveries from the outside are not feasible, these communities must ensure their own survival.

This is why Horizons is continuing

to work with our Panamanian partner ACUN (Ngäbe Cultural Action) to roll out training to enable these communities to locally produce everything they eat, including nutritious daily lunches for students attending the local school.

When it comes to tackling malnutrition among children and youth, the communities understand that addressing nutritional habits and knowledge are key. While progress has been made

to increase agricultural yields of fresh vegetables and fruits, the pandemic put extra stress on local food supplies and highlighted how much more work is needed to guarantee that participating communities are prepared to successfully deal with any future issues that arise.

The two biggest food security issues are a lack of reliable protein sources and the knowledge necessary to maintain food safety through preservation techniques. ACUN is helping to increase and diversify local protein sources with the addition of more backyard birds, laying hens and other livestock. Traditional preservation techniques that are safe and healthy are being taught in large workshops and in individual family homes.

Training all members of extended families in this way will ensure that young people learn early about nutrition and food preparation techniques that support their growth and health.

It will also give the use of traditional technologies for food handling, dehydration and salting a new life with the younger generation and deepen connections with the Ngäbe-Buglé culture.



Farmers gather at trade network meetings to discuss how to improve agricultural yields and sales, as well as how to reduce the risk of escalating violence to keep families safe.

Remote communities in Chiapas, Mexico also face not only food insecurity but regular encroachment by violent outsiders on their Indigenous territories.

These small-scale agricultural communities have to grow everything they need to feed their families on small plots of one to five hectares. Horizons and our local partner DESMI (Economic and Social Development

Tackling Escalating Violence in Mexico

of Indigenous Mexicans) are helping them learn and implement sustainable agricultural methods that can improve yield and species diversity and develop secure food systems that can support community health, nutrition, economic independence, and resilience. This support began before the pandemic, and the communities have made a lot of progress.

However, the pandemic introduced new challenges: extra stress on the existing food security system and escalating local violence from cartels warring for control of Chiapas territory. Open displays of violence continue to make it difficult for parents and their young children to be outside and to work on their farms. Participating communities have requested additional help from us.

Over the next two years, Horizons and DESMI are rolling out support

to fully establish resilient food security systems, boost health and nutrition levels, and improve economic independence through the development of trade and sales networks in participating communities.

We are also focusing on improving the political capacity of participating farmers and leaders to address local violence by:

- educating them on the political context at the root of increasing levels of violence
- holding forums that enable community members to plan strategies to improve food security and address local violence
- teaching de-escalation and peace building techniques, and when to use them, and
- training to promote stronger gender relations and address violence against women, (by reflecting on the importance of women's jobs and rights).

2023: Introducing New Programs for Migrant Workers



A trip to Toronto to see the Blue Jays play was a big hit with the migrant workers.

Horizons of Friendship's Migrant Worker Outreach Program is teaming up with new partners to expand its supports for Northumberland County's migrant workers.

Each year, an estimated 150-200 migrant workers from Jamaica, Trinidad, Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras come to our community to grow our food, working on apple orchards, dairy farms, in fruit production and more.

Horizons has long supported these workers by providing critical access to health and legal clinics, thanks to the Community Health Centres of Northumberland, and the Northumberland Community Legal Centre. During the pandemic, we also provided COVID-19 kits to help protect them from the virus.

This year, we are adding to the supports we provide migrant workers to address other identified needs.

What our new programs look like

Migrant workers often experience health and safety risks, financial insecurity, and stress and anxiety related to

leaving their families behind, cultural differences, language barriers and isolation.

Horizons understands that addressing these gaps can positively impact migrant workers' wellbeing.

1. Financial insecurity. We are providing welcome kits to every migrant worker, filled with basic necessities like food and personal hygiene items, as well as information in both Spanish and English on health, workplace safety, and emergency contacts. The kits help alleviate financial stress upon arrival, and let migrant workers know they are in a community that welcomes and supports them.



Welcome kits, filled with food and basic necessities, help alleviate financial stress upon arrival.

2. Isolation. We are expanding opportunities for migrants to get to know each other and participate in fun and informative activities away from work. This summer, we headed to Toronto for a Blue Jays baseball game, tickets courtesy of long-time supporter Steelworkers Humanity Fund. The trip was a big hit with the migrant workers and very appreciated.



At monthly workshops, migrant workers learn about health and safety and emergency care.

3. Workers' health and safety.

Migrant agricultural workers can be exposed to chemicals, heat stress, extreme weather conditions, repetitive strain injuries, and more on the job, but usually have little health and safety training.

This year, we are partnering with Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) to provide migrant workers with health and safety information to help protect themselves on the job. Free information workshops, facilitated by OHCOW one Sunday a month, have been well-received. "They have helped us meet more people and prevent accidents in the workplace," says one migrant worker.

4. Mental health. To provide much needed emotional support to migrant workers, we are working with the Farmer Wellness Program, a local organization that recently extended their counseling supports to include migrant workers, as well as with counsellor Rosa Cervantes. Rosa's confidential, bilingual support is available free to migrant workers over the phone, outside of working hours, and on workers' days off.



Meet Rosa Cervantes

A member of the Ontario Association of Mental Health Professionals (OAMHP), Rosa Cervantes has provided one-on-one psychological counselling to individuals in Mexico and Toronto for the past 25 years.

Rosa understands the stresses that migrant workers are under, and can provide them with a safe, comfortable, confidential, and supportive space to discuss their concerns and work toward better mental well-being. Empathy, compassion, and respect are hallmarks of her practice.

